

STATE OF MAINE
Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
Agricultural Resource Development



RFA# 202002037

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

RFA Coordinator	<p><i>All communication regarding this Request for Applications <u>must</u> be made via email to:</i></p> <p>Contact Information: specialtycropblockgrant@maine.gov</p>
Submitted Questions Due	<p>All questions regarding this Request for Applications <u>must</u> be submitted to the email address identified above. Questions must be submitted no later than March 10, 2020. Any questions submitted after that date may not be answered.</p>
Application Submission	<p>The application submission deadline will be 11:59 p.m. on March 31, 2020. Applications are required to be submitted prior to the submission date and time to be considered for that annual application enrollment period.</p> <p>Electronic (email) Submission Address: Proposals@maine.gov</p>

RFA DEFINITIONS/ACRONYMS

The following terms and acronyms shall have the meaning indicated below as referenced in this RFA:

1. **AMS:** Agricultural Marketing Service, the division of the USDA that administers the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.
2. **Application:** A completed package containing all elements detailed in the RFA.
3. **Beginning farmer:** The USDA defines a “beginning farmer” as an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation.
4. **Bid:** In this RFP, submitted applications are referred to as Applications. In some contexts, they may be referred to as Bids.
5. **Block Grant:** Funding awarded by the federal government (in this case, via the USDA) to a state to administer locally within the parameters of the grant program priorities. The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is funded by the USDA, and in Maine the DACF administers the program, including establishing priority areas, coordinating the RFA process, contracting with successful applicants, and reporting on project progress to the USDA.
6. **Department or DACF:** Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
7. **Indicators:** The Agricultural Marketing Service lists measurable indicators for each possible project Outcome (found in Part IV of the RFA). Eligible projects must address at least one Indicator for each relevant Outcome.
8. **Indirect Costs:** “Costs of doing business,” such as utilities, rent, and furnishings, are indirect costs, and may not be included in the proposed project budget.
9. **Letter of Support (LOS):** If an individual or producer applies, they must have an agricultural organization or commodity group as a partner who has an accepted role in the project and has included a Letter of Support. The project application and LOS must clearly demonstrate benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to the individual or organization.
10. **OMB:** Office of Management and Budget
11. **Outcomes:** The Agricultural Marketing Service lists eight possible Outcomes (listed in Part IV of the RFP) which Specialty Crop Block Grants may address. Eligible projects must address at least one AMS Outcome.
12. **Priority Areas:** Each year the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry determines specific priorities for that year’s grant funding. Applications that directly target one of these priorities receives points for doing so in the scoring process.
13. **Reimbursement basis:** Grant monies will be paid to successful Applicants with completed contracts upon submittal of invoices for approved project expenses.
14. **RFP:** Request for Applications, the document containing details of how to apply for a Specialty Crop Block Grant.
15. **RFP Coordinator:** person designated by the DACF to coordinate all parts of the Specialty Crop Block Grant application process. All questions regarding the application process must be submitted to the RFP Coordinator listed on the first page of this RFP.
16. **SCBGP:** Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

- 17. Socially Disadvantaged Farmer:** A farmer who farmer 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.
- 18. Specialty Crop:** Section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) and amended under [section 10010 of the Agricultural Act of 2014](#), [Public Law 113-79](#) (the Farm Bill) defines specialty crops as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).” Eligible plants must be cultivated or managed and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification to be considered specialty crops. Processed products shall consist of greater than 50% of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water.
- 19. State:** State of Maine
- 20. USDA:** United State Department of Agriculture

PART I INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose and Background

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (Department) is seeking applications which, if approved, will become part of a State of Maine plan submitted for approval and funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) as defined in this Request for Applications (RFP) document. This document provides instructions for submitting Applications, the procedure and criteria by which the successful Applicant(s) will be selected, and the contractual terms which will govern the relationship between the State of Maine ("State") and the awarded Applicant(s).

The Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) authorized the USDA to provide grants to State departments of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is eligible to submit a State Plan for these funds. The state plan will include project Applications that are submitted, reviewed and approved through this formal RFA process.

B. General Provisions

1. From the time this RFA is issued until award notification is made, all contact with the State regarding this RFA must be made through the aforementioned RFA Coordinator. No other person/ State employee is empowered to make binding statements regarding this RFA. Violation of this provision may lead to disqualification from the grant application process, at the State's discretion.
2. Issuance of this RFA does not commit the Department to issue an award or to pay expenses incurred by an Applicant in the preparation of a response to this RFA. This includes attendance at personal interviews or other meetings and software or system demonstrations, where applicable.
3. All applications should adhere to the instructions and format requirements outlined in this RFA and all written supplements and amendments (such as the Summary of Questions and Answers), issued by the Department. Applications are to follow the format and respond to all questions and instructions specified below in the "Application Required Submission Components" section of this RFA.
4. Applicants shall take careful note that in evaluating an application submitted in response to this RFA, the Department will consider materials provided in the application, information obtained through interviews/presentations (if any), and internal Departmental information of previous contract history with the Applicant (if any). The Department also reserves the right to consider other reliable references and publicly available information in evaluating an Applicant's experience and capabilities.
5. The application shall be signed by a person authorized to legally bind the Applicant and shall contain a statement that the application and the pricing contained therein will remain valid and binding for a period of 180 days from the date and time of the grant application deadline.
6. The RFA and the selected Applicant's application, including all appendices or attachments, shall be the basis for the final contract, as determined by the Department.

7. Following announcement of an award decision, all submissions in response to this RFA will be considered public records available for public inspection pursuant to the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) (1 M.R.S. §§ 401 et seq.).
[State of Maine Freedom of Access Act](#)
8. The Department, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to recognize and waive minor informalities and irregularities found in applications received in response to this RFA.
9. All applicable laws, whether or not herein contained, shall be included by this reference. It shall be the Bidder's responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them.

C. Eligibility to Apply

The following entities may be eligible to apply for this grant:

1. Individuals
2. Commodity groups
3. Agricultural organizations
4. Buy local organizations
5. Colleges and universities
6. Producers including Native American and disadvantaged farmers
7. Municipalities
8. State agencies
9. Agricultural nonprofit organizations

Provided their Applications meet all the specifications in this Request for Proposals and the USDA's Notice of Federal Assistance.

If an individual or producer applies, they must have an agricultural organization or commodity group as a partner who has an accepted role in the project and has included a Letter of Support. The project proposal must clearly demonstrate benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to the individual or organization. SCBGP will not award grant funds for projects that benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, recipient and sub-recipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

Project(s) must enhance the competitive of U.S. or U.S. territory-grown specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets. See the [SCBGP website](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbqp) (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbqp>) for a definition of specialty crops and processed products, including a list of eligible specialty crops and ineligible commodities.

D. Contract Term

The Department anticipates that most projects will be completed in 1-2 years. (Please note that these are estimated dates and may be adjusted, as necessary, in order to comply with all procedural requirements associated with this Request for Applications and the contracting process). The actual contract start date will be established by a completed and approved contract.

E. Number of Awards

The Department anticipates making multiple awards up to \$100,000 each as a result of this RFA process. The Department may only include the first year of a multiple year project in the State Plan submitted to the USDA. Applications for multiple year projects must clearly separate each year of the proposed project into single year goals and objectives. If selected, only the first year of a multiple year project will be included and contracted. Projects that are for one single year only will still have a multi-year reporting requirement to observe the long-term outcomes of project, which is represented in the multi-year contract timeline.

F. Annual Application Submittals

This RFA offers an annual application submittal. Applicants must submit a new application on an annual basis. A new application will be released and available to applicants each year at <http://www.maine.gov/dafs/procurementservices/vendors/grants>. Applications will be accepted from any and all applicants per the details provided on the RFA cover page each year this RFA is active.

PART II SCOPE OF SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED

A. PROJECT STRATEGIES

The SCBGP encourages States to develop projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

1. Enhanced Food Safety;
2. 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 (including USDA GroupGAP) for small farmers, packers, and processors;
3. Investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes;
4. Developing new and improved seed varieties for specialty crops;
5. Pest and disease control;
6. Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;
7. Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; and
8. Sustainability.

Contracts will not be awarded to projects that benefit a particular commercial product, organization, institute, or individual. Applications must demonstrate how the specialty crop industry, or the public will benefit from the project.

Only one project may be proposed per application. Applications for multiple projects will not be considered for award and will be rejected without exception. However, if an entity chooses to do so, it may submit more than one proposal as long as each proposal is for a single project.

B. AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE REPORTING

DACF will collect reports from selected applicants in order to fulfill the reporting requirements of the block grant process. AMS is required to report on the outcomes of the SCBGP at a national scale to demonstrate the performance of this program. By collecting, aggregating, and reporting performance data across all states and territories, AMS can share the impact of the SCBGP with all stakeholders, including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Congress, the agricultural community, and the general public. The following are AMS requirements:

1. Each project submitted in the State Plan must include at least one of the eight outcomes listed below, and at least one of the indicators listed underneath the selected outcome(s). If there are multiple sub-indicators under the selected indicator, select at least one.
2. If the indicator(s) below the selected outcome(s) are not relevant to a project, a project-specific indicator(s) may be developed which will be subject to approval by AMS.
3. The progress of each indicator must be reported in the Annual Performance Report and the result in the Final Performance Report.
4. AMS will aggregate the data collected to assess the overall impact of the program and report to OMB and Congress on these national outcome measures.

5. AMS will review the quality of the information we receive in subsequent performance reports and modify the outcomes and indicators as needed over time to lead to better results in showing the impact of the SCBGP.

PART III KEY RFA EVENTS

A. How to Submit Questions about the Request for Applications

1. General Instructions

- a. **All questions related to this proposal must be submitted to the grant coordinator as listed on the front of this RFA document.**
- b. It is the responsibility of all Applicants, and other interested parties, to examine the entire Request for Applications and to seek clarification, in writing, if they do not understand any information or instructions. No questions may be submitted after the deadline for submittal has passed.
- b. Applicants and other interested parties should use the Submitted Questions Form – for submission of questions (attached to the end of this Request for Applications).
- c. The Submitted Questions Form must be submitted by e-mail to the address identified on the cover page of this Request for Application.
- d. Submitted Questions must include the Request for Applications Number and Title in the subject line of the e-mail. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete/on time e-mail transmission and receipt.

2. **Question & Answer Summary:** In order to be fair to all Applicants, all questions about this Request for Applications, and responses to those questions, will be posted online. Responses to all questions will be compiled in writing and posted on the following website: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](#). It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain a copy of the Question & Answer Summary. Only those answers issued in writing on this website will be considered binding.

B. How to Find any Changes to the Request for Applications

All amendments (if any) released in regard to this Request for Applications will be posted on the following website: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](#). It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain amendments. Only those amendments posted on this website are considered binding.

C. Submitting the Application

1. **Applications Due:** Applications must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. local time, on the date listed on the cover page of this RFA, at which point they will be opened. Applications received **after** the 11:59 p.m. deadline will be **rejected** without exception.
2. **Delivery Instructions:** Email application submissions are to be submitted to the State of Maine Division of Procurement Services, via email, to the email address provided on the RFA Cover Page (proposals@maine.gov).
 - a. Only applications received by email will be considered. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete e-mail transmission and receipt.
 - b. Applicants are to insert the following into the subject line of their email submission: **“RFA# 202002037 Application Submission – [Applicant’s Name]”**
 - c. Applications must be submitted in WORD format.

PART IV APPLICATION SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

This section contains instructions for Applicants to use in preparing their applications. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

1. The application for this Request for Applications is available as a separate document on the following webpage: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](#)
2. The “Application Cover Page” must be the first page of the application package. It is important that the cover page show the specific information requested, including Applicant address(es) and other details listed. The Application Cover Page shall be dated and signed by a person authorized to enter into contracts on behalf of the Applicant.
3. The Applicant must complete and submit the “Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification Form”. Failure to provide this certification may result in the disqualification of the Applicant’s application, at the discretion of the Department.
4. The Applicant is asked to be brief and concise in providing written information required in the application.
5. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to provide all information requested in the Request for Applications package at the time of submission. Failure to provide information requested in this Request for Applications may, at the discretion of the Department’s Grant Review Team, result in a lower rating for the incomplete sections or disqualification.

A. Required Application Template Submission Components

As outlined above, the Application Template must be fully completed and include:

- Application Cover Page (Pass/Fail)
- Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification (Pass/Fail)
- Litigation (Pass/Fail)

The Application Template must include the following:

1. Project Purpose

- a. The purpose should include the specific issue, problem, interest or need to be addressed and why the project is important and timely.
- b. Include a listing of the objectives that this project hopes to achieve.
- c. Include how the objectives of the project address the issues that have been identified by USDA.
- d. If this is a marketing program, show that funding will be used to enhance the competitiveness of Specialty Crops.
- e. If any of the project activities or costs has the potential to enhance the competitiveness of non-specialty crops (ex: farmers market, general buy local, CSA etc.) describe the methods or processes you will implement to verify all grant funds are expended on activities and costs that only enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops.
- f. If the project builds on a previous SCBGP or SCBGP-FB project, indicate clearly how the new project differs from and builds on the previous project’s work.
 - i. For proposals requesting second year funding of last year’s project, summarize the outcomes in 3-5 sentences regarding the previous year

and why it is important to continue to fund the project for the coming year(s).

- ii. Provide lessons learned on potential project improvements from implementing and what will be incorporated to make the ongoing project more effective and successful at meeting goals and objectives.
 - iii. Please describe the likelihood of the project becoming self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent on grant funds.
- g. For each project, indicate if the project will be, or has been, submitted to or funded by another Federal or State grant program and if the project duplicates efforts of the SCBGP-FB and the other Federal or State grant program. If it does not, how does it supplement.

2. Potential Impact

- a. Discuss who is to be affected by the project, including whether this project benefits socially disadvantaged farmers or beginning farmers as defined by the USDA SCBGP.
- b. Indicate an estimate of the number of people or operations who are considered beneficiaries and define who the intended beneficiaries of this project are.
- c. Provide an assessment of the potential economic impact of the project if such data are available and relevant to the project.
- d. Describe the specialty crop stakeholders who support this project and why (other than the applicant and organizations involved in the project).

3. Expected Measurable Outcomes

All projects must choose at least one of the eight outcomes listed below, which were approved by the OMB and are required by the USDA in order to evaluate the performance of SCBG at the national level. Please select the outcome measure(s) that are applicable to the project and select at least one of the related quantifiable indicators prescribed.

Outcome 1: To enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased sales

***This outcome is mandatory for all marketing and promotion projects.**

Marketing and promotion projects focus efforts to sell, advertise, promote, market, and generate publicity, attract new customers, or raise customer awareness for specialty crops or a specialty crop venue. These include, but are not limited to:

- a. Uses of social media to market and promote;
- b. Specialty crop local, regional and national campaigns;
- c. Specialty crop only tradeshow;
- d. Website promotion and development;
- e. Use/development of billboards, radio, television, magazine and email ads, marketing materials such as direct mail, brochures;
- f. Agritourism;
- g. Export market development;
- h. Retail promotions including point-of-purchase items, labels, packaging etc.;
- i. Farmers market promotions; and
- j. Marketing and promotion campaigns with an education component directed to consumers.

The specific measure must be expressed as a dollar value and percentage increase in sales of one or more specialty crops in one or more States or foreign markets as a result of marketing and/or promotion activities. For example, an expected outcome of growth in sales from 5% to 10% is not acceptable by itself, but in combination with an increase in sales of \$1 million to \$2 million it is acceptable. This requirement means that an established baseline of sales in dollars must already exist at the time of application. For projects that do not already have a baseline of sales in dollars, one of the objectives of the project must be to determine such a baseline in order to meet the requirement to document the value of sales increases by the end of the project.

Indicator:

Sales increased from \$X to \$X and by X percent, as result of marketing and/or promotion activities

AMS understands that sales can be impacted by a host of unrelated issues including trade disputes, phytosanitary issues, export conditions, weather, and other factors affecting the farmer, supply chain, retailers, wholesalers and/or consumers. The above factors demonstrate that even a perfectly executed marketing campaign can result in sales remaining constant or even declining. These factors and events that either positively or negatively impacted the sales of a project can be explained in the performance report.

Outcome 2: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased consumption

Indicators:

- a. Of the _____ total number of children and youth reached,
 - i. The number that gained knowledge about eating more specialty crops
 - ii. The number that reported an intention to eat more specialty crops
 - iii. The number that reported eating more specialty crops
- b. Of the _____ total number of adults reached,
 - i. The number that gained knowledge about eating more specialty crops
 - ii. The number that reported an intention to eat more specialty crops
 - iii. The number that reported eating more specialty crops
- c. Number of new and improved technologies and processes to enhance the nutritional value and consumer acceptance of specialty crops (excluding patents)
- d. Number of new specialty crops and/or specialty crop products introduced to consumers _____

Outcome 3: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased access and awareness

Indicators:

- a. Of the _____ total number of consumers or wholesale buyers reached,
 - i. The number that gained knowledge on how to access/produce/prepare/preserve specialty crops
 - ii. The number that reported an intention to access/produce/prepare/preserve specialty crops
 - iii. The number that reported supplementing their diets with specialty crops that they produced/preserved/obtained/prepared

- b. Of the ____ total number of individuals (culinary professionals, institutional kitchens, specialty crop entrepreneurs such as kitchen incubators/shared-use kitchens, etc.) reached,
 - i. The number that gained knowledge on how to access/produce/prepare/preserve specialty crops
 - ii. The number that reported an intention to access/produce/prepare/preserve specialty crops
 - iii. The number that reported supplementing their diets with specialty crops that they produced/prepared/preserved/obtained
- c. Number of existing delivery systems/access points of those reached that expanded and/or improved offerings of specialty crops
 - i. ____ farmers markets
 - ii. ____ produce at corner stores
 - iii. ____ school food programs and other food options (vending machines, school events, etc.)
 - iv. ____ grocery stores
 - v. ____ wholesale markets
 - vi. ____ food hubs that process, aggregate, distribute, or store specialty crops
 - vii. ____ home improvement centers with lawn and garden centers
 - viii. ____ lawn and garden centers
 - ix. ____ other systems/access points, not noted
 - x. ____ total (if not reported above)
- d. Number of new delivery systems/access points offering specialty crops
 - i. ____ farmers markets
 - ii. ____ produce at corner stores
 - iii. ____ school food programs and other food options (vending machines, school events, etc.)
 - iv. ____ grocery stores
 - v. ____ wholesale markets
 - vi. ____ food hubs that process, aggregate, distribute, or store specialty crops
 - vii. ____ home improvement centers with lawn and garden centers
 - viii. ____ lawn and garden centers
 - ix. ____ other systems/access points, not noted
 - x. ____ total (if not reported above)

Outcome 4: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through greater capacity of sustainable practices of specialty crop production resulting in increased yield, reduced inputs, increased efficiency, increased economic return, and/or conservation of resources.

Indicators:

- a. Numbers of plant/seed releases (i.e., cultivars, drought-tolerant plants, organic, enhanced nutritional composition, etc.) _____
- b. Adoption of best practices and technologies resulting in increased yields, reduced inputs, increased efficiency, increased economic return, and conservation of resources (select at least one below).
 - i. Number of growers/producers indicating adoption of recommended practices _____
 - ii. Number of growers/producers reporting reduction in pesticides, fertilizer, water used/acre _____

- iii. Number of producers reporting increased dollar returns per acre or reduced costs per acre _____
- iv. Number of acres in conservation tillage or acres in other best management practices _____
- c. Number of habitat acres established and maintained for the mutual benefit of pollinators and specialty crops _____

Outcome 5: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through more sustainable, diverse, and resilient specialty crop systems

Indicators:

- a. Number of new or improved innovation models (biological, economic, business, management, etc.), technologies, networks, products, processes, etc. developed for specialty crop entities including producers, processors, distributors, etc. _____
- b. Number of innovations adopted _____
- c. Number of specialty crop growers/producers (and other members of the specialty crop supply chain) that have increased revenue expressed in dollars _____
- d. Number of new diagnostic systems analyzing specialty crop pests and diseases. _____
 - i. [Diagnostic systems refer to, among other things: labs, networks, procedures, access points.]
- e. Number of new diagnostic technologies available for detecting plant pests and diseases. _____
 - i. [The intent here is not to count individual pieces of equipment or devices, but to enumerate technologies that add to the diagnostic capacity.]
- f. Number of first responders trained in early detection and rapid response to combat plant pests and diseases _____
- g. Number of viable technologies/processes developed or modified that will increase specialty crop distribution and/or production _____
- h. Number of growers/producers that gained knowledge about science-based tools through outreach and education programs _____

Outcome 6: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increasing the number of viable technologies to improve food safety

Indicators:

- a. Number of viable technologies developed or modified for the detection and characterization of specialty crop supply contamination from foodborne threats _____
- b. Number of viable prevention, control and intervention strategies for all specialty crop production scales for foodborne threats along the production continuum _____
- c. Number of individuals who learn about prevention, detection, control, and intervention food safety practices and number of those individuals who increase their food safety skills and knowledge _____
- d. Number of improved prevention, detection, control, and intervention technologies _____
- e. Number of reported changes in prevention, detection, control, and intervention strategies _____

Outcome 7: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased understanding of threats to food safety from microbial and chemical sources

Indicators:

Number of projects focused on:

- a. Increased understanding of fecal indicators and pathogens _____
- b. Increased safety of all inputs into the specialty crop chain _____
- c. Increased understanding of the roles of humans, plants and animals as vectors _____
- d. Increased understanding of preharvest and postharvest process impacts on microbial and chemical threats _____
- e. Number of growers or producers obtaining on-farm food safety certifications (such as Good Agricultural Practices or Good Handling Practices) _____

Outcome 8: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through enhancing or improving the economy as a result of specialty crop development.

Indicators:

- a. Number of new rural careers created _____
- b. Number of new urban careers created _____
- c. Number of jobs maintained/created _____
- d. Number of small businesses maintained/created _____
- e. Increased revenue/increased savings/one-time capital purchases (in dollars) _____
- f. Number of new beginning farmers who went into specialty crop production _____
- g. Number of socially disadvantaged farmers who went into specialty crop production _____

For more information on the Specialty Crop Block Grant program visit:
www.ams.usda.gov/scbqp

4. Data Collection Methods

Explain how you will collect the required data to report on the outcome and indicator.

5. Budget /Budget Narrative

- a. **The Department is limiting proposed project funding to a maximum of \$100,000.** Each project budget should accurately reflect costs and be proportional to the benefit to be derived from the project (See scoring criteria on budget). Projects with proposed budgets over this amount may not be evaluated or considered for award, at the Department's sole discretion. The budget worksheet included in this RFP must be completed and incorporated as part of the proposal.
- b. Include a budget narrative with sufficient information in paragraph format about the budget categories to demonstrate that grant funds are being expended on eligible grant activities that meet the purpose of the program. All expenses described in this Budget Narrative must be associated with expenses that will be covered by the SCBGP.
- c. All allowable costs should be budgeted in accordance with the USDA's requirements. The Department does not allow indirect costs. You can find these requirements outlined in the most current *20xx Request for Applications* document located on the USDA's webpage. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbqp>
- d. Detail must be provided for any specialty equipment or supplies that will be purchased or leased as part of the project.
- e. Use the budget form included in the application.

6. Project Commitment

Describe how all grant partners commit to and work toward the goals and outcome measures of the proposed project. Attach any letters of partnership support, if required.

PART V APPLICATION EVALUATION AND SELECTION

Evaluation of the submitted Applications shall be accomplished as follows:

A. Evaluation Process - General Information

1. An evaluation team, comprised of qualified reviewers, will judge the merits of the Applications received in accordance with the criteria defined in the RFA.
2. Officials responsible for making decisions on the selection of project applications shall ensure that the selection process accords equal opportunity and appropriate consideration to all who are capable of meeting the specifications. The goals of the evaluation process are to ensure fairness and objectivity in review of the applications and to ensure that the grant is awarded to the Applicants whose applications best satisfy the criteria of the Request for Applications at a reasonable/competitive cost.
3. The Department reserves the right to communicate and/or schedule interviews/presentations with Applicants if needed to obtain clarification of information contained in the Applications received, and the Department may revise the scores assigned in the initial evaluation to reflect those communications and/or interviews/presentations. Interviews/presentations are not required, and changes to applications will not be permitted during any interview/presentation process.

B. Scoring Weights and Process

1. **Scoring Weights:** The score will be based on a 100-point scale and will measure the degree to which each application meets the following criteria.

<u>Scoring Category</u>	<u>Maximum Points Available</u>
The proposal is determined to be a Commissioner priority area.	5 points
The proposal is complete and adheres to the format outlined in the RFP.	5 points
The project addresses the issues put forth by USDA, as stated in the RFP.	25 points
The outcomes and indicators are clearly defined and are clearly measurable, including methods of monitoring and data collection.	20 points
The project proposed will measurably impact multiple Specialty Crop producers	15 points
Budget is complete and clearly indicate anticipated benefit in relation to the proposed cost.	30 points
<u>Total Points</u>	100 points

2. **Scoring Process:** The review team will use a consensus approach to evaluate and score Application cover page, Non-disclosure form, and the Project Profile Template.

Members of the review team will not score those sections individually but, instead, will arrive at a consensus as to assignment of points for each of those sections.

3. **Scoring the Budget:** Regarding the grant funds requested and the proposed work, the review team will consider the degree to which the project represents a good return for the investment (money, time, etc.) as well as whether the project work and cost estimates (tasks and budget) are reasonable for the expected
4. **Negotiations:** The Department reserves the right to negotiate with the successful Applicant to finalize a contract. Such negotiations may not significantly vary the content, nature or requirements of the application or the Department's Request for Applications.

C. Selection and Award

1. The final decision regarding the award of the contract will be made by representatives of the Department subject to approval by the State Procurement Review Committee.
2. Notification of award selection or non-selection will be made in writing by the Department.
3. Issuance of this RFA in no way constitutes a commitment by the State of Maine to award a contract, to pay costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this request, or to pay costs incurred in procuring or contracting for services, supplies, physical space, personnel or any other costs incurred by the Applicant.
4. The Department reserves the right to reject any and all Applications or to make multiple awards.
5. The Department will complete a State Plan document for USDA, and final award is contingent upon the acceptance of the State Plan by the USDA. **The USDA also reserves the right to reject any and all proposals or to make adjustments to awards.**

D. Appeal of Contract Awards

Any person aggrieved by the award decision that results from this Request for Applications may appeal the decision to the Director of the Bureau of General Services in the manner prescribed in 5 MRSA § 1825-E and 18-554 Code of Maine Rules, Chapter 120 (found here: [Chapter 120](#)). The appeal must be in writing and filed with the Director of the Bureau of General Services, 9 State House Station, Augusta, Maine, 04333-0009 within 15 calendar days of receipt of notification of contract award.

