

## **2026 IDALS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

### **Application Checklist**

**Use this checklist\* as a tool to ensure that all of the required documents are in your application.** \*This checklist is for your use only and is not to be used as a cover sheet

- I have read and reviewed all guidelines and performance measures for the 2026 IDALS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.
- I understand that projects within the priority area will receive higher priority. Priority areas identified for 2026 are:
  - Projects that have the potential to significantly expand, enhance, and improve local production, processing, distribution, and markets (demand).
  - Research projects increasing yields, including but not limited to organic production, including focus on pest and disease control and new varieties.
  - Projects that provide training, resources and technical assistance, or information to growers on creating and sustaining profitable businesses.
  - Educational projects that focus on increasing knowledge of specialty crop nutrition, preparation, and accessibility.
- Principle Investigators are not allowed to have more than 2 open projects at one time. Contracts will be issued for 12 months, 24 months or the maximum of 30 months. Projects closing prior to the award of the new grant do not count towards that number. On the cover sheet, please list a secondary contact that is familiar with the project as a backup should contact with the PI fail. Grant awards that are made are between the organization and IDALS, be sure that members of your organization are able to report back on the project.
- I have completed the 2025 Project Profile Template for grant consideration. When completing the expected measurable outcome section please refer to the SCBG Performance Measure Guidance link on our webpage. USDA requires you select at least one outcome and indicator. While more than one outcome/indicator may be applicable to your project, we encourage you to limit your outcomes to no more than two and select only indicators that are a good fit for your project. This will make reporting easier should your project be funded.
- I understand that the annual report (if grant lasts longer than one year) is due within 60 days after the end of the first grant year reporting period (September 29, 2027) and every subsequent year, until the expiration of the grant period.
- I understand that a Final Performance Report is due within 60 days following the end of the grant agreement.

## **Request for Proposals - Application Procedures and Requirements**

### **Submission**

The maximum amount of a subaward is set at \$30,000. However, if it is determined there are not enough qualified projects to award all available funding from USDA, the Department reserves the right to re-evaluate the maximum amount to be awarded on a per project basis at its sole discretion in order to utilize all funding available. The duration of the project cannot exceed 30 months.

Information within this packet is used for different purposes with some information going to USDA, the review committee or being kept on file for grant monitoring. For those reasons, please create 3 different pdfs as identified below (or send files separately, all under 1 email.) Be sure to include your organization name in the saved files. All information listed below is required.

- 1) **Project Profile Template** -To open, download the file and save the PDF to your computer. Once saved to your computer, navigate to the PDF saved and double click. The PDF will then open in the Adobe App. This USDA provide dynamic PDF will not open on the internet.
- 2) **Review Committee**
  - Completed and signed IDALS Cover Sheet
  - Work Plan
  - Brief description of key personnel – including previous grant experience & background
  - Three letters (minimum) in support of project and its goals. At least one from a grower/grower group, recommended that one include an expert in the field (example honey projects – state apiarist). Be sure to include partners or resource providers specifically named in the proposal.
  - Documentation of matching funds if applicable.
- 3) **Grant Support**
  - Printed registration page from SAM.GOV showing status on SAM.GOV
  - Completed and signed W-9 Form
  - Completed Grantee Self-Assessment of Internal Controls and Risks

Proposals must be received by IDALS on or before **4:00 p.m. on March 6, 2026**. Proposals must be mailed, e-mailed, or delivered. Electronic submission is preferred. Please send a read receipt to ensure it has been received.

IDALS will send applicants an e-mail confirmation within two business days of receiving the proposal. IDALS may return late and/or incomplete proposals without consideration. The submission of a grant proposal does not guarantee funding.

Send to:  
Amy Gamble  
Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship  
Hoover State Office Building  
1305 E. Walnut Street  
Des Moines IA 50319

Phone: (515) 281-7657

E-mail: [amy.gamble@iowaagriculture.gov](mailto:amy.gamble@iowaagriculture.gov)

The deadline for submitting applications is **Friday, March 6 at 4:00 p.m.** Applicants will be notified of preliminary acceptance by April 30, 2026. USDA final notification may not occur until September or October.

### **Scorer's consideration(s)**

- ✓ Is the project reasonable and does it provide a significant benefit/impact to the industry?
- ✓ Does the project have the ability to be sustainable?
- ✓ Are outcomes clearly defined, measurable, and reasonable to the project?
- ✓ Do they have a plan to disseminate the information?
- ✓ Are expenditures necessary and reasonable to meet the program goals?
- ✓ Is the applicant working with at least 1 grower/grower group?
- ✓ Agencies past grant performance – responsiveness, project completion, timely submission of reports

### **Format**

The Project Profile must follow the 2025 Project Profile Template form. Use the Project Profile Template Quick guide and Grant Performance Measures website to assist you.

The Cover Sheet and W-9 forms must be signed.

The Project Profile Template form is available on our website along with all required forms. Each section of the profile explains what information is expected in that particular section.

Please note: Federal approval may not be announced until September or October. Timelines should not start before September 30, 2026, unless otherwise notified by IDALS.

### **Evaluation**

Proposals will be reviewed by a review committee appointed by the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture. The panel will review and evaluate proposals that meet all the requirements using established evaluation criteria. The committee will make recommendations to the Secretary as to which proposals should be funded. The Secretary will make the final decision as to which proposals will be forwarded on to USDA-AMS for final review, approval, and funding. IDALS will notify applicants of the status of their proposal after receiving USDA-AMS approval.



## **Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship** **2026 IDALS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) Guidelines**

### **Funding Source**

USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) provides the funds to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in the state. IDALS has set the maximum amount of a subaward at \$30,000. However, if it is determined there are not enough qualified projects to award all available funding from USDA, the Department reserves the right to re-evaluate the maximum amount to be awarded on a per project basis at its sole discretion in order to utilize all funding available.

### **Eligible Entities**

IDALS will accept proposals for consideration for specialty crop block grant funds from Iowa agencies, universities, institutions, and producers, industry, and community-based organizations. To be eligible for a grant, the project(s) must solely enhance the competitiveness of Iowa grown specialty crops that benefit the industry as a whole and that do not directly benefit a particular product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. Grant 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. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners. Applicants must be a legal entity and have the legal capacity to contract.

Eligible applicants must reside, and/or conduct their business or organization in Iowa and must be in good standing. Awardees will be required to be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) and have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number. The UEI is a 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned to an entity. This number it replaces the DUNS number. If you are registered in SAM.gov you already have a Unique Entity ID. It is viewable at SAM.gov.

### **Eligible Specialty Crops**

Specialty crops are defined in law as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture.” USDA – Agricultural Marketing Service provides a more detailed definition and lists eligible plants commonly considered fruits and tree nuts, vegetables, culinary herbs and spices, medical plants and nursery, floriculture, and horticultural crops at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop>

Both fresh and processed specialty crops are eligible. Ineligible commodities are also listed. Livestock and poultry are not considered specialty crops.

### **Eligible Grant Projects**

To be eligible for a grant, the project(s) enhances the competitiveness of Iowa grown specialty crops that benefit the industry as a whole and that do not directly benefit a particular product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. Additional points are awarded to projects that are within the identified priority areas.

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) encourages projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry: increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops; improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; assisting all entities in the specialty crops distribution chain in developing Good Agricultural Practices, Good Handling Practices, and Good Manufacturing Practices, and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers, and processors; investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes: enhancing food safety; developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops; pest and disease control; and development of organic and sustainable production practices. Increasing competitiveness may include developing local and regional food systems and improving food access in underserved communities.

Applicants should describe how the project potentially impacts and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. Please refer to the Performance Measure Information Sheet.

### **Cost-Share and Matching Funds**

Leveraging funds to further your grant project is a great way to increase the impact; however, this funding opportunity does not have a Federal cost-sharing or matching requirement. For audit purposes, USDA does not want matching funds included in the project proposal.

“Applicants should not include this topic in the submitted application nor subsequent performance or financial reports.” For projects that offer a cost-share component, please do not include “cost-share,” but perhaps reimbursement program or other such language. If you have matching funds, you can include that information in your support letters to be sent to the review committee, but not in your project profile.

### **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.
- Individual specialty crop businesses or roadside stands requesting funds to promote their individual businesses.
- A sole proprietor requests grant funds to redesign her/his logo in order to make her/his specialty crop value-added product stand out at the local farmers market.
- A company that develops specialty crop value-added products requests funds to train its employees how to make value-added products.
- A specialty crop producer requests funds to promote their asparagus at a roadside stand.

### **Examples of Acceptable Projects**

- A university requests grant funds 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.
- A single grower 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 company requests funds to provide a viable pollination alternative to specialty crop stakeholders in the region, which currently does not have one.
- A single specialty crop organization requests funds to conduct an advertising campaign that will benefit their specialty crop members.
- A single farmer erects high tunnels on their property to extend the growing season
- of tomatoes and lettuce and conducts a field day and farm tour to encourage other small family farmers to adopt the production methods.

Projects that support bio-based projects and bioenergy and energy programs, including biofuels and other alternative uses for agricultural and forestry commodities, should visit the USDA Energy website at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/energy-programs> for information on how to submit those projects for consideration.

Projects that support farmers markets that do not enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops should visit the Farmers Market Promotion Program at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fmpp> for information on how to submit those projects for consideration.

### **Multi-State Projects**

Multi-state projects are encouraged to provide a growing need for solutions to problems that cross state boundaries such as, but not limited to: addressing good agricultural practices, research on crop productivity or quality, enhancing access to federal nutrition programs, pest and disease management, or commodity-specific projects addressing common issues in multi-state regions. The review process for multistate projects will be conducted directly through the USDA- AMS. If you are interested in submitting a multi-state plan or have questions on the application process, please follow the link below:

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scmp>

### **Administration of Grants**

IDALS follows the USDA AMS federal grant uniform administrative requirements, 2 CFR Part 200

IDALS applies the following federal grant uniform administrative requirements to the management of each sub-grantee awarded based on the type of organization through their contractual or cooperative linkages. Please reference the AMS/USDA 2CFR Part 200 Appendix below for sections applicable to your organization.

#### **23.0 Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

[https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2024\\_SCBGP\\_RFA\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2024_SCBGP_RFA_FINAL.pdf)

#### **2 CFR 200.332**

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/subject-group-ECFR031321e29ac5bbd/section-200.332>

#### **2 CFR Appendix IV to Part 200**

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/appendix-Appendix%20IV%20to%20Part%20200>





### **Allowable Costs**

IDALS and sub-grantees are subject to those federal cost principles applicable to the particular organization concerned. Please refer to the applicable cost principles when developing project activities and budget. Please reference Appendix A (links provided below) List of Selected Items of Cost Contained in OMB Cost Principles Regulations to locate the principles applied to establish allowable or unallowable costs. All costs must be associated with project activities that solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Links are provided above to the USDA AMS to CFR Sections and Circulars.

### **Restrictions and Limitations on Grant Funds**

Grant funds will not be awarded for the following:

- Any request that solely benefits a particular commercial product or provides a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual.
- Any request that seeks to replace operational funding for ongoing projects that have suffered losses of state or federal funding, or to replace other local, state or federal funding.
- Any request to pay for “indirect costs” associated with a project.
- Any request for per diem or meals and incidental expenses that exceed the federal limits. <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates> Per diem rates or the new Per Diem tool to calculate trip allowances - <https://www.gsa.gov/travel?gsaredirect=travel-resources>
- Any contractual costs that exceed the cap of GS-15 step 10 unless acceptable justification is provided. \$134,776 annual salary or \$64.80 per hour, not including benefits.
- Any request to pay for government services normally paid for with general taxpayer funds, such as research equipment or faculty salaries.
- Any request for reimbursement of expenses for activities completed prior to submission and approval of a proposal and a signed contractual agreement.
- Any requests to pay for general administrative or accounting duties. In order for secretarial or clerical salaries to be allowable as direct charges to the grants, a justification of how that person will be directly involved in the project must be included in the narrative.
- Any political activities in accordance with the Hatch Act.
- Any capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land. Capital expenditures of special purpose equipment are allowable with USDA-AMS acceptance.

### **Budget Guidelines**

**Travel - mileage will be reimbursed at the state rate which is generally lower than the federal rate.**

Please note – Grant funds will not be allowed for reimbursement of travel expenses where the cost is over the Federal government per diem and meals and incidental expenses limits.

<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates> -Per Diem rates overview

<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-a-trip/per-diem-rates/mie-breakdowns> M&IE Breakdowns

### **Capital Expenditures**

Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land are unallowable as direct and indirect charges. 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. Ancillary charges, such as taxes, duty, protective in-transit insurance, freight, and installation may be included in, or excluded from the acquisition cost in accordance with the governmental unit's regular accounting practices.

Capital expenditures for special purpose equipment are allowable as direct costs, provided that items with a unit cost of \$10,000 or more have the prior approval of AMS. (Note: Prior approval from AMS means that the special purpose equipment must be included in the State Plan, and the State Plan must receive approval from AMS. If special purpose equipment was not originally included in the approved State plan, then the grantee must request approval from AMS to purchase the equipment before utilizing grant funds.)

Special purpose equipment means equipment which is used only for research, scientific, or other technical activities. The special purpose equipment must solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops and benefit the specialty crop industry.

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 \$10,000.

General purpose equipment means equipment, which is not limited to research, scientific or other technical activities. Examples include office equipment and furnishings, telephone networks, information technology equipment and systems, reproduction and printing equipment, and motor vehicles. Rental costs of buildings and equipment are allowable as direct costs in accordance with the cost principles in Subpart E of 2 CFR Part 200.

### **Supplies**

This is anything with acquisition cost under \$10,000 and could be anything from office supplies and software to educational or field supplies. Items such as telephone, postage, fax and express mail are more appropriately listed under the "Other" category.

### **Other**

**Conferences/Meeting** - 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.

**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. In contrast, 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.

**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, as well as the number of pieces to be printed and/or published.

**Data collection** - Provide the estimated cost of collecting performance data to measure the project outcome measures.

### **Indirect Charges**

Please Note – Indirect charges are not allowable in the IDALS- SCBGP.

### **Program Income**

If program income is earned it may be used for 1) expanding the project or program; 2) continuing the project or program after the grant or sub grant support ends; and 3) supporting other projects or programs that further the broad objectives of the grant program.

## **Work Plan Guidelines**

(Separate document not included in the project profile template, for IDALS & review committee use only)

Please note: Federal approval may not be announced until September 2026. Timelines should not start before September 30, 2026, unless otherwise notified by IDALS. The following information should be included in this section:

- What are the activities necessary to accomplish the project objectives?
- When will the performance monitoring/data collection plan activity be accomplished?
- Will outcome 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 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program 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 following is an example of a work plan:

Project Activity	Who	Timeline
Assemble the specialty crop steering committee to provide direction throughout project	Agricultural Marketing Council, specialty crop industry representatives from the mushroom, apple, and peach	January
Develop statement of work for literature review	Ag Marketing Council	January
Procure literature reviewer	Ag Marketing Council	January – February
Conduct literature review on the post-harvest nutritional content of specialty crops and report gaps to steering committee	ABC Consultant	February - March
Prioritize research gaps; develop/issue Request for Proposals (RFP) for original research	ABC Consultant	March - April
Receive proposals; distribute to steering committee	ABC Consultant	April - May
Review and select proposals	Specialty crop steering committee	April - May
As appropriate, refer proposals to individual commodity research and promotion programs	Specialty crop steering committee and individual research and promotion programs	April - May
Develop and execute research grant agreements for selected projects	Ag Marketing Council	May - June
Obtain progress reports from researchers; synthesize for steering committee.....	Ag Marketing Council	September, December

### **Sub-grantee Responsibilities**

- Comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws in the conduct of the work under the agreement.
- Monitor the performance of all activities and ensure that the work is completed within the established time frame.
- Ensure funds are used only for expenses covered by the approved project.
- Ensure Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) are followed
- Recipients are required to acknowledge USDA-AMS support through oral or written presentation. Grant recipients and subrecipients must acknowledge USDA AMS support in all publications written or published with USDA AMS grant or cooperative agreement support. Funding for (Project or Publication) was made possible by a grant from the U.S.

Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the USDA.

- Complete a post-award management training
- Keep all reports, data, financial information, and other pertinent information for a minimum of three years after completion of the project
- Submit an annual report (if the grant duration is longer than one year) within 60 days after the end of the first year of the date of the signed grant agreement and each subsequent year until the expiration of the grant period. The annual report will be reviewed and approved by the USDA – AMS. Once approved the annual report will become part of the official grant file.
- Submit a final performance report within 60 days following the end date of the grant agreement. The final report will be reviewed and approved by the USDA –AMS. Once approved, the final report will be posted by the USDA-AMS on the SCBGP- FB website and represents an important vehicle for sharing project findings with Federal and State agencies, as well as the public.
- Annual and Final report templates will be emailed to the project investigator in advance of the deadline.
- Additional Information. Any information or data derived from an IDALS SCBGP must be made available to IDALS which reserves the right to share these results with the general public.
- If a change in your organization occurs impacting the completion of your project, IDALS must be notified within 30 days; failure to do so may impact your organization's future grant opportunities

### **Prior IDALS Approvals Required – Post Award**

Any change or activity requiring an amendment must be addressed under challenges/developments within annual/final reports. Awardees must contact IDALS to request prior approval under the following conditions:

### **Change in Key Personnel**

When it is necessary to change the program contact for a period of more than 3 months, submit a notice to IDALS. Request should contain the new individuals name and contact information to include name, physical address, email, and phone number.

### **Change in Scope or Objectives**

When it is necessary to modify the scope or objectives of the award, submit a written justification for the change along with the revised scope or objectives of the award to IDALS. If requesting to discontinue all or a portion of the project and add a new project, submit a written justification for the change along with a project proposal to include the project title, purpose, project abstract, potential impact, expected measurable outcomes, work plan, budget narrative, project oversight, and project commitment.

### **Extension of Grant Agreement**

Where an extension of time is required on a grant; the extension must be received in writing no later than 60 days prior to the expiration date of the award. The request must contain the following information:

- The length of additional time required to complete project objectives and a justification for the extension
- A summary of progress to date (status of project timeline and objectives, etc.),
- An estimate of remaining funds on the scheduled expiration date,
- A projected timetable to complete the project for which the extension is being requested.

### **Changes to the Contractual Category**

Applicants need to be very mindful of any funds allocated under "contractual." Any changes occurring within the budget or the vendor require a USDA approved amendment to the project.

### **Budget Changes**

Where a budget modification is required, the modification must be pre-approved by IDALS if the **cumulative amount of the modifications exceeds 20% of the project's total budget.**

A request for budget change shall include a description of the change and a justification for the change. If the cumulative amount of budget changes is less than 20%, prior IDALS approval is not required, unless it involves a contractual change. **Any modification involving contractual changes will require a USDA approved amendment to the project.**

The IDALS grant administrator should be notified as soon as possible if you foresee a project overage nearing 20% of the cumulative awarded grant amount.