

**SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM – FARM BILL  
FISCAL YEAR 2015  
Request for Applications  
Nebraska Department of Agriculture**

**Program Purpose**

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) is pleased to announce a competitive solicitation process to award Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds for projects that solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, nursery crops, including floriculture. Please visit USDA's web site at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp.html> to view a comprehensive list of eligible specialty crops, ineligible commodities, and examples of projects that solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops under the SCBGP.

**Legislative Authority**

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 (the Farm Bill). SCBGP is currently implemented under 7 CFR part 1291 (published March 27, 2009; 74 FR 13313). The Act authorized the USDA to provide grants to states to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. State departments of agriculture are eligible to apply for grant funds directly from the USDA.

Each State department of agriculture is eligible to receive an estimated base grant of approximately \$221,328.44 and an amount based on the average of the most recent available value of specialty crop cash receipts in the State (2012 calendar year estimates) and the acreage of specialty crop production in the State (2007 Census of Agriculture). The data source for specialty crop cash receipts and acreage is from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service and National Agricultural Statistics Service.

**Award Process**

Before USDA will award Nebraska any SCBGP funds for the 2015 fiscal year, NDA must submit a detailed state plan to USDA explaining how this money will be used to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Projects approved for funding may last up to three years in length. The grant period begins September 30, 2015, and ends September 29, 2018.

**NDA will utilize a competitive grant process in order to provide all interested parties an opportunity to access funds.** NDA's goal is to fund meaningful projects

that have the highest degree of measurable benefits to Nebraska specialty crop producers in relation to each dollar spent.

### **Funding Availability**

A maximum grant award does not exist and neither NDA nor the SCBGP requires a cost sharing or matching requirement. During the FY 2013 and 2014 funding cycles, the average amount of funding, per award, totaled \$27,655 and \$34,209, respectively. All projects are subject to the availability of funds.

### **Eligibility Requirements**

Project(s) must **solely** enhance the competitiveness of U.S. or U.S. territory-grown specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets. Each project must identify at least one expected measurable outcome that specifically demonstrates the project's impact in solely enhancing the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops. Funds will not be awarded for projects that solely benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, grant funds cannot be used to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

Proposals should be initiated by organizations, industry groups, or academic institutions, or should involve collaboration or partnerships between producers, industry groups, academics, or other organizations. Applicants may cooperate with any public or private organization, or two or more individuals or organizations may propose a joint project. Applicants 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. Multi-state projects are allowed, but should provide solutions to problems that cross state boundaries. A multi-state partnership is a project that implements activities with measurable outcomes that benefit two or more U.S. states and/or territories.

Multi-state partnership projects that address problems that cross state boundaries will be considered. Multi-state partnership proposals must explain the impact the projects will have on a multi-state or national level.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Evaluation criteria for assessing technical and business merit include significance, approach, and feasibility. Significance is the extent to which the project, if successfully carried out, will make an important and/or original contribution to the field of endeavor. Approach is the extent to which the concept, design, methods, analyses, and technologies are properly developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the project aims. Feasibility is the likelihood that the proposed work can be accomplished within the proposed budget by the applicant, given their staff experience and expertise, past

progress, available resources, institutional/organizational commitment, and (if appropriate) access to technologies. These criteria will be considered when the SCBGP Field Review Panel evaluates the Concept Proposals.

NDA will give priority to projects that enables the applicant to measure the quantifiable outcomes of the project, including the likelihood that the project will provide solutions that lead to measurable benefits to specialty crop growers and consumers.

### **Competitive Grant Application Review Process**

NDA's competitive solicitation process will be divided into two phases: Phase I, Concept Proposal and Phase II, Grant Proposal. Concept Proposal instructions are listed below. Projects with the highest combined scores will serve as recommendations to the Director of Agriculture as to which applicants should be invited to complete a Grant Proposal. All applicants will be notified of their grant application status, and whether they have been selected to complete the Phase II, Grant Proposal application. Instructions and completion deadline for Phase II will be given at that time. The Grant Proposal will fully describe the project's purpose, potential impact, measurable outcomes, work plan, budget narrative, oversight, and commitment. An applicant's failure to meet eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in NDA's rejection of the award prior to or after the application review.

#### Phase I, Concept Proposal

In Phase I, interested, eligible non-profit organizations, local, state, and federal government entities, for-profit organizations, producer groups, and colleges or universities must submit Concept Proposals. Concept Proposals are due to NDA by **April 1, 2015**, and must briefly describe the project in a clear, concise manner and be responsive to the following categories:

- Organization/Business Type
- Organization/Business Name
- Federal Tax Identification and DUNS numbers
- Organization/Business Contact Information
- Requested Grant Amount for the Entire Project
- Project Coordinator
- Project Title
- Receipt of Prior NDA Grant Funds
- Receipt of Prior SCBGP Funds
- Area of Focus
- Beginning Farmer or Rancher
- Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher
- Multi-State Project
- Project Purpose
- Estimated Timeline
- Goals, Objectives, and Expected Measurable Outcomes

- Preliminary Project Work Plan
- Projected Budget

Once the Concept Proposals have been collected by NDA and the submission deadline has expired, NDA will determine whether the submitted Concept Proposals meet SCBGP-FB grant eligibility requirements and, if applicable, will assess any of the applicant(s) past grant performances. An SCBGP Field Review Panel will then be formed, which will likely be comprised of representatives from public agencies and non-profit entities with an interest and expertise in specialty crop food and agricultural systems. The Panel will rank proposals against the evaluation criteria and questions listed on the Technical Evaluation Criteria Score Sheet. Depending on the nature of the Concept Proposals, the Panel may seek additional peer review for more specialized proposals. The Panel will make recommendations to the Director of Agriculture as to which applicants should be invited to submit a Phase II, Grant Proposal, which will be included in NDA's FY 2015 SCBGP State Plan. The Director will ultimately decide which projects will be invited to Phase II. **Applicants invited to Phase II will be required to attend a webinar hosted by NDA. The webinar will provide instructions on how to write a grant proposal.** NDA's Concept Proposal outline and application instructions and the Technical Evaluation Criteria Score Sheet from which applications will be scored are accessible via NDA's web site at [www.nda.nebraska.gov](http://www.nda.nebraska.gov).

#### **Concept Proposal Submission Instructions:**

Interested applicants can apply by completing Nebraska's Concept Proposal application, which is accessible via NDA's web site at [www.nda.nebraska.gov](http://www.nda.nebraska.gov). Concept Proposals can be either sent or e-mailed to:

Nebraska Department of Agriculture  
Ag Promotion and Development Division  
P.O. Box 94947  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
[casey.foster@nebraska.gov](mailto:casey.foster@nebraska.gov)

Concept Proposals must be postmarked or e-mailed on or before **April 1, 2015**. Questions regarding this grant and/or the competitive solicitation process should be directed to NDA at 800-422-6692 or [casey.foster@nebraska.gov](mailto:casey.foster@nebraska.gov).

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