2026 Iowa Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

OFFICE HOURS

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What is a Specialty Crop?

- Fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)

- Examples and additional information https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop

Who is eligible to apply?

- Iowa agencies, universities, institutions, and producer, industry, and community-based organizations.

- Single organizations, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

- Applicants must reside, and/or conduct their business in Iowa.

- Must be a legal entity with a UEI number and have the legal capacity to contract.

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

2026 SCBGP applications will be due by 4 PM, March 6, 2026.

SCBGP Office Hours
Tuesday, February 10 · 2:00 – 3:00pm
Google Meet joining info
Video call link: **https://meet.google.com/zto-viko-zqw**

Applicants

Guidelines and Request For Proposals

Performance Measure Information Sheet

SCBG Performance Measure Guidance

Application Materials

Project Profile Template (application)

- *How to open the SCBGP Project Profile Template*

W9 Form

Cover Sheet

Minority Impact Statement

Grantee Self-Assessment of Internal Controls and Risks

Resources

Be a Part of the Review Committee

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) is requesting nominations of qualified individuals active in the specialty crop industry, academia and public sectors to establish a professionally diverse Review Committee for the upcoming IDALS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (IDALS SCBGP). Members of the Review Committee will review, evaluate and make recommendations to IDALS on submitted Iowa Specialty Crop Block Grant Program proposals.

Reviewers should have knowledge of specialty crops, and/or grant writing or grant management experience, and the ability to devote the necessary time to complete the review process. Reviewers will be appointed by Iowa Secretary of Agriculture. Reviewers will provide their time and service as a volunteer with no compensation. Reviewers will not be allowed to submit a grant proposal in which they are listed as the Principle Investigator while serving on the Review Committee. This does not include open grants that have already been approved.

Definition

"Specialty Crops" are identified as: fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture." A list is provided at **www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp** and contains commonly considered specialty crops and also a list of ineligible commodities.

The Review Process

- Reviewers will be notified by February 27, 2026 of their selection to serve on the Review Committee.
- Reviewers will be provided with electronic copies of all qualifying grant proposals to evaluate and approximately one month in which to review them. The grant application deadline is being moved up to March 6, 2026 due to the anticipated earlier state plan deadline. Each reviewer will review and grade all proposals and submit their evaluation to the grant administrator. This review includes at least three comments for each proposal.
- The grant administrator will compile the scores from all of the reviewers to submit to the Secretary of Agriculture for approval. Should there be a need to discuss projects similar in score, a conference call or virtual meeting will be used.

Responsibilities

- Reviewers should be dedicated to high quality, fair reviews, and be able to devote sufficient time to the review process.
- Reviewers will utilize their knowledge and expertise to evaluate grant proposals and provide scores and written comments about proposals from eligible entities that are applying for IDALS SCBGP grants.
- Objective and impartial
- Free of organization, project, or racial biases
- Able to maintain confidentiality
- Forthcoming in declaring conflicts of interest

Reviewers should be knowledgeable of how to objectively evaluate and assess grant proposals for objectives, work plans and expected results in determining the potential for project success.

Reviewers must write comments to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each application. The review criteria is specific to the IDALS SCBGP, meets the needs of the specialty crop stakeholders priorities identified by outreach activities, and IDALS goals and objectives.

Reviewers rank proposals against the evaluation criteria and make recommendations to the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture. Reviewers DO NOT choose the proposals which will be funded by IDALS and the USDA.

Reviewers must sign the Policy on Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality Form. The confidentiality

NOTES FOR 2026

USDA

- New USDA Project Profile template
    - Fillable form
    - USDA dynamic templates need to be downloaded and opened from your computer, rather than from the web browser

IDALS

- To avoid so many amendments, contracts for approved projects will be issued for 12, 24 or up to 30 months. Projects completed earlier can close out early.

Projects

A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive, distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period of time and within specific limitations. Additionally, it uses resources that are specifically allocated to the work of the project and usually involves a team of people and has a start and end date.

- Leveraging efforts to market & promote SC;
- Assisting producers with research and development relevant to SC;
- Expanding availability & access to specialty crops;
- Addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers

IDALS PRIORITIES

- 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.

IDALS Information

- Funding around $369,000 typically (last year $369,273.79)

- Projects can be up to $30,000.

- Approve around 11-12 applications/year

- Projects include:

High tunnel	Shared kitchen
Honey	Christmas trees
Marketing	Hazelnuts
Wine	Perennial grasses
Food hubs	Fruits/vegetables
No- Till	Farm to School

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SCBGP & SCMP PERFORMANCE MEASURES
DATA COLLECTION GUIDE

All Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) and Specialty Crop Multi-State Program (SCMP) applicants must select at least one outcome and indicator/subindicator that will be addressed through their grant project within the project's period of performance. Marketing projects must select at least one Outcome 1 indicator. All projects must establish baseline numbers and/or estimate realistic target numbers for the selected indicator. The following is a list of outcomes and indicators with tips for data collection.

OUTCOME 1: INCREASING CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER PURCHASING OF SPECIALTY CROPS

INDICATOR 1.1: TOTAL NUMBER OF CONSUMERS WHO GAINED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SPECIALTY CROPS ____.

Of those, the number of

- 1.1a: Adults ____.
- 1.1b: Children ____.

Tip

The Data Collection Considerations section offers methods for measuring knowledge gained through surveys, separate studies, measuring digital traffic, and tracking transactions and/or returning customers. Projects will identify a method to establish a baseline and measure increased knowledge.

INDICATOR 1.2: TOTAL NUMBER OF CONSUMERS WHO CONSUMED MORE SPECIALTY CROPS ____.

- 1.2a: Adults ____.
- 1.2b: Children ____.

Tip

The Data Collection Considerations section offers methods for measuring consumption changes through surveys, separate studies, measuring digital traffic, and tracking transactions and/or returning customers. Projects will identify a method to establish a baseline and measure increased consumption.

Allowable Cost and Activities

AMS 2026 General Terms and Conditions

https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY26AMSGDGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf

Section 8.2 Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities

Cost Category	Affected AMS Grant Program(s)	Description, Guidance and Exceptions
Buildings and Land – Construction	ALL with exceptions	**Unallowable** for the acquisition of buildings, facilities, or land or to make new constructions, additions, improvements, modifications, replacements, rearrangements, reinstallations, renovations, or alterations of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architecture fees), unless the cost is associated with fulfilling the purpose of the grant program or with prior written approval. This also includes construction-related materials, which may include, but are not limited to, the purchase of building materials such as wood, nails, concrete, asphalt, roofing, gravel, sand, paint, insulation, drywall, or plumbing. **Allowable** for rental costs of land and building space. However, lease agreements to own (i.e., lease-to-own or rent-to-own) are not allowable. The lease or rental agreement must terminate at the end of the grant cycle. A building is any permanent structure designed or intended for support, enclosure, shelter, or protection of people, animals, or property, and having a permanent roof supported by columns or walls.
Conferences	ALL with exceptions	**Allowable** if the conference fulfills the grant program's purpose. Allowable conference costs paid by the non-Federal recipient as a sponsor or host of the conference may include rental of facilities, speakers' fees, costs of meals (see Meals for restrictions), and refreshments, local transportation, and other items incidental to such conferences with the exception of entertainment costs that are unallowable. If registration fees are collected, the recipient must report fees as program income (see Program Income). **Allowable** to rent a building or room for training; however, where appropriate, AMS encourages the use of technologies such as webinars, teleconferencing, or videoconferencing as an alternative to renting a building or a room. The recipient should use the most cost-effective facilities, such as State government

Additional Information

- Avoid "cost-share" or inclusion of a "match" in project
  - USDA does not allow
  - Review Committee loves to see it – have support letters or other documents to incorporate into your application package.

- 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, reports submitted timely?

- PI may not have more than 2 open projects

Tips & Tricks

- Find a grant that fits your project; don't force your project into a grant

- Project needs strong cohesiveness

- Living with the grant. Reporting is a part of all grants. Select outcomes that fit; sometime less is more

- Use available resources in writing your grant
    - Scoring matrix
    - Priorities
    - Previously approved projects

Scoring Criteria

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & LAND STEWARDSHIP

SCBG Project Title: _____

Evaluate each project based on the following criteria and award points for each category.

1. Industry Need/Impact	
Is the project reasonable & does it provide a significant benefit/impact to the specialty crop industry? Does this project clearly meet a need/gap of the specialty crop industry? Does the project have the ability to be sustainable? Does the project have a reasonable number of beneficiaries in correlation with the work?	/40
2. Priority Areas	
- 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.	/10
3. Expected measurable outcome(s)	
Are outcomes clearly defined and measurable? Are outcomes reasonable to the project?	/10
4. Work Plan/Purpose	
Is the project completed within the 30-month timeframe? Is the work plan easy to follow and provide enough detail? Do they have a plan to disseminate the information?	/10
5. Budget	
Are funds directly benefitting growers? Is personnel costs an appropriate percentage of the total budget? Are the expenditures necessary & reasonable to meet the program goals? Are there matching or in-kind funds provided along with a detailed explanation? (not a grant requirement)	/10
6. Project Partners/Partnerships	
Did they demonstrate strong partnerships with stakeholders and professional affiliations? Are they working with at least 1 grower/grower group (named in grant)? Did they provide support letters from them?	/10
7. Project oversight	
Did they provide a brief description of key personnel experience & background? Did they demonstrate an ability to implement the project in an efficient manner? Did they include a profile of the organization including previous grants & experiences?	/10
Bonus points	
Is this project unique?	/5

FOR IDALS OFFICE USE

☐ Low 0-54 points
☐ Medium 55-73 points
☐ High 74-89 points
☐ Outstanding 90-100 points

Total points awarded

/100

The Process

- Applications reviewed by a review committee
    - Reviewers provide independent score, ranking and comments for each project

- Reviewers' information compiled into a summary/evaluation and presented to Secretary Naig for consideration

- Additional questions/feedback sought of subgrantees if necessary

- Recommendations put into state plan and submitted to USDA

- USDA requests additional information/clarification mid-late summer

- State plan approved and contracts issued (September) contract start dates 9/30/2026.

Additional Questions

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