

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Fiscal Year 2023 Information and Guidelines

Grant Application Due Date:

Friday, March 3, 2023

5:00 PM EST



North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services

1001 Mail Service Center

Raleigh, NC 27699-1001

(919) 707 - 3000

Steve Troxler - Commissioner

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<http://www.ncspecialtycropgrant.org>

Program Solicitation Information

Funding Opportunity Title from USDA AMS: Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – Farm Bill

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.170

Dates: Applications must be sent electronically to Jenni Keith, Program Administrator at jenni.keith@ncagr.gov by **5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 3, 2023**. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding. Applicants may submit a draft application before Wednesday, January 25, 2023 for review and feedback from NCSCBG staff. Reviews may be limited due to time and demand and offer no guarantee of funding.

Executive Summary: The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2023 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). Projects will be reviewed, selected, and modified as necessary and compiled into one submission (State Plan) to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). North Carolina anticipates receiving approximately \$1.2 million in funding. These funds are for projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Funding of these grants is dependent upon the release of USDA AMS's 2023 Notice of Funds Availability. These guidelines and instructions are based on the [USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) and are subject to change.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. GENERAL INFORMATION	
Purpose	3
Project Types.....	3
Projects More Relevant for Other Federal Grant Programs.....	4
Eligible Applicants.....	4
Eligible and Ineligible Specialty Crops.....	4
Definition of a Project.....	4
Multi-State Projects.....	5
II. FUNDING	
Funding Source and Available Funds.....	5
Reimbursements	5
III. COMPLIANCE	
General Compliance.....	5
Permitting Requirements.....	5
Arbitration.....	6
Disagreement Process.....	6
Indemnification.....	6
Non-Discrimination.....	6
Conflict of Interest.....	6
Non-Availability of Funds.....	6
Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA).....	6
Records Requirement.....	6
Monitoring.....	7
IV. APPLICATION	
Timeline.....	7
Formatting.....	7
Allowable and Unallowable Costs.....	8
Application Review and Scoring.....	8
V. POST AWARD INFORMATION	
Notification of Award.....	9
Reporting.....	9
Reimbursements	9
Amendments.....	9
Budget Revisions.....	10
VI. CONTACT INFORMATION	10
VII. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	10

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

PURPOSE

The SCBGP assists State departments of agriculture within any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in enhancing the competitiveness of U.S. specialty crops. Specialty crops are defined as “fruits, vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). A State department of agriculture is the agency, commission, or department of a State government responsible for agriculture within the State.

PROJECT TYPES

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers the SCBGP. USDA encourages projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

- 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, for example, by developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good Manufacturing Practices,” and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors;
- investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes;
- developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops;
- pest and disease control;
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;
- Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; and
- Sustainability

USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encourages applicants to consider including goals and activities related to reducing and stabilizing the levels of heat trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere or adapting to the already occurring climate change in their project’s design and implementation.

Eligible applicants may wish to consider submitting grants that increase the competitiveness of specialty crop farmers, including Native American, beginning and disadvantaged farmers. Increasing competitiveness may include developing local and regional food systems and improving food access in underserved communities.

A Beginning Farmer or Rancher is defined as an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation.

A Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher is defined as a farmer or rancher who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political

beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

PROJECTS MORE RELEVANT FOR OTHER FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS

Entities that engage in projects that support the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase and/or include technologies for benefit redemption systems should consider submitting those projects to the [Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program](#).

Projects that support domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, other direct producer-to consumer market opportunities, local and regional food business enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, or store locally or regionally produced food products should consider submitting those projects to the [Farmers' Market Promotion Program](#) and [Local Food Promotion Program](#).

Projects that support biobased products and bioenergy and energy programs, including biofuels and other alternative uses for agricultural and forestry commodities (development of biobased products) should see the [USDA energy website](#) for information on how to submit those projects for consideration to the energy programs supported by USDA.

ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

State and/or local governmental units, academia (Universities and Colleges), and non-profit organizations, including producer associations, community-based organizations and other specialty crop stakeholders are eligible to apply.

NC SCBGP grant funds will be awarded for projects of up to **two (2) years and six (6) months duration. Projects will not be extended past June 30, 2026.**

More than one project application packet per applicant may be submitted. If submitting multiple project application packets, please prioritize your submissions by indicating the priority order at the top, right hand corner of the "Application Cover Page".

Applications for grant funds should describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. AMS will not award grant funds for projects whose products or services promote or provide profit that solely benefits a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, recipients and subrecipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

ELIGIBLE AND INELIGIBLE SPECIALTY CROPS

Commonly recognized specialty crops are fruits and tree nuts, vegetables, culinary herbs and spices, medicinal plants, as well as nursery, floriculture, and horticulture crops. Please see [What is a Specialty Crop? | Agricultural Marketing Service \(usda.gov\)](#) for a comprehensive listing.

DEFINITION OF A PROJECT

A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive, distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period of time and within specific limitations (cost, performance/quality, etc.). Additionally, it uses resources that are specifically allocated to the work of the project and usually involves a team of people. Projects are different from other ongoing operations in an

organization because, unlike operations, projects have a definitive beginning and end – they have a limited duration. A project has an overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks.

MULTI-STATE PROJECTS

The NC SCBGP is not participating as a lead State in the Specialty Crop Multi-State Program (SCMP).

II. FUNDING

FUNDING SOURCE AND AVAILABLE FUNDS

AMS is charged with distributing block grant funds to State Departments of Agriculture, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Successful project application funding is contingent upon the available funding from the USDA, AMS. The USDA is the funding entity and has the final approval for projects submitted to the USDA for the Specialty Crop Block Grant. The NCDA&CS reserves the right to offer an award amount less than the amount requested.

The NCDA&CS will award multiple grants from these funds for the fiscal year 2023 grant cycle. Determination of funding allocations will be competitive with awards made to the top qualifying applicants. **The maximum grant request amount for 2023 will be no more than \$200,000.**

REIMBURSEMENTS

Each payment is conditioned upon receipt and approval by the NC SCBGP Administrator of the deliverable(s) **specified in the Scope of Work** and shall be accompanied by reasonable assurance (documentation, receipts, invoices, etc.) that the goods and services for which payment is requested were received and performed. The NCDA&CS, NC SCBGP has the right to disallow costs determined inappropriate or unreasonable.

III. COMPLIANCE

GENERAL COMPLIANCE

All awarded grant projects must comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations and the terms of the grant award. The Grantee shall comply, as applicable, with the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004 of Public Law 108-465 (7 U.S.C. § 1621 note); specialty crop block grant program regulations at 7 C.F.R. Parts 1290 and 1291; and uniform federal grant regulations at 7 C.F.R. Parts 3015, 3016, 48 C.F.R. Subpart 31.2 and 2 C.F.R. Part 200.

PERMITTING REQUIREMENTS

NC SCBGP funded projects may involve conducting work that requires permits and clearances from various agencies. The NCDA&CS and NC SCBGP do not determine which, if any, permits are required for specific projects nor does it review permits for accuracy or appropriateness. Applicants are responsible for determining that all necessary permits that apply to their project are identified and obtained.

ARBITRATION

To the extent required pursuant to North Carolina General Statute and any successor statute, the parties agree to use arbitration, after exhausting all applicable administrative remedies, to resolve disputes arising out of the Grant Award Contract.

DISAGREEMENT PROCESS

The NC SCBGP reserves the right to reject any application packet due to ineligibility or requirements not met as stated in this grant information packet. Disagreements will be addressed pursuant to the North Carolina General Statutes.

INDEMNIFICATION

The parties involved with a fully executed contract awarding funds to carry out a NC SCBGP project agree that the State of North Carolina, its departments, agencies, boards and commissions shall be indemnified and held harmless by the contractor for the vicarious liability of the State as a result of entering into this contract. However, the parties further agree that the State of North Carolina, its departments, agencies, boards and commissions shall be responsible for its own negligence. Each party to a contract is responsible for its own negligence.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Grantee agrees to comply with Federal and North Carolina General Statutes prohibiting discrimination in employment. Information on filing a claim with the NC Civil Rights Division can be found at <https://www.ncoah.com/civil/>.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Grant Award Contract will be subject to termination. Successful applicants must provide a copy of their approved current conflict of interest policies pursuant to North Carolina General Statute.

NON-AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

Every payment obligation of the State under a Grant Award Contract will be conditioned upon the availability of funds appropriated or allocated for the payment of such obligation. If funds are not allocated and available for the continuance of the Contract, it may be terminated by the State at the end of the period for which funds are available. No liability shall accrue to the State in the event this provision is exercised, and the State shall not be obligated or liable for any future payments or for any damages as a result of termination under this paragraph.

FEDERAL FUNDING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY ACT (FFATA)

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) requires that all entities receiving federal funds register in the Federal System for Award Management (SAM) database and submit required information as determined in the FFATA regulation. SAM is a Federal Government owned and operated free website that consolidates the capabilities in CCR/FedReg, ORCA, and EPLS. As such, all selected applicants shall register in the SAM database, <https://www.sam.gov> and submit any additional forms and/or documentation requested to fulfill the FFATA reporting requirements as outlined by the NCDA&CS. SAM registration must be maintained and the SAM account must remain active during the entire life of the Grant Award Contract.

RECORDS REQUIREMENTS

Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute and 7 C.F.R. §§ 3015.21 & 3016.42, the Grantee shall retain and shall contractually require each subcontractor to retain all Records for a period of five years after completion date indicated in the Contract and until any litigation, claim, negotiation, audit, cost recovery, or action involving the Records has been completed. All Records shall be subject to inspection and audit by the

State and/or USDA at normal business hours. Upon request, the Grantee shall produce the original of any or all Records.

MONITORING

The NCDA&CS and NC SCBGP reserve the ability to perform site monitoring visits to any and all grantees to ensure that work is progressing within the required time frame and that fiscal procedures are followed accurately and appropriately. Monitoring includes both financial and program information as well as site visits.

IV. APPLICATION

TIMELINE

January 6, 2023	Grant opportunity announced
March 3, 2023	Application due, 5:00 pm EST
March-April 2023	Applications reviewed
June 2023	Final Application submitted to USDA by NC SCBGP
Late September/Early October 2023	Awarded projects announced by USDA
October-December 2023	Grant agreements/contracts sent to grantees
January 1, 2024	Anticipated project start date

FORMATTING

All organizations **must** adhere to the following instructions, in addition to other requirements as stated in this grant information packet, to be considered eligible for grant funding. Applications **missing any of the subsequent information may be deemed ineligible.**

The Project Profile Template must be used as the format for the application. The complete 2023 Application Packet, including the Application Cover Page and Project Profile Template can be found on the NC SCBGP website at www.ncspecialtycrops.com.

The Project Profile should include the project details and necessary information to fulfill the goals and objectives of the project. The acceptable font size for the narrative is 11 or 12 pitch with all margins at 1 inch. Information should be completed for each question then delete the instructions in each section keeping all formatting consistent.

Applications are to be a maximum of 20 pages in length. This does NOT include the Cover Sheet, or other attachments such as Researcher's Vitae and Letters of Support.

Required Attachments:

- IRS Tax Exempt Status for your organization
- Biographical Sketches- Provide a resume or biographical sketch of each person who has primary responsibility for developing and implementing the project. Information should clarify each person's duties and highlight their qualifications.
- Letters of Support- At least one letter, but no more than three, providing evidence of support for the project.

ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COSTS

A summary of allowable and unallowable costs can be found in the [General Terms and Conditions](#) section 8.0. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive. Reference [Subpart E-Cost Principles of 2 CFR part 200](#) for a complete explanation of the allowability of costs. These terms and conditions are subject to change with the release of the FY 2023 USDA-AMS SCBGP General Award Terms and Conditions.

No indirect or administration costs may be allotted to the budgeted projects.

Equipment purchases are not allowed.

Travel costs including meals, lodging and mileage must follow the policies set forth in the [State of North Carolina Budget Manual](#). The current rates are effective as of July 1, 2021 and are subject to change.

If you have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing this section, please contact the NC SCBGP Administrator.

APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING

All applications received prior to the deadline will be reviewed for completeness by NC SCBGP staff. Incomplete applications may not be further considered.

All qualifying applications will be evaluated by the NC SCBGP Selection Committee. The Selection Committee will review each application using standard and consistent review criteria. After the applications have been evaluated and rated, contract offer recommendations will be made to the NC SCBGP staff. The NC SCBGP Selection Committee may recommend adjustments to the project proposal, scope of work and/or project budget.

Project applications will be scored on the following scale:

Application Cover Page	10 points
Project Partner and Summary	15 points
Project Purpose	20 points
External Project Support	10 points
Expected Measurable Outcomes	20 points
Budget	25 points
Total:	100 Points

The NC SCBGP reserves the right to fund the project in part, add and delete tasks, and ask for clarification. No contract will be entered into until the NCDA&CS and NC SCBGP are satisfied with all the specifications of the project.

The NC SCBGP will then make funding recommendations to the Director of Research Stations Division based on the rating and the strength of the project proposal as determined by the Selection Committee. Upon approval, all projects will be compiled in a State Plan for final approval from the USDA.

Previous performance: If an organization has previously received funding through the NC SCBGP, up to 20 points may be deducted if the recipient organization failed to provide invoices and/or reports in a timely manner or otherwise failed to properly administer the project in compliance with the requirements of the SCBGP.

V. POST AWARD INFORMATION

NOTIFICATION OF AWARD

All eligible applications will be reviewed. Successful applications will be chosen on the merits of the project and previous performance as determined by the NC SCBGP Selection Committee and will be included in the North Carolina State Plan. This will be submitted to USDA no later than the final deadline which they set for the receiving of applications for approval. Applicants will be notified via email whether or not their project is selected for inclusion in the North Carolina State Plan. Funding is not guaranteed if the project is included in the State Plan.

Following approval of the North Carolina State Plan by USDA, applicants will be notified and will then be required to supply several supplemental forms (i.e. Conflict of Interest Policy, Sworn Statement of No Overdue Taxes, etc.) prior to being sent a Contract Award Agreement. The Contract Award Agreement will require grantees to agree to the clauses of the Contract and Special Provisions. The NC SCBGP anticipates that contract awards and notifications will be made in late 2023.

After contract awards have been made, all application packets may be made available to the public. The NC SCBGP may determine that trade secrets or proprietary information may continue to be held confidential. If you believe that any of the information contained in your application packet should be held confidential you must designate that information as “confidential” in your application packet and provide an explanation as to why it should be held confidential.

REPORTING

- **Interim and Annual Performance Reports:**

Grantees must submit the Interim Performance Report by **July 31 each year**, and Annual Performance Report by **October 31 each year**.

- **Final Report:**

A Final Report **will be due within 60 days following the completion of the project** or expiration of the Grant Award Contract. 20% of the Grant Total will be withheld until the Final Performance Report is approved by the NC SCBGP.

Forms for reporting are available on the [NC SCBGP website](#).

Failure to submit timely reports may result in the forfeiture of reimbursements.

REIMBURSEMENTS

Reimbursement requests may be submitted no more than monthly or when expenses have been incurred. Reimbursement request forms can be found on the [NC SCBGP website](#).

AMENDMENTS

Grantees are highly encouraged to include ample time for project completion. There is no penalty for completing all tasks in the work plan early. **Contract extensions are not encouraged and will only be granted in extreme circumstances.**

Contract Award shall be modified by mutual written consent only through a Contract Award Amendment executed by the NCDA&CS and the Grantee. Unauthorized changes to a Contract Award shall be void and without effect, and the Grantee shall not be entitled to any claim under a Contract based on those changes. Contract Awards are intended to incorporate all provisions required by federal and state law. If the

NCDA&CS learns that a provision required by federal or state law has not been incorporated in the Contract, the parties agree to promptly amend the Contract to include the provision.

Prior to initiating any paperwork, the NC SCBGP Administrator should be contacted. The Administrator will provide the information needed to begin the initial steps and forms needed to request a Contract Award Amendment.

BUDGET REVISIONS

If a project budget adjustment is needed during the project period, a written request may be made to the NC SCBGP to reallocate budget funds between budget categories. However, the total budget amount, as dictated by the approved grant award, cannot be adjusted. Grantees may not spend funds from line items not approved in the Contract Award. **No deviation from the approved budget will be allowed without prior written approval by the NCDA&CS.**

Grantees shall inform the NC SCBGP of the potential for unexpended awarded grant funds prior to the end of the grant period.

VI. CONTACT INFORMATION

Jenni Keith- Program Administrator
North Carolina Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Jenni.keith@ncagr.gov
(919) 707-3158

VII. Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Can the outcome of the research project be beyond the timeline of the grant?**
Yes. These grants will fund projects for up to two (2) years and six (6) months. The NCDA&CS understands that for many specialty crops, it may take longer than 2.5 years to reach measurable outcomes. If proposing such a project, communicate what the anticipated outcomes will be by the end of the grant and a timeline for the expected end results of the project beyond the end of the grant. It will also be important to communicate HOW the project will be able to continue without the SCBGP funds at the end of the granting period.
- 2. Does the application need to follow *exactly* the outline specified in the Project Profile Template, or are those categories just suggestions?**
Proposals need to contain the exact categories specified in the Application Guidelines. The NCDA&CS's application to USDA is required to contain these specific categories in this order for each project funded through the SCBGP.
- 3. Can SCBGP funds be used to purchase a greenhouse?**
No, SCBGP funds cannot be used to purchase buildings. Funds can be used to purchase supplies needed to run the greenhouse.
- 4. Can NC SCBGP funds be used to purchase equipment?**
No, equipment purchases are not allowed.
- 5. The project calls for the purchasing of many parts that will be used to make one piece of equipment. Should this be listed as supplies?**

The total amount of the parts and inputs should be totaled. If the amount is over \$5,000 they are unallowable.

6. What regulations are to be used when calculating travel expenses for the grant?

Travel expenses must comply with the current State of North Carolina travel regulations. These rates are available on the [NC SCBGP website](#).

7. When can work begin on my project?

The process for approval is as follows: After USDA approval of the State Plan, the NCDA&CS will advise if your project was approved and is eligible to receive funding. Meanwhile efforts will be underway to complete and execute the contract, and you may be required to submit additional documents and forms after the eligibility of award announcement and prior to a contract being executed. The NC SCBGP anticipates a project start date of January 1, 2024. You can begin efforts on your project upon the receipt of a fully executed Contract Award. Any expenditures PRIOR to receiving a fully executed Contract Award are the grantee's responsibility.