

Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program 2024

About the Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has partnered with the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) to launch the RFSI Program. This initiative aims to strengthen Georgia's food supply chain by improving processing, aggregation, and distribution capabilities across various sectors, including specialty crops, dairy, and grains. By targeting the middle stages of the supply chain, RFSI seeks to enhance market access for small and mid-sized producers, promote value-added product development, ensure fair pricing and wages, and create new employment opportunities within the state.

Funding and Duration

GDA anticipates awarding approximately \$7.1 million to eligible projects that can begin by October 1, 2024, and must conclude by February 28, 2027. The program will support projects that significantly enhance the capacity for local and regional food products, focusing on infrastructure improvements and equipment upgrades.

Eligibility

Eligible entities for RFSI Grants include:

- Agricultural producers or processors (individuals or groups)
- Nonprofit organizations focused on supply chain activities
- Local government entities
- Tribal governments
- Educational and healthcare institutions aiming to facilitate collaborative infrastructure or equipment investment

All applicants must be based within Georgia and engage in **middle-of-the-supply-chain activities**, such as processing, packaging, and distribution.

Project Types

Simplified Equipment-Only Grants

The Georgia Department of Agriculture offers the simplified Equipment-Only Grant as a fixed price award specifically designed to fund the acquisition of equipment essential for enhancing the food supply chain's efficiency. This grant will allocate funds ranging from a minimum of \$10,000 to a maximum of \$100,000 to cover the costs of **specialized equipment**. Eligible investments include machinery and tools that aid in processing, aggregation, and distribution activities, directly benefiting multiple Georgia producers. As defined in Section 8.2 of the AMS General Terms and Conditions, eligible equipment must serve a special purpose within the scope of supply chain operations. Notably, this grant does not require a matching fund contribution from recipients.

Infrastructure Grants

Infrastructure Grants, as facilitated by the Georgia Department of Agriculture, aim to significantly increase the operational capacity and infrastructure critical to the state's agricultural supply chain. Funding for these projects begins at \$100,000, extending up to \$3,000,000, adhering to the USDA guidelines detailed in the RFSI Program Scope and Requirements. Essential to fostering a robust agricultural infrastructure, these grants necessitate matching funds from recipients, ensuring a collaborative investment into the future of Georgia's food systems.

Infrastructure Grant Match Requirement

For the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program in Georgia, Infrastructure Grant recipients are obligated to provide a matching contribution amounting to 50% of the total project cost. This stipulation applies universally, except for applicants qualifying for a reduced match rate. Matching contributions can be a combination of cash and in-kind contributions.

A concession is made for historically underserved farmers and ranchers, as well as businesses falling under specific U.S. Small Business Administration categories, including disadvantaged small businesses, women-owned small businesses, and veteran-owned small businesses. For these groups, the required match is reduced to 25% of the total project cost. Eligibility for this reduced match rate requires self-certification within the Infrastructure Grant application process. More information on eligibility criteria for historically underserved farmers and ranchers can be found [here](#), and details on qualifying SBA categories are available [here](#):

historically underserved farmers and ranchers

(<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/gettingassistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers>)

U.S. Small Business Administration categories

(<https://www.sba.gov/federalcontracting/contracting-assistance-programs>)

Examples of Matching Fund Requirements:

Standard 50% Match: For a project costing \$200,000, an applicant would need to secure \$100,000 in federal funds complemented by \$100,000 in non-federal matching funds or in-kind contributions.

Reduced 25% Match: For a project with a total cost of \$133,333.33, the application would require \$100,000 in federal funds, supplemented by \$33,333.33 in non-federal matching funds or in-kind contributions.

It's important to highlight that the Simplified Equipment-Only Grants do not necessitate a matching fund contribution, easing the financial burden on applicants aiming for essential equipment upgrades.

Eligible Projects

For Georgia's Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI), the term "middle-of-the-supply-chain" encompasses a series of critical activities positioned between the initial production phase and the final retail sale. These activities, essential for the processing, aggregation, and distribution phases, enhance the value, safety, and marketability of agricultural products across the state. The activities

outlined below, while not exhaustive, are illustrative of the operations supported by the RFSI program to strengthen Georgia's agricultural supply chain:

Packaging Operations: This includes the grading, sorting, and labeling of products to prepare them for market.

Processing Techniques: Activities such as canning, preserving, pasteurizing, and other processing methods that extend the shelf life and improve the safety of agricultural products.

Extraction Processes: The extraction of juice, oil, nut meats, and other derivatives from agricultural products for further use or sale.

Crop Processing: Tasks like chopping, washing, peeling, drying, hulling, milling, and shelling that are preliminary steps for further processing or direct sale.

Value-Added Product Creation: The transformation of raw agricultural goods into products with increased market value through cooking, baking, juicing, fermenting, distilling, and other processing methods.

Logistics and Storage: Activities related to the efficient tracking, storage (including cold storage), warehousing, and distribution of products to ensure they reach markets in optimal condition.

Application Process

Applications must be submitted by email to Georgia by email at RFSI@agr.Georgia.gov . The process includes filling out detailed forms, answering project-related questions, and attaching necessary documentation. Guidance on using the application system is available, please contact RFSI@agr.Georgia.gov for any questions.

UEI Requirement

All applicants for the Georgia Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program must have a valid Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number as part of their application process. The UEI is a requirement for all entities receiving federal financial assistance and serves as a standard identifier for doing business with the U.S. government.

To obtain or verify your UEI number, please visit the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>. Registration is free and is essential for ensuring your eligibility for the RFSI grant. Please ensure that your SAM registration is current and active at the time of application and throughout the grant period. Applications without a valid UEI will not be accepted.

Timeline

Application Opening: February 14, 2023

Webinars and Office Hours: TBD

Application Deadline: March 29, 2024, at 5:00 PM ET

Award Announcements: On or about June 1st, 2024

Review and Selection

Applications will undergo a thorough review process assessing their alignment with program goals, potential impact, feasibility, administrative capacity, and budget adequacy. Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate a high level of achievability, exhibit significant potential to enhance Georgia's food supply chain resilience and benefit historically underserved communities. **Projects that will be difficult to implement or are overly complex are discouraged.**

Requirements and Compliance

Environmental Compliance

Projects involving ground disturbances under the Georgia RFSI program must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and all relevant local and tribal laws. Compliance ensures the protection of environmental and historical sites.

Build America, Buy America Act (BABAA)

All public infrastructure projects funded through Georgia's RFSI program need to comply with BABAA requirements, ensuring the use of domestically sourced materials.

For-Profit Exemptions: BABAA rules generally don't apply to for-profit entities, except when project costs exceed \$250,000.

Small Grants Waiver: Projects with federal funding under \$250,000, including Equipment Only Grants, are exempt from BABA.

Resources

BABAA Compliance: For detailed guidelines, visit 2 CFR Part 184. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-1/part-184>

NEPA Compliance: Projects must adhere to NEPA. For a summary of requirements, check the Citizen's Guide to NEPA. <https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/get-involved/citizens-guide-to-nepa-2021.pdf>

Assistance and Resources

GDA will provide resources, including webinars and office hours, to assist applicants in understanding the RFSI program, application process, and project implementation requirements. A FAQ section and technical assistance contacts will be available on the GDA RFSI webpage. Questions should be submitted to RFSI@agr.Georgia.gov.