2025 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Request for Concept Proposals

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE 10.170

Released:
August 12, 2024

Concept Proposals Due:
By 5:00 p.m. PT on September 9, 2024
Late submissions will not be accepted.

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About the Program

Purpose

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds projects that enhance the competitiveness of California specialty crops. The SCBGP is designed to support all sectors of California's specialty crop industry and improve the performance of California specialty crops within local, domestic, national, and international markets. Specialty crops are fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. Visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) What is a Specialty Crop website (https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop) for a list of eligible and ineligible commodities and a comprehensive definition of specialty crops.

Funding and Duration

CDFA anticipates that up to $23 million will be awarded to projects enhancing the competitiveness of California specialty crops. Grant amounts range from $100,000 to $500,000. The maximum grant duration is two (2) years, eight (8) months, and grant funds cannot be expended before November 1, 2025, or after June 30, 2028. CDFA reserves the right to offer an award amount different than the amount requested.

Funding is contingent upon passage of a Farm Bill and available funding from the USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

Separate of the competitive process, CDFA may award up to $3 million for proposals that address urgent or critical issues affecting California specialty crop agriculture.

Eligibility

Non-profit and for-profit organizations; local, state, and federal government entities, including Tribal governments (federally and non-federally recognized); and public or private colleges and universities are eligible to apply. Individuals are not eligible to apply. There is no limit on the number of Concept Proposals applicants may submit; however, each Concept Proposal must be for a wholly unique project.

Additional notes to help determine eligibility:

- Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. For example, the program will not fund a project to start or expand a farm or business venture.
- Grant funds cannot be used to compete unfairly with private companies that offer equivalent products or services.

- Projects must enhance the competitiveness of California specialty crops. Projects benefiting non-specialty crops will not be selected for funding.
- Projects must address one or more of the program priorities identified by CDFA. To view these priorities, reference pages 6-11 of the Request for Concept Proposals (RFCP).

Executive Order N-6-22 – Russia Sanctions

On March 4, 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom issued Executive Order N-6-22 regarding Economic Sanctions against Russia and Russian entities and individuals. "Economic Sanctions" refers to sanctions imposed by the U.S. government in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, as well as any sanctions imposed under state law. By submitting a proposal or application, Applicant represents that it is not a target of Economic Sanctions. Should the State determine Applicant is a target of Economic Sanctions or is conducting prohibited transactions with sanctioned individuals or entities, that shall be grounds for rejection of the Applicant's proposal/application any time prior to agreement execution, or, if determined after agreement execution, shall be grounds for termination by the State.

SCBGP Additional Assistance for Historically Underrepresented Organizations Program

The intent of the 2025 SCBGP Additional Assistance for Historically Underrepresented Organizations (Additional Assistance) Program (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2024_additional_assistance.pdf) is to provide a process through which organizations that have been historically underrepresented in the SCBGP can participate and successfully implement their SCBGP projects. Non-profit organizations, tribal governments (federally and non-federally recognized), and K-12 school districts that have not previously received SCBGP funding, do not have technical expertise with grant writing, and who work directly in either supporting underserved and/or beginning farmers or providing nutrition education and/or access to specialty crops in underserved communities are eligible to apply to this program.

Applicants are eligible to receive technical assistance on the Additional Assistance Program application and should email grants@cdfa.ca.gov as soon as possible to begin receiving assistance with their Concept Proposal.

Applications to the Additional Assistance Program have their own funding categories, program priorities, deadlines, and submission requirements. Please email grants@cdfa.ca.gov and/or review the Additional Assistance Program's specific Request for Concept Proposals

(https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2024_additional_assistance.pdf) for more detailed information.

Please note that projects that receive individual technical assistance must submit to the Additional Assistance Program; any projects that receive technical assistance and then decide to submit to the general SCBGP may be disqualified.

Other Grant Programs

Projects submitted to the SCBGP must increase the competitiveness of California specialty crops and cannot benefit an individual entity or organization. CDFA offers several grant programs that address nutritional education, improve access to and consumption of healthy California foods, and provide direct assistance to California farmers and ranchers.

For a comprehensive list of CDFA's Grant Programs, please visit https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/grants/. A complete list of California grant and loan programs can also be found on the State Library's California Grants Portal: https://www.grants.ca.gov/.

Solicitation Process and Timeline

Phase I: Concept Proposal

CDFA's SCBGP consists of a two-phase solicitation process. During Phase I, applicants must submit a Concept Proposal (i.e., an overview of their proposal) online using the Financial Assistance Application Submittal Tool (FAAST) to answer all Concept Proposal questions. CDFA will advise all applicants as to the outcome of the Concept Proposal review.

Phase II: Grant Proposal

For Phase II, successful Concept Proposal applicants will be invited to submit a Grant Proposal (i.e., a more detailed description of their proposal) by answering all Grant Proposal questions online using FAAST. CDFA will provide applicants with specific Grant Proposal requirements and instructions along with the invitation to submit Grant Proposals. CDFA will advise all applicants as to the outcome of the Grant Proposal review.

Schedule for Phase I: Concept Proposal

Phase I	Date
Release Request for Concept Proposals	August 12, 2024
Webinars	August 20, 2024 - August 28, 2024
Concept Proposals Due	September 9, 2024, 5:00 p.m. PT

Schedule for Phase II: Grant Proposal (by invitation only)

Phase II	Date
Invitation to Submit Grant Proposals	December 2024
Grant Proposals Due	January 2025
Grant Proposals to USDA for Approval	May 2025

Schedule for Awards

Awards	Date
Announce and Award Funding	Fall 2025

How to Apply

Applicants are required to complete and submit both their Concept Proposals and Grant Proposals online using the FAAST system (https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov), hosted by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB).

Applicants must create a user account in FAAST in order to submit their proposals. FAAST is organized into various tabs and pages utilizing a question-and-answer format. Questions are answered in one or more of the following formats: a drop-down menu, a text box with predetermined character limitations, yes/no, single-choice, multiple-choice, or a document attachment. Responses to all questions must be submitted in the manner and format required by the Concept Proposal application questionnaire in FAAST without exception.

The CDFA Grants website contains a Frequently Asked Questions (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/scbgp_frequently_asked_questions.pdf) page and FAAST has their own User Manual (https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov/LoginLinks/FAAST_UserManual.pdf) available on the SWRCB website. For questions about the FAAST system, please contact CDFA by emailing grants@cdfa.ca.gov or calling (916) 657-3231. The FAAST Help Desk is also available and can be reached by emailing FAAST_ADMIN@waterboards.ca.gov or calling 1-866-434-1083.

Computer System Recommendations

To ensure concept proposals and attachments are submitted successfully, CDFA strongly encourages all applicants to comply with the computer system recommendations provided by the SWRCB. CDFA cannot guarantee that the FAAST system or the required templates will be compatible with other browsers or operating systems. Use of other browsers or operating systems will limit the ability of CDFA and SWRCB staff to provide applicants with technical assistance, should any issues arise.

CDFA and SWRCB recommend that applicants:

- Use a Personal Computer (PC) and Microsoft Edge;
- Disable pop-up blocking software while using FAAST;
- Save work often – the system will time out after 90 minutes and any unsaved work will be lost.

Funding Areas, Funding Categories, and Program Priorities

CDFA has developed three funding areas, with one to three categories within each area. In practice, Concept Proposals might seem to address elements from multiple funding areas and funding categories. However, applicants *must* select the one funding category that identifies the primary focus of their Concept Proposal. Identifying a funding category ensures that Concept Proposals are evaluated by reviewers with the appropriate area of expertise. Applicants may not submit multiple Concept Proposals for a single project or submit the same Concept Proposal to multiple funding categories.

Concept Proposals should:

- Demonstrate a high likelihood of success.
- Be scalable to the larger community.
- Identify the specific and existing issue, problem, or need the project will address.
- Demonstrate industry need and support.
- Include an outreach component addressing how project results, research findings, and conclusions will be extended to specialty crop growers. (Note that advertising is not considered outreach to industry.) In developing the outreach component, applicants are strongly encouraged to include outreach to historically underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers.

For examples of project types appropriate for each funding category, reference Appendix A on page 28.

Funding Area I: Market Enhancement

Proposals in this funding area will focus on increasing sales of California specialty crops through promotion of the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California, developing new markets, increasing opportunities in existing markets, improving availability, and increasing demand. In addition to advertising or conducting outreach to encourage increased consumption, all SCBGP projects should include an outreach component that communicates project efforts to specialty crop stakeholders.

Market Enhancement Category A: Grown in California

In this funding category, CDFA will consider proposals that enhance the marketability and long-term competitiveness of specialty crops by leveraging the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California. Specifically, these proposals should seek to increase the awareness and consumption of specialty crop products through the

development of markets (local, regional, institutional, national, and international) for all California producers through cooperative promotion and partnerships.

All proposals submitted to Market Enhancement Category A must address at least one of the following program priorities:

1) Increasing marketing opportunities for California specialty crops by leveraging the California grown identity.
2) Expanding opportunities for specialty crop producers, marketing orders, and other specialty crop stakeholders through innovative marketing and promotional activities that incorporate multiple specialty crop products leveraging the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California.
3) Creating economic opportunities for specialty crop producers, including organic producers, through specialty crop market development activities that focus on local, regional, institutional, national, and international markets by leveraging the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California.
4) Emphasizing the quality, food safety, and healthy lifestyle benefits of specialty crops grown in California.
5) Increasing the marketability of California specialty crops by educating consumers about the stewardship efforts of California specialty crop farmers.
6) Increasing awareness and sales of California grown specialty crops through marketing efforts that highlight California's specialty crop farmers, their unique histories, and their contributions to California agriculture.
7) Supporting market opportunities through regional aggregation and distribution for small to medium sized specialty crop farmers and underserved California producers and farmers, including but not limited to BIMPOC (Black, Indigenous, Multiracial, and People of Color), LGBTQ+, women, and veterans.

Funding Area II: Access, Education, and Training

Proposals in this funding area will focus on improving the competitiveness of California specialty crops through improving access to and consumption of California specialty crops, providing nutritional education for consumers in order to increase consumption, and providing training for producers and growers to equip them for current and future

challenges in specialty crop agriculture. In addition to advertising or conducting outreach to encourage participants to participate in project-related activities, all SCBGP projects should include an outreach component that communicates project efforts to specialty crop stakeholders.

Access, Education, and Training Category A: Healthy Specialty Crops for All Californians

In this funding category, CDFA will consider proposals that improve access to and consumption of California specialty crops and/or improve the public's knowledge and understanding of specialty crop agriculture and its beneficial importance to the health and well-being of all Californians. Proposals submitted to the Healthy Specialty Crops for All Californians category should seek to improve access to and consumption of healthy, safe California specialty crops for improved nutrition and overall health.

All proposals submitted to Access, Education, and Training Category A must address at least one of the following program priorities:

1) Education to increase specialty crop consumption through healthy eating habits.
2) Increasing knowledge of how to produce, prepare, or preserve specialty crops.
3) Increasing the awareness of and demand for locally sourced specialty crops.
4) Increasing the availability of specialty crops in homes, schools, the workplace, hospitals, prisons, and other underserved communities.
5) Increasing specialty crop production and/or distribution capacity into underserved urban and rural communities.
6) Increasing consumption of healthy California specialty crops in schools by developing connections between farmers and school nutrition directors/officials that include tools and resources for building strong partnerships.

Access, Education, and Training Category B: Equity, Opportunity, and Education for All California Specialty Crop Farmers

In this funding category, CDFA will consider proposals that benefit all current and future California specialty crop farmers by providing education and training, including improving equity through culturally appropriate education and training for underserved farmers in areas including business development and regulatory compliance. Proposals

submitted to the Equity, Opportunity, and Education for All California Specialty Crop Farmers category should seek to ensure the viability of California specialty crops by investing in training for growers/producers/operators to address current and future challenges.

All proposals submitted to Access, Education, and Training Category B must address at least one of the following program priorities:

1) Introducing and recruiting young and beginning farmers, as well as members of underserved and underrepresented groups, including women and veterans, to the variety of specialty crop career opportunities.
2) Providing support to specialty crop producers in adopting the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act.
3) Providing training to support specialty crop producers in adopting methods to reduce water use and improve water efficiency.
4) Creating and implementing workforce training programs to develop and maintain the technical skills required to keep the California specialty crops sector competitive.
5) Providing technical assistance and training to better equip farmers to protect and conserve natural resources through on-farm practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase carbon sequestration, and adjust to a changing climate.
6) Assisting specialty crop farmers in adapting to ongoing impacts of COVID-19, including addressing workplace health and safety requirements and market uncertainty, and by increasing equity in food systems.
7) Conducting outreach to increase the safety and security of the specialty crop food system.

Funding Area III: Research

Proposals in this funding area will focus on improving the competitiveness of California specialty crops through projects that invest in specialty crop research, including research that focuses on conservation and environmental outcomes, pest and disease control, and organic and environmentally sustainable production practices. While research may be the primary objective of proposals in this funding area, all SCBGP projects should include an outreach component that communicates project efforts to

specialty crop stakeholders. In developing the outreach component, applicants are strongly encouraged to include outreach to historically underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers.

Research Category A: Environmental Stewardship, Conservation, and Climate Smart Agriculture

In this funding category, CDFA will consider proposals that address specialty crop agriculture's potential to mitigate and/or adapt to climate change, contribute to conservation of agricultural land and water, and/or enhance soil health. Proposals submitted to the Environmental Stewardship, Conservation, and Climate Smart Agriculture category should seek to expand stewardship practices and natural resource conservation to improve the environmental and financial performance of California specialty crop growers.

All proposals submitted to Research Category A must address at least one of the following program priorities:

1) Developing strategies and tools to enable specialty crop farmers to mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon.
2) Developing strategies and tools to enable specialty crop farmers to adapt to climate change.
3) Developing innovations in both water use efficiency and drought resilience.
4) Improving soil health by identifying specific specialty crop management practices that build the soil organic matter content.
5) Research to develop new methods to expand organic and/or environmentally sustainable and conservation driven production practices, including mechanization of methods to enhance environmental and agricultural sustainability.
6) Conducting research and/or outreach projects to assist growers with improved irrigation and/or nutrient management practices.

Research Category B: Plant Health and Pest Management

In this funding category, CDFA will consider proposals that address pests, invasive species, and diseases that affect the production of California's specialty crops. Proposals submitted to the Plant Health and Pest Management category should incorporate research related to the probability and impact of invasive pest, disease, and

weed threats to specialty crops, as well as research to develop tools to detect, eradicate, and control pests, weeds, and diseases.

All proposals submitted to Research Category B must address at least one of the following program priorities:

1) Conducting research and grower trials into biological solutions for pest management.
2) Addressing threats through the use of innovative solutions such as integrated pest management techniques, biologically integrated farming systems, or other engineering or cultural solutions.
3) Developing new tools to detect, eradicate, and control pests and diseases, including invasive plant and pest species.
4) Preventing and managing pests, weeds, and diseases to minimize economic and environmental harm to specialty crop farmers.
5) Enhancing speed and reliability of detection methods.

Research Category C: Food Safety (Separate proposal solicitation)

CDFA will continue its partnership agreement with the Center for Produce Safety Foundation (CPS) to utilize the technical expertise of their grant reviewers in the area of food safety. CPS will release a separate food safety proposal solicitation. Please contact CPS at (530) 554-9706 or visit the CPS website (http://www.centerforproducesafety.org) for the solicitation timeline and proposal requirements.

Concept Proposal Questions and Scoring

Applicants must apply in the FAAST system (https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov/). Failure to answer one or more application questions may result in disqualification. The following questions and descriptions are provided as a preview of the application, accessible only in FAAST.

General Information

Project Title:

Concisely describe the project in 15 words or less, with a unique and descriptive title.

Project Description:

Summarize the need for the project and describe the anticipated goals and outcomes. All projects must also briefly describe the plan for evaluating and measuring the success of the project.

Applicant Organization:

Legal name of the organization that will serve as lead for the project and will receive and oversee the use of grant funds.

Submitting Organization:

Legal name of the organization submitting the proposal on behalf of the applicant, if other than the applicant.

Project Budget

Funds Requested:

The total amount of SCBGP funds requested for the project. This number must match the amount listed under category I in the project's Budget template. Funds requested must range from $100,000 to $500,000; requests outside of this range may result in disqualification.

Local Cost Match:

The total amount of cost sharing (matching funds and in-kind contributions) committed to the project from other sources, if applicable. Cost sharing (cash match or in-kind match contributions) is allowed but is not a requirement of the SCBGP and is discouraged by USDA. CDFA includes the ability to outline cost share in proposals so that unallowable costs and/or activities (such as projects that also benefit non-specialty crops) can demonstrate that SCBGP funds will not be used for these costs. Cost share

is not required and, as an unscored question, does not impact whether projects will be awarded funding.

Total Budget:

Enter the sum of the Funds Requested plus the Local Cost Match.

Unique Entity Identifier (UEI):

Enter the applicant's UEI number, if known. To obtain a UEI, please visit the System for Award Management website (https://sam.gov/content/home). If awarded SCBGP funds, recipients will need to obtain a UEI before a grant agreement can be executed.

Funding

Select the 2025 SCBGP funding program by checking the box on the right-hand side of the screen and click the "Next" button.

Project Management

Project Director and Project Manager:

Please enter contact information for the individual who is authorized to execute a funding agreement and receive grant funds, as well as a backup if that individual should be unreachable.

Legislative Information

California Senate and Assembly Districts:

Using the drop-down menus, select the districts where the applicant and project are located. More than one district can be selected, if needed. If the project covers all of California, select "Statewide." If the program/project is outside of California, choose "00".

Cooperating Entities

This section is provided for proposals that include other entities that may also be participating in the project. In this section, indicate their role and contribution to the project. This section is unscored, and cooperating entities are not a requirement of the SCBGP.

Questionnaire

1. Organization Type (not a scored question):

Using the drop-down menu, select the organization type that best describes the applicant.

2. Funding Area and Funding Category (not a scored question):

Using the drop-down menu, select the most appropriate funding area and funding category for the project. Failure to select a funding area and funding category will result in disqualification.

3. Program Priorities (5 points):

Enter verbatim at least one of the 2025 SCBGP program priorities for the chosen funding category as described on pages 6-11 of the RFCP and briefly explain how the project addresses the priority or priorities identified.

Scoring Criteria: Scoring will be based on the extent to which the project demonstrates a link to the program priorities identified in the 2025 RFCP.

4. Project Purpose (10 points):

All of the following must be addressed within the text boxes provided:

- Identify the specific and existing issue, problem, or need the project will address.
- Explain why the proposal is important and timely for the specialty crop industry.

Scoring Criteria: Scoring will be based on how clearly the proposal states the specific issue, problem, or need the project will address, as well as the timeliness and relevance to the specialty crop industry.

5. Prior Year SCBGP Projects (not a scored question):

Please indicate if this project or project team are building upon a prior-year project. If “No,” please indicate “No.” If "Yes," all of the following must be addressed within the text boxes provided:

- Provide the specialty crop block grant agreement number(s) (e.g., SCB13090, 17-0275-001-SC, or 22-0001-001-SF). Please provide agreement number(s) for any and all prior SCBGP grants.
- Describe how the project differs from and builds upon the previous work.
- If the prior-year project has finished, please briefly describe lessons learned from that project.

- If a prior-year project has recently begun, please address how the proposed project's goals and/or planned activities differ from those of the recently-started project(s).

6. Other Support from Federal or State Grant Programs (not a scored question):

Activities funded under the SCBGP cannot duplicate activities funded by another federal or state grant program. If the project has been or will be submitted to or funded by another federal or state grant program, all of the following must be addressed:

- Identify the Federal or State grant program and the agency administering the program
- List the amount of grant funds requested or awarded by the program
- Describe how this proposed project supplements rather than duplicates the efforts funded by the other Federal or State grant program

If none, enter "Not Applicable."

7. Project Sustainability (5 points):

SCBGP projects should have a long-term impact without relying indefinitely on grant funding. Within the text box, describe:

- The likelihood of the project becoming self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent on SCBGP funds, and/or;
- The benefit(s) to California's specialty crop industry resulting from the project that will continue beyond the grant duration.

Scoring Criteria: Scoring will be based on the extent to which the proposal demonstrates the project will become self-sustaining and/or that the benefit of the project will continue beyond the grant duration without relying indefinitely on SCBGP or other grant funding.

8. Project Beneficiaries (5 points):

All of the following must be addressed within the text boxes provided:

- Estimate the number of project beneficiaries. The number cited should be a reasonable estimate of the number of individuals that could realistically be **directly impacted** by the results of the project. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the number of beneficiaries is trackable and reportable **within the project duration**.
- Identify and quantify the project beneficiaries and describe how they will benefit from the project objectives (list the specific specialty crops that will be affected, if possible).

- Succinctly address how the proposal benefits the specialty crop industry, rather than directly benefiting a single individual or organization, such as the applicant.

Scoring Criteria: Scoring will be based on how clearly the proposal identifies and quantifies the beneficiaries and explains how they will directly benefit, as well as the relevance and significance of the anticipated project benefit(s) to the specialty crop industry.

9. Outcome Measures (10 points):

Download the required Outcome Measures template (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/SCBGP_OutcomeMeasuresTemplate.docx), complete, and upload the form to the application using the attachments tab in FAAST. The Outcome Measures template must be submitted as a Microsoft Word Document (do not submit a PDF) and must use the required Microsoft Word Document template (do not alter the template in any way, except to add numbers and a description of data collection methods for the outcomes and indicators selected). For a completed example of the Outcome Measures template, reference Appendix C on page 32.

All of the following must be addressed in the Outcome Measures template:

- **Outcome:** Using the check boxes provided, select at least one of the seven outcome measures.
- **Indicator:** Using the check boxes provided, identify at least one indicator for each selected outcome. Complete the fillable text fields for each indicator selected. If there are multiple sub-indicators under a selected indicator, enter a value for one or more.
- **Description:** Within the description section for each outcome selected, describe the data collection methods for the outcome(s) and indicator(s) selected. The description of data collection methods must apply specifically to the Outcome Measure selected and not to other aspects of the project.

Please note that all selected outcome measures and related indicators/sub-indicators must be achievable during the grant duration. Applicants are only required to select one indicator and, if applicable, sub-indicator.

Outcome measures and the associated indicators were developed by USDA and the Office of Management and Budget and cannot be altered or amended in any way. Altering the language of the outcomes or indicators, or providing responses in a format other than that described in the document, may result in disqualification of a proposal. Reference the Outcome Measures supplement

(https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/SCBGP_OutcomeMeasuresSupplement.pdf) for additional information on the required outcomes and indicators.

Note: All marketing and promotion projects, as well as all proposals submitted to the Grown in California funding category, **must** identify one or more sub-indicator(s) (a, b, or c) from Outcome 1, Indicator 1.5: Increasing Consumption and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops.

Scoring Criteria: Scoring will be based on the significance of the anticipated project outcome, the relevance to the project activities, soundness of data collection methods, and likelihood of success.

10. Project Duration (not a scored question):

Within the text boxes provided, enter a start and end date for the project. Projects cannot start before November 1, 2025 or continue beyond June 30, 2028. Failure to provide a project start and end date within the allowable duration may result in disqualification.

11. Work Plan and Outreach (10 points):

Within the text boxes provided, all of the following must be addressed:

- Briefly describe the project activities that are necessary to accomplish project objectives and support outcome measures. Each project activity should include an approximation of when it will occur (formatted as MON YYYY; e.g., Dec 2025 or May 2026 - Jun 2026).
- Include tasks for all personnel responsible for carrying out project activities. Note that all personnel, including contractors and any associated personnel, listed in the budget must be involved in at least one activity described in the Work Plan.
- Describe how the project results will be shared with the target audience, stakeholders, and other interested parties beyond those directly involved in the project. In developing the outreach component, applicants are strongly encouraged to include outreach to historically underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers. Examples of such activities include presentations at professional conferences or producer meetings, publication of articles in professional journals or the agricultural press, educational brochures, websites, etc.

Scoring Criteria: Scoring will be based on the clarity of the work plan, the relevance of the specific project activities to the project purpose, and how well the project outlines a plan to disseminate project results.

12. Budget (5 points):

Download the required Budget template (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/Form_1.6.1.2_Budget_Template.docx), complete, and upload the form to the application using the attachments tab in FAAST. All budget items should support enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops and correlate to the goal(s) of the project. Before completing the Budget template, review the Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/pdfs/Allowable-and-UnallowableCosts-and-Activities.pdf)

Scoring Criteria: Scoring will be based on the extent to which the budget is reasonable and appropriate to achieve the project goals.

Total number of points achievable in the Concept Proposal: 50 Points

Concept Proposal Budget Template

For each budget category listed below, enter the amount of SCBGP funds requested (rounded to the nearest whole dollar) and a brief description of the costs or activities covered. A description is required for each budget category in which funds are requested, except for category *H. Indirect Costs*. A completed sample budget is available in Appendix B on page 31 and Appendix C on page 32.

Salary and wages, fringe benefits, travel, special purpose equipment, supplies, other, and indirect costs for individuals not employed by the applicant organization must be listed under category *F. Contractual*.

A. Salary and Wages

Estimate the total cost of salary and wages for time spent on the project by individuals employed by the applicant organization. In the description column, list the title of each employee, the approximate time spent on the project (number of hours or percent full time equivalent), and the individual's activities in support of project goals.

B. Fringe Benefits

Estimate the total cost of fringe benefits for time spent on the project by individuals employed by the applicant organization in accordance with the applicant organization's established fringe benefits policy. In the description column, list the approximate fringe benefit rate and types of benefits included in the applicant organization's established fringe benefits policy.

C. Travel

Estimate the total cost of project related travel for all individuals except contractual personnel. In the description column, briefly describe how the travel will help accomplish the goals and objectives of the project. Use the rates established by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) available on the GSA website (https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates) to develop the travel cost estimate. Reference pages 12-13 of the Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/allowable_and_unallowable_cost_activities.pdf) for restrictions on travel costs.

D. Special Purpose Equipment

Estimate the total cost to purchase any special purpose equipment necessary to achieve project objectives. Special purpose equipment is nonexpendable, tangible personal property with a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost which equals or exceeds $5,000 to be used only for research, scientific, or other

technical activities. In the description column, list the special purpose equipment to be purchased. Reference pages 3-4 of the Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/allowable_and_unallowable_cost_activities.pdf) for restrictions on special purpose equipment.

E. Supplies

Estimate the total cost to purchase supplies necessary to achieve project objectives. Supplies are items with an acquisition cost less than $5,000 per unit that are used exclusively for the objectives of the project. In the description column, list the types of supplies to be purchased and their use in the project. General use office supplies (paper, printer ink, pens, etc.), facilities costs (telephone, internet, etc.), and administrative costs are considered indirect and should not be included under category *E. Supplies*. Reference pages 23-24 of the RFCP for more information about direct and indirect costs.

F. Contractual

Estimate the total cost of work on the project that will be performed by individuals/organizations other than the applicant (e.g., consultants, contractors, partner organizations, etc.). This amount should include all associated salary and wages, fringe benefits, travel, special purpose equipment, supplies, other, and indirect costs. In the description column, list the services to be provided by each contractor that will work on the project and be paid with grant funds and provide a brief breakdown of costs. Reference pages 2-3 of the Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/allowable_and_unallowable_cost_activities.pdf) for restrictions on contractual costs.

G. Other

Estimate the total cost of all other project related expenses. Expenses typically listed under category *G. Other* include registration fees to attend professional conferences, speaker/trainer fees, stipends, fees to publish in academic journals, fees for data collection and laboratory analysis, meeting space or equipment rentals, subscriptions, etc. In the description column, provide a brief breakdown of the specific expenses necessary to accomplish the goals and objectives of the project.

H. Indirect Costs

Indirect costs are facilities and administrative costs that cannot easily be tied directly to the activities of the grant. Examples of common indirect costs include administrative/clerical services, rent, utilities, internet and telephone service, maintenance, and general office supplies. The maximum amount of indirect costs

allowable is 8 percent of total personnel costs (category *A. Salary and Wages* plus category *B. Fringe Benefits*). Reference page 23 of the RFCP for more information about indirect costs. *Formula: (A. Salary and Wages + B. Fringe Benefits) x 0.08 = Maximum Indirect Costs*

I. Total SCBGP Funds Requested

Total SCBGP funds requested will automatically be calculated using the amounts requested for categories A through H. This total cannot be less than $100,000 or greater than $500,000. Please ensure that the total matches the award requested amount listed on the Project Information section.

J. Program Income

Estimate the amount of income (if any) that may be generated by a supported activity or earned as a result of the award. In the text box, explain how the program income will be generated and how it will be used to further support the project objectives. Program income must be spent on activities that support the goals and objectives of the project, should be expended before seeking reimbursement of grant funds, and must comply with restrictions on allowable and unallowable costs and activities.

Requirements and Limitations

Farm Bill and USDA Guidance

Authorization for this program was established under the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 and continues under authorization from the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (commonly referred to as the "Farm Bill"). The 2018 Farm Bill contains provisions for the continuation of this program in 2024 and beyond; however, as of the date of this publication, Congress has not passed a new Farm Bill or a continuing budget resolution to reauthorize funding for the program. While CDFA anticipates continued funding for the program as described in the 2018 Farm Bill, grant awards will only be made if continuing authorization for the program is established and funds are made available by USDA, AMS.

As of the date of this publication, USDA has not provided CDFA or any other state department of agriculture with a Request for Applications (RFA) or Terms and Conditions for the 2025 SCBGP. If necessary, CDFA will prepare, and make available, a supplement to this document to advise applicants of any changes to the program upon receipt of USDA's RFA. CDFA and all applicants will be subject to the terms of USDA's RFA and Terms and Conditions.

Federal Cost Principles

Federal cost principles are regulations based on organization type used to determine allowable costs and ensure consistent treatment of costs. Applicants are responsible for identifying the federal cost principles appropriate to their organization, consistent application of cost principles to the SCBGP grant funds, and ensuring contractors or consultants comply with federal cost principle requirements.

- State, local, or Tribal governments; non-profit organizations; and colleges and universities will be subject to 2 CFR 200 (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=898fdaa0b947dd0bf8c962a137d230dd&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5).
- For-profit organizations will be subject to 48 CFR Subpart 31.2 (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-48/chapter-1/subchapter-E/part-31/subpart-31.2).

Unallowable Costs

CDFA has developed an Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/allowable_and_unallowable_cost_activities.pdf) to assist applicants in preparing their proposal budget. The table provides overall guidance for the handling of common costs and includes

USDA and CDFA requirements specific to this program. Proposals with unallowable costs may be subject to disqualification as described below.

Indirect Costs

The indirect cost rate for the SCBGP is limited by federal statute. The rate published in this solicitation document ensures conformity to the federal statute. Applicants that might ordinarily be eligible to receive a higher indirect rate from other state or federal programs are responsible for ensuring that their organization/institution will allow an exception for this program before submitting an application.

The maximum indirect cost rate is 8 percent of total personnel costs (budget category *A. Salary and Wages* plus category *B. Fringe Benefits*).

Applicants are responsible for presenting costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances consistently and must not include costs associated with an established indirect cost rate agreement as direct costs. In addition, applicants cannot allocate a cost as a direct cost if it is also incurred as an indirect cost for the same purpose and vice versa.

Direct costs are costs that can be identified specifically with a particular award, project, program, service, or other organizational activity or that can be directly assigned to such an activity relatively easily with a high degree of accuracy. Typically, direct costs include, but are not limited to, compensation of employees who work directly on the award to include salaries and fringe benefits, travel that is necessary for the project, equipment and supplies used for the project to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, and the hiring of qualified contractors to achieve project objectives.

Indirect costs (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”) are costs incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be identified specifically with a particular project, program, or organizational activity. Below are typical indirect costs. The salaries of administrative and clerical staff should normally be treated as indirect costs. Direct charging of these costs may be appropriate where all of the following conditions are met:

- administrative or clerical services are integral and directly related to a project or activity;
- individuals involved can be specifically identified with the project or activity;
- such costs are explicitly included in the budget or have the prior written approval of the federal awarding agency; and
- the costs are not also recovered as indirect costs.

The following are considered indirect and should not be included in the Budget as direct costs:

- Information technology services.
- Rent.
- Utilities and internet service.
- Telephone service (mobile and land-line).
- General office supplies.
- Insurance.
- Maintenance.

Travel

The maximum travel rates allowable are the lesser of the rates in effect at the time of travel as established by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), available on the GSA website (https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates), or the Recipient's established travel policy. Applicants should apply the current government mileage rate for personally owned vehicles used for travel related to the project; this rate is available on the IRS website (https://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates).

Consideration should be given to the use of alternative technologies such as teleconferencing or videoconferencing if they are available, appropriate for the project, and less costly, particularly for international travel.

Note: International travel must comply with the Fly America Act, 49 U.S.C. 40118 (https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2011-title49/pdf/USCODE-2011-title49-subtitleVII-partA-subparti-chap401-sec40118.pdf) *and Foreign Travel Per Diem Allowances* (https://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp).

Review and Notification

Review Criteria

CDFA's intent is to fund projects that can produce the highest degree of measurable benefits to California specialty crop producers in relation to each dollar spent. Applicants' Concept Proposals will be evaluated on the criteria set forth in the Concept Proposal Questions and Scoring section on pages 12-18.

Review Process

CDFA will conduct two levels of review during the Concept Proposal process. The first level is an administrative review to determine whether Concept Proposal requirements are met and, if applicable, assess an applicant's past CDFA grant performance. The second level is a technical review to evaluate the merits of the Concept Proposals.

The CDFA SCBGP Technical Review Committee will perform the technical review. The Technical Review Committee is comprised of growers and representatives from industry, universities, public agencies, and non-profits with an interest and expertise in specialty crops and agricultural systems.

Notification and Feedback

Proposals that are disqualified utilizing the criteria below will be notified within 21 days of the Concept Proposal due date. All other applicants will be notified regarding the status of their Concept Proposals in December 2024. Successful applicants will be invited to Phase II and will receive instructions for submitting a Grant Proposal. Applicants not invited to participate in Phase II will receive feedback on their Concept Proposal within 60 days after receiving notification.

To ensure all communications are received, points of contact listed in the application should add grants@cdfa.ca.gov to their email safe senders list, address book, or contact list.

Disqualifications

The following may result in the disqualification of a project proposal:

- Proposals from individual applicants.
- Incomplete proposals: proposals with one or more unanswered questions or only minimal responses.
- Proposals that include activities outside the grant duration.
- Proposals for less than the minimum award amount or more than the maximum award amount.

- Proposals with unallowable costs or activities necessary to complete the project objectives,
- Proposals with indirect costs that exceed the limit set forth in this document.
- Proposals submitted to the Additional Assistance Program by organizations that are ineligible to apply.
- Proposals from applicants that received personalized assistance as part of the Additional Assistance Program, but then applied to the conventional SCBGP through the FAAST system.
- Proposals submitted outside of the FAAST system.
- Proposals that benefit a single individual or organization, rather than the specialty crop industry as a whole.

APPEAL RIGHTS: Any discretionary action taken by the Office of Grants Administration (OGA) may be appealed to the CDFA's Office of Hearings and Appeals within ten (10) calendar days of receiving a notice of disqualification from CDFA. Email notification shall serve as the date of service. The appeal must be in writing and signed by the responsible party named on the grant application or their authorized agent. It must state the grounds for the appeal and include any supporting documents and a copy of the OGA decision being challenged. The submission must be sent to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Office of Hearings and Appeals, 1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 or emailed to CDFA.LegalOffice@cdfa.ca.gov. If submissions are not received within the time frame provided above, the appeal will be disqualified from consideration.

Assistance and Questions

Concept Proposal Webinars

CDFA will conduct webinars on the 2025 SCBGP solicitation process, the Concept Proposal application, and use of FAAST between August 20, 2024 - August 28, 2024. Please visit the CDFA SCBGP website (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) for dates, times, and locations. All applicants are encouraged to participate in a webinar.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The general SCBGP FAQ can be accessed on the CDFA SCBGP website (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/).

Questions and Answers (Q&A)

CDFA will conduct three rounds of Q&A to address general questions about the Concept Proposal phase. Email all questions about the solicitation process to: grants@cdfa.ca.gov. Responses to all questions received during the webinars or by email will be posted to the CDFA SCBGP website according to the following schedule:

Schedule for Q&A

Questions Received by:	Responses Posted by:
August 19, 2024, at 8:00 a.m. PT	August 23, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. PT
August 26, 2024, at 8:00 a.m. PT	August 30, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. PT
September 3, 2024, at 8:00 a.m. PT	September 6, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. PT

September 3, 2024, at 8:00 a.m. PT is the final deadline to submit questions for the Concept Proposal phase.

To maintain the integrity of the competitive grant process, CDFA is unable to advise and/or provide individuals with any information regarding specific proposals during the solicitation process.

Appendix A: Project Examples

Market Enhancement Category A: Grown in California

- Development of cooperative marketing activities that leverage the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California such as quality, food safety, and lifestyle benefits.
- Increase the sales of specialty crops through multi-commodity promotions that leverage the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California.
- Create economic opportunities for specialty crop producers through commodity content development and social media activities leveraging the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California.
- Support specialty crop marketing concepts that target the unique characteristics of California specialty crops in domestic and international markets.
- Develop marketing concepts that promote the healthy lifestyle benefits of specialty crops grown in California.

Access, Education, and Training Category A: Healthy Specialty Crops for All Californians

- Increase child nutritional knowledge through education in the classroom.
- Increase interest in specialty crops through experiential learning (such as school gardens).
- Develop training or demonstrations to educate families on increasing consumption of specialty crops in their diets.
- Improve knowledge of the health benefits of specialty crops among children, seniors, and caregivers.
- Strengthen the local food system in underserved communities by supporting production, distribution, access points, and consumption of specialty crops.
- Address “food deserts” with improved access to specialty crops at farmers' markets, corner stores, grocery stores, food hubs, or other systems.
- Utilize regional, local, or native crops to address disparities in access.

Access, Education, and Training Category B: Equity, Opportunity, and Education for All California Specialty Crop Farmers

- Assist specialty crop farmers in adopting Good Agricultural Practices, Good Handling Practices, and Good Manufacturing Practices.

- Design and conduct culturally appropriate business skills training for underserved farmers.
- Recruit and train new specialty crop farmers in the skills for sustainable food production.
- Develop and implement sustainable farming practices and beneficial management practice tools that improve farm viability and the agricultural economy, as well as the environment.
- Accelerate Best Management Practices implementation in specialty crop production for water conservation and efficiency.

Research Category A: Environmental Stewardship and Conservation

- Research and develop new technologies to improve water use efficiency and drought resiliency (such as improving the water holding capacity of soil) in specialty crop production.
- Improve the environmental sustainability of specialty crop products through development of farming or processing methods that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Assist communities in implementing climate smart agriculture planning for specialty crops in California.
- Development of tools and programs that improve environmentally sustainable farming practices for specialty crop growers in California.

Research Category B: Plant Health and Pest Management

- Enhance the speed and reliability of detection methods for pests affecting specialty crops.
- Develop new tools for eradication of pests affecting specialty crops.
- Develop specialty crops resistant to pests and diseases.
- Develop secondary inspection and detection capacity for pests affecting specialty crops.
- Conduct pest surveys to ascertain the threat and/or spread of threat to specialty crops.
- Develop pest protocol programs for a subsector of specialty crops.

Examples of Unacceptable Projects

- A company requests grant funds to purchase starter plants or equipment used to plant, cultivate, and grow a specialty crop to make a profit, or to expand production of a single business or organization.

- An organization requests grant funds to make grants to individual specialty crop businesses or roadside stands to promote their individual business. Small stipends designed to offset the cost of attending training may be allowed with sufficient justification.
- A non-profit organization requests grant funds to purchase produce to sell to other entities at cost or a higher price than the purchase price while competing with other private companies who sell produce in the area.
- A sole proprietor requests grant funds to redesign their logo in order to make their specialty crop value-added product stand out at the local farmers' market.
- A single specialty crop organization requests grant funds to market its organization so that it can increase its membership.
- An organization requests grant funds to plant, grow, or purchase produce that will ultimately be donated.
- An organization requests grant funds to provide training stipends to individuals in exchange for the individuals receiving education or training on specialty crop related topics. Small stipends designed to offset the cost of attending training may be allowed with sufficient justification. Stipends may not be provided solely for the benefit of the individual(s) receiving the stipend.

Appendix B: Budget Example

INSERT IMAGE HERE

Appendix C: Outcome Measures Example

INSERT IMAGE HERE

Appendix D: Concept Proposal Tips

The Office of Grants Administration receives hundreds of grant applications every funding cycle. To help ensure that a proposal is accurately submitted and well-received by the Technical Review Committee, please consider the following advice when composing the Concept Proposal:

- Do not wait until the last minute to prepare or submit the Concept Proposal. Allow ample time for composition, research, review, and submittal.
- Compose answers to questions in a word processing document so they can be checked for grammar, spelling, syntax, and overall clarity before entering them into FAAST.
- Keep answers clear and concise.
- Double-check the project budget against the Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/pdfs/Allowable-and-UnallowableCosts-and-Activities.pdf). Significant unallowable costs listed in the budget may result in disqualification.
- Review the FAQ and Q&A posted on the CDFA SCBGP website (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) prior to submission.
- Double-check to ensure the most appropriate funding category has been selected for the proposal. Identifying the most appropriate category ensures proposals are evaluated by reviewers with the most relevant expertise. The selected funding category cannot be changed once the Concept Proposal is submitted.
- Check that the total award requested on the Budget tab matches the total listed in the Total Overall Budget Costs listed on the Budget template.