

USDA SPECIALTY CROP COMPETITIVE GRANT

ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF SPECIALTY CROPS IN VIRGINIA

Guidelines, Instructions and Application

Federal Fiscal Year 2009

Administered by

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

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THE USDA SPECIALTY CROP COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Background

On December 21, 2004, the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) authorized the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide state assistance for specialty crops. On December 21, 2004, the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) authorized the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide grants to State departments of agriculture solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill) amended the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 and authorized the USDA to provide grants to States for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Each State that submits an application that is reviewed and approved by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is to receive at least an amount that is equal to the higher of \$100,000, or 1/3 of 1 percent of the total amount of funding made available for that fiscal year. In addition, AMS will allocate the remainder of the grant funds based on the value of specialty crop production in each state in relation to the national value of specialty crop production using the latest available cash receipt data.

In an effort to reach specialty crop initiatives throughout the state, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) established a competitive grant process for these funds. VDACS will be administering funds totaling a minimum of \$160,000 for the development of Specialty Crop projects that will support and enhance the competitiveness of Specialty Crops in Virginia. VDACS will accept grant proposals with a value of up to \$25,000. Once all proposals are submitted to VDACS, each will be carefully reviewed and evaluated based on the criteria listed in this application. All VDACS-approved projects will then be developed into one grant submission to the USDA. Upon approval from USDA, VDACS will notify applicants (sub-grantees) of their status. No final awards to any sub-grantee will be made until a final grant award is made to VDACS (grantor) by USDA. Final approval is expected by September of 2009, but is subject to change.

Intent/Scope of Program: Research Projects Accepted for Funding

Definition of Specialty Crops:

Eligible Specialty Crops

Specialty crops are defined in law as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture.”

Ineligible Commodities

Alfalfa	Livestock products	Safflower oil
Barley	Millet	Shellfish (marine or freshwater)
Borage	Mustard seed oil	Sorghum
Canola Oil	Oats	Soybean oil
Cotton & Cottonseed Oil	Peanut oil	Soybeans
Dairy products	Peanuts	Sugar beets
Eggs	Primrose	Sugarcane
Field corn	Rapeseed oil	Sunflower oil
Fish (marine or freshwater)	Range grasses	Tobacco
Flaxseed	Rice & Wild Rice	Tofu
Hay	Rye	Wheat

VDACS' priorities for use of USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Program grant funds will be projects which will solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

- increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops
- improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems
- assisting all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain in developing “Good Agricultural Practices”, “Good Handling Practices”, “Good Manufacturing Practices”
- investing in specialty crop research, including organic research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes
- enhancing food safety
- developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops; pest and disease control; and sustainability.

PART I: QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Application Requirements

- The application must be typed and submitted electronically in Microsoft Word. Complete this form by either typing the information on the sheet provided or by completing the form in Microsoft Word by downloading this document from our web site at www.vdacs.virginia.gov.
- Applications will be accepted via mail, electronic mail, express delivery or hand delivery to the VDACS office at 102 Governor Street, Room #326 in Richmond. Include at least one signed, unbound original, one copy and one electronic version (applications should not be permanently bound or submitted in a notebook). Applications sent electronically via e-mail must also submit one hard copy with original signatures. Send applications to:
USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Project Manager
Virginia Department of Agriculture Services
102 Governor Street #326, Marketing
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Melissa.Ball@vdacs.virginia.gov
- *Applications must be received by 5:00 PM on Wednesday, July 1st, 2009 to be considered for this funding.*

Eligible Applicants

- Applications will be accepted from agricultural associations, industry / producer groups, community based organizations, and academia that seek to improve the competitiveness of specialty crops in Virginia.

Non-Eligible Applicants and Uses of Funds

Applications will **NOT** be accepted for any of the following:

- Projects that solely benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual. Such organizations, institutions and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners
- Projects which replace, rather than supplement the expenditure of state funds
- Any lobbying activities

- Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land (i.e. any equipment, building or land for which the expenditure in excess of \$5000). Note that rental costs of buildings and equipment are allowable as direct costs.
- Any project which is also funded by another federal grant program.
- Any request for reimbursement of expenses for activities completed prior to submission and approval of the application.
- Requests that seek to replace operational funding for ongoing projects that have suffered losses of state or federal funding, or to supplant other local, state or federal funding.
- Any request to pay for “indirect costs” associated with a project
- Any request for reimbursement of travel expenses where the cost is over the State travel requirements.

Evaluation Criteria

Approval and scoring of applications will be based, in part, upon the following:

Specialty Agricultural Development Potential (up to 40 points)

- Needs Assessment and Market Opportunities (valid and clear appraisal of magnitude of specialty agriculture need or market opportunity to be addressed by a project)
- Potential Impact (project’s ability to add income and wealth to farmers, agribusinesses and organizations in Virginia from specialty agricultural products, markets or value-added opportunities)
- Conveyance & Visualization (potential ease with which the theoretical design can be implemented)
- Numbers of Farms/Farmers Served, Assisted, or Trained (increasing scale as project moves from achieving greater awareness/education of opportunities to highest points for measurable conversion of farms to specialty agriculture, products, and markets)
- Please note that for sub-grants to academia, those documenting the support of associations and industry will be favored

Technical Merit (up to 25 points)

- Thoroughness and Clarity of Request (assessment of needs and opportunities, budget documentation, qualified project management, etc.)
- Financial Feasibility and Project Readiness (identification of appropriate sources of funds, status/commitment of those funds, reasonable outline and timeframe of steps for project implementation)
- Matching Funds. Applications that include matching funds will receive higher consideration than requests that are based solely on Specialty Crop grant funds. Matching funds may include in-kind resources or direct cash contributions. While there is no required percentage of matching funds, any funds committed as matching funds must be spent concurrently with USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant funds (i.e. past expenditures will not be counted as match).

Significance to Long Term Sustainability of Virginia Agriculture (up to 35 points)

- Regional or Statewide Significance (documented philosophical support from a cross-sector of vested farms, agribusinesses or organizations within a multi-jurisdiction region, with increasing points for financial participation)
- Long Term Solutions (long-term, measurable and sustainable solutions to specialty agriculture needs or opportunities identified by the project)
- Knowledge Transfer – "User-friendly" (potential for transferability of methodology and technology throughout Virginia)

Application Review Process

Requests for funding will be reviewed by VDACS Division of Marketing staff, a representative from Virginia Farm Bureau Federation and Virginia Agribusiness Council, and then presented to the Commissioner of Agriculture, who will make final grant awards.

Terms of the Grant

Unless agreed to by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, funding for all projects will be granted for up to two years. All project leaders will be required to submit a twelve month progress report as well as a cumulative final report.

Sub-grant recipients agree to participate in at least one VDACS sponsored event (i.e. educational conferences and seminars) designed to disseminate knowledge gained.

Award Administration

Acknowledgement of Support

An acknowledgement of the USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Program must appear in any publication or any significant event based on this project. Terms should include "This project is supported in part by the USDA Specialty Agriculture Grant Program, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services."

Payment of Grant Funds

Upon final approval, all sub-grantees must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) stating that funds shall be used as described in the application. Funds are disbursed on a reimbursement basis and upon submission of a payment request form and adequate supporting documentation. Payments will be made within 30 days after receipt of properly completed reimbursement requests.

Reporting Requirements

Reporting requirements are project specific and based on the duration. By signing the Memorandum of Agreement the grantee agrees to accountability and reporting requirements, including:

The **first report** must be in the following format and include:

- **Activities Performed.** Briefly summarize activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals achieved during the reporting period to meet measurable outcomes for each project.
- **Problems and Delays.** Note unexpected delays or impediments as well as favorable or unusual developments for each project.
- **Future Project Plans.** Outline work to be performed during the next reporting period for each project.
- **Funding Expended To Date.** Comment on the level of grant funds expended to date for each project.
- **Additional information.** Include other relevant project information available (e.g. publications, web sites, photographs).

The **final/cumulative report** must be in the following format and include:

- **Project Summary.** An outline of the issue, problem, interest, or need for each project.
- **Project Approach.** How the issue or problem was approached via each project.
- **Goals and Outcomes Achieved.** How the performance goals and measurable outcomes were achieved for each project. If outcome measures were long term, summarize the progress that has been made to towards achievement.
- **Beneficiaries.** Description and quantitative data for the number of people or operations that have benefited from the project's accomplishments, and/or the potential economic impact of each project.
- **Lessons Learned.** Lessons learned, results, conclusions, for each project. If outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help expedite problem-solving.

Failure to fulfill reporting requirements may be cause for withholding funding, withdrawal of funding or possible rejection of future proposals. All financial reports must be submitted no later than 30 days after the completion of the project.

Audit and Reports

Financial records, statistical records, supporting documents, and other records pertinent to this award shall be retained for a period of three years from submission of the Final Project Report. Records that relate to audits, appeals, litigation, or settlement of claims arising out of the performance of the project shall be retained until such audits, appeals, litigation, or claims have been disposed of. The VDACS Internal Audit Director and the Auditor of Public Accounts or any of their duly authorized representatives shall have access to any pertinent documents, books, papers, and records of the recipient organization to make audits, examinations, excerpts, and transcripts.

Site Visits

VDACS and the Auditor of Public accounts, through their authorized representatives, have the right, at all reasonable times, to make site visits to review project accomplishments and management control systems, and to provide such technical assistance as may be required.

Safeguarding Funds

In no case will USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant funds be commingled with the personal funds of, or be used for personal purposes by, any officer, employee, or agent of the recipient; nor will any of these funds be deposited in personal bank accounts for disbursement by personal check.

Changes in Project Leader or Partners

If any leader leaves the recipient organization or otherwise relinquishes control of the project, VDACS must be notified immediately. Transfer of the award to other organizations must be reviewed and approved by VDACS.

Withholding Payments

VDACS reserves the right, upon written notice, to withhold future payments after a specified date if the recipient fails to comply with the conditions of the award, including reporting requirements.

PART II: Instructions for Completing Application

Each proposal should include the following documents. Complete *all* information requested. Proposals that are incomplete and do not satisfy all the requirements are at risk of being disqualified and returned to the proposing organization without review. Each proposal must be in the following format with numbered pages:

I. Cover Page and Abstract:

Include the lead agency for administering the plan, along with an **abstract of 200 or fewer words** for the proposed project.

II. Project Purpose:

Clearly state the purpose of each project. The purpose should include the specific issue, problem, interest, or need to be addressed and why the project is important and timely.

If the project is a state marketing program, describe how the State will ensure that funding is being used to solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops.

If the project builds on a previous SCBGP or SCBGP-FB project, indicate clearly how the new project compliments previous work.

For each project, indicate if the project will be or has been submitted to or funded by another Federal or State grant program.

III. Potential Impact:

Discuss the number of people or operations affected.

The intended beneficiaries of each project.

The potential economic impact if such data are available and relevant to the project.

IV. Expected Measurable Outcomes:

For each project, describe at least one distinct, quantifiable, and measurable outcome that directly and meaningfully supports the projects purpose. The outcome-oriented objective must define an event or condition that is external to the project and that is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries and/or the public.

Provide a timeframe when outcome measures will be achieved. Outcome oriented objectives may be long term that exceed the grant period.

Describe how the project outcome will be measured. Describe the plan that will be used to show performance improvements. Include a performance-monitoring plan to describe the process of collecting and analyzing data to meet the outcome-oriented objectives.

V. Work Plan:

For each project, explain briefly the activities that will be performed to accomplish the objectives of the project.

Indicate who will do the work of each activity.

VI. Budget Narrative:

Provide sufficient information in paragraph format about the budget categories listed on SF-424A for each project to demonstrate that grant funds are being expended on eligible grant activities that meet the purpose of the program.

Personnel. For each project participant, indicate their title, the percent of full time equivalents (FTE), and the corresponding salary for the FTE.

Travel. Indicate the destination, purpose of trip, number of people traveling, number of days traveling, total airfare costs if applicable, total ground transportation costs if applicable, total lodging and meals costs if applicable, and total mileage costs for the travel if applicable.

Equipment. Indicate anticipated rental costs of equipment and its intended use. List separately each item of equipment, its intended use, and its cost. Equipment is an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year an acquisition cost which equals or exceeds \$5,000. If under \$5,000, please include under supplies.

Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land are unallowable as direct and indirect charges.

Capital expenditures for special purpose equipment are allowable as direct costs, provided that items with a unit cost of \$5000 or more have the prior approval of AMS. The special purpose equipment must solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops and benefit the specialty crop industry.

Rental costs of buildings and equipment are allowable as direct costs in accordance with the cost principles in Subpart T of 7 CFR 3015.

Supplies. Provide an itemize list of projected supply expenditures and the dollar amount for each item.

Contractual. Provide a short description of the services each contract covers and the flat rate fee or the total hourly rate. Compensation for individual consultant services should be reasonable and consistent with that paid for similar services in the marketplace. Consultant may not exceed \$130,000 or \$500 per eight-hour day, excluding travel and subsistence costs.

Other. Provide detailed descriptions of other costs such as conferences or meetings, communications, speaker/trainer fees, publication costs, and data collection, and other budgeted costs associated with each project.

Project Oversight. Describe the oversight practices that provide sufficient knowledge of grant activities to ensure proper and efficient administration.

Project Commitment. Describe how all grant partners commit to and work toward the goals and outcome measures of the proposed project.

Multi-state Projects. Describe how the States are going to collaborate effectively with related projects. Each state participating in the project should submit the project in their State plan indicating which State is taking the coordinating role and the percent of the budget covered by each State.

VIII. Authorization:

By signing this Application, the Authorizing Agent is guaranteeing that the information contained in this Application is correct and verifiable. The Authorizing Agent is also affirming that the funds requested herein will be used for the specific purpose outlined in this Application and for no other purpose. (Attach a resolution of the governing body of the applicant organization, authorizing this person to submit the application in the name of the organization.)

ATTACHMENTS

IX. Biographical Sketches

- Provide a resume or biographical sketch of each person who has primary responsibility for developing and implementing the proposal.
- Information should clarify each person's project responsibilities, and highlight their qualifications.

X. Letters of Support

Attach any letters providing evidence of support for the project.

I. Application for USDA Specialty Agriculture Grant Cover Page

Project Title (No more than 50 characters)		
Name of Organization	Address of Organization	
Employer Identification Number		
PROPOSAL INFORMATION		
Requested Start Date: 9/1/2009	Anticipated End Date: 8/31/2011	
Requested Amount:	Total Project Cost:	
	PROJECT LEAD	CEO / PRESIDENT
Full Name		
Title		
Organization		
Telephone Number		
Fax Number		
E-Mail Address		
Mailing Address		
City, State, Zip		

Signature _____

Date _____

**Abstract
(200 or fewer
words)**

II: Project Purpose:

Clearly state the specific issue, problem, interest, or need to be addressed. Explain why your project is important and timely.

Project Title:	

III. Potential Impact

Discuss the number of people or operations affected, the intended beneficiaries of the project and/or the potential economic impact if such data are available and relevant to the project.

IV. Financial Feasibility:

Provide budget estimates for the total cost. Indicate what percentage of the budget covers administrative costs. Administrative costs should not exceed 10% of any proposed budget.

Proposed Project Budget

	Spec. Crop Funds	State	Local	Private	Other* (in-kind etc.)	Total
Personal Services (Salaries, Wages, Benefits)	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Contractual Services						
Supplies and Materials (pre-project information, workshop manuals, final reports, etc)						
Advertising/Promotions (Publication Costs / Documentation / Dissemination)						
Meeting Expenses						
Travel						
Other						
TOTAL COSTS:	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$

* Other/in-kind contributions must be described in the Budget Narrative.

Budget Narrative: Describe how these funds will be used, provide additional budget detail for distinct elements of the program and explain how the estimated expenditures were determined.

[Empty box for Budget Narrative]

V. Expected Measurable Outcomes:

Describe at least two discrete, quantifiable, and measurable outcomes that directly and meaningfully support your project's purpose. The outcome measures must define an event or condition that is external to the project and that is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries and/or/ the public. Examples of outcome measures may include per capita consumption, consumer awareness as a percent of target market reached, market penetration based on sales by geographic region, dollar value of exports, or web site hits.

VI. Goals

Describe the overall goal (s) in one or two sentences for the project.

VII. Work Plan:

Explain briefly how each goal and measurable outcome will be accomplished for the project. Be clear about who will do the work. Include appropriate time lines. Expected measurable outcomes may be long term that exceed the grant period. If so, provide a timeframe when long term outcome measure will be achieved.

VIII. Authorization:

By signing this Application, the Authorizing Agent is guaranteeing that the information contained in this Application is correct and verifiable. The Authorizing Agent is also affirming that the funds requested herein will be used for the specific purpose outlined in this Application and for no other purpose. (Attach a resolution of the governing body of the applicant organization, authorizing this person to submit the application in the name of the organization.)

Name of Requesting Entity: _____

Name of Authorizing Agent: _____

Title of Authorizing Agent: _____

Address of Authorizing Agent: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Signature of Authorizing Agent: _____

Date: _____

SUBMISSION ATTACHMENTS

IX. Biographical Sketches

Provide a resume or other description of each project manager’s qualifications. See Instructions for details.

X. Letters of Support

Attach letters providing evidence of support for the project.