

Alaska Specialty Crop Competitive Grant FY 2013 Request for Proposals

The Alaska Division of Agriculture (Division) announces the availability of grant funds for the sole purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of Alaska Grown specialty crops. This guidance document contains the following sections:

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OVERVIEW

Funding Source and Available Funds

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) distributes block grant funds annually, which are administered by state departments of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. AMS has announced 2013 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funding, and the Division intends to grant multiple projects, with a maximum grant amount for each project of \$25,000.

Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, and nursery crops (including floriculture and turf production). The USDA maintains a list of eligible specialty crops on its website: www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp. AMS encourages projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, sustain the livelihoods of American farmers, and strengthen local economies.

Alaska SCBGP funds will be distributed to the specialty crop industry through a competitive review process. Projects may be up to three calendar years in length, and multi-year projects are encouraged. Grants must follow USDA guidelines for eligible spending. Guidelines are available at: www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp and in Appendix B.

Projects that demonstrate innovative partnerships are encouraged. Applications that build on a previously funded SCBGP project may be submitted; in such cases, the application should clearly indicate how the project complements previous work. Applications for grant funds should show how the project impacts multiple businesses in the supply chain and/or produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry, rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. The following are some examples of acceptable and unacceptable projects.

Examples of Unacceptable Projects

- A company requests grant funds to purchase starter plants or equipment used to plant, cultivate, and grow a specialty crop for the purpose of making a profit, or to expand production of a single business.
- Requests by individual specialty crop businesses or roadside stands to promote their individual business.

Examples of Acceptable Projects

- A producer group or university submits a proposal to conduct research on the feasibility of planting, cultivating, and growing a specialty crop in a particular area, the results of which can be shared with many growers throughout the State.
- An organization requests grant funds to help improve and expand new markets which benefit a wide array of specialty crop producers.

Match

Match funds are not required, but projects that identify match funds will be given preference points in the review process.

Review Process

All applicants are required to submit a mandatory letter of intent (LOI) to the Division by May 24th. Please read the scoring criteria on page 6 carefully to ensure that your application addresses the areas that will be evaluated by the review committee. The LOI template is provided below. Projects will be reviewed and ranked based on the information provided in the LOI. Projects ranking the highest will be asked to submit a full application.

The full application format is provided beginning on page 3; the scoring rubric begins on page 6.

Applicants with previous participation that have incomplete or unsatisfactory performance may be ruled ineligible for participation at the sole discretion of the Division.

Timeline

May 24, 2013: LOI due by midnight (mandatory)

June 5, 2013: LOI feedback returned to applicants

June 19, 2013: Full applications due by midnight (for those who have been invited to apply only)

June 28, 2013: Final decisions made

July 10, 2013: State plan submitted to USDA (some adjustments to projects may be required by AMS at this point)

September 30, 2013: Funds disbursed from USDA (exact date TBA)

LETTER OF INTENT TEMPLATE

A mandatory Letter of Intent (LOI) must be submitted by May 24th. Please be sure to review the scoring criteria on page 6 before completing your LOI. After reviewing LOIs, the top-ranking projects will be asked to submit a full application.

1. Proposal Summary

Provide a concise project summary (maximum 2,000 characters) that addresses the following points:

- The industry need your project is addressing.
- Outcomes expected as a result of this project and how outcomes will be measured (describe impact on the supply chain or specialty crops industry).
- Project duration (up to 3 years).
- Has this project been funded previously? If so, why is additional funding needed?

2. Project Budget (estimated)

Provide the estimated budget for this project, including funding from other sources, using the template below.

CATEGORY	SCBGP Request	Match (include Source)	TOTAL
Personnel			
Fringe Benefits			
Travel			
Equipment			
Supplies			
Contractual			
Other			
TOTAL			

3. Partner Organizations

List all partner organizations that are formally participating with you in this project. If you are the only formally participating organization, write "N/A".

APPLICATION FORMAT

1. Abstract

Include a project abstract of 200 words or less. The project abstract must contain a summary of the proposed project suitable for dissemination to the public. It should be a self-contained description of the project and should contain a statement of objectives and methods to be employed.

2. Project Purpose

The following questions should be addressed in this section:

- What is the specific issue, problem or need to be addressed by the project?
- Why is the project important and timely?
- What are the objectives of the project?
- Does the project have the potential to enhance the competitiveness of non-specialty crops (ex: farmers market, general buy local, etc.)?
 - IF YES, how will the applicant ensure that all grant funding is being used to solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops? (Ex: using the registration process for a conference to ensure that only specialty crop farmers attend; matching 50% of the funds to cover a portion of the project that does not benefit specialty crops)
- Does the project build on a previously SCBGP or SCBGP-FB funded project?
 - IF YES, how does this project compliment work done previously? Provide a summary (3 to 5 sentences per project) of the results of the completed work on this project, the long-term quantifiable effects of these results (especially as they impact on the specialty crop industry), and how this year's funding will supplement or build on previous funding from the SCBGP or SCBGP-FB.
- Has the project been submitted to or funded by another Federal or State grant program?
 - IF NO, indicate that it has not.
 - IF YES, how does the project supplement efforts of the SCBGP-FB and the other Federal or State

grant program and not duplicate funding efforts? The SCBGP-FB will not fund duplicative projects.

3. Potential Impact

This section shall show how the project potentially impacts the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. The following questions should be answered:

- Who are the beneficiaries of the project and how will they be impacted by the project?
- How many beneficiaries will be impacted?
- What is the potential economic impact of the project if available?

4. Expected Measureable Outcomes

- What is at least one distinct, quantifiable, and measurable outcome that directly and meaningfully supports the project's purpose and is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries?
- Each measurable outcome should include the following: GOAL; PERFORMANCE MEASURE; BENCHMARK; TARGET.
- How will performance toward meeting the outcome(s) be monitored?
- What are your data sources for monitoring performance?
- How will data be collected? For example are you using a survey or questionnaire?

Examples of outcome measures may include, but are not limited to: per capita consumption, consumer awareness as a percent of target market reached, market penetration based on sales by geographic region, or web site hits.

EXAMPLE:

Increase visits to the Specialty Crop Website (GOAL) 25% over the course of one year (TARGET) from the current 9,000 annual hits (BENCHMARK) by measuring website visits each month over the next year (PERFORMANCE MEASURE).

5. Work Plan

- What activities are necessary to accomplish the project objectives?
- When will your performance monitoring/data collection plan activity be accomplished?
- Will outcomes measures be completed or measured outside the grant period?
 - If YES, include the performance monitoring plan in the work plan and indicate how monitoring will occur after the grant period ends without SCBGP-FB funding.
- Who will do the work of each activity? If collaborative arrangements or subcontracts are used, make sure you specify their role and responsibilities in performing project activities.
- When will each activity be accomplished? Include timelines for accomplishing each activity. Make sure to include the month and year the project is scheduled to begin.

The work plan section may be in any format you choose as long as it contains the appropriate information. For a sample work plan, please see Appendix A on page 9.

6. Budget Summary and Narrative

Although there is no specific format for the budget, this section should contain a table summary and narrative in paragraph format for each project in order for the Division and USDA-AMS to determine the

costs are reasonable and allowable.

Funds should be categorized in the following budget object class codes:

PERSONNEL: Persons employed by the grantee or sub grantee organization should be listed in this category. Those employed elsewhere would be listed as subcontractors or consultants in the “Contractual” category.

- For each project participant, indicate their title, percent of full time equivalents (FTE), and corresponding salary for the FTE.
- Show the total for all SCBGP-funded personnel.

FRINGE BENEFITS

- Provide the rate of fringe benefits for each project participant’s salary described in the personnel section.
- Show the total for all SCBGP-funded fringe benefits.

TRAVEL

- Please provide the following information in the narrative if applicable: destination; purpose of trip; number of trips; number of people traveling; number of days traveling; estimated airfare costs; estimated ground transportation costs; estimated lodging and meals costs; estimated mileage rate and costs for the travel.
- Show the total for all SCBGP-funded travel.

EQUIPMENT: This category includes items of property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000. If the cost is under \$5,000, then include these items under SUPPLIES.

- Provide an itemized list of equipment purchases or rentals, along with a brief narrative on the intended use of each equipment item, and the cost for all the equipment purchases or rentals.
- Show the total for all SCBGP-funded equipment.

Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land are unallowable as direct and indirect charges. Capital expenditures for special purpose equipment are allowable as direct costs, provided that items with a unit cost of \$5000 or more have the prior approval of the Division and USDA-AMS. Rental costs of buildings and equipment are allowable as direct costs in accordance with the cost principles in Subpart T of 7 CFR 3015.

SUPPLIES: This is anything with acquisition cost under \$5,000 and could be anything from office supplies and software to educational or field supplies. For non-typical materials & supplies items, include a brief narrative of how this fits with the project.

- Provide an itemized list and estimate the dollar amount for each item.
- Show the total for all SCBGP-funded supplies.

For example, office supplies such as pens, paper, toner; or gardening supplies such as soil and fertilizer. Items such as telephone, postage, fax and express mail are more appropriately listed under the “Other” category.

CONTRACTUAL

- Provide a short description of the services each contract covers.
- Indicate if the cost is a flat rate fee or hourly rate. If hourly rates exceed \$65.78 (the salary of a GS-14 step 10 Federal employee), provide a brief justification.

- List general categories of items the contract covers such as professional services, travel, lodging, indirect costs, etc.
- Show the total for all SCBGP-funded contractual.

If the contract is for service or maintenance, costs should be in direct correlation to the use of the equipment for the project (i.e., if a particular copy machine is used 50% of the time for the project, the project should only be charged 50% of the service contract paid from Federal funds.)

OTHER: Provide a detailed description of all other direct costs such as:

- Conferences/meetings – Costs of holding a conference or meeting are included in this category. Some examples are the rental of facilities or equipment for the meeting. Details of costs for each conference or meeting should be broken out and provided in the budget.
- Communications – Mailings, postage, express mail, faxes, and telephone long distance charges. Provide the estimated cost for this category.
- Speaker/trainer fees – Provide the amount of the speaker’s fees and a description of the services they are providing.
- Publication costs – Provide the estimated cost of printing of brochures and other program materials or scientific or technical journals.
- Data collection – Provide the estimated cost of collecting performance data to measure the project outcome measures.
- Show the total for all SCBGP-funded “Other”.

See Appendix B for more on allowable costs.

7. Project Oversight

- Who will oversee the project activities?
- How will oversight be performed? Include timelines.

8. Project Commitment

- Who supports this project?
- How will all grant partners work toward the goals and outcomes of the project?
- Letters of support from project partners are required. Letters of support from industry members are encouraged.

IV. SCORING CRITERIA FOR FULL PROPOSAL

Application. (10 points) The application is complete and thorough, addressing all format criteria.

Industry Need. (20 points) The proposed project responds to a specialty crop industry need and demonstrates the ability to impact that need.

Specialty Crop Industry Impact and Outcomes. (25 points) The proposed project demonstrates that it will increase the competitiveness of specialty crop producers, and will impact a significant number of beneficiaries. The project includes a strong outreach/information dissemination component to ensure a broad impact. Outcome measures are thoughtfully developed and realistic

Specialty Crop Industry Support. (25 points) The proposal demonstrates that there is broad industry support for the project. Letters of support and/or formal commitments from all project partners are included.

Evaluation. (10 points) The project includes a strong monitoring and evaluation plan and explains clearly how outcomes will be measured.

Efficient use of Resources. (10 points) The proposed work plan and budget are realistic; the applicant has leveraged additional matching funds or organizational support to enhance the project.

V. GRANT MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

I. Grant Award Agreement and Payment

Prior to beginning work on the proposed project or receiving funding, successful applicants will be required to sign a Grant Award Agreement (Agreement) with the Division indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks and authorizing the Division to monitor the progress of the proposed project. In addition to obtaining a DUNS number (required prior to application submission), successful applicants will be required to register with the federally run Central Contractor Registration database prior to issuance of the Agreement. To register with CCR, go to www.ccr.gov, and click “Start New Registration” to begin.

Agreements must be signed and returned to the Division within 30 days of receipt. Failure to submit an executed copy of the Agreement within 30 days of receipt will result in the loss of awarded grant funds, unless the delay was caused by circumstances outside the control of the grantee. Grantees may submit an invoice for 40% of the total grant amount with their signed Agreement. An invoice for an additional 40% of the total grant amount may be submitted with the first annual report. The remaining 20% of grant funds will be retained until receipt of the complete final report.

2. Reporting Requirements

The Division reserves the right to modify reporting requirements during the course of the project. Information submitted in any report to the Agency will be a public record.

Annual Reports: Annual performance reports are required 30 days after the end of the first year of the date of the signed grant agreement and each year until the expiration date of the grant period. Reports must detail the project status and how grant monies were used to achieve project outcomes outlined in the project proposal submitted with the grant application packet. Reports must also include a detailed financial report that tracks all expenditures against the project budget submitted with the grant proposal.

The annual performance report should be organized under, but not limited to, the following headings for each project:

- **Activities Performed:** Briefly summarize activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals achieved during the reporting period for each project. Include favorable or unusual developments. It is encouraged to clearly convey progress toward achieving outcomes by graphing baseline data and showing the progress toward achieving set targets. If targets have already been achieved, amend the outcome measure to go beyond what was originally proposed. Identify the amended measurable outcome in the performance report.
- **Problems and Delays:** Note unexpected delays or impediments for each project. Make sure to review measurable outcomes to determine if targets are realistic and attainable. An objective that is

too stringent should be scaled back and identified in the performance report. Keep in mind that targets may slip due to all kinds of factors, such as employee turn-over and bad weather. Include revised work plan timelines.

- **Future Project Plans:** Summarize activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals to be achieved during the next reporting period for each project. Describe the work accomplished in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Describe any changes that are anticipated in the project.
- **Funding Expended To Date:** Provide information regarding the level of grant funds expended to date. In the event that a project gained income as a result of planned activities, provide the amount of this supplemental funding and how it will be reinvested into the project.

Final Reports - A final performance report will be required within 30 days following the end date of the grant agreement. The final report will be posted on the USDA-AMS web site and represents an important vehicle for sharing project findings with Federal and State agencies and the public.

The final report should be organized under, but not limited to, the following headings for each project:

- **Project Summary:** An outline of the issue, problem, interest, or need for each project.
- **Project Approach:** How the issue or problem was approached via the project.
- **Goals and Outcomes Achieved:** How the performance goals and measurable outcomes were achieved for each project(s). If outcome measures were long term, summarize the progress that has been made towards achievement. It is encouraged to clearly convey progress toward achieving outcome measures by graphing baseline data and showing the progress toward achieving set targets.
- **Beneficiaries:** Provide a description and quantitative data for the number of people or operations that have benefited from the project's accomplishments, and/or the potential economic impact of each project.
- **Lessons Learned:** Lessons learned, results, conclusions, for each project. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving.
- **Contact Person:** Contact person for each project with telephone number and email address.
- **Additional Information:** We encourage submission of any supplemental publications, web sites, photographs, etc.
- **Budget Summary:** In addition to the final project report, the Division reserves the right to conduct a follow-up survey of funded projects in order to determine long-term impacts of the project.
- **Reporting Compliance** – Applicants who do not submit the semi-annual reports or who submit reports that do not meet all of the above reporting requirements will be required to return all previously disbursed funds to the Division.
- **Budget Adjustments** - If a material change (10% or greater) in the budget is needed during the project period, a written request may be made to the Division to reallocate budget funds between budget categories. However, the total budget amount as dictated by the approved grant award cannot be adjusted.

SAMPLE WORK PLAN

Month	Activities Performed	Responsible Authority
October – December 2013	Collect and analyze fall-harvested root samples for protein content	Dr. Joe
April – June 2014	Collect & analyze spring-harvested root samples for protein content	Dr. Joe
July 2014 – March 2015	Analyze results; prepare for 2014 harvest, share information to ARP members	Dr. Joe and Committee Chair
May – December 2015	Prepare and publish final results	Dr. Joe & Committee Chair

ALLOWABLE COSTS AND FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

All costs must be associated with project activities that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Failure to mention a particular item of cost in these sections is not intended to imply that it is unallowable. See 2 CFR Part 225 for further guidance on cost principles.

Meals

When paying for the travel of a person to attend a conference, meals and lodging may be included in the cost without additional justification. Meals may not be charged as project costs when individuals decide to go to lunch or dinner together when no need exists for continuity of a meeting. Such activity is considered to be an entertainment cost. Meals may be charged to the project if such activity maintains the continuity of the meeting and to do otherwise will impose arduous conditions on the meeting participants. Include a justification for meal costs. Some examples of acceptable reasons are that the conference facility is located in a remote area where public facilities are not accessible; there will be a speaker and business discussions during the meal; there is insufficient time available to allow participants to go out on their own. If one or more of these justifications cannot be met, or if there are no other acceptable and compelling reasons, then the meals should not be charged to the award. The attendees should be responsible for providing their own meals. Breakfasts for conference attendees are usually considered unallowable as it is expected these individuals will have sufficient time to obtain this meal on their own before the conference begins in the morning.

Eligible project expenses include, but are not limited to:

Compensation for Personnel Services: salaries, wages and fringe benefits

Consultant Services or Subcontractors

- Advertising and public relations costs that solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops.
- Costs incurred by advisory councils or committees.
- Costs of professional and consultant services rendered by persons who are members of a particular profession or possess a special skill.

Contractual hourly rates should not exceed \$65.78 (the salary of a GS-14 step 10 Federal employee in Alaska), unless one of the following justifications is provided.

Materials and Supplies: Costs incurred for materials, supplies, and fabricated parts necessary to carry out the grant project. Purchased materials and supplies shall be charged at their actual prices, net of applicable credits. Withdrawals from general stores or stockrooms should be charged at their actual net cost under any recognized method of pricing inventory withdrawals, consistently applied.

Incoming transportation charges are a proper part of materials and supplies costs.

Equipment and other Capital Expenditures: lease/rental or depreciation costs

- Capital expenditures for special purpose equipment are allowable as direct costs, provided that items with a unit cost of \$5000 or more have the prior approval of AMS. "Special purpose equipment" means equipment which is used only for research, medical, scientific, or other technical activities. Examples of special purpose equipment include microscopes, harvesters, and produce coolers.
- Rental costs of buildings and equipment are allowable as direct costs in accordance with the cost principles in Subpart T of 7 CFR 3015. To the extent that the rates are reasonable in light of such factors as: rental costs of comparable property, if any; market conditions in the area; alternatives

available; and the type, life expectancy, condition, and value of the property leased.

Other Miscellaneous Costs: i.e. telephone, meetings, publications, etc.

- Costs incurred for telephone services, local and long distance telephone calls, telegrams, postage, messenger, electronic or computer transmittal services and the like.
- Costs of meetings and conferences with the primary purpose of dissemination of technical information. This includes costs of rental of facilities, speakers' fees, and other items incidental to such meetings or conferences with the exception of entertainment costs as described under unallowable costs.
- Publication costs include the costs of printing (including the processes of composition, plate-making, press work, binding, and the end products produced by such processes), distribution, promotion, mailing, and general handling. Page charges for professional journal publications are allowable as a necessary part of research costs where: (1) The research papers report work supported by the Federal Government; and (2) The charges are levied impartially on all research papers published by the journal, whether or not by federally-sponsored authors.
- The cost of training provided for employee development or agricultural producers.

Ineligible expenses include:

Capital Expenditures for General Purpose Equipment, Buildings and Land

- Capital expenditures means expenditures for the acquisition cost of capital assets (equipment, buildings, land), or expenditures to make improvements to capital assets that materially increase their value or useful life. Acquisition cost means the cost of the asset including the cost to put it in place. Acquisition cost for equipment, for example, means the net invoice price of the equipment, including the cost of any modifications, attachments, accessories, or auxiliary apparatus necessary to make it usable for the purpose for which it is acquired.
- "General purpose equipment" means equipment, which is not limited to research, medical, scientific or other technical activities. Examples include office equipment and furnishings, modular offices, telephone networks, information technology equipment and systems, air conditioning equipment, reproduction and printing equipment, and motor vehicles.
- Equipment means an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost which equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the governmental unit for financial statement purposes, or \$5000.

Bad debts - Paying off existing debt, including losses (whether actual or estimated) arising from uncollectable accounts and other claims, related collection costs, and related legal costs.

Lobbying, political and other governmental activities

- Development or participation in lobbying activities including costs of membership in organizations substantially engaged in lobbying are not allowed.
- Development or participation in political activities in accordance with provisions of the Hatch Act (5 U.S.C. 1501-1508 and 7324-7326) is not allowed.

Entertainment and alcohol

- Alcoholic beverages
- Amusement, diversion, and social activities and any costs directly associated with such costs (such as tickets to shows or sports events, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, and gratuities) are not allowed.
- Meals as an entertainment expense

Other ineligible expenses:

- Indirect (administrative support) costs.
- Donated or volunteer services may be furnished to a governmental unit by professional and technical personnel, consultants, and other skilled and unskilled labor. The value of these services is not reimbursable either as a direct or indirect cost.
- Contributions or donations, including cash, property, and services, made by the governmental unit, regardless of the recipient.
- Fines, penalties, damages, and other settlements resulting from violations (or alleged violations) of, or failure of the governmental unit to comply with, Federal, State, local, or Indian tribal laws and regulations.
- Organized fund raising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used.
- Costs of investment counsel and staff and similar expenses incurred to enhance income from investments.
- Tuition.