

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commonwealth Specialty Crop Block Grant Program 2023-2024 Program Guidelines

The Department of Agriculture (Department) announces the program requirements and application period for grants under the Commonwealth Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (Program). The Program is authorized under Act 40 of 2019 (3 Pa.C.S. §§ 10501 – 10509) (the Act).

1. Program objectives.

The purpose of the Program is to enhance, but not replace, the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program by establishing a Commonwealth Specialty Crop Block Grant Program for specialty crops that are not currently eligible for grant payments under the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, or that are otherwise designated high-priority specialty crops by the Secretary. Funding for the Program will assist the growth, certification of seed, and marketing of these eligible specialty crops.

2. Eligible applicants and projects.

(a) *Eligibility of applicants.* State and local organizations, producer associations, academia, community-based organizations and other eligible specialty crops stakeholders are eligible to apply for grants under the Program.

(b) *Eligible projects.*

(1) Grants may not be awarded to projects that directly benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual.

(2) Grants must be for projects that are focused on an eligible specialty crop. For the Fiscal Year 2023 round of grant applications, the Secretary designates the following as the high-priority specialty crops that are eligible for Program grants:

- (i) hemp;
- (ii) hardwoods;
- (iii) honey;
- (iv) hops; and
- (v) barley, rye and wheat for distilling, brewing and malting only.
- (vi) flax for fiber only.

(3) If a project relates to a processed eligible specialty crop, the processed product must consist of greater than 50% of the eligible specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water.

(4) Projects must enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops and benefit the eligible specialty crop industry as a whole and may include, but are not limited to, projects such as:

- (i) Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops.
- (ii) Participation of industry representatives at meetings of international standard setting bodies in which the Federal Government participates.
- (iii) Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems.
- (iv) Assisting all entities in the specialty crop distribution chains in developing good agricultural practices, including the use of cover crops for specialty crop production; good handling practices; good manufacturing practices; and in cost-share arrangements for funding

audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors.

(v) Investing in specialty crop research, including the use of cover crops for specialty crop production, organic research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes and enhancing food safety.

(vi) Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops.

(vii) Pest and disease control.

(viii) Sustainability.

3. Definitions.

The following words and terms have the following meanings:

Cover Crops - Grasses, legumes, or forbs planted for seasonal vegetative cover to support one or more of the following purposes: a) reduce erosion from wind and water; b) maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content; c) reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excessive soil nutrients; d) suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles; e) Improve soil moisture use efficiency; and f) minimize soil compaction.

Crop - Plants that are cultivated for sale, production, processing or subsistence. The term does not include wild plants.

Department - The Department of Agriculture of the Commonwealth.

Eligible specialty crop - A specialty crop designated as a high-priority specialty crop by the secretary, with priority given to crops, plants and products that are not currently eligible for funding under the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. For the Fiscal Year 2022 round of grant applications, these designated eligible specialty crops are hemp, hardwoods, honey, hops and the following grains if used for distilling, brewing and malting only: barley, rye and wheat.

Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - The Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-465, 118 Stat. 3882).

General evaluation criteria - The evaluation criteria established by the Department and utilized for the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

Horticultural crop - A crop that is used by people for food, medicinal purposes and aesthetic gratification.

Population density - The total population of this Commonwealth as determined by the most recent Federal decennial census, divided by the total area of this Commonwealth in square miles.

Program - The Commonwealth Specialty Crop Block Grant Program established under Act 40 of 2019 (3 Pa.C.S. §§ 10501 – 10509).

Rural municipality - A municipality of this Commonwealth with a population density less than the Statewide average population density or a total population less than 2,500, unless more than

50% of the population lives in an urbanized area, as defined by the United States Census Bureau.

Secretary - The Secretary of the Department.

Silvicultural product. A product of a forest or woodland, including, but not limited to, timber.

Specialty crop. A horticultural crop or silvicultural product, a plant cultivated and utilized for fiber or biofuel purposes or an apiary product.

Urban municipality - A municipality of this Commonwealth not defined as a rural municipality.

4. Limitations on grants.

- (a) *Project duration*. A project must have a completion date of no later than **June 30, 2027**.
- (b) *Reimbursement grants*. Grant funds will be awarded as reimbursement grants.

5. Available funds; Allocation of monies.

(a) *Funds-available basis*. The sum of \$460,000 is available for grants under the Program. Grants will be awarded on a funds-available basis.

(b) *Allocation of funding*. Monies made available by the Department for Program grants will be allocated as follows:

(1) An amount equal to 6.2% of the money will be allocated to recipients and projects located in rural municipalities where at least 20% of the population has been below the Federal poverty line since 1990, based on census data. A list of these rural municipalities can be accessed at the Department of Agriculture's website at:

<http://www.agriculture.pa.gov/pafarmbill> under the Commonwealth Specialty Crop Block Program.

(2) An amount equal to 3.8% of the money will be allocated to recipients and projects located in urban municipalities where at least 20% of the population has been below the Federal poverty line since 1990 based on census data. A list of these urban municipalities can be reviewed on the Department's website, at the internet address provided in Paragraph (1), above.

(3) The balance of the money remaining after making these allocations, and after deducting for the Department's permissible administrative costs, will be allocated to recipients and projects in a manner which seeks to distribute the money evenly among types of eligible specialty crops and, where practicable, in a manner that distributes the money across this Commonwealth.

6. Applications.

(a) *Full Proposal required*. The Department will accept proposals for eligible projects as part of a two-phase competitive process. Eligible applicants must submit a Full proposal for a project which describes how the grant would be used to enhance the competitiveness of the subject eligible specialty crop through market development, technology, innovation, food safety, nutrition knowledge, sustainable practices and/or management. A template for the full proposal may be found on the Department of Agriculture's website at:

<http://www.agriculture.pa.gov/pafarmbill>, under the Commonwealth Specialty Crop Block Program

(b) *Electronic applications only.* Interested applicants must submit a complete electronic full proposal using the Department of Community and Economic Development’s Electronic Single Application (“ESA”) website, at: www.esa.dced.state.pa.us.

(c) *Application window.* Completed full proposals may be electronically submitted beginning March 4, 2024. All full proposals must be received by no later than 5:00 p.m. on April 19, 2024.

7. Review of application.

The Secretary will review and evaluate the full proposal and supporting documentation and will consider the following factors, which are consistent with the general evaluation criteria of the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, in deciding whether to approve or reject the full proposal:

- (1) The full proposal involves a project for an eligible specialty crop as defined above.
- (2) The proposal states the specific issue, problem, or need the project will address, the timeliness and relevance to the specialty crop industry, if it will provide a direct benefit to the specialty crop industry, and if the approach is rational and sound
- (3) The Proposals will result in at least one of the eight outcomes as predetermined by the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. Outcomes are measurable changes in behavior or conditions that reflect a positive impact to the specialty crop industry. Only one outcome and indicator is required. Scoring will be based on the outcome selected and the project’s likelihood of success and relevance to the specialty crop industry.
- (4) The predetermined indicator (as described on the application form) listed under the outcome identified, and the quantifiable results written for the indicator selected.
- (5) How the data will be collected and how well the project will accomplish the outcome and indicator selected.
- (6) The extent to which the budget is reasonable and consistent with the project’s purpose, outcome, and indicator; whether matching funds or in-kind contributions are anticipated; and whether it is feasible that the proposed work can be accomplished given the proposed budget. Matching funds are not a requirement of the Program; however, matching funds are encouraged and may serve as evidence to demonstrate industry commitment to, or support for, the project.
- (7) The extent to which the full proposal meets the requirements for an “eligible project” presented in Section 2(b).
- (8) Whether the subject specialty crop is not currently eligible for grant payments under the Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

8. Notice of disposition of application.

The Department will email written notice of the acceptance or rejection of a full proposal. This notice will be by email to the email address provided by the applicant in the application. Applicants who have submitted successful full proposals will be invited to submit an application containing a final proposal for the Program. This application will be provided by the Department with instructions for submittal. Only those applicants notified by the Department will be eligible to submit a final proposal. The Department will evaluate all final proposals by applying the allocation percentages presented in Section 5, and the evaluation factors presented in Section 7.

9. Grant agreement.

After the Secretary approves a grant application, and as a precondition to the Department’s release of grant moneys to a successful applicant, the Department and the applicant will execute

a written or electronic Grant Agreement which describes the terms and conditions subject to which the grant is made. The Grant Agreement shall contain and conform to the requirements of this notice and shall also contain special terms and conditions as required by the Secretary. Applicants who wish to view the full terms and conditions of the Grant Agreement in advance of submitting an application may contact the Department at the address set forth in Section 11. Applicants who are unable to agree to the terms and conditions should not submit an application.

10. Verification of project completion.

(a) *General.* Within thirty (30) days of completion of the subject project, the applicant shall provide the Department with proof of the completion of the project and eligibility to receive reimbursement grant funds from the Department.

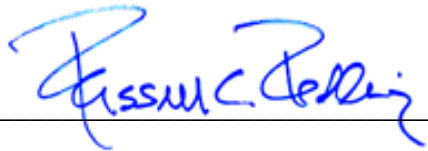
(b) *Required documentation.* The proof described in subsection (a) shall consist of:

(1) copies of invoices for goods or services directly related to the project, along with the written certification of the president or treasurer of the applicant that the goods or services that are the subject of the invoices have been delivered or provided to the applicant; and

(2) a certificate of completion, signed by its president or treasurer, verifying completion of the subject project and stating that the grant funds will reimburse the applicant for a portion of the costs incurred by the applicant in completing the subject project.

11. Questions and additional information.

Questions on this Program, including on the on-line application process may be directed to Lauren Stackhouse, Bureau of Administrative Services, Department of Agriculture, 2301 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9408, (717) 772-5207, email lastackhou@pa.gov.



RUSSELL C. REDDING,
Secretary