

Specialty Crop Block Grant

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) 10.170

2024 Request for Proposals

Applications due by 4 p.m. Central Time (CT) on March 21, 2024

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Eligibility and Application Instructions

Eligible applicants

Nonprofit organizations, producer organizations, government agencies, universities, and other organizations involved in Minnesota agriculture are eligible to apply. Proposals may involve collaborations or partnerships between producers, industry, academia, or agricultural organizations. Applicants may cooperate with any public or private organization. Organizations may submit more than one application but may be asked to prioritize those projects.

Projects proposed by individual producers, for-profit businesses, or commercial entities are eligible only if they demonstrate a significant benefit to the broader specialty crop industry. Projects proposed by such applicants must provide knowledge that is transferable to other entities and incorporate a clear plan for disseminating the results of their research, production methods, etc., to provide value to the industry at large.

All applicants must register with the [System for Award Management \(SAM.gov\)](https://sam.gov) and provide annual updates as needed. Maintaining an active SAM.gov registration allows you to do business with the federal government and ensures that federal funds are paid to organizations that have not been suspended or disbarred. You will need to include your Unique Entity ID in your proposal.

To register your organization in SAM.gov the first time, you will need your organization's Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number. A DUNS number is a nine-digit number established and assigned by Dun and Bradstreet, Inc. to uniquely identify business entities (it is not your Employer Identification Number). You can get your organization's DUNS number by calling 866-705-5711 or searching the [Dun and Bradstreet](https://dunandbradstreet.com) website. Once your organization is registered, you will be assigned your Unique Entity ID.

Eligible projects

Projects must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, by addressing one of these means:

- Leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops;
- Assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops;
- Expanding availability and access to specialty crops; or
- Addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers.

The focus of Minnesota Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) projects should be on benefiting the competitiveness of specialty crops that are or will be grown in Minnesota. Specialty crops are defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and include "fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, including floriculture." The USDA provides a more comprehensive list of [eligible and ineligible specialty crops](#) on their website. Eligible projects may also increase the competitiveness of processed products with 50% or more specialty crop content by weight, exclusive of added water.

A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed time period and within specific limitations (cost, resources specific to project, performance, etc.). Each project is required to demonstrate external support from specialty crop stakeholders, including specialty crop growers, grower-level groups, processors, and distributors. Applications for grant funds should describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry or the public, who will benefit from the project, and how project results and outcomes will be evaluated. Projects that address problems or opportunities that cross state boundaries are eligible.

Previously funded activities need to describe how the projects should become self-sustaining or justify funding an on-going project. Ongoing projects must also list the specialty crop stakeholders, other than those involved in the project, who support the continuation of the project.

Projects that solely benefit a particular commercial product; provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual; or result in unfair competition with private companies that provide equivalent products or services are not allowed.

Funding availability

The MDA anticipates awarding approximately \$1.25 million using a competitive review process. We expect 12 to 15 grants will be awarded, but the final number depends on the size of awards. The maximum award is \$125,000 and the minimum award is \$20,000.

Priorities

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant-making.

[Policy 08-02: Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review \(PDF\)](#) establishes the expectation that grant programs intentionally identify how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities or disparities.

Minnesota seeks projects that pertain to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry by awarding up to eight points for proposals according to how well they address one of these priorities:

- Improving distribution systems, promotion, and marketing of specialty crops.
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops.
- Researching and developing techniques that focus on pest or disease control.
- Developing new or improved specialty crop seed or plant varieties.
- Researching and developing techniques to improve sustainable production of specialty crops and environmental outcomes.
- Improving capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to ensure food safety and comply with food safety standards and requirements.

In addition:

- Projects that benefit beginning farmers receive up to two points. A beginning farmer is an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation.
- Projects that benefit emerging farmers receive up to five points. The USDA tracks projects that benefit underserved farmers as defined on page six of the [USDA SCBG 2024 Request for Applications \(PDF\)](#). This definition includes emerging farmers, such as women, veterans, persons with disabilities, American Indian or Alaskan Natives, members of a community of color, young, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+), or urban farmers.

Eligible project expenses

All project costs must be associated with and needed to conduct approved project activities and be allowable as described in the most recent USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Grants Division [General Terms and Conditions, updated December 2021 \(PDF\)](#). State, local, or Native American tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, colleges, and universities can find further guidance on cost principles in [2 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) 200 Subpart E](#). For-profit organizations can find further guidance in [48 CFR Subpart 31.2](#). You can also contact the program coordinator with questions about eligible expenses.

Eligible project expenses include, but are not limited to:

Personnel

Includes personnel services in proportion to the amount of time or effort an employee devotes to the grant-supported project or program. Salaries, wages, and fringe benefits incurred under formally established policies of the organization must be consistently applied, reasonable for the services rendered, and supported with adequate documentation.

Consultant services and contractual costs

Includes professional and consultant services performed by an individual or organization other than the applicant that is in a particular profession or with a special skill. Also included in this category are contractual expenses associated with purchasing goods. These expenses are procured through a contract.

- Compensation for contractor or consultant services should be reasonable and consistent with that paid for similar services in the marketplace. Contractor and consultant rates must not exceed \$82.65 per hour (not including other allowable expenses such as travel).
- Procurement standards for goods and services. Grantees must use their own documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable state and local laws and regulations, provided that the requirements conform to applicable federal law and the standards found in [2 CFR 200.318-326](#).
- Any subcontract must be a written agreement between the grantee and the third party. The contract must, as appropriate, state the activities to be performed; the time schedule; the policies and requirements that apply to the contractor, including those required by [2 CFR 200.326](#) and other terms and conditions of the grant (these may be incorporated by reference); the maximum amount of money for which the grantee may become liable to the third party under the agreement; and the cost principles to be used in determining allowable costs in the case of cost-type contracts.

Materials and supplies

Includes materials, supplies, and fabricated parts necessary to carry out the grant project. Purchased materials and supplies must be charged at their actual prices, net of applicable credits. Computing devices, if the acquisition cost is less than \$5,000 and is essential and allocable to the performance of the grant project, are allowable.

Equipment

Includes tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost that equals or exceeds \$5,000 per unit.

- Only lease or rental of general-purpose equipment is allowable, and the agreement must terminate at the end of the grant cycle. General purpose equipment means equipment that is not limited to technical activities. Examples include office equipment and furnishings, modular offices, telephone networks, information technology equipment and systems, air conditioning equipment, reproduction and printing equipment, and motor vehicles.
- Special purpose equipment is equipment used only for research, scientific, or technical activities of the grant award project. Rental costs and acquisition costs of special purpose equipment are allowable provided certain criteria are met, such as being not otherwise reasonably available and accessible (consult with the MDA program coordinator for further restrictions).
- Website development, mobile apps, etc., that are not considered to be information technology systems, but rather social media applications, are allowable.
- Equipment is subject to the full range of acquisition, use, management, and disposition requirement under [2 CFR 200.313](#).

Travel costs

Includes domestic airfare, lodging, meals, mileage, parking, etc., if these costs are necessary for grant activities. Grantees must follow their formal organizational policy to limit these costs. If a grantee does not have formal travel policies or is a for-profit entity, allowable travel costs may not exceed those established by the [Federal Travel Regulation \(FTR\)](#) issued by the [General Services Administration](#), including the maximum per diem and subsistence rates prescribed in those regulations. In the case of air travel, project participants must use the lowest reasonable commercial airfares.

Other

Includes, but is not limited to, meetings and conferences; communications; rental expenses; advertisements; publication costs; data collection; and participant support costs, including stipends or gift cards to participants that complete a project survey or take part in a focus group. These costs need to be reasonable and justifiable, and some need prior approval (include in the application). Meeting meals cannot be associated with entertainment and not included in a per diem travel cost. Publication costs are the costs of printing and publication of informational leaflets, reports, manuals, and soft copy publications relating to the project.

Ineligible project expenses

Ineligible project expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Costs incurred prior to the start date on the executed grant contract agreement
- Costs associated with preparing the application
- Indirect costs in a sub-grant contract agreement or for any contractor or consultant services as defined at [2 CFR 200.56](#)
- Business startup or farm expansion costs
- Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land
- Construction and renovation of buildings and structures
- Costs for projects that will disparage the mission, goals, or actions of another organization
- Bad debt
- Lobbying, political, and other governmental activities
- Entertainment and alcohol (alcoholic beverage expenses are allowed only when the costs are associated with enhancing the competitiveness of wine grapes and when prior approval is given by the MDA)
- Amusement, diversion, or social activity costs (such as tickets to shows or sports events, or meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, or gratuities connected with attending entertainment events)
- Contributions to a contingency reserve or any similar provision
- Fines, penalties, damages, and other settlements resulting from violations (or alleged violations) of, or failure to comply with federal, state, local, or Native American tribal laws and regulations
- Organized fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions – regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used
- Costs of goods or services for personal use of the employees – regardless of whether the cost is reported as taxable income to the employees
- Information technology systems that have a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost equal to or exceeding \$5,000 (consult with the MDA program coordinator for additional details)
- Costs of investment counsel and staff and other expenses incurred to enhance income from investments
- Political activities in accordance with provisions of the Hatch Act ([5 United States Code 1501-1508](#) and [7324-7326](#))
- Unallowable costs for the USDA SCBG are listed in Section 8.2 of the AMS Grants Division General Terms and Conditions, updated December 2021

Program income

SCBG projects occasionally result in the grantee generating income through the grant-supported activity or earned only because of the grant contract agreement during the grant period of performance. This includes, but is not limited to, income from fees for services performed; the sale of commodities or items fabricated under an award (including items sold at cost if the cost of producing the item was funded in whole or partially with grant funds); registration fees for conferences; etc. Program income earned during an active agreement must be re-invested into the project and used to further the objectives, and it does not have to “offset” any awarded or allocated SCBG funds.

Application review process and timeline

All eligible applications will be reviewed by MDA staff and an external review committee based on the criteria in the evaluation profile. External reviewers may include growers, private industry members, university faculty or staff, public agency staff, and representatives from nonprofits who have interest and expertise in specialty crops, research, food marketing, or agricultural systems. The commissioner of agriculture reviews the committee recommendations and is responsible for finalizing the recommendations that will be forwarded to the USDA for final approval. The review committee and commissioner may use information like rural or urban location, geographic distribution, services to prioritized populations, applicant’s history as a state grantee, and capacity to perform the work when making their decisions. All applicants will be notified after the MDA review process whether their proposal was or was not selected for submission to USDA. Proposals that are selected by the commissioner will be included in the Minnesota State Plan which will be submitted to the USDA in May 2024 for approval. During the USDA review process, the MDA will notify you if adjustments to your scope of work or project budgets are requested.

Request for Proposals (RFP) posted on the MDA website.....	February 2024
Deadline for questions.....	March 15, 2024, 4 p.m. CT
Applications due to the MDA.....	March 21, 2024, 4 p.m. CT
Grant review process.....	about four weeks
The MDA notifies conditionally approved applicants.....	late April 2024
The MDA submits state plan to the USDA.....	May 2, 2024
USDA approval (anticipated).....	September 2024
The MDA issues approval letters to successful applicants; initiates contracting.....	October 2024
Earliest grant contract start date (project work can start).....	November 1, 2024
Planned project end date.....	April 30, 2027
Furthest project end date upon approved request (expected).....	September 29, 2027

Once conditionally approved applicants are notified, we will ask them to compile their project information into USDA’s project profile template for inclusion in our state plan. Be prepared for a very short turnaround (a few days) to return the completed template to the MDA.

Once the USDA approves Minnesota’s state plan, we will notify successful applicants and request documentation needed for risk assessment and to draft a grant contract agreement. We expect to be able to notify awardees in September 2024 and to draft grant agreement documents in October, with the earliest projected project start date of November 1, 2024.

Application instructions

- Apply for the SCBG using our [online application system](#).
 - If you're a new user, you need to create an account first.
 - Once you're logged in, select Specialty Crop Block Grant.
- Applications are due by **4 p.m. CT on Thursday, March 21, 2024**.
 - We will not accept late applications.
 - Apply early so that there is enough time to get help with the online application system if you need it. It's best practice to submit your application at least 24 hours in advance.
 - We are not responsible for any technical or logistical problems that result in a late submission. It is your responsibility to ensure that we receive your application before the deadline.

Questions

- Email your questions to MDA.AGRIGrants@state.mn.us before **4 p.m. CT on March 15, 2024**, with "2024 SCBG question" in the subject line.
 - We will post answers on the [Questions and Answers](#) section of the Specialty Crop Block Grant web page.
- For technical assistance with the online application system, call the Grants Line at 651-201-6500.

Conflicts of interest

State grant policy requires that steps and procedures are in place to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers ([MINN. STAT.16B.98](#) and [Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making, 2022 \(Word\)](#)).

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the MDA due to competing duties or loyalties.
- A grantee's or applicant's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties.

In cases where a conflict of interest is suspected, disclosed, or discovered, the applicants or grantees will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Data privacy and trade secret notice

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a Specialty Crop Block Grant. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Data provided in this application is initially classified by the [Minnesota Data Practices Act](#) as private or nonpublic, although some or all of the data will generally become public at various points of the application process unless the data are otherwise classified by state or federal law. Access to private or nonpublic data is limited to those authorized by law, including but not necessarily limited to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant, parties identified in a valid court order or federal subpoena, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, the MDA may also share the data with law enforcement or the Office of the Attorney General.

Per Minnesota's statute on grants ([MINN. STAT. 13.599](#)):

- Names and addresses of grant applicants, and the grant amount requested, will be public data once application responses are opened.
- All remaining data in application responses (except for data otherwise classified by law, including trade secret information, see below) becomes public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret information, see below) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed.

Procedure for claiming protection of trade secrets:

Trade secret information is classified as not public data. In order to qualify as trade secret information, the data in question must be provided to the MDA by the affected person (i.e., the data must be about the applicant) and otherwise meet the legal definition found in statute ([MINN. STAT. 13.37, Subd. 1\(b\)](#)). In order for an applicant to assert trade secret protection for data submitted as part of this application: the applicant must: 1) clearly identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or process that the applicant believes to be trade secret information; 2) describe what efforts the applicant takes to maintain the secrecy of the data; and 3) adequately explain how the data derive(s) independent economic value from not being generally known to, and not readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons. Merely asserting trade secret protection does not, in and of itself, classify the data in question as not public; determining what data meet the definition of trade secret information is ultimately the legal responsibility of the MDA, and the MDA cannot guarantee that data identified as trade secret information by an applicant will be classified as such. If the MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, the data in question will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

All persons, businesses, and individuals applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must comply with applicable laws. Under the law titled Right of Setoff ([MINN. STAT. 270C.65, Subd. 3](#)), a grantee consents to disclosure of its social security number, federal employer tax identification number, and/or Minnesota tax identification number, already provided to the State, to federal and state tax agencies and state personnel involved in the payment of state obligations. These identification numbers may be used in the enforcement of federal and state tax laws which could result in action requiring a grantee to file state tax returns and pay delinquent state tax liabilities, if any.

Liability

The MDA will not be held liable for any costs incurred by any firm for work performed in the preparation and production of a proposal, nor for any work performed prior to the formal execution of the contract.

Other considerations

All proposals submitted in response to this RFP become the property of the MDA. The MDA reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish, otherwise use, and to authorize others to use materials produced under this grant agreement.

The MDA also reserves the right to:

- Post funded proposals or final reports to the MDA website.
- Reject any or all proposals received.
- Waive or modify minor irregularities in proposals received after prior notification and agreement of applicant.
- Use any or all ideas submitted unless those ideas are covered by legal patent or proprietary rights.
- Clarify the scope of this program, within the RFP requirements and with appropriate notice to potential applicants, to best serve the interests of the State of Minnesota.
- Amend program specifications after their release, with appropriate written notice to potential applicants.
- Withhold any payments when contract conditions are not met.

Requirements for Projects Receiving Grant Funds

General compliance

All grant recipients must comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations and the most recent USDA AMS Grants Division General Terms and Conditions, updated December 2021.

Financial management

Grantees must follow the general procurement standards in [2 CFR 200.318](#) and use their own documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable state and local laws and regulations, provided that the requirements conform to applicable federal law and the standards found in [2 CFR 200.302-326](#).

Grantees must have adequate internal controls to assure that federal grant funds are kept separate from other grant funds and general organization expenses and income and has a process for approving expenditures as described in [2 CFR 200.303](#).

Grantees must maintain written standards of conduct covering conflicts of interest and governing the actions of its employees engaged in the selection, award, and administration of contracts.

Grantees must not make subawards or contract with vendors who are included in [Minnesota's Suspended/Debarred Vendor Report](#). Grantees must also verify that sub-awardees have registered in SAM.gov and have maintained an active account.

Pre-award financial review

During the 2023 legislative session, the Minnesota Legislature adopted new grant administration provisions (Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 62, article 7, section 11). The MDA reserves the right to adjust these pre-award financial review requirements as implementation details are being determined.

If the MDA determines that the awardee has substantial financial risks that inhibit its ability to perform the required duties under the grant contract agreement, then the MDA may either request more information for the purpose of satisfying the concerns, develop a risk mitigation plan to protect the interests of the state, or not award the grant.

Applicants will be required to comply with [Policy 08-06: Policy on Pre-Award Risk Assessment for Potential Grantees \(PDF\)](#), and will be asked to submit documents relevant to their entity.

Nonprofit organizations

All nonprofit organizations applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant award of \$50,000 and higher.

To comply with Policy 08-06, applicants may be asked to submit the following documents:

- A copy of the nonprofit’s most recent Form 990 or Form 990-EZ with the Internal Revenue Service. If the nonprofit has not been in existence long enough or is not required to file Form 990 or Form 990-EZ, then they must submit the following information:
 - Proof of its tax-exempt status
 - Most recent board-reviewed financial statements
 - Documentation of its internal controls
- Most recent certified financial audit if required to complete one under Section 309.53, Subd. 3.
- Confirmation that it is in good standing with the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Confirmation that it is registered with the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office, unless otherwise exempt.
- Confirmation that none of its current board members or staff with authority to access grant funds have been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last 10 years.

Nonprofit grantees that are not in good standing with the Minnesota Secretary of State and appropriately registered with the Attorney General’s Office are not eligible to receive grant contract agreements unless approved by the MDA.

For-profit businesses

All for-profit businesses selected for a grant award of \$50,000 must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant contract agreement.

To comply with Policy 08-06, applicants may be asked to submit the following documents:

- A copy of the business’ most recent federal and state tax returns. If the business has not been in business long enough to have a tax return, then they must submit current financial statements and documentation of internal controls.
- Confirmation that the business entity is not under bankruptcy proceedings or have any liens on assets.
- Confirmation that the business is in good standing with the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Confirmation that none of its current board members or staff with authority to access grant funds have been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last 10 years.

All for-profit businesses selected for a grant award over \$100,000 must submit either a [Form REV 185i \(PDF\)](#) or [Form REV185b \(PDF\)](#) at the time of grant award notification. These forms give the Minnesota Department of Revenue permission to inform the MDA if the grantee owes any back taxes.

Political sub-divisions

All political sub-divisions selected for a grant award must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant contract agreement.

To comply with Policy 08-06, applicants must confirm that none of its current public officials, board members, or staff with authority to access grant funds have been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last 10 years.

Individuals

Individuals will need to certify that they have not been convicted of a felony financial crime related to a state grant contract agreement.

All individuals selected for a grant award over \$100,000 must submit either a Form REV 185i or Form REV185b at the time of grant award notification. These forms give the Minnesota Department of Revenue permission to inform the MDA if the grantee owes any back taxes.

Grant award agreement

Prior to beginning work on the proposed project or receiving funding, each successful applicant must sign a grant contract agreement with the MDA indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks, report results, and authorizing the MDA to monitor the progress of the proposed project. The MDA cannot pay for any activity or project expenses incurred before the agreement is executed.

Some changes may become necessary during your project. Please contact the program coordinator with any project changes. These include moving funds between cost items or activities, purchasing an item not listed in the approved budget, or changes in key personnel or personnel time devoted to the project. Changes that alter the scope, objectives, or outcomes of a project require prior approval by the MDA and USDA and require an amendment to the contract.

Reporting requirements and payments

To receive a payment, the grantee must submit requests for reimbursement. Requests need to include an itemized invoice, along with financial reports from your financial accounting system (including payroll), supporting documentation, and a progress report.

There are three types of progress reports:

- Invoicing reports are brief progress reports attached to each payment request in between annual reports.
- Annual performance reports describe activities done to accomplish the project objectives and collect data on outcomes and are required for the reporting period that ends on September 29 of each year of the grant agreement.
- The final performance report describes the activities performed and accomplishments made to assist in fulfillment of the project's objectives, outcomes, and indicators; the impact the accomplishments had on the project's beneficiaries; and quantifiable results for each outcome or indicator. Any corrective actions or project changes conducted to overcome challenges or developments and lessons learned are also explained in this report. The final report will be posted to the USDA website to share project findings with federal and state agencies and with the public. The MDA will post links to project publications and results on the SCBG website.

All reports must be submitted in a format specified by the MDA. Grantees who do not submit reports on time or submit incomplete reports may be required to return previously disbursed funds to the MDA, and may be removed from consideration for future funding. The MDA reserves the rights to modify reporting requirements during the project and to conduct additional follow-up surveys of funding projects to determine long-term impacts of the program.

Reports should be submitted according to the following schedule:

Due Date	Date Range	Type of Progress Report
April 30, 2025	Contract Effective Date – March 31, 2025	Invoicing
November 15, 2025	April 1, 2025 – September 30, 2025	Annual Performance
April 30, 2026	October 1, 2026 – March 31, 2026	Invoicing
November 15, 2026	April 1, 2026 – September 30, 2026	Annual Performance
April 30, 2027	October 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027, or end date	Invoicing or Final Performance
November 15, 2027	April 1, 2027 – September 29, 2027, or end date	Final Performance

Note: Grantees must submit a final performance report within 45 days of their grant agreement end date.

If needed by the grantee or required by the MDA, an interim financial report with supporting documentation and invoicing progress report may be submitted for the report periods: April 1 to June 30 and October 1 to December 30 of each year within the grant contract term. Submission due dates are 30 days after the end of the interim report period. Recipients may request 10% of the grant award as an advance, if necessary, to get a project started, and then deduct the advance payment amount from total project expenditures claimed during the first reporting period of the grant.

The MDA may retain up to 25% of the total award pending receipt of an acceptable and timely final report, in a format specified by the MDA.

Monitoring

The MDA monitors grantees to ensure that work is progressing within the required time frame, outcome data is being collected, and that fiscal procedures are followed accurately and appropriately. Monitoring can include review and discussion of financial and program information via phone and email (called “desk audits”), as well as site visits.

Record retention and audits

Grantees must maintain a project file containing all records of correspondence with the MDA, receipts, invoices, records of payments, payroll records, and copies of all reports and documents associated with the project. Upon request by state or federal agencies, the grantee shall produce a legible copy of any or all such records. The grantee’s books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the state granting agency, the Department of Administration, and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate ([MINN. STAT. 16B.98, Subd. 8](#)). The grantee is responsible for the retention of documents and records relevant to the grant. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date with receipt and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements in [2 CFR 200.334](#), whichever is later.

All grantees (other than federal agencies and for-profit businesses) are responsible to comply with [2 CFR 200 Subpart F – Audit Requirements](#). The standards require any grantee that expends \$750,000 or more in federal awards during their fiscal year to have a single or program-specific audit conducted for that year. All auditees are to submit their audit reports directly to the [Federal Audit Clearinghouse](#).

Civil rights

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights enforces the state human rights law that prohibits discrimination in public services because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, disability, sex, sexual orientation, or public assistance status. For more information or to file a complaint, contact:

Minnesota Department of Human Rights
Freeman Building, 625 North Robert Street
St. Paul, MN 55155
651-539-1100 (voice)
800-657-3704 (toll free)
711 or 800-627-3529 (MN Relay)
651-296-9042 (fax)
Info.MDHR@state.mn.us (email)
<https://mn.gov/mdhr/> (website)

Affirmative action and non-discrimination

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified ([MINN. STAT. 363A.02](#)). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship ([Minnesota Rules, part 5000.3500](#)).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#).

Voter registration

The grantee will provide voter registration services for its employees and the public served by the grantee ([MINN. STAT. 201.162](#)).

2024 SCBG Evaluation Profile

Evaluation criteria	Score
<p>Potential impact Does the project have the potential to have a positive impact on the competitiveness of a specialty crop industry or segment in Minnesota? How well will the project address one of the means to accomplish the purpose of the SCBG program? Is the proposal well organized and does it clearly explain how the project will do these two things?</p>	1 – 15
<p>Project purpose How well does the applicant define the need for and purpose of the project? Are the objectives clear and appropriate? Is the project purpose important and timely?</p>	1 – 15
<p>Funding priorities How well does the proposal address one of these funding priorities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve distribution systems and marketing of specialty crops, such as reducing costs, increasing promotion, or creating new methods to achieve and sustain profitable businesses. • Increase child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops. • Research on and development of techniques that focus on pest or disease control. • Develop new or improved specialty crop seed or plant varieties. • Research and develop techniques to improve sustainable production of specialty crops and environmental outcomes. Examples include extending growing season, adaption to drought and floods, strengthening seed and crop systems, and increasing soil health. • Improve capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act. For example, developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good Manufacturing Practices,” and other support for farmers, packers, and processors to enhance food safety. 	0 – 8
<p>Project beneficiaries and external project support Will the project meaningfully impact a significant number of beneficiaries? Are effective letters of support from stakeholders (growers, grower organizations, processors, and distributors) included in the proposal? Is the project likely to succeed?</p>	1 – 15
<p>Benefit emerging farmers Does this project have the potential to benefit emerging farmers? Has the applicant provided evidence of this?</p>	0 – 5
<p>Benefit beginning farmers Does this project have the potential to benefit beginning farmers? Has the applicant provided evidence of this?</p>	0– 2
<p>Measurable outcomes and indicators Does the project include at least one outcome and indicator that measures the project’s achievements? Is each indicator relevant and achievable within project period? Is there a good plan for collecting data to report on each outcome and indicator?</p>	1 – 15
<p>Budget and narrative Is the total grant amount requested reasonable and appropriate? Are line items reasonable and appropriate, including compensation and personnel rates? Does the budget narrative adequately explain and justify each budget line item?</p>	1 – 15
<p>Personnel and contractual responsibilities Does the applicant adequately describe each activity needed to accomplish the goals and purposes of the project? Do they state when those activities are taking place and who is responsible for each? Does the plan make sense?</p>	1 – 10
<p>Maximum points</p>	100

Application Questions

These questions are provided for your convenience; application information will be used by the MDA program coordinator to complete the USDA Application SCBG Project Profile Template. You will answer these questions in the MDA's online application system.

Contact information

(Part of registration in the online application system)

- Name of contact person
- Name of organization
- Address
- City
- State
- Zip
- Email address
- Phone

Background

- Project name
- Name and title of authorized signer
- Email address and phone number of authorized signer
- Project coordinator; principal investigator (PI) name
- PI name; phone number; email address
- Industry sector(s) or specific specialty crop(s) targeted (e.g., tree fruit: apples)
- Counties served by proposal
- Amount requested
- Project start date
- Project end date
- Unique Entity ID

Overview

Confirm that the following statements apply to your organization. You must respond “Yes” to all the statements to be eligible to apply for this grant.

- The applicant supports Minnesota specialty crop producers or industry, and has agricultural research capabilities and an adequate financial system.
- The applicant is in good standing with the State of Minnesota, does not owe the State of Minnesota any back taxes, has not defaulted on any State of Minnesota-backed financing in the last seven years, is compliant with current state regulations or this project will support the organization becoming compliant, and, if applicable, has an active registration with the Secretary of State and will maintain one for the entirety of the grant period if awarded.
- The applicant, principals of the applicant organization, or others with access to grant funds have not been convicted of a financial crime such as theft, embezzlement, and forgery related to a state or federal grant contract agreement in the last 10 years.
- The applicant has a Unique Entity ID (UEI) and is eligible to receive federal funding.

Project description

Provide a very brief (approximately one sentence) description of your project. This may be used for public notification. (250 characters, including spaces)

Project summary

Summarize the project, to include:

- The name of the applicant organization that, if awarded a grant, will establish an agreement or contractual relationship with the MDA to lead and execute the project;
- A concise outline of the project outcomes; and
- A description of the general tasks to be completed during the project period to fulfill this goal. (2,600 characters, including spaces)

Project purpose (need for project)

Provide the specific issue, problem, or need that the project will address. (3,000 characters, including spaces)

Explain how this project is timely and will enhance the competitiveness of this specialty crop or industry. (1,200 characters, including spaces)

List each main objective (Objective 1, Objective 2, etc.) that this project aims to achieve that is both realistic and achievable during this grant. Under each objective, provide a brief description of what you will accomplish and general plan on what you will do to accomplish the objective within the time frame of the grant. (3,700 characters, including spaces)

Will this project enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by:

- Leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops? (Yes/No)
- Assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops? (Yes/No)
- Expanding availability and access to specialty crops? (Yes/No)
- Addressing local or regional challenges confronting specialty crop producers? (Yes/No)

Project beneficiaries

Estimate the number of people and organizations who will benefit from the project, including a one- to two-word descriptor (e.g., 500 child consumers, 20 specialty crop producers) and the total number (sum of all types) of beneficiaries (e.g., 520 beneficiaries). (300 characters, including spaces)

Describe how your project will address barriers within the specialty crop production, distribution, and marketing systems that affect Emerging Farmers, such as women; veterans; persons with disabilities; American Indian or Alaskan Natives; members of a community of color; young; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+); or urban farmers. (See the [MDA's Emerging Farmers](#) website for more information.) (1,500 characters, including spaces)

Describe how your project will benefit beginning farmers by increasing their profitable production of specialty crops. (1,000 characters, including spaces)

Continuation and other federal and state support

Have you previously received any grants from any source for similar projects? (Yes/No)

- If yes, briefly describe your previous grant project(s), including date(s), amount(s) awarded, and funding source(s). (1,000 characters, including spaces)

Have you previously received any grants from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, such as SCBG, AGRI Crop Research, or AGRI Sustainable Ag Demonstration, for similar projects? (Yes/No)

- If yes, briefly describe your previous grant project(s), including date(s), amount(s) awarded, and funding source(s). (1,000 characters, including spaces)

Has this project been submitted to another grant program or is another grant program currently funding the project? (Yes/No)

- If yes,
 - Identify the federal or state grant program(s).
 - Describe how the SCBG project differs from or supplements the other grant program(s) efforts. (2,000 characters including spaces)

Project support

List all project partners and collaborators and provide a brief summary of each of their contributions to this project and a short description of their relevant abilities and qualifications. (3,500 characters including spaces)

- A **partner or partnership** is a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project.
- A **collaborator** is a person or organization that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project but is not immediately connected to the management of the project.

Affirm that each partner and collaborator listed understands their role and has indicated they are willing to participate and commit adequate time to this project.

Describe the specialty crop stakeholders (e.g., growers, grower level groups, processors, and distributors) who support this project and how each stakeholder supports this project. (3,500 characters, including spaces)

Provide letters of support from specialty crop stakeholders. Stakeholder letters of support are not required but are part of the scoring criteria.

Outcomes

Refer to the list of outcomes and indicators in [SCBGP Outcomes and Indicators \(PDF\)](#) and the [Appendix](#) in the RFP for new performance measures beginning with this grant cycle. Select the performance measure(s) that are applicable for this project from that list. Select at least one of the outcomes and list at least one of the indicators for each outcome from the indicator list under each outcome. If there are multiple sub-indicators listed under the indicator, select at least one sub-indicator. You will be required to report the measures of each indicator chosen in annual and final reports. If the indicator(s) are not relevant to the project, a project-specific indicator(s) may be developed, which is subject to approval by the USDA. (2,000 characters, including spaces)

Example:

- Outcome 4, Indicator 4.5a.: Of the 50 producers that enhanced or maintained pest and disease control practices (described through this project), 20 will report a reduction in product lost to pest and diseases.

Explain how work and activities conducted to accomplish your project objectives will result in the chosen measurable outcome indicators before the end of this grant period. (1,500 characters, including spaces)

Explain how you will collect the required data to report on the results of each outcome and indicator in the final report (for example, from questions asked of participants of a focus group or field day, or from a survey of workshop attendees). (3,000 characters, including spaces)

Budget

Budget table

Complete the budget table with expenses that will be funded by the SCBG if awarded a grant and then upload to your application.

Expense category	SCBG request
Personnel – salaries	
Personnel – fringe benefits	
Travel	
Equipment (over \$5,000)	
Supplies	
Contractual	
Other	
Total direct project costs	
Indirect costs (MDA projects only)	
Total SCBG project costs	

Budget narrative

Provide a detailed explanation for each item in each expense category. For each section, see the definitions in the [eligible expenses](#) section.

Personnel

List people employed by your organization whose time and effort can be specifically identified and easily and accurately traced to this project’s activities. For each person you list, include their name, title, level of effort (number of hours or percent of full-time equivalents [FTE]), and total grant funds requested for each employee. (1,500 characters including spaces)

For everyone listed, describe the activities to be completed by each person, with a timeline of when the activities will occur to accomplish the project objectives. (3,600 characters including spaces)

Fringe benefits

Provide the rate of fringe benefits and funds requested for each of the project's salaried employees described in the personnel section that will be paid with SCBG funds. (1,000 characters including spaces)

Travel

Travel costs are limited to those allowed by your organization's formal policy.

List all trips or grouping of trips that will be needed to conduct this project or to provide outreach or education on project outcomes and the overall cost for each trip. Explain the purpose of and how each trip will achieve the objectives and outcomes of the project. (3,600 characters including spaces)

Do you confirm that your organization's established travel policies will be adhered to when completing the above-mentioned trips in accordance with [2 CFR 200.474](#) or 48 CFR subpart 31.2 as applicable? (Yes/No)

If you do not agree to the statement above, explain the travel policy you will adhere to when making SCBG funded trips? (1,000 characters, including spaces)

Equipment

Describe each piece of special purpose equipment to be purchased or rented using SCBG funds and any general-purpose equipment rented using SCBG funds. Include whether the equipment item will be rented or purchased, when it will be acquired, the funds requested (1,000 characters including spaces), and how it will be used to accomplish the project's objective(s) and outcomes(s) (2,000 characters including spaces).

Materials and supplies

Describe each item (material, supply, and fabricated part that costs less than \$5,000 per unit); amount of funds requested for each item (2,500 characters including spaces); and how each item is necessary to complete this project's objective(s) and outcomes(s) (3,000 characters including spaces).

Contractors and consultants

Provide a list of contractors and consultants, detailing out the name of the contractor or organization, the cost of the services performed by each contractor or consultant (1,500 characters including spaces), and describe the project activities that will be conducted to accomplish the project's objective(s) and outcome(s) within a timeline for their work. In addition, explain why each contractual service will be used instead of your organization's personnel (3,500 characters including spaces). Note that we do not allow indirect costs for contractors and consultants.

Do you confirm that your organization follows the same policies and procedures used for procurements from non-federal sources, which reflect applicable state and local laws and regulations and conform to the federal laws and standards identified in [2 CFR Part 200.317 through .326](#), as applicable? If the contractor(s) or consultant(s) are not already selected, my organization will follow the same requirements. (Yes/No)

Other

List each project expense not covered in any of the previous budget categories. For each item, give the amount of SCBG funds requested (2,500 characters including spaces), describe the purpose of each item, and how it is necessary for completion of the project's objective(s) and outcome(s) (3,000 characters including spaces).

Program income

Describe the nature or source of program income, the total estimated amount from each source of income, and how you will reinvest the program income back into this project to further the objectives of this project. (2,000 characters including spaces)

Appendix: Performance Measures

Each application must include at least one of the following outcomes, and at least one of the indicators listed underneath a selected outcome. If there are multiple sub-indicators listed under the indicator, select at least one. If these outcomes or indicators are not relevant to the project, you can develop project-specific outcomes and indicators that are subject to approval by USDA. You are required to report on the results of data collected on each indicator in annual and final reports.

These performance measures, or SCBGP Outcomes and Indicators, went into effect beginning with the FY 2022 grant application cycle.

Increasing Consumption and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops **Outcome 1 Increasing consumption and consumer purchasing of specialty crops**

1.1 Total number of consumers who gained knowledge about specialty crops:

1.1a Adults:

1.1b Children:

1.2 Total number of consumers who consumed more specialty crops:

1.2a Adults:

1.2b Children:

1.3 Number of additional specialty crop customers counted:

1.4 Number of additional business transactions executed:

1.5 Increased sales measured in:

1.5a Dollars:

1.5b Percent change:

1.5c Combination of volume and average price as a result of enhanced marketing activities:

Increasing Access to Specialty Crops and Expanding Specialty Crop Production and Distribution

Outcome 2 Increasing access to specialty crops and expanding specialty crop production and distribution

- 2.1** Number of stakeholders that gained technical knowledge about producing, preparing, procuring, or accessing specialty crops:
- 2.2** Number of stakeholders that reported producing, preparing, procuring, or accessing more specialty crops:
- 2.3** Total number of market access points for specialty crops developed or expanded. Of those:
 - 2.3a** Number of new online portals created to sell specialty crops:
 - 2.3b** Number with expanded seasonal availability:
 - 2.3c** Number of existing market access points that expanded specialty crop offerings:
 - 2.3d** Number of new market access points that established specialty crop offerings:
- 2.4** Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about more efficient and effective distribution systems:
- 2.5** Number of stakeholders that adopted best practices or new technologies to improve distribution systems:
- 2.6** Total number of partnerships established between producers, distributors, or other relevant intermediaries related to distribution systems. Of those established:
 - 2.6a** Number formalized with written agreements (i.e., MOU's, signed contracts, etc.):
 - 2.6b** Number of partnerships with underserved organizations:
- 2.7** Total number of new and improved distribution systems developed. Of those, the number that:
 - 2.7a** Stemmed from new partnerships:
 - 2.7b** Increased efficiency:
 - 2.7c** reduced costs:
 - 2.7d** Increased specialty crop grower participation:
 - 2.7e** Expanded customer reach:
 - 2.7f** Increased online presence:
- 2.8** Number of specialty crop-related jobs:
 - 2.8a** Created:
 - 2.8b** Maintained:
- 2.9** Total number of new individuals who went into specialty crop production as a result of marketing. Of those, the number who are:
 - 2.9a** Beginning farmers or ranchers:
 - 2.9b** Socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers:
- 2.10** Number of market access points that reported increased:
 - 2.10a** Revenue:
 - 2.10b** Sales:
 - 2.10c** Cost-savings:

Increase Food Safety Knowledge and Processes

Outcome 3 Increase food safety knowledge and processes

- 3.1** Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about prevention, detection, control, or intervention food safety practices, including relevant regulations to improve their ability to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) or meet the standards for aligned third party food safety audits such as [Harmonized GAP \(Good Agricultural Practices\)](#):
- 3.2** Number of stakeholders that:
 - 3.2a** Established a food safety plan:
 - 3.2b** Revised or updated their food safety plan:
- 3.3** Number of specialty crop stakeholders who implemented new or improved prevention, detection, control, and intervention practices, tools, or technologies to mitigate food safety risks to improve their ability to comply with the FSMA or meet the standards for aligned third party food safety audits such as Harmonized GAP:
- 3.4** Number of prevention, detection, control, or intervention practices developed or enhanced to mitigate food safety risks:
- 3.5** Number of stakeholders that used grant funds to:
 - 3.5a** Purchase:
 - 3.5b** Upgrade food safety equipment:

Improve Pest and Disease Control Processes

Outcome 4 Improve pest and disease control processes

- 4.1** Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about science-based tools to combat pests and diseases:
- 4.2** Number of stakeholders that adopted pest and disease control best practices, technologies, or innovations:
- 4.3** Number of stakeholders trained in early detection and rapid response practices to combat pests and diseases. Of those:
 - 4.3a** The number of additional acres managed using integrated pest management:
- 4.4** Number of stakeholders that implemented new diagnostic systems, methods, or technologies for analyzing specialty crop pests and diseases:
- 4.5** Total number of producers or processors that enhanced or maintained pest and disease control practices. Of those, the number that reported:
 - 4.5a** Reduction in product lost to pest and diseases:
 - 4.5b** Improved crop quality:
 - 4.5c** Reduction in labor costs:
 - 4.5d** Reduction in pesticide use:
- 4.6** Number of producers or processors improving the efficiency of pest and disease control diagnostics and response testing, as reported by:
 - 4.6a** Improving speed:
 - 4.6b** Improving reliability:
 - 4.6c** Expanding capability:
 - 4.6d** Increasing testing (i.e., survey work for pests):

Develop New Seed Varieties and Specialty Crops

Outcome 5 Develop new seed varieties and specialty crops

- 5.1 Number of cultivar and variety trials conducted. Of those:
 - 5.1a The number that advanced to further stages of development:
- 5.2 Number of cultivars and seed varieties developed:
- 5.3 Number of cultivars and seed varieties released:
- 5.4 Number of growers adopting new cultivars or varieties:
- 5.5 Number of acres planted with new cultivars or varieties:

Expand Specialty Crop Research and Development

Outcome 6 Expand Specialty Crop Research and Development

- 6.1 Number of research goals accomplished:
- 6.2 For research conclusions, the number that:
 - 6.2a Yielded findings that supported continued research:
 - 6.2b Yielded findings that led to completion of study:
 - 6.2c Yielded findings that allow for implementation of new practice, process, or technology:
- 6.3 Number of industry representatives and other stakeholders who engaged with research results:
- 6.4 Total number of research outputs published to industry publications and academic journals. For each published research output, the:
 - 6.4a Number of views or reads of published research and data:
 - 6.4b Number of citations counted:

Improve Environmental Sustainability of Specialty Crops

Outcome 7 Improve environmental sustainability of specialty crops

- 7.1 Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about environmental sustainability best practices, tools, or technologies:
- 7.2 Number of stakeholders reported with an intent to adopt environmental sustainability best practices, tools, or technologies:
- 7.3 Number of producers that adopted environmental best practices or tools:
- 7.4 Number of new tools and technologies developed or enhanced to improve sustainability, conservation, or other environmental outcomes:
- 7.5 Number of additional acres managed with sustainable practices, tools, or technologies that focused on:
 - 7.5a Water quality or conservation:
 - 7.5b Soil health:
 - 7.5c Biodiversity:
 - 7.5d Reduction in energy use:
 - 7.5e Other positive environmental outcomes (optional):
- 7.6 Number of additional acres established and maintained for the mutual benefit of pollinators and specialty crops: