



Request for Applications

United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Grants

Awarded by the Illinois Department of Agriculture

Funding Year: Fiscal Year 2026

Application Deadline: June 23, 2025, 11:59 PM CST

Anticipated Funding Awarded to Illinois: \$679,005.52

Federal Award Range: \$75,000.00 max

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-SCBGP-G-25-0004

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 10.170

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Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) to award grants to eligible State departments of agriculture to carry out projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. This announcement identifies the eligibility criteria for SCBGP projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a SCBGP award.

AMS encourages applications that benefit smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. For grants intending to serve these entities, applicants should engage and involve those beneficiaries when developing projects and applications.

IDOA solicits applications for projects that fall within the scope of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. This notice identifies the SCBG Funding Priorities for Illinois, funding information, application form locations, and associated instructions.

Background

The SCBGP is authorized under 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 (Farm Bill). SCBGP is currently implemented under 7 CFR part 1291. Each state applies (state application is referred to as the State Plan) that is reviewed and approved by USDA AMS personnel. To reach specialty crop initiatives throughout the state, the IDOA has established a competitive grant process for these funds.

Purpose

The SCBGP assists State departments of agriculture in the 50 States, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by— (1) leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops; (2) assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; (3) expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and (4) addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers. Specialty crops are fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). A State department of agriculture is the agency, commission, or department of a state government responsible for agriculture within the State. The term ‘State’ means the 50 States, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Illinois Funding Priorities

Illinois currently devotes more than 100,000 acres of farmland to growing specialty crops, which produce nearly \$500 million in sales for Illinois farmers.

To encourage further expansion of this industry, and to take full advantage of the allocated funds, the Department invites the development of projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

- Enhancing food safety;
- Improving compliance with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act;
- Investing in specialty crop research and technology;
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;
- Improving pest and disease control;
- Improving Food Access in underserved communities and among veterans
- Protecting and improving pollinator health;
- Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems;
- Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops.

Applications for grant funds should describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. The Illinois Department of Agriculture will not award grant funds for projects whose products or services promote or provide profit that solely benefits a single organization, institution, or individual.

Examples of Eligible Projects:

- A non-profit organization requests funds to demonstrate the viability of organic small fruit production and partners with Cooperative Extension to publicize the working model of diversification to other regional growers.
- A single farmer implements food safety practices or models on his/her property to meet food safety requirements and conducts a field day and training services to encourage other small family farmers to adopt the methods
- A research project to find ways to extend the growing season of a specialty crop.
- A non-for-profit organization's project to teach underserved communities how to grow, wash and prepare specialty crops for food.

Ineligible Projects

The following activities are not eligible for SCBG funding:

- Acquiring real property (including pre-existing buildings and land purchases), or any interest therein;
- Activities that have received a Federal award from another Federal award program;
- Purchasing farm equipment or labor of farm employees.

Match and Evidence Requirement

Matching Funds Requirement

There is no match requirement for the SCBG Program.

Application Information

Implementation Period

Specialty Crop Block Grant Application Period: May 23, 2025- June 23, 2024

IDOA Funding Period Begins: January 1, 2026

IDOA Funding Period Closes: September 29, 2028

Eligibility

Entities eligible for grants under the SCBG program are:

- Nonprofit organizations.
- Local government entities.
- Tribal governments.
- Institutions such as schools, universities, or hospitals.
- For profit farmers or producers who are connecting the public and/or other farmers or producers to specialty crops with educational programs.

Project Evaluation

Grant projects will be scored by an independent external review panel comprised of agriculture, agribusiness development, and economic development experts. The review panel will use a scoring rubric to assign points to application content.

The competitive review process will:

- Follow all applicable state policies and procedures;
- Include the use of an independent review panel of experts or qualified individuals;
- Include the factors and reasons for selecting an applicant and any changes in project proposal ranks/scores that may occur during the review process; and,
- Maintain guidelines and procedures to prevent any conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest as required by [2 C.F.R. § 400.2\(b\)](#).

Project Evaluation Criteria

Each project that meets the minimum eligibility requirements according to Section A of Application Requirements, will be reviewed and scored by an external review panel using the criteria listed below.

Criteria 1: Project Partner and Summary

- a. The application provides a clear and concise description of the need for the proposed project.
- b. The applicant identifies and engages the intended beneficiaries of the proposed project, including the number of beneficiaries and how they will benefit.
- c. The proposed project will directly benefit specialty crops in the State.

Criteria 2: Project Purpose and Plan

- a. Extent to which the application presents a clear, well-conceived plan of work that addresses at least one identified Illinois SCBG Funding Priority.
- b. The project plan provides a clear, viable, and well-conceived overall methodology for fulfilling the goals and objectives of the proposed project.
- c. Performance measures are appropriate for the scale and scope of the proposed project.

Criteria 3: Beneficiaries Include Specialty Crop Industry

- a. The project is a research project that will benefit specialty crop farmers/producers.
- b. The project aims to make specialty crop more competitive in the market.

Criteria 4: Beneficiaries include Beginning or Socially Disadvantaged

- a. The project benefits socially disadvantaged or beginning farmers or communities.

Criteria 5: External Support

- a. The application demonstrates local support for the proposed project.
- b. The project demonstrates support from external stakeholders.
- c. The project includes letters of support.

Criteria 6: Budget

- a. The budget narrative and justification give a sufficient description of each category.
- b. The overall budget is sufficiently detailed and consistent with the size and scope of the project.

Criteria 7: Overall Application

- a. The application adhered to the application instructions.
- b. The overall application presents a clear, focused, and viable plan to increase the competitiveness of Illinois specialty crops in a well written manner.
- c. The project is focused the Illinois specialty crop industry and how to better the industry. The Illinois specialty crop industry is not an accidental beneficiary of the project.

Submission Requirements

Applicants must:

1. Be registered and in good standing with SAM.gov.
2. Be registered and in good standing with GATA (grants.illinois.gov)
3. Be registered on [Amplifund](#).
4. Use the provided application templates located on Amplifund or the [IDOA SCBG webpage](#).
5. Submit application and all required documents on Amplifund by 11:59 pm CST on June 23, 2026.
 - a. Please be sure that all documents are submitted together by the application deadline.

Reporting Requirements

Projects that are funded are expected to align outcomes with the performance measures.

Performance and financial reports will be collected from awarded projects on regular quarterly intervals. Awarded projects will also be required to submit annual reports 45 days after the end of each budget period and a final report 45 days after the project end date. IDOA will solicit performance and financial reports from each awarded project via email, phone, teleconferencing, and/or site visits.

Award Notices

Upon completion of the competitive review process, selected applications will be sent to USDA AMS. Final determination of approved projects and award amounts will be facilitated by USDA AMS. Successful applicants will be notified after final approval of applications by IDOA. Successful applicants will be required to register as a vendor of the State of Illinois prior to the awarding of the grants. Each funded project will submit a Financial Capability Questionnaire as a risk assessment measure and will sign a subaward agreement acknowledging terms and conditions, statement of work, reporting deadlines, and invoicing guidelines.

Unsuccessful Applications

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by IDOA via email as soon as possible after awards are approved by USDA AMS.

Risk Assessment

Each organization applying for the grant will undergo a risk assessment evaluation. In accordance with [2 CFR 200.331](#), IDOA must determine the ability of the subrecipient to comply with Federal statutes, regulations and the terms and conditions of the sub-award agreement. All grantees will complete a Financial Capability Questionnaire as part of this risk assessment. Other factors included:

- IDOA prior experience with subrecipient (i.e., on-time reports, accurate invoicing, communication)
- Results of previous site visits or audits
- New or frequently changing personnel and/or substantially changed internal control systems.
- Extent and results of any prior Federal awarding agency monitoring, debarment, suspension, or delinquency on Federal debt

Organizations deemed at-risk by IDOA may still receive SCBG sub-awards. However, IDOA is authorized to impose special conditions on high risk subrecipients as listed in [2 CFR 200.207](#). Examples of special conditions may include additional measures for project monitoring, and/or more detailed or frequent financial reporting.

Agency Contact Information

Applicants and other interested parties can contact Illinois Department of Agriculture SCBG personnel by email with questions @ AGR.ISCBG@illinois.gov. For more information, please visit <https://agr.illinois.gov/assistance/illinoisfarmprograms/specialty-crop-grants.html>