

GDA 2025 USDA/AMS SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM (SCBGP) REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT: 2/1/2025

Notice of Federal Grant Funds Availability – FY 2025, administered by: Georgia Department of Agriculture

The Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) is pleased to announce the competitive solicitation process to award the 2025 USDA/AMS (Agricultural Marketing Service) Specialty Crop Block Program grant (SCBGP).

Individual project award funding requests require a minimum request of \$20,000 up to a maximum of \$100,000. Grants may be applied-for in excess of \$100,000 for certain *marketing* projects, but must be approved by GDA (by email) well in advance of submission. Awarded projects will have up to 3 years to complete the requirements of the grant: There are no extensions.

The application process:

Submittal of a project application to GDA. It is imperative that you read the directions on the application template carefully and not skip any fields or leave any section blank. Choose ONLY ONE Outcome Measure (1-7) and only one or two associated indicators. Note that the “Miscellaneous” Outcome Measure may NOT be used.

For the APPLICATION form/template* please go to:

https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Application_ProjectProfile_Template.pdf

*Note that you must **DOWNLOAD** the template, then open it from your computer, not directly from the browser or you will get an error message.

Be as **complete and detailed** as possible in your narrative and budget. For a list of allowable and unallowable costs (for use when preparing your budget), go here: <https://agr.georgia.gov/sites/default/files/documents/financial-assistance/scbgp-appendixa-allowablecosts.pdf>

THE APPLICATION IS DUE TO GDA BY TUESDAY, 3/4/25 at NOON to Grants@agr.georgia.gov. DO NOT SEND IT TO ANY OTHER GDA EMAIL ADDRESS(ES), INCLUDING THAT OF THE COORDINATOR/GRANTS DIRECTOR. **Only** the email time-stamp of when the application was received by GDA will be used to determine if the deadline was met: No exceptions.

ELIGIBILITY

Proposals will be accepted *only* from GEORGIA-based: IRS-designated 501(c)(3) current non-profit organizations, commodity commissions, grower associations, state and local government entities, and colleges and universities. All entities must head-quartered within Georgia. **Individuals and for-profit organizations (businesses, including farms) are not eligible to apply, per GDA restrictions.**

Non-profit organizations that have *not* previously received the SCBGP in Georgia must partner with a Principal Investigator (PI) from a Georgia college or university, preferably from either of Georgia’s Land Grant institutions (UGA or FVSU). Because this is a very complicated grant to administer, previous experience with federal grants will factor *greatly* in application scoring, as will perceived administrative capacity, as well as previous SCBGP grant administrative performance (if applicable). If an organization/administrator was awarded a SCBGP grant in the past and did not spend all of its funds, did not follow grant instructions regarding pre-approval of funds, and/or was late with annual reports, it is very unlikely that it will be funded again.

University researchers may submit *no more than one application* for consideration for which they may be listed as the Principal Investigator (PI) and/or *no more than one application* for consideration for which they can be listed as the co-PI. If a researcher has a colleague submit their proposal as the PI and it’s later discovered that this was done to circumvent the above limit, the proposal/application will be disqualified. Researchers should keep in mind that it is

unusual for the same researcher to be funded over multiple years and *very rarely* is a given crop/commodity funded more than once in a given year (For example: If 3 researchers submit apple projects, it's quite likely that only 1 will be funded, if at all). Researchers (other than tree nut) should include in their proposals a plan to present the findings of their SCBG project at the annual SERFVG Conference, held each January. If you have submitted the same project to GDA twice in the past and it has *not* been funded, it cannot be submitted again: You are welcome to submit a new project for consideration. If you were awarded a SCBGP grant in the past and did not spend all of your funds, did not follow your project's budget plan, and/or submitted reports late, it is very unlikely that you will be funded again. Again, attempts to circumvent this by having another researcher submit your proposal will lead to proposal disqualification.

PURPOSE OF THE SCBGP

The purpose of the SCBGP is to provide funding for projects that *enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Georgia*. The project proposal must focus on research, education, or marketing and benefit the specialty crop industry. **Projects will be chosen for funding based on potential increased impact to the specialty crop industry in Georgia.**

Specialty crops are defined as: fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, Christmas trees, turfgrass/sod, nursery and greenhouse crops, including floriculture. Note that hemp and soybeans are *not* specialty crops. Eligible plants must be cultivated or managed and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification (i.e. crops used for animal feed are not eligible). Processed products shall consist of greater than 50% of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water. Please see the specific listing of eligible crops on the USDA/AMS website located at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop>

FUNDING PRIORITIES/FOCUS AREAS

*The following have been identified as **funding priorities** for the SCBGP for Georgia:*

- Increasing consumption of specialty crops in Georgia's schools by expanding child knowledge of and improving access to the nutritional benefits of specialty crops;
- Enhancing specialty crop food safety, particularly in regard to helping farmers/growers/producers prepare for and comply with the provisions of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA);
- Assisting all entities in the specialty crop production/distribution chain in developing "Good Agricultural Practices," "Good Handling Practices," "Good Manufacturing Practices," and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors;
- Research projects, including those which focus on helping specialty crop growers reduce the financial costs and/or environmental impact of their operations, including improved pest and disease management techniques, efficient water management, integrated pest management, and/or sustainable production;
- Developing and researching new and improved specialty crop varieties that are better adapted to Georgia's soils and climate and/or result in longer shelf-life;
- Increasing sales and marketability and driving demand for commercially grown specialty crops.

****The public is always welcome to suggest additional funding priorities to be considered by GDA for future SCBGP solicitations. These should be sent to Grants@agr.georgia.gov****

GDA's intent is to fund projects that can produce *the highest degree of measurable benefits* to Georgia's specialty crop producers, in relation to each dollar spent. Applications will be scored based on the IMPACT the projects will likely have on Georgia's Specialty Crop industry.

PARTNERSHIPS are strongly encouraged for this grant and proposals/applications that show input/buy-in from all interested parties in Georgia will score higher than ones that don't. All partnerships require a letter acknowledging participation.

THREE letters of support ARE required for all applications. Letters from GDA or USDA staff will *not* be accepted. Applications must show evidence of Georgia specialty crop *industry* support in letters. All letters are due with the application, by the deadline.

Note that *no* indirect/administrative/F&A costs can be charged for this grant. This is because USDA caps it at 8% for SCBG and GDA retains that amount to cover its overhead costs.

Please also note that this is a **very competitive grant**. Only a fraction (appx. 1/4) of the applications received will be funded, and often at an amount reduced from the requested amount.

PROJECTED TIMELINE (as proposed/subject to change and contingent on passage of the Farm Bill)

February 1, 2025

Announcement of 2025 SCBG grant opportunity; Request for Application published.

MARCH 4, 2025 (Tuesday)

Project Proposal/Application submission deadline to GDA by **NOON** (no exceptions) to Grants@agr.georgia.gov (DO NOT send to any other GDA email addresses), along with THREE (*no more, no less*) letters of support.

EARLY APRIL 2025

GDA staff review of full applications: revisions and clarifications requested from applicants and GDA/Specialty Crop Review Committee evaluation of applications.

MID TO LATE APRIL 2025

Notice to applicants of acceptance/denial of their project proposals by the Review Committee. Revisions made to projects before submission to USDA/AMS-SCBG. Note that most applications will require scope/budget revisions to projects based on Review Committee recommendations.

If funded:

LATE SEPTEMBER 2025

Award letters and contract agreements will go out to awardees/sub-grantees through the Principal Investigator (PI). Announcement of grant awards through press release/GDA website. Awards can then be announced by awardees.

OCTOBER 2025

3-year grant period begins (once all contracts are fully executed).

NOVEMBER 2025

First Annual Report Due. Template will be emailed to Principal Investigators by ~11/1/26.

MARCH 31, 2027

Grantees should have requested reimbursement for at least 50% of their grant funds by this date. Unspent funds are subject to recapture and reallocation. New workplans are required if at least 50% of funds are not drawn down by now.

NOVEMBER 2027

Second Annual Report Due. The template will be emailed to Principal Investigators by ~11/1/27.

SEPTEMBER 29, 2028

3-year Grant period ends. **NO EXTENSIONS**. Projects must be completed by this date and absolutely no 2025 grant funds can be spent after this date.

NOVEMBER 2028

Final Reports Due. The template will be emailed to Principal Investigators by ~11/1/28.

For questions or additional information please e-mail: SCBG Coordinator at Grants@agr.georgia.gov