2026 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Farm Bill Overview

Updated: 12/17/2025

Grant Guidelines

This is the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) program solicitation for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program-Farm Bill (SCBGP-FB) through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Ag Marketing Service (AMS). The funding is from federal allocations. MDARD Specialty Crop Block Grant Program conducts an annual competitive proposal process to award grant funds. Funding for this Michigan Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is dependent on USDA announcing a Request for Applications.

ELIGIBILITY

Specialty Crops

For the purpose of this program, Section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) as amended section 10010 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79 (the Farm Bill) defines specialty crops are defined as "fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)". Eligible plants must be cultivated or managed and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification to be considered specialty crops. Processed products shall consist of greater than 50% of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water. What is a Specialty Crop? | Agricultural Marketing Service (usda.gov)

Eligible Entities

- Eligible entities include:
  - non-profit organizations,
  - for-profit organizations,
  - local, state, and federal government entities, and
  - tribal governments.

Please note: University applying for funding must be submitted by an eligible organization for which the work is being performed. The budget should reflect that the work by the university is contractual with the eligible entity.

Benefit More Than One Product or Organization

Proposals for grant funds should show how the project potentially impacts and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. Grant funds will not be awarded for projects whose products or services promote or provide profit that solely benefits a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, recipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

The following are some examples of acceptable and unacceptable projects:

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.*
- *A non-profit organization uses grant funds to purchase produce and then sells that produce 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 her/his logo in order to make her/his 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 membership in the organization.*

Examples of Acceptable Projects

- *A State requests funding to contract with a university to conduct research on the feasibility of planting, cultivating, and growing a specialty crop in a particular area, the results of which will be shared with many growers throughout the State during the project.*
- *A single grower or non-profit organization requests funds to demonstrate the viability of organic small fruit production and partners with Cooperative Extension to publicize the working model of diversification to other regional growers.*
- *A single non-profit organization requests funds to conduct an advertising campaign that will benefit their specialty crop members.*
- *A single farmer implements food safety practices or models on his/her property to extend the growing season of tomatoes and lettuce and conducts a field day and farm tour to encourage other small family farmers to adopt the production methods.*

Best Practices

Limit outcomes and indicators to those that are most relevant for the project. 1-3 indicators are acceptable for most projects.

- Use good data collection methods. Check the guidance provided at: https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCBGPQuickGuide.pdf
- Projects must be completed within two years after project is given its initiation date. All data collection and analysis should be completed by the end date of the project.

FUNDING

Funding Availability

The maximum award amount is $125,000 regardless of proposal type. Proposal types are research, marketing, training, and education. Only proposals submitted in whole dollar amounts will be considered.

Indirect costs

Indirect costs are unallowable under Michigan's specialty crop grant program for subrecipients. 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. Administration costs are defined as indirect costs and are limited to 8 percent of the total Federal funds provided under the award per section 101(k)(2) of the Specialty

Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. § 1621 note), as amended by section 10107 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, Public Law 115-343 (the Farm Bill). MDARD applies the full 8 percent toward administration of the grant.

Administration Expenses - The department will not accept any proposal with a budget line of administration expenses. (pre-award costs, proposal costs; depreciation or use allowances on buildings and equipment; costs of operating and maintaining facilities; general administration and general expenses; and personnel, legal, information technology, and accounting administration.)

SOLICITATION PROCESS

SCBG proposals must be received by **5:00 p.m. (EST) on Thursday, February 5, 2026,** within the MiAgGrants System and will not be accepted if received after the deadline.

Please read all materials carefully. There are changes in the proposal, application process, and requirements. Any proposal not submitted in the correct format and complete will not be accepted for review.

Applicants must use MiAgGrants site to apply for the grant, via the application. All sections must be complete, and the application must be submitted and not in progress status to be considered for review. The MiAgGrants system resource page can be found at MDARD - MiAgGrants Grant Management System (michigan.gov).

MiLogin is the State of Michigan's application for online access to many state services and systems across multiple departments, including MDARD's MiAgGrants System. MiLogin allows users to access many state services and systems online, across multiple departments, using a single user ID and password. If you have not yet created a MiLogin account, you will need to do so to access MiAgGrants. For increased security, MiLogin requires a multifactor authentication before you can access LPS or other state systems.

Applying for a grant by clicking on the links below:

- Citizen Account: An individual using State of Michigan online services for their own personal transaction.

- Business Account: An individual using State of Michigan online services on behalf of a business, organization, or corporation.

**NOTE*: If you currently have a Citizen and/or Business Account to access State of Michigan online services and applications, you should already have a MiLogin account. Please use your user ID and password from those systems to log into the MiLogin portal, instead of creating a new account.

If you experience technical issues logging into the system, please contact the MDARD Customer Service Center at 1-800-292-3939 (Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (EST). All communications, inquiries and questions concerning this RFP should be sent via e-mail to: mda-grants@michigan.gov.

Resources for MiAgGrants and MiLogin:

- Learn how to create a MiLogin account (PDF).
- MiAgGrants Authorized User Manual (PDF)
- How to Login to MiLogin (video)
- Forgot Your MiLogin Password (video)
- How to Create a MiLogin Account (video)
- How to Lookup Your MiLogin UserID (video)

Timetable

Proposal	
Release Request for Proposals	December 17, 2025
Informational Webinar Click here to join the meeting	January 7, 2026
Proposals Due in MiAgGrants	February 5, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. (EST)
Evaluation Committee Review	March 2026
MDARD Submits State Plan to USDA	May 2026 (tentative)
USDA Reviews State Plan	June/July 2026 (tentative)
Award	
USDA State Plan Approval and Sign Agreement with USDA	September 2026 (tentative)
Grant Agreements signed with Sub-Awardees – Work may begin on projects	October/November 2026 (tentative)

Purpose

The Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funds projects that enhance the competitiveness of Michigan specialty crops.

The funds can be used for projects involved in promotion, marketing, research, nutrition, trade enhancement, food safety, food security, plant health programs, education, increased child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption, increased innovation, improved efficiency and reduced costs of distribution systems, environmental concerns and conservation, product development, good agricultural practices, good handling practices, and good manufacturing practices.

Funding Priorities

- Market enhancement to promote specialty crops
    - Market expansion, availability, and access to specialty crops
    - Farm to institutions, reviewing opportunities for aggregation, distribution, and light/minimal processing at farms to institutions, include but not be limited to food hubs, schools, local governments, health care systems and providers, higher education and technical institutions, early childhood education centers, non-profits, state government, and other.
    - Nutritional Education
- Research and development relevant to specialty crops
    - Plant health & pest management
    - Regenerative Agriculture

- Training & education addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers
    - Enhancing food safety
    - Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge, education, and consumption of specialty crops
    - Environmental sustainability
    - Conservation
    - Workforce/labor
    - Nutritional education

Grant Proposal Criteria

- SCBG proposals must be received through the MiAgGrants System by **5:00 p.m. (EST) on Thursday, February 5, 2026**, and will not be accepted if received after the deadline.

- Grant period will be approximately November 1, 2026, through November 30, 2028.

- This is a cost reimbursement program. Grantees must expend funds initially and may request reimbursement from MDARD according to the reporting requirements outlined in the Grant Agreement. This will include sending the report, invoice to MDARD, and proper documentation for proof of payment of expenses.

- Two proposals per entity are eligible for consideration. Any industry or organization that submits or endorses multiple proposals may be asked to prioritize those proposals. Please rank your proposals #1 and #2 in the title if your organization submits two proposals.

- Applicants who do not submit progress and annual reports on time, and/or submit incomplete reports, may be removed from consideration of future funding, or risk the forfeiture of current funding.

- Applicants must include a plan to disseminate results, research findings, and conclusions to specialty crop growers, target industries or stakeholders.

- 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 SCBG Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table on page 10 Agricultural Marketing Service Grants Division General Terms and Conditions Updated September 2025 (usda.gov)

- Applicants contracting with a university to perform research/activities - Do not include tuition in the university's budget if requesting "personnel" and "fringe" for students.

- Recommendation of proposals to be awarded will be determined in approximately April 2026, and all applicants will be notified, tentative and subject to USDA annoucement.

- If your project is recommended for funding, the contact person must be available for questions and comments from USDA AMS until the State Plan is accepted. Failure to comply with these requests may result in the withdrawal of your project from funding consideration.

- Projects cannot begin work and/or expend any funds until a signed grant agreement is in place.
- The Director of Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development will have authority to recommend or not recommend grant awards to USDA, based upon selection criteria, program priorities and proposal instructions. USDA will make final approval of awards.

- APPLICATIONS SHOULD AVOID SPECIAL CHARACTERS ($, %, &, *, Spanish "ñ", etc.).

Beginning Farmer or Rancher is an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation.

Underserved Farmer or Rancher is a farmer or rancher who is a member of an Underserved Group. An Underserved Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

Veteran Farmer or Rancher is a producer who served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve component thereof, was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable, and has not operated a farm or ranch or has operated a farm or ranch for no more than 10 years or who first obtained status as a veteran during the most recent 10-year period.

Clarifications/Revisions

Before award, MDARD reserves the right to seek clarification or request any information deemed necessary for proper evaluation of submissions from all applicants deemed eligible for the subrecipient agreement. Failure to provide requested information may result in rejection of the application.

Rejection of Applications

MDARD reserves the right to reject any and all applications or waive any minor irregularities when to do so would be in the best interest of the State of Michigan, and to reject the proposal of an applicant whom MDARD determines is not in a position to perform the scope of work. Minor irregularities are those which will not have a significant or adverse effect on overall completion of performance.

Award Notice

Upon completion of MDARD's evaluation of applications, all applicants will be notified regarding the status of their applications.

MDARD reserves the right to negotiate and/or adjust the final award amount and scope of work prior to the award.

General Compliance

All awarded grant projects must comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations and the terms of the grant award. Specific federal requirements can be found at eCFR: 2 CFR Part 200 -- Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

All applicants must register for a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) with the federal System for Award Management System for Award Management https://www.sam.gov/SAM/ and provide updates as needed. Registration with this site allows the organization to do business with the Federal government and ensures that Federal Funds are not paid to organizations that have been suspended or disbarred, as referenced in 2 CFR 200.212.

Organizations must be legal entities recognized by the IRS AND A REGISTERED VENDOR WITH THE State of Michigan. Register at DTMB - How to Register as a Vendor (michigan.gov) - Click "Register as a Vendor", then Visit "SIGMA VSS".

Organizations must be in good standing with the State of Michigan through The Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs - Corporations Division - Login Page.

The grantee will be responsible for setting up and maintaining a project file that contains records of correspondence with MDARD, receipts, invoices and copies of all reports and documents associated with the project. The grantee shall retain all data and other records relating to the acquisition and performance of the Grant Award Agreement for a period of three years after MDARD submits the final report to USDA. All records shall be subject to inspection and audit by state personnel at reasonable times. Upon request, the grantee shall produce a legible copy of any or all such records.

MDARD reserves the right to perform site monitoring visits to any and all grantees to ensure that work is progressing within the required time frame and that fiscal procedures are followed accurately and appropriately. Monitoring includes both financial and program information, as well as site visits.

Applicants must reside, and/or conduct their business or organization in Michigan and must be in good standing.

All eligible applicants will be reviewed by the Joint Evaluation Committee (JEC), a team of industry experts; will review proposals and recommend proposals for award to the MDARD Director. With the Director's approval, MDARD staff will prepare and submit those projects in the Michigan State Plan to USDA-AMS in accordance with State Plan requirements.

Ineligible Criteria

- Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual, as these projects do not enhance specialty crop industry competitiveness.
- Incomplete proposals, including proposals with one or more unanswered questions and/or missing, unreadable, or otherwise unusable attachments.
- Proposals with activities outside the grant duration.
- Proposals with more than the maximum award amount.
- Proposals with unallowable costs and activities necessary to complete the project objectives.
- Proposals for ineligible or non-specialty crop commodities.

Eligible Commodities

This list is not intended to be all inclusive but rather intended to give examples of the most common specialty crops. For a complete list, see: What is a Specialty Crop? | Agricultural Marketing Service https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop

Programmatic, Administrative, and National Policy Requirements

The application shall be in compliance with all laws, rules, and regulations applicable to the federal funds provided by the federal financial assistance funding opportunity.

The applicant shall maintain an accounting system and a set of accounting records which allow for the identification of revenues and expenditures related to this funding opportunity.

Equal Opportunity

The State of Michigan and the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, height, weight, marital status, partisan considerations, or a disability or genetic information that is unrelated to the person's ability to perform the duties of a particular job or position.

To file a complaint of discrimination, please contact: MDARD Office of Legal Affairs, 525 West Allegan, Lansing, MI 48909, or call 517-284-5643.

You may also contact the Michigan Department of Civil Rights at:
Phone: 313-456-3700
Fax: 313-456-3701
Toll-Free: 800-482-3604
TTY: 877-878-8464
Email: MDCRServiceCenter@michigan.gov

Reasonable Accommodations

The Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) strives to ensure site accessibility for all its users. Our grant process is inclusive and accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. If you require reasonable accommodations, please respond with the following information to mda-grants@michigan.gov:

When contacting us, please include the following information so that we can respond in a manner that is helpful to you:
- Nature of the accessibility issue
- Web address of the content you are attempting to access
- Your preferred format for the content
- Your contact information

Please submit this request no later than Thursday, January 15, 2026. Please allow up to two weeks for the processing of this request. Thank you