

GDA 2024 USDA/AMS SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM (SCBGP) REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT: 2/1/2024

Notice of Federal Grant Funds Availability – FY 2024, administered by: Georgia Department of Agriculture

The Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) is pleased to announce the competitive solicitation process to award the 2024 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) 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 through GDA consists of TWO STEPS:

Submittal of a **Request for Concept Proposal (CP) Application** form to GDA. This will be scored against all other CPs submitted and only the TOP 25-35 highest scoring projects will go on to step #2 (which will involve the revamping of the CPs in response to GDA's feedback). It is imperative that you read the directions on the CP carefully and not skip any fields.

For the CP form/template, please go to:

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

Be as *complete and detailed* as possible in your narrative and budget as this will mean less work later if your CP is approved to move forward. 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 CONCEPT PROPOSAL (CP) IS DUE TO GDA BY 3/1/24 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.

2. **Invitation** (by 3/8/24 at 5pm) from GDA to submit a full project proposal application package, which is due to GDA 3/15/24 at NOON: Comments/suggested revisions from GDA will be included in the invite e-mail.

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) **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 Concept Proposal/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* Concept Proposal for consideration for which they may be listed as the Principal Investigator (PI) and/or *no more than one* Concept Proposal 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

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> (Note that hemp and soybeans are NOT specialty crops, per USDA).

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. Concept Proposals will be scored based on the IMPACT the projects will likely have on Georgia's Specialty Crop industry.

Additionally, 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. **Letters of Support should *not* be submitted with Concept Proposals but THREE letters ARE required for full applications.** Letters from GDA or USDA staff will *not* be accepted. Full applications must show evidence of Georgia specialty crop industry support in letters.

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 of the Concept Proposals received will be invited to submit a full application. From there, only 1/4 to 1/3 are likely to receive funding, which is often reduced from the requested amount.

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

February 1, 2024

Announcement of 2024 SCBGP grant opportunity; Request for Concept Proposals (pre-screening) published.

MARCH 1, 2024 (Friday)

Deadline for submission of Concept Proposals; must be received by **NOON (NO EXCEPTIONS, NO EXTENSIONS)** to Grants@agr.georgia.gov. You will receive an acknowledgement of submission *within 24 hours*: If you do not, your application was NOT received.

No later than MARCH 8, 2024 at 5pm

GDA will send out Requests for Full Applications to organizations for the top 25-35 projects with eligible/most impactful/highest scoring Concept Proposals. Those *not* invited to apply this year will also receive notice.

MARCH 15, 2024 (Friday)

Full 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 2024

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 2024

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

LATE SEPTEMBER 2024

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 2024

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 ~11/1/24.

MARCH 31, 2026

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 2026

Second Annual Report Due. The template will be emailed to Principal Investigators by ~11/1/26.

SEPTEMBER 29, 2027

3-year Grant period ends. **NO EXTENSIONS**. Projects must be completed by this date and absolutely no 2024 grant funds can be spent after this date.

NOVEMBER 2027

Final Reports Due. The template will be emailed to Principal Investigators by ~11/1/27.

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