NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY
SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

AWARD INFORMATION

Funding Opportunity Number:	USDA-AMS-TM-SCBGP-G-24-0003
Assistance Listing Number:	10.170
Indiana's Available Grant Allocation:	$512,013.27
Minimum Award Amount:	$50,000.00
Maximum Award Amount:	No Maximum
Recommended Project Size/Budget:	$150,000.00

PERFORMANCE PERIOD

State Project Performance Period: September 30, 2024 – September 29, 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture ("ISDA"), Division of Economic Development is seeking applications for the State Fiscal Year 2025 (SFY25)/Federal Fiscal Year 2024 (FFY24) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) to carry out projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialist crops in the state of Indiana. Approximately $512,000 in annual Farm Bill funding is available under this solicitation. ISDA shall retain $41,013.27 of the total available grant allocation for indirect costs (grant administration), therefore leaving $471,000 for award in the competitive solicitation process. Applicants/Grantees are not permitted to claim indirect costs under this solicitation of the SCBGP.

This Notice identifies the eligibility criteria for SCBGP projects and applicants, applicants instructions and associations forms needed to apply, and pre/post-award timelines. ISDA encourages applications that engage in outreach to new, veteran and socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and underserved communities.

TIMELINE FOR APPLICANTS

Thursday, February 22, 2024	SCBGP applications open in GMS. Applicants can begin creating their proposals.
Friday, March 22, 2024, no later than 12:00pm EST	SCBGP applications must be submitted in eGMS. Unsubmitted/late proposals will not be accepted or reviewed.
No later than Wednesday April 17, 2024	ISDA notifies successful and unsuccessful applicants.
Wednesday, May 1, 2024	ISDA submits the State Plan to USDA-AMS.
Fall 2024	State grant agreements are prepared and executed; projects can begin.

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

A. Legislative Authority

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture ("ISDA") was established as a separate and distinct state agency by the General Assembly in 2005 through Public Law 83-2005. The Director of the ISDA is appointed by the Governor and is a member of the Governor's cabinet. The Lt. Governor serves as Secretary of Agriculture & Rural Development by virtue of Office. ISDA administratively reports to the Office of the Lt. Governor.

Legislative authority for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is provided under Section 101 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 (Pub. L. No. 115—334) (Farm Bill). Legislative authority for ISDA to carry out this solicitation is provided under IC 15-11-2-3.

B. Purpose

The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program helps State Departments of Agriculture enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by:

1. Leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops;
2. Assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops;
3. Expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and,
4. Addressing local, regional, and national challenges confront specialty crop producers.

ISDA administers the SCBGP for the state of Indiana. ISDA is seeking project proposals from farmers, ranchers, researchers, producers, and other practitioners in the specialty crop industry. Proposals must enhance specialty crops throughout the state of Indiana. Section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note), amended under section 10010 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79 (the Farm Bill), defines specialty crops as, "Fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)." For a detailed list of eligible specialty crops, please visit https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop.

ISDA encourage applicants to development projects which address these issues affecting the specialty crop industry in Indiana:

- Enhancing food safety
- Assisting entities in the specialty crop distribution chain in developing GAP, GHP, and GMP
- Developing cost-share arrangement for funding GAP, GHP, and GMP audits for small farmers, packers, and processors
- Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops
- Pest and disease control
- Developing local and regional food systems
- Improving food access in underserved areas
- Investing in research that focuses on conservation and environmental outcomes
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops
- Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems
- Support/promotion of the hydroponic/aquaponic industry
- Education/outreach to farmers on best practices
- Research/outreach on value-added products

II. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION
A. Eligible Applicants

For-profit entities (including sole proprietors), nonprofit entities, local units of government (e.g., towns, cities, counties), and both public and private institutions of higher education (IHEs) may apply for the SCBGP. Individuals acting on their own are not eligible to apply. To be eligible for funding, applicants must meet the following criteria:

For All Applicants
• If the applicant has previously received SCBG funding, cannot be delinquent on any reports, claims, or actions as required by ISDA or USDA.
• Must not have more than two (2) open grants at the time of application. For IHEs, this requirement applies at the Department/Division level.
• Must have a SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and active registration in SAM.gov
• Must NOT be on the SAM.gov exclusions list, USDA suspension/debarment list, or any other federal suspension/debarment list
• Must be registered as a bidder with the Indiana Department of Administration (IDOA) Supplier Division.

For-Profit Entities	Nonprofit Entities/Private IHEs
• Must be a registered entity with the Indiana Secretary of State (SOS), active and in good standing • Must be a registered entity with the Indiana Department of Revenue (IDOR), active and in good standing	• Must be a registered nonprofit entity with the Indiana Secretary of State (SOS), active and in good standing • Must be a registered tax-exempt entity with the Indiana Department of Revenue (IDOR), active and in good standing • Must be considered tax-exempt under federal Internal Revenue Code

Helpful Links for Applicants				
How to check entity registration in SAM.gov, renew registration, or start new registration. https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration	How to check your bidder registration or start new registration with IDOA Supplier Division https://in.accessgov.com/idoa/Forms/Page/idoa/idoa-bidder-registration/0	How to search for your entity's registration with the Indiana SOS, check filings status, and standing. https://inbiz.in.gov/BOS/PublicSearch/Search	How to obtain a copy of your IDOR tax-exempt certificate (NP-1) https://www.in.gov/dor/business-tax/nonprofit-tax-forms/#How_should_nonprofit_customers_request_their_Form_NP_1_	How to obtain a copy of your IRS tax-exempt status letter ("Determination Letter") https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/eo-operational-requirements-obtaining-copies-of-exemption-determination-letter-from-irs

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture encourages applicants to submit projects which actively engage and involve beginning, underserved, and veteran farmers/ranchers. Applications for projects that involve these beneficiaries must include written justification and supporting documentation.

Farmer/Rancher	Definition
Beginning	an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation.
Underserved	a farmer/rancher who is a member of an Underserved Group which 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	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.

B. Eligible Projects

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program projects must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in the state of Indiana to be to be eligible. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the proposed project will benefit the specialty crop industry and/or the public as a whole. Projects that benefit a single entity, organization, or individual are not eligible. Additionally, recipients cannot use grant funds to unfairly compete with organizations that provide equivalent goods and services.

Examples of Eligible Project Activities	Examples of Ineligible Project Activities
• A 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 farmer implements food safety practices or models on his/her property to meet food safety requirements and conducts a field day and training services to encourage other small family farmers to adopt the methods.	• 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 single specialty crop organization requests grant funds to market its organization so that it can increase its membership.

This list is non-exhaustive. Refer to the **USDA SCBG FFY2024 Request for Applications** for specific guidance on eligible activities and projects.

C. Performance Measures

Applicants must identify at least one (1) specialty crop that their project will address. Applicants may choose to work with more than one specialty crop but doing so can make reporting obligations more complex. Refer to Section I: Funding Opportunity for a list of specialty crops that are eligible.

Recipients must provide regular and timely progress reports to ISDA and USDA to show the accomplishments that have been achieved towards completing the project activities. Applicants must identify at least one (1) Outcome and one (1) corresponding Indicator. Applicants may choose more than one but should not exceed three (3) Outcomes.

The SCBG Performance Measures worksheet with the Outcomes and corresponding Indicators is located https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCBGPPerformanceMeasures.pdf. A list of the seven Outcomes has been provided below.

1. Increasing Consumption and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops (with 5 indicators)
2. Increasing Access to Specialty Crops and Expanding Specialty Crop Production and Distribution (with 10 indicators)
3. Increase Food Safety Knowledge and Processes (with 5 indicators)
4. Improve Pest and Disease Control Processes (with 6 indicators)
5. Develop New Seed Varieties and Specialty Crops (with 5 indicators)
6. Expand Specialty Crop Research and Development (with 4 indicators)
7. Improve Environmental Sustainability of Specialty Crops (with 6 indicators)

Tip for Applicants: There are multiple Indicators under each Outcome. You only need to choose the indicator that best applies to your project and the activity you are measuring. You do not need to fill out every Indicator for the chosen Outcome(s).

D. Budget

Because of the uniqueness of the SCBG program, ISDA recognizes that some applicants would not be able to afford purchases of some approved grant project items without financial assistance. In knowing this, ISDA is offering conversations of upfront costs with selected grant awardees. The budget categories to be considered include: 1) Equipment, 2) Supplies, 3) Travel, 4) Contractual, and 5) Other. Personnel and Fringe will not be considered. Upfront costs will be determined on a case-by-case basis and ISDA does reserve the right to deny requests.

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III. COMPETITIVE GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS
A. Three-Stage Application Review & Selection

Stage 1: Application Submission & Threshold Review

Applications must be timely submitted no later than Friday, March 22, 2024, 12:00pm EST. Applications submitted after the due date/time will not be reviewed or considered for funding.

Applications will be screened for basic completeness, eligibility, and regulatory compliance ("threshold") by the Lt. Governor's Grant Services Division ("Grant Services"). The purposes of the threshold review include, but are not limited to, determining if the proposed activities are eligible under the SCBGP, determining if the applicant is an eligible entity, and determining if the budget contains any unallowable costs. Threshold reviews are directed by the program rules and regulations set forth in the SCBGP FFY 2024 Request for Applications, SCBGP FFY 2023 Terms & Conditions, and the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200).

ISDA reserves the right to reject any proposals for projects which are ineligible and likely would not become eligible without substantial revisions.

Stage 2: Scoring Review

Applications will be scored by the Competitive Application Review Board ("CARB"), comprised of experts in the specialty crop industry. The panel will consist of five (5) principal members and two (2) alternate members selected in accordance with 2 CFR § 400.2 to ensure all panel members are free from any real and/or perceived conflicts of interest and conduct fair and impartial reviews. Members with a verified conflict of interest will recuse themselves from reviewing the impacted application(s). An alternate scorer with no conflict of interest will participate in their place. All panel members will submit a Conflict of Interest Disclosure to ISDA prior to selection and confirmation to the CARB.

The CARB will independently review each application and assign scores using a rubric developed with ISDA's 2024 scoring criteria outline in the next section. The panel will then meet to rank the applications based on the total weighted average score and provide recommendations to executive staff.

Stage 3: Executive Selection & Submission of the State Plan to USDA

ISDA Executive Staff will assess the Committee's recommendations and formulate a finalized funding recommendation to USDA. All selected projects are considered awarded once USDA approves ISDA's State Plan. Selected applicants may be asked to modify scope and/or budget components of their projects in order to meet USDA's requirements.

B. Scoring Criteria & Rubric
Application Scoring Criteria

SECTION I: OVERVIEW		
Subsection	**Criteria**	**Possible Points**
Project Summary	How clearly does the applicant describe the project and need, as well as identify the expected impact and an implementation strategy? If there are project partners (other organizations performing project activities with the lead applicant), is the relationship between the applicant and partners clearly explained?	15 points
	SECTION I POINTS AVAILABLE ➔	15 points
SECTION II: PURPOSE		
Subsection	**Criteria**	**Possible Points**
Project Issue	Does the applicant provide a clear and compelling description of the problem(s) the project intends to address?	15 points
	Is frequency (# of occurrences) and prevalence (commonness and severity) of the issue(s) clearly described and/or documented?	15 points
Objectives	Do the objectives align with the purpose and goal of the project?	20 points
Timeline	Did the applicant provide a timeline breaking down project activities by quarter, per year? Does the timeline demonstrate the applicant can complete all project activities and objectives within the two-year project period?	15 points
Sustainability	Does the applicant clearly describe how the project will be sustained in the long-term, and not indefinitely dependent on publicly generated grant funds?	10 points
Applicant	Does the applicant identify as 1) a new or beginning farmer/rancher, 2) an underserved farmer/rancher, or 3) a veteran farmer, rancher, or producer? (Max 10 pts even if applicant is more than one special class).	10 points
Outreach to Special Classes/Groups	Is the project designed to benefit 1) new or beginning farmers/ranchers, 2) underserved farmers/ranchers, or 3) veteran farmers, ranchers, or producers? If **YES** for any of the special classes, does the applicant clearly explain how the project will benefit these groups AND provide documented support from these groups (e.g., letters of support, documented partnerships, surveys from stakeholders, social media callouts and comments, etc.)? If **NO**, can the applicant clearly documents its outreach attempts or explain why no outreach to these special groups was not conducted?	15 points
	SECTION II POINTS AVAILABLE ➔	100 points
SECTION III: MEASURABLE OUTCOMES		
Subsection	**Criteria**	**Possible Points**
Outcomes & Indicators	Do the outcomes and indicators selected correlate to the proposed project activities?	15 points
Data Collection & Reporting Methods	Are the proposed data collection, monitoring and reporting methods adequately explained?	15 points
	SECTION III POINTS AVAILABLE ➔	30 points
SECTION IV: BUDGET		
Subsection	**Criteria**	**Possible Points**
Budget Justification	Does the budget justification clearly explain how the line items are related to the proposed project activities? Does the narrative explain the need for the proposed line items? Was supporting documentation for special equipment (required if applicable) provided?	25 points
	SECTION IV POINTS AVAILABLE ➔	25 points

In addition to the criteria established above, ISDA has established three funding priorities which were created in collaboration with experts and stakeholders from the specialty crop industry. Projects **must** align with at least one of these funding priorities. The funding priorities are listed below in order of importance:

Funding Priority I: Market Enhancement	25 points
Funding Priority II: Access, Education and Training	15 points
Funding Priority III: Research	5 points

Applicants can earn an additional 5 points if the proposed project blends funding priorities. Primary points will be awarded for the higher funding priority. For example, an applicant proposing a project that aligns with Funding Priority II and Priority III will be awarded 15 points + 5 points for blending priorities, giving them a total of 20 points on this section. Points for this section will not exceed 30. These points are assessed and awarded by the SCBGP team and Grant Services internally, and not reviewed by the independent review panel. Total application score of 200 points possible.

SECTION I: OVERVIEW	15 points
SECTION II: PURPOSE	100 points
SECTION III: MEASURABLE OUTCOMES	30 points
SECTION IV: BUDGET	25 points
Funding Priority Bonus Points (Internal)*	30 points
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE ➔	**200 points**

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C. Required & Recommended Uploads for the Application

ISDA must collect certain documentation to verify the eligibility of applicants and potential awardees, as well as the eligibility of certain activities and associated costs. Additionally, USDA requires documented proof of outreach and support for projects that perform outreach to the special groups identified in Section 1.4.2 of the USDA-AMS SCBGP RFA. In an effort to reduce the burden on applicants while still fulfilling ISDA's compliance obligations, ISDA has developed the following document checklist for the SCBGP application.

Document Name	REQUIRED?	Purpose/ Section of Application
SAM Entity Registration or proof registration was started	Required	Applicant Eligibility
IN SOS Business Entity Report	Required for nonprofits and private IHEs	Applicant Eligibility
IN DOR Nonprofit Certificate (NP1)	Required for nonprofits and private IHEs	Applicant Eligibility
IN Direct Deposit Authorization Form (SF 47551)	Required	Applicant Eligibility
IRS W-9	Required	Applicant Eligibility
IRS Determination Letter	Required for nonprofits and private IHEs	Applicant Eligibility
Public IHE Statutory Citation* ➢ Ball State: IC 21-19-2 ➢ Indiana University: IC 21-20-2 ➢ Indiana State University: IC 21-21-2 ➢ Ivy Tech Community College: IC 21-22-2 ➢ Purdue University: IC 21-23-2 ➢ University of Southern Indiana: IC 21-24-2 ➢ Vincennes University: IC 21-25-2	Required for public IHEs	Applicant Eligibility *Choose from the list
IN DOA Supplier Division Bidder Registration or proof registration was started	Required	Applicant Eligibility
Support letters from organizations partnering with lead applicant	Required*	Project Summary – Project Partners *If project does not include partners performing work on the actual project activities, no documentation required.
Justification to established purpose/need and frequency/prevalence of issues	Optional	Purpose – Project Issue
Timeline (broken by quarter/year)	Required	Purpose – Timeline
Support letters from special groups/beneficiaries included in outreach	Required*	Purpose – Outreach to Special Groups *If project does not include outreach to these groups, no documentation required.
Support letters from other stakeholders and supporters of the project	Optional	Purpose – Outreach to Special Groups
Justifications for each budget/line item category (excluding equipment)	Optional	Budget – Budget Justifications
Detailed justification with price quotes, pictures, concept drawings, fact sheets, etc. describing the special equipment and its purpose	Required*	Budget – Budget Justifications *If project does not include special equipment, no documentation required.

This list is not exhaustive. Applicants may provide any additional documentation to assist the scorers in reviewing their proposal. Documentation must be relevant to the proposed project, scoring criteria, and questions posed in the application. Acceptable file types include pdf files, photos, word documents, and excel sheets. **All documentation must be uploaded to Uploads page of the application prior to submitting the application. Documentation cannot be added to the application once it has been submitted.**

D. Reminder of Important System Deadline

To be considered for funding, applicants must submit the SCBGP application in GMS by **Friday, March 22, 2023, no later than 12:00pm EST**. ISDA will have staff available to provide technical assistance up to the submission deadlines. However, please note that ISDA is not responsible delayed submissions as a result of an applicant's last-minute call for technical assistance. Do NOT wait until the last minute to submit your application!

E. Contact Info for Technical Assistance, Program Guidance, & Grant Information

For technical assistance with GMS including, but not limited to, creating a GMS portal account or resetting a password, accessing the SCBGP application, issues uploading files or submitting the application, please contact Leah Harmon with ISDA. For guidance and information about the SCBG Program, please contact Emily Conwell with ISDA. For information about the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200), the USDA-AMS Terms & Conditions, eligible activities and allowable costs, please contact Emily Conwell or Timothy (Tim) Parthun with LG-Grant Services.

SCBG Program Contact	GMS Technical Guidance	Grant Policy & Regulatory Guidance
EMILY CONWELL *Director of Economic Development Grant Programs* emconwell@isda.in.gov 317-502-5673	**LEAH HARMON** *Director of Technology Development & Strategy* lharmon2@isda.in.gov 317-607-4127	**TIM PARTHUN** *Senior Grants Manager* tiparthun@lg.in.gov 317-639-9527