DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
2026 Program Guidelines

The Department of Agriculture (Department) announces a competitive solicitation process to award Specialty Crop Block Grant Program-Farm Bill (SCBGP-FB) funds for projects that enhance the competitiveness of Pennsylvania's specialty crops. Specialty crops are defined as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, including floriculture. (For a full list of commonly considered specialty crops, see the United States Department of Agriculture's Website at www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants under the *Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.*)

1. Program objectives. The purpose of the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by:

(1) leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops;
(2) assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops;
(3) expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and
(4) addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers.

2. Eligible applicants and projects.

(a) *Eligibility of applicants*. State and local organizations, producer associations, academia, community-based organizations, and other eligible specialty crops stakeholders are eligible to apply for grants under the Program.

(b) *Eligible projects*.

(1) Grants may not be awarded to projects that directly benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual.

(2) Grants must be for projects that are focused on an eligible specialty crop.

(3) Projects must enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops and benefit the eligible specialty crop industry as a whole and may include, but are not limited to, projects such as:

(i) Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops.

(ii) Participation of industry representatives at meetings of international standard setting bodies in which the Federal Government participates.

(iii) Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems.

(iv) Assisting all entities in the specialty crop distribution chains in developing good agricultural practices, including the use of cover crops for specialty crop production; good handling practices; good manufacturing practices; and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors.

(v) Investing in specialty crop research, including the use of cover crops for specialty crop production, organic research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes and enhancing food safety.

(vi) Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops.

(vii) Pest and disease control.

(viii) Sustainability.

3. Definitions.

The following words and terms have the following meanings:

Department - The Department of Agriculture of the Commonwealth.

Eligible specialty crop – Fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops (including floriculture). A complete list of eligible specialty crops can be found at: www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, Specialty Crop Definition.

Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - The Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-465, 118 Stat. 3882).

General evaluation criteria - The evaluation criteria established by the Department and utilized for the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

Secretary - The Secretary of the Department.

4. Limitations on grants.

(a) *Project duration***.** A project must have a start date of September 30, 2026, and a completion date of no later than September 29, 2029.

(b) *Reimbursement grants*. Grant funds will be awarded as reimbursement grants.

5. Funds-available basis.

Approximately $1,000,000 is available for grants under the Program. Grants will be awarded on a funds-available basis.

6. Applications.

(a) *Full Proposal required.* The Department will accept proposals for eligible projects as part of a two-phase competitive process. Eligible applicants must submit a full proposal for a project which describes how the grant would be used to enhance the competitiveness of the subject eligible specialty crop through market development, technology, innovation, food safety, nutrition knowledge, sustainable practices and/or management.

(b) *Electronic applications only*. Interested applicants must submit a complete electronic full proposal using the Department of Community and Economic Development's Electronic Single Application ("ESA") website, at: www.esa.dced.state.pa.us.

(c) *Application window*. Completed full proposals may be electronically submitted beginning November 10, 2025. All full proposals must be received by no later than 5:00 p.m. on December 19, 2025.

7. Review of application.

The Secretary will review and evaluate the full proposal and supporting documentation and will consider the following factors, which are consistent with the general evaluation criteria of the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, in deciding whether to approve or reject the full proposal:

(1) The full proposal involves a project for an eligible specialty crop as defined above.

(2) The proposal states the specific issue, problem, or need the project will address, the timeliness and relevance to the specialty crop industry, if it will provide a direct benefit to the specialty crop industry, and if the approach is rational and sound

(3) The proposals will result in at least one of the seven outcomes as predetermined by the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. Outcomes are measurable changes in behavior or conditions that reflect a positive impact to the specialty crop industry. Only one outcome indicator is required. Scoring will be based on the outcome selected and the project's likelihood of success and relevance to the specialty crop industry.

(4) The predetermined indicator (as described on the application form) listed under the outcome identified, and the quantifiable results written for the indictor selected.

(5) How the data will be collected and how well the project will accomplish the outcome and indicator selected.

(6) The extent to which the budget is reasonable and consistent with the project's purpose, outcome, and indicator.

(7) The extent to which the full proposal meets the requirements for an "eligible project" presented in Section 2(b).

(8) Whether the subject specialty crop is not currently eligible for grant payments under the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

8. Notice of disposition of application.

The Department will email written notice of the acceptance or rejection of a full proposal. This notice will be sent to the email address provided by the applicant in the application. Applicants of successful full proposals will be invited to submit an application containing a final proposal for the Program. This application will be provided by the Department with instructions for submittal. Only those applicants notified by the Department will be eligible to submit a final proposal. The Department will evaluate all final proposals by applying the evaluation factors presented in Section 7.

9. Grant agreement.

After the Secretary approves a grant application, and as a precondition to the Department's release of grant moneys to a successful applicant, the Department and the applicant shall execute a written or electronic grant agreement which establishes the terms and conditions subject to which the grant is made. The grant agreement will not be effective, and work should not begin, until all required signatures have been applied to the grant agreement. The grant agreement will contain and conform to the requirements of this notice and will also contain special terms and conditions as required by the Secretary. Among the terms of the grant agreement will be a requirement that the grant recipient provide the Department full and complete access to all records relating to the performance of the project and submit such information as the Department may require. Applicants who wish to view the full terms and conditions of the grant agreement in advance of submitting an application may contact the Department at the phone number or email address set forth in Section 11. Applicants who are unable to agree to the terms and conditions should not submit an application.

10. Verification of project completion.

(a) *General*. Within thirty (30) days of completion of the subject project, the applicant shall provide the Department with proof of the completion of the project and eligibility to receive reimbursement grant funds from the Department.

(b) *Required documentation*. The proof described in subsection (a) shall consist of:

(1) copies of invoices for goods or services directly related to the project, along with the written certification of the president or treasurer of the applicant that the goods or services that are the subject of the invoices have been delivered or provided to the applicant; and

(2) a certificate of completion, signed by its president or treasurer, verifying completion of the subject project and stating that the grant funds will reimburse the applicant for a portion of the costs incurred by the applicant in completing the subject project.

11. Questions and additional information.

Questions regarding this Program, including the on-line application process may be directed to Holly Zarefoss, Bureau of Market Development, Department of Agriculture, 2301 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9408, (717) 783-8461, email hzarefoss@pa.gov.

RUSSELL C. REDDING
Secretary