**STATE OF MAINE**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

*Agricultural Resource Development*



**RFA# 202201008**

**Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

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| --- | --- |
| **RFA Coordinator** | *All communication regarding the RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified below*.  **Contact Information:** [specialtycropblockgrant@maine.gov](mailto:specialtycropblockgrant@maine.gov) |
| **Submitted Questions Due** | *All questions must be received by the RFA Coordinator identified above by:*  **Date:** **02/15/2022**, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time |
| **Proposal Submission** | *Proposals must be received by the Division of Procurement Services by:*  **Submission Deadline:** **3/8/2022**, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time.  *Proposals must be submitted electronically to the following address:*  **Electronic (e-mail) Submission Address:** [Proposals@maine.gov](mailto:Proposals@maine.gov) |

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PUBLIC NOTICE

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**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

**RFA# 202201008**

**Specialty Crop Block Grant**

The State of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Division of Agricultural Resource Development has a requirement for grant applications which, if approved, will become part of a State of Maine plan submitted for approval and funding from the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

A copy of the RFA, as well as the Question & Answer Summary and all amendments related to the RFA, can be obtained at: [https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/rfps)

Proposals must be submitted to the State of Maine Division of Procurement Services, via e-mail, at: [Proposals@maine.gov](mailto:Proposals@maine.gov). Proposal submissions must be received no later than 11:59 p.m., local time, on **3/8/2022** Proposals will be opened the following business day. Proposals not submitted to the Division of Procurement Services’ aforementioned e-mail address by the aforementioned deadline will not be considered for contract award.

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**RFA DEFINITIONS/ACRONYMS**

The following terms and acronyms shall have the meaning indicated below as referenced in this Request for Applications document:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Term/Acronym** | **Definition** |
| **Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS)** | The division of the SUDA that administers the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program |
| **Application** | A completed package containing all elements detailed in the RFA |
| **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. |
| **Bid** | In this RFA, submitted applications are referred to as Applications. In some contexts, they may be referred to as Bids. |
| **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. |
| **Department or DACF** | Department of Agriculture Conservation & Forestry |
| **GAP** | Group Agricultural Practices |
| **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. |
| **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. |
| **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. We encourage submission of LOS for other projects as well, doing so will help document industry support for a project. |
| **OMB** | Office of Management and Budget |
| **Outcomes** | The Agricultural Marketing Service lists seven possible Outcomes (listed in Part IV of the RFA) which Specialty Crop Block Grants may address. Eligible projects must address at least one AMS Outcome. |
| **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. |
| **Reimbursement basis** | Grant monies will be paid to successful Applicants with completed contracts upon submittal of invoices for approved project expenses. |
| **RFA** | Request for Applications |
| **RFA Coordinator** | The 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 RFA Coordinator listed on the first page of this RFA. |
| **SCBG** | Specialty Crop Block Grant |
| **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer** | A 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. |
| **Specialty Crop** | [Section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004](http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=specialty+crop+block+grants&f=treesort&fq=true&num=0&hl=true&edition=prelim&granuleId=USC-prelim-title7-section1621) (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. |
| **State** | State of Maine |
| **USDA** | United States Department of Agriculture |

**State of Maine - Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

*Agricultural Resource Development*

**RFA# 202201008**

**Specialty Crop Block Grant**

**PART I INTRODUCTION**

1. **Purpose and Background**

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (Department) is seeking applications which, if approved, will become part of a State Plan submitted for approval and funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) Program as defined in this Request for Applications (RFA) document. This document provides instructions for submitting proposals, the procedure, and criteria by which the awarded 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](http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=specialty+crop+block+grants&f=treesort&fq=true&num=0&hl=true&edition=prelim&granuleId=USC-prelim-title7-section1621) (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.

1. **General Provisions**
   1. From the time the RFA is issued until award notification is made, all contact with the State regarding the RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified on page 1. No other person/ State employee is empowered to make binding statements regarding the RFA. Violation of this provision may lead to disqualification from the bidding process, at the State’s discretion.
   2. Issuance of the 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 the RFA. This includes attendance at personal interviews or other meetings and software or system demonstrations, where applicable.
   3. All proposals must adhere to the instructions and format requirements outlined in the RFA and all written supplements and amendments (such as the Summary of Questions and Answers), issued by the Department. Proposals are to follow the format and respond to all questions and instructions specified below in the “Proposal Submission Requirements” section of the RFA.
   4. Applicants should note that in evaluating a proposal submitted in response to the RFA, the Department will consider materials provided in the proposal, 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 proposal must be signed by a person authorized to legally bind the Applicant and must contain a statement that the proposal and the pricing contained therein will remain valid and binding for a period of 180 days from the date and time of the bid opening.
   6. The RFA and the awarded Applicant’s proposal, including all appendices or attachments, will 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 public records, available for public inspection pursuant to the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) ([1 M.R.S. §§ 401](http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/1/title1sec401.html) et seq.).
   8. The Department, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to recognize and waive minor informalities and irregularities found in proposals received in response to the RFA.
   9. All applicable laws, whether or not herein contained, are included by this reference. It is the Applicant’s responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them.
2. **Eligibility to Apply**

Provided their Applications meet all the specifications in this Request for Proposals and the [USDA’s Notice of Federal Assistance](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2022_SCBGP_RFA.pdf), the following entities may be eligible to apply for this grant:

* Individuals
* Commodity groups
* Agricultural organizations
* Buy-local organizations
* Colleges and universities
* Producers, including Native American and disadvantaged farmers
* Municipalities
* State agencies
* Agricultural nonprofit organizations

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 include a Letter of Support from that organization (more than one LOS is encouraged). The project proposal must clearly demonstrate benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to the individual or organization. SCBG 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 Maine-grown specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets. See the SCBG website (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp>) for a definition of specialty crops and processed products, including a list of eligible specialty crops and ineligible commodities.

1. **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.

The term of the anticipated contract, resulting from the RFA, is defined as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Period** | **Start Date** | **End Date** |
| Period of Performance | 09/30/2022 | 09/29/2024 |

1. **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

**PART II SCOPE OF SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED**

1. **USDA PROJECT STRATEGIES**

The USDA encourages States to develop projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops with emphasis on the following strategies to enhance the Specialty Crop industry:

* + Enhanced 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 (including USDA GroupGAP) 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 for 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.

**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.

1. **REPORTING**

DACF will collect reports from successful applicants in order to fulfill the reporting requirements of the SCBG process. USDA AMS publicly reports on the outcomes of the SCBG Program at a national scale to demonstrate the performance of this program. By collecting, aggregating, and reporting performance data across all states and territories, AMS shares the impact of the SCGBP 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 seven outcomes listed in Part IV 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, all of which grant recipients will report to DACF.
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 indictors as needed over time to lead to better results in showing the impact of the SCBG Program.

**PART III KEY RFA EVENTS**

1. **Questions**
   1. **General Instructions**
      1. **All questions related to this proposal must be submitted to the grant coordinator as listed on the front of this RFA document.**
      2. 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.
      3. Applicants and other interested parties should use the Submitted Questions Form – for submission of questions (attached to the end of this Request for Applications).
      4. The Submitted Questions Form must be submitted by e-mail to the address identified on the cover page of this Request for Applications.
      5. 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](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants). 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.

## Amendments

All amendments (if any) released in regard to this Request for Applications will be posted on the following website: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants). 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.

## Submitting the Application Summary

1. **Application Summary 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](mailto:proposals@maine.gov)).
3. Only applications received by email will be considered. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete e-mail transmission and receipt.
4. E-mails containing links to file sharing sites or online file repositories will not be accepted as submissions. Only e-mail proposal submissions that have the actual requested files attached will be accepted.
5. Encrypted e-mails received which require opening attachments and logging into a proprietary system will not be accepted as submissions. Please check with your organization’s Information Technology team to ensure that your security settings will not encrypt your proposal submission.
6. File size limits are 25MB per e-mail. Applicants may submit files separately across multiple e-mails, as necessary, due to file size concerns. All e-mails and files must be received by the due date and time listed above.
7. Applicants are to insert the following into the subject line of their email submission:

“**RFA# 202201008 Application Submission – [Applicant’s Name]”**

1. Applications must be submitted in MS WORD format. Any other format will disqualify the application from the review process.

# **PART IV APPLICATION SUMMARY SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

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

* 1. The application summary for this Request for Applications is available as a separate document on the following webpage: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants)
  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 summary.
  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.

## Required Application Template Submission Components

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

1. **Application Cover Page**
   1. Must be completed in its entirety and signed
2. **Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification**
   1. Must be signed
3. **Litigation**
   1. Must list all current litigation where the Applicant is named
   2. Must include a list of all closed cases within the past five (5) years in which the Applicant paid the claimant either as part of a settlement or by decree
   3. If there is no relevant litigation “none” must be indicated
   4. Must be signed
4. **Commissioner Priorities**
   1. List and explain which, if any, of the Commissioner Priority areas the project incorporates.
5. **Project Summary**
   1. Explain the project need, purpose, and primary goals of the project in 250 words or less.
6. **USDA Strategies**
   1. In 250 words or fewer, please explain which of the USDA Strategies the proposal addresses and which specific strategies are used.
7. **Expected Measurable Outcomes**
   1. All projects must choose at least one of the seven outcomes listed below, which were approved by the OMB and are required by the UDA 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: Increasing Consumption and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops**

* 1. Total number of consumers who gained knowledge about specialty crops \_\_\_.
     1. Adults \_\_\_.
     2. Children \_\_\_.
  2. Total number of consumers who consumed more specialty crops \_\_\_.
     1. Adults \_\_\_.
     2. Children \_\_\_.
  3. Number of additional specialty crops customers counted \_\_\_.
  4. Number of additional business transactions executed \_\_\_.
  5. Increased sales measured in:
     1. Dollars \_\_\_.
     2. Percent change \_\_\_.
     3. Combination of volume and average price as a result of enhanced marketing activities \_\_\_.

**Outcome 2: Increasing Access to Specialty Crops and Expanding Specialty Crop Production and Distribution**

2.1 Number of stakeholders that gained technical knowledge about producing, preparing, procuring, and/or accessing specialty crops \_\_\_.

2.2 Number of stakeholders that reported producing, preparing, procuring, and/or accessing more specialty crops \_\_\_.

* 1. Total number of market access points for specialty crops developed or expanded \_\_\_. Of those:

2.3a Number of new online portals created to sell specialty crops \_\_\_.

2.3b Number with expanded seasonal availability \_\_\_.

2.3c Number of existing market access points that expanded specialty crop offerings \_\_\_.

2.3d Number of new market access points that established specialty crop offerings \_\_\_.

* 1. Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about more efficient and effective distribution systems \_\_\_.
  2. Number of stakeholders that adopted best practices or new technologies to improve distribution systems \_\_\_.
  3. Total number of partnerships established between producers, distributors, and/or other relevant intermediaries related to distribution systems \_\_\_. Of those established:

2.6a Number of formalized with written agreements (i.e. MOU’s, signed contracts, etc.) \_\_\_.

2.6b Number of partnerships with underserved organizations \_\_\_.

* 1. Total number of new/improved distribution system developed \_\_\_. Of those, the number that:

2.7a Stemmed from new partnerships \_\_\_.

2.7b Increased efficiency \_\_\_.

2.7c Reduced costs \_\_\_.

2.7d Increased specialty crop grower participation \_\_\_.

2.7e Expanded customer reach \_\_\_.

2.7f Increased online presence \_\_\_.

* 1. Number of specialty crop-related jobs:

2.8a Created \_\_\_.

2.8b Maintained \_\_\_.

* 1. Total number of new individuals who went into specialty crop production as a result of marketing \_\_\_. Of those, the number who are:

2.9a Beginning farmers or ranchers \_\_\_.

2.9b Socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers \_\_\_.

* 1. Number of market access points that reported increased:

2.10a Revenue \_\_\_.

2.10b Sales \_\_\_.

2.10c Cost-savings \_\_\_.

**Outcome 3: Increase Food Safety Knowledge and Processes**

3.1 Number of Stakeholders that gained knowledge about prevention, detection, control, and/or intervention food safety practices, including relevant regulations (to improve their ability to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and/or meet the standards for aligned third party food safety audits such as Harmonized GAP/GHP \_\_\_.

3.2 Number of stakeholders that:

3.2a Established a food safety plan \_\_\_.

3.2b Revised or updated their food safety plan \_\_\_.

3.3 Number of specialty crop stakeholders who implemented new/improved prevention, detection, control, and intervention practices, tools, or technologies to mitigate food safety risks (to improve their ability to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and/or meet the standards for aligned third party food safety audits such as Harmonized GAP/GHP \_\_\_.

3.4 Number of prevention, detection, control, or intervention practices development or enhanced to mitigate food safety risks \_\_\_.

3.5 Number of stakeholders that used grant funds to:

3.5a Purchase \_\_\_.

3.5b Upgrade food safety equipment \_\_\_.

**Outcome 4: Improve Pest and Disease Control Processes**

4.1 Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about science-based tools to combat pests and diseases \_\_\_.

4.2 Number of stakeholders that adopted pest and disease control best practices, technologies, or innovations \_\_\_.

4.3 Number of stakeholders trained in early detection and rapid response practices to combat pests and diseases \_\_\_. Of those:

4.3a Number of additional acres managed using integrated pest management \_\_\_.

4.4 Number of stakeholders that implemented new diagnostic systems, methods, or technologies for analyzing specialty crop pests and diseases \_\_\_.

4.5 Total number of producers/processors that enhanced or maintained pest and disease control practices \_\_\_. Of those, the number that reported:

4.5a Reduction in product lost to pest and diseases \_\_\_.

4.5b Improved crop quality \_\_\_.

4.5c Reduction in labor costs \_\_\_.

4.5d Reduction in pesticide use \_\_\_.

4.6 Number of producers/processors improving the efficiency of pest and disease control diagnostics and response testing as reported by:

4.6a Improving speed \_\_\_.

4.6b Improving reliability \_\_\_.

4.6c Expanding capacity \_\_\_.

4.6d Increasing testing (i.e. survey work for pests) \_\_\_.

**Outcome 5: Develop New Seed Varieties and Specialty Crops**

5.1 Number of cultivar and/or variety trials \_\_\_. Of those:

5.1a The number of advanced to further stages of development \_\_\_.

5.2 Number of cultivars and/or seed varieties developed \_\_\_.

5.3 Number of cultivars and/or seed varieties released \_\_\_.

5.4 Number of growers adopting new cultivars and/or varieties \_\_\_.

5.5 Number of acres planted with new cultivars and/or varieties \_\_\_.

**Outcome 6: Expand Specialty Crop Research and Development**

6.1 Number of research goals accomplished \_\_\_.

6.2 For research conclusions, the number that:

6.2a Yielded findings that supported the continued research \_\_\_.

6.2b Yielded findings that led to completion of study \_\_\_.

6.2c Yielded findings that allow for implementation of new practice, process, or technology \_\_\_.

6.3 Number of industry representatives and other stakeholders who engaged with research results \_\_\_.

6.4 Total number of research outputs published to industry publications and/or academic journals \_\_\_. For each published research output, the:

6.4a Number of views/reads of published research/data \_\_\_.

6.4b Number of citations counted \_\_\_.

**Outcome 7: Improve Environmental Sustainability of Specialty Crops**

7.1 Number of stake holders that gained knowledge about environmental sustainability best practices, tools, or technologies \_\_\_.

7.2 Number of stakeholders reported with an intent to adopt environmental sustainability best practices, tools, or technologies \_\_\_.

7.3 Number of producers that adopted environmental best practices or tools \_\_\_.

7.4 Number of new tools/technologies developed or enhanced to improve sustainability/conservation or other environmental outcomes \_\_\_.

7.5 Number of additional acres managed with sustainable practices, tools, or technologies that focuses on:

7.5a Water quality/conservation \_\_\_.

7.5b Soil health \_\_\_.

7.5c Biodiversity \_\_\_.

7.5d Reduction in energy use \_\_\_.

7.5e Other positive environmental outcomes (optional) \_\_\_.

7.6 Number of additional acres established and maintained for the mutual benefit of pollinators/specialty crops \_\_\_.

**PART V APPLICATION EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

Evaluation of the submitted applications will be accomplished as follows:

1. **Evaluation Process - General Information**
   1. An evaluation team, composed of qualified reviewers, will judge the merits of the proposals received in accordance with the criteria defined in the RFA.
   2. Officials responsible for making decisions on the award selection will 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 proposals and to ensure that the contract is awarded to the Applicant whose proposal provides the best value to the State of Maine.
   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 proposals received. The Department may revise the scores assigned in the initial evaluation to reflect those communications and/or interviews/presentations. Changes to proposals, including updating or adding information, will not be permitted during any interview/presentation process and, therefore, Applicants must submit proposals that present their rates and other requested information as clearly and completely as possible.
2. **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 proposal meets the following criteria.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Scoring Category** | **Maximum Points**  **Available** |
| The proposal is determined to address a Commissioner priority area. | *5 points* |
| The proposal is complete and adheres to the format outlined in the RFA. | *5 points* |
| The project utilizes designated USDA Project Strategies as stated in the RFA (part II section A). | *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* |
| **Total Points** | ***100 points*** |

* 1. **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.
  2. **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
  3. **Negotiations:** The Department reserves the right to negotiate with the awarded 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 Application to an extent that may affect the price of goods or services requested. The Department reserves the right to terminate contract negotiations with an awarded Applicant who submits a proposed contract significantly different from the proposal they submitted in response to the advertised RFA. In the event that an acceptable contract cannot be negotiated with the highest ranked Applicant, the Department may withdraw its award and negotiate with the next-highest ranked Applicant, and so on, until an acceptable contract has been finalized. Alternatively, the Department may cancel the RFA, at its sole discretion.

1. **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 conditional award selection or non-selection will be made in writing by the Department.
   3. Issuance of the 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 the RFA, 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 proposals or to make multiple awards.
   5. Applicants selected during the RFA process will be required to complete the USDA Project Profile Template, in full, to be included with the Department’s State Plan document.
   6. The Department will complete a State Plan document for the 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.**
2. **Appeal of Contract Awards**

Any person aggrieved by the award decision that results from the RFA may appeal the decision to the Director of the Bureau of General Services in the manner prescribed in [5 M.R.S.A. § 1825-E](http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/5/title5sec1825-E.html) and [18-554 Code of Maine Rules Chapter 120](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/policies-procedures/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 conditional contract award.

**Appendix A**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

**SUBMITTED QUESTIONS FORM**

**RFA# 202201008**

**Specialty Crop Block Grant**

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| **Organization Name:** |  |

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| **RFA Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
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*\* If a question is not related to any section of the RFA, state “N/A” under “RFA Section & Page Number”.*

*\*\* Add additional rows, if necessary.*