

2025 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT

Request for Proposals & Instructions

Released:

Monday, February 3, 2025, 5:00p.m. EST

Grant Proposals Due:

Monday, March 3, 2025, 5:00p.m. EST

No late submissions will be accepted.

Incomplete submissions will not be considered.



Ohio Department of Agriculture

Attn: Sarah Swartzwelder, Grant Coordinator

8995 East Main Street

Reynoldsburg, Ohio 43068

614-995-0435

SCBG@agri.ohio.gov

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) will be receiving a federal allocation from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for specialty crop promotion in 2025. ODA is currently soliciting projects to solely enhance the competitiveness of Ohio specialty crops. It is the intent that all funding will be used to advance the long-term economic and viability of Ohio's specialty crop industry while increasing the marketability of specialty crops.

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) will allocate funding to Ohio to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. The Ohio Department of Agriculture will award multiple grants to sub-recipients from these funds. Grant awards will range from a minimum of \$25,000 up to a maximum of \$150,000. ODA reserves the right to offer an award amount different than the amount requested.

Because USDA is the funding authority, the agency will have final approval for projects submitted through this notice. ODA will utilize a review panel to make funding recommendations to ODA Director Brian Baldrige. The review panel and Director's decision will be forwarded to USDA to make the final determination concerning the awards. Projects cannot begin until the USDA has made their official award announcement and the contract between ODA and the sub-grantee has been signed by all parties. Projects are permitted to last two years in duration (September 2025– September 2027), with an option to extend to a third year with ODA approval.

Purpose of Grant

Grant Proposals must enhance the competitiveness of Ohio specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets by leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops, assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops, expanding availability of and access to specialty crops, and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers. Specialty crops are fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture). Visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) What is a Specialty Crop website (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbpg/specialty-crop>) for a list of eligible and ineligible commodities and a comprehensive definition of specialty crops.

Applicant Eligibility Requirements

The Ohio Department of Agriculture will only accept proposals for consideration for specialty crop block grant funds from food and agricultural non-profit organizations, cooperatives, associations or commodity groups, universities, and research institutions (hereinafter referred to as "eligible applicants") that represent specific specialty crop sectors.

Individuals and partnerships (hereinafter referred to as "partnering entities") may participate in this grant program by developing and submitting proposals, through an eligible applicant. If an eligible applicant is partnering with a partnering entity, the eligible applicant will be the grantee with the Ohio Department of Agriculture for the block grant funds and be the party responsible for the completion of the grant and associated requirements. Eligible parties are encouraged to seek applications or proposals from their membership to be considered for submission for a specialty crop block grant.

Projects benefiting only one single private individual, company or organization are not eligible to apply. Employees of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, members of their immediate family, or business partners of the aforementioned are not eligible to receive a grant. Members of the review committee are not permitted to apply for the grant if they are the applicant or have a financial obligation to project.

Each applicant must obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). On April 4, 2022, the Federal government stopped using DUNS to uniquely identify entities and started using a UEI created in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov). For more information, please visit gsa.gov/entityid. You are not required to have the UEI number before submitting your application to the Ohio Department of Agriculture for the Specialty Crop Block Grant program, but you will be required to have the number before accepting funds as a recipient.

Proposal Timeline

Ohio RFP Opens	February 3, 2025, at 5PM EST
Application deadline	March 3, 2025, by 5PM EST
Review panel recommendations	March 2025 (exact date TBA)
Ohio plan Submitted for USDA	End of April 2025 (exact date TBD)
Expected date of completed contract	November 3, 2025 (estimated)

Submission Criteria

To be considered, applications must be submitted electronically to Sarah Swartzwelder at SCBG@agri.ohio.gov, no later than 5:00PM EST on Monday, March 3, 2025.

GRANT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- A. Proposals shall be designed to address obstacles or opportunities that solely impact the competitive advantage of Ohio's specialty crop industry; develop a plan to address these obstacles or opportunities.
- B. Proposals must clearly identify measures that can quantify the results or outcome of the proposed project. Proposals that able to demonstrate clear profit and employment opportunities to the specialty crop industry will be given a higher rating during the review process.
- C. Grant projects may focus on, but are not restricted to these areas:
 - Support for efforts to reduce or mitigate risk for specialty crop producers, particularly in the areas of climate and weather extremes, crop disease, pest control and/or labor.
 - Improving sustainability of specialty crops
 - Provide improvements in the aggregation and distribution of specialty crops, including improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems
 - Marketing to increase child and/or adult consumption of specialty crops
 - Enhancing food safety
 - Improving the capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act ([21 U.S.C. Chapter 27](#)), for example, developing "Good Agricultural Practices," "Good Handling Practices," "Good Manufacturing Practices," and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems (including USDA Group GAP) for small farmers, packers and processors.
 - Implement programs or projects that provide outreach and education on the importance of the specialty crop industry with regards to Ohio's economy, food safety or the nutrition and health benefits of specialty crops.
 - Research focused on environmental and conservation outcomes.
 - Developing new and improved specialty crops through seed varieties, cultivars, cuttings, etc.

- D. All applicants must provide matching funds of a minimum of 25% of the requested grant amount. This match can be cash or in-kind contribution. Indirect expenses that are unallowable for reimbursement though the federal grant award may be used as match. Please note that funds can only be used for expenses related directly to the project.
- E. Examples of Acceptable Projects:
- A non-profit organization requests funds to demonstrate the viability of organic small fruit production and partners with Cooperative Extension to publicize the working model of diversification to other regional growers.
 - A university partners with a single farmer to implement food safety practices or models on his/her property to meet food safety requirements. The university and farmer then conduct multiple field day and training services at the farm, to encourage other small family farmers to adopt the methods.
- F. Examples of Unacceptable Projects:
- A company requests grant funds to purchase starter plants or equipment used to plant, cultivate, and grow a specialty crop to make a profit or to expand production of a single business or organization.
 - A single specialty crop organization requests grant funds to market its organization or product(s) so that it can increase its membership or revenue.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS AND PROPOSAL FORMAT

An online application for 2025 is available at [ODA's SCBG Website](#).

Please note that there are several parts to this year's application:

1. USDA Project Profile Template.
2. Organization and Grant Applicant Contact Information Form.
3. A PDF of appendices which should include:
 - a. An abstract or executive summary of your project (300 words or less).
 - b. A budget outline of your 25% match.
 - c. Three letters of support for your project.
 - d. Current résumés for each individual working on the project.
 - e. Copy of IRS 501(c)3 determination, if applicable.

The Project Profile Template will include the following elements described in detail in the online application and links to supporting documents. Reviewers will consider opportunities to link separate proposals with similar goals and objectives and may make suggestions for resubmission of a collaborative proposal.

1. Project Title: Please keep title to 15 words max.
2. Duration of Project: Please use 9/30/2025 as the beginning date and 9/29/2027 as the end date.
3. Project, Partner and Summary: Provide a project summary of 250 words or less suitable for dissemination to the public. This should include a very brief (1 sentence) description to include the name of the organization; concise outline; and description of the general tasks to be completed.
4. Project Purpose: What is the specific issue, problem, or need that the project will address? Provide a listing of objectives that the project hopes to achieve.
5. Project Beneficiaries: Estimate the number of beneficiaries; will the project benefit socially disadvantaged farmers or beginning farmers?

6. Statement of Solely Enhancing Specialty Crops: Include a statement that confirms the project will specifically enhance specialty crops.
7. Continuation Project Information: If this is a continuation of a previously funded project, please describe how it will differ from the build on the previous efforts; 3 to 5 sentences of the outcomes of the previous efforts and lessons learned on potential project improvements.
8. Other Support from Federal or State Grant Programs: This grant will not fund duplicative projects. Did you submit this project to a Federal or State grant program? Please identify the grant if applied.
9. External Project Support: Describe the specialty crop stakeholders who support this project and why. (Must be other than the applicant and organizations involved.)
10. Expected Measurable Outcomes: Select at least one of the seven Outcome Measures provided on the application. Choose at least one Outcome Indicator from the attached document, "SCBGP Performance Measures" that corresponds with the measurable outcome. Please note that the Performance Measures have been updated for the FY2025 grant application cycle and forward. Details on performance measures are available at [USDA-AMS's website](#).
11. Miscellaneous Outcome Measure: In the unlikely event that the outcomes and indicators are not relevant to your project, you must develop a project-specific outcome(s) and indicator(s) which will be subject to approval by USDA/AMS.
12. Data Collection to Report on Outcomes and Indicators: Explain how you will collect the required data to report on the outcome and indicator.
13. Budget Narrative: All expenses described in the budget narrative must be associated with expenses that will be covered by the SCBGP. A 25% match is required by ODA. Please prepare a separate budget sheet showing your 25%. Please use the following as a guideline when preparing your budget narrative.
 - Personnel: List the organization's employees whose time and effort can be specifically identified and easily and accurately traced to project activities. Include the number of hours or %FTE for each person. Provide justification for each individual by describing the activities and when they will occur.
 - Fringe Benefits: Provide the fringe benefit rates for each of the project's salaried employees described in the Personnel section that will be paid with SCBG funds.
 - Travel: Explain the purpose of each trip request to include destination; purpose of travel; type of travel (air, car); number of days/miles; cost per day/mile; hotel rate per day; number of travelers. You must follow the state travel rules. For travel rules visit: <http://ohiosharedservices.ohio.gov/TravelExpense/>. Justification must include when the trips will occur and how it will achieve the objectives and outcomes of the project.
 - Equipment: Purchases of equipment is not permitted. Equipment is an item that costs \$5,000 or more.
 - Supplies: List the materials and supplies that cost less than \$5,000 per unit and describe how they will support the purpose and goal of the project. Justification should include the purpose of the supply and how it is necessary for the completion of the project's objectives and outcomes. ***Please be as detailed as possible when listing supplies, including unit/cost.***
 - Program Income: This is gross income generated by the grant and must be reinvested back into the project to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Please explain how you will reinvest the income into your project on your written quarterly reports. Your quarterly reimbursement form must include the funds collected that specific quarter.
 - Contractual/Consultant: These costs are the expenses associated with purchasing goods and/or procuring services performed by an individual or organization other than the applicant in the form of a procurement relationship. If there is more than one contractor or

consultant, each must be described separately. A copy of each completed contract must be submitted to ODA for the project file.

- If the contractor is already chosen, please clarify that the policies and procedures were followed and conform to the federal laws and standards identified in 7 CFR Part 3019.40 through 48 or 3016.36, as applicable.
- If the contractor has not been selected, provide acknowledgement that the procurement processes have not yet been conducted and an assurance that the proper guidelines and procedures will be followed as identified in 7 CFR Part 3019.40 through 48 or 3016.36, as applicable.
- Provide an itemized budget (personnel, fringe, travel, equipment, supplies) with appropriate justification.
- If contractor hourly rates exceed the salary of a GS-15 step 10 Federal employees in your area (for information visit <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>), provide a justification for the expenses. This limit does not include fringe benefits, travel, indirect costs, or other expenses.
- Other – Include any expense not covered in any of the previous budget categories. Be sure to break down costs into cost/unit. This section may include meetings, conferences, advertisements, publication costs and data collection expenses. Justify the expense and why it is important to the success of the project.

Support Letters

All proposals **must include three (and not more than three)** letters of support for the project from industry members that confirm a need for this project. The letters must be received with the original grant application.

Appendices

- Current résumés for each individual working on the project (**no more than 2 pages each**).
- Three industry support letters.
- Copy of IRS 501 (c) 3 determination.

ODA may ask a potential grantee for additional information on any of the application requirements prior to awarding the grant or entering into a grant agreement with the grantee. ODA reserves the right to fund the project in part, add or delete tasks and ask for clarification on the work plan, timeline, expected measurable outcomes or budget. No agreement will be entered into until ODA is satisfied with all project specifications.

Project Revisions

After a proposal is accepted and a grant agreement is entered into between the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the grantee, no modifications or changes can be made to substantially change the project scope, objectives, or budget, extend the project period, change key persons associated with the grant, or increase the budget amount without submitting a request in writing to the ODA. Adding a new contractor to the project after it has been approved must require approval from USDA. Any shift in the budget more than 20 percent must be approved by the USDA as well. Budget changes under 20 percent must be emailed to ODA for state approval.

General Compliance

Grantee agrees to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws in the conduct of the work under the grant agreement.

Furthermore, the Grantee acknowledges the application and documents submitted to the Ohio Department of Agriculture are considered public records pursuant to R.C. 149.43(A)(1) unless the records are not releasable due to an exemption or are protected under another state or federal law. Specifically, the Grantee may claim that some of the documentation submitted is considered a trade secret, and must establish that the record qualifies as a trade secret by following the requirements set forth in 1333.61(D) of the Ohio Revised Code, including, but not limited to, indicating which documents are considered by the applicant as trade secrets, submitting a statement describing the measures the applicant has taken to safeguard the confidentiality of the information, and what value or injury would result in the release of the information. The applicant is responsible for taking the necessary steps to establish that a document is a trade secret under R.C. 1333.61 (D).

Eligible/ Ineligible Expenses

Refer to the [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\) Grants Division General Terms and Conditions](#) for allowable and ineligible expenses under the program.

Additional Documents:

Upon approval, successful applicants will be required to complete and submit the following documents to ODA, among others:

- Contract with ODA
- Obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)
- Form W-9 & Vendor Information Form: (If this is your first-time receiving payment from the State of Ohio.)

REPORTING AND REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS FOR APPROVED APPLICATIONS

Quarterly, Annual and Final Reporting

Grantees shall submit written reports detailing the progress of each project. Progress reports must be submitted to the ODA on a quarterly and annual basis. Quarterly reports are due 30 day after the end of each quarter. The annual report must be submitted to ODA by December 1, 2026. You will be notified by email with the proper formatting of the report prior to the due date. Refer to the USDA [“How do I report on my grant’s progress?” section](#) for more information. A complete timeline of report due dates can be found at [ODA’s SCBG Program website](#), under the **Forms, Templates and Other Resources** tab.

A final performance report will also be required and due to ODA on December 1, 2027, and submitted in the format requested by the USDA. You will receive a reminder email along with formatting instructions. Refer to the USDA [“How do I report on my grant’s progress?” section](#) for more information.

ODA reserves the right to hold the processing of a reimbursement if an annual or final report is not provided by a sub-recipient at the approved deadline. A held reimbursement will be released for payment once that information is provided to ODA. Repeated delays in timely reporting could result in lower scoring of future projects submitted by the award recipient.

Reimbursements

Please note payments for this grant are strictly provided as a reimbursement of expenses incurred. Quarterly reimbursement requests are to be submitted once a quarter with the written quarterly report and can be found at www.agri.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/oda/divisions/markets/resources/SCBG.

To receive reimbursements, an invoice must be submitted to ODA after actual expenses are incurred by the grantee. Supporting documentation for both the reimbursement and match is required with the reimbursement request. All documentation of expenses shall be required as part of the budget closeout report.

EXAMPLE: Request for personnel reimbursement must include hours worked, tasks performed and hourly rate. Matching for personnel should also show the same however when submitted with the reimbursement form, please keep the reimbursement documentation separate from the match.

For more information on Ohio's 2025 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, please contact Sarah Swartzwelder at 614-995-0435, or SCBG@agri.ohio.gov.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Please submit applications by **5:00 PM EST, on Monday, March 3, 2025**. Application templates along with all other additional parts of the application must be submitted electronically to Sarah Swartzwelder, at SBCG@agri.ohio.gov.

Please note that there are several parts to this year's application, and all parts must be submitted to be considered complete. Any submissions missing one or more of the following will be considered incomplete, and will not be considered.

1. Organization and Grant Applicant Contact Information Form.
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3. A PDF of appendices which should include:
 - a. A budget outline of your 25% match.
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