January 29, 2024

Dear Agricultural Organization Representative:

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) requests applications for the funding available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service’s (AMS) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) to carry out projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. For the purpose of this grant program, “specialty crops” are defined as: vegetables and fruits, including grapes for wine, nuts, horticultural products including Christmas trees, honey, herbs, potatoes, sweet corn, and other specialty crops, including algae. Agricultural commodities which are NOT eligible for these grant funds include, but are not limited to: feed crops, food grains, seafood, livestock, dairy, and poultry products, including eggs, range grasses, and oilseed crops.

The NJDA requests that all interested organizations representing New Jersey’s specialty crop industry submit project proposals for consideration for this funding **on or before March 22, 2024**, at 5:00 PM EST. Any applications received after this deadline will not be considered.

To apply, please email all application materials to NJDA.Grants@ag.nj.gov. Once you submit an application, you should receive confirmation of receipt via e-mail within 24 hours.

To be eligible for a grant, projects must “enhance the competitiveness” of specialty crops by:

(1) leverage efforts to market and promote specialty crops;

(2) assist producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops;

(3) expand availability and access to specialty crops; and/or

(4) address local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers.

The projects might include but are not limited to: research, promotion, marketing, nutrition, trade enhancement, food safety, food security, plant health programs, education, “buy local” programs, increased consumption, increased innovation, improved efficiency and reduced costs of distribution systems, environmental concerns and conservation, product development, and developing cooperatives. The NJDA encourages applications that benefit smaller farms and new beginning farmers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. For projects intending to serve these entities, applicants should engage and involve those beneficiaries when developing projects and applications.

Organizations are encouraged to develop projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

* Enhancing food safety
* Improving the capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (21 U.S.C. Chapter 27), for example, developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good Manufacturing Practices,” and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems (including USDA Group GAP) for small farmers, packers and processors;
* Investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes;
* Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops;
* Pest and disease control;
* Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;
* Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; and
* Sustainability.

Funding for projects up to $40,000 will be available to selected and approved applicants after October 1, 2024.

All proposed projects must follow a standardized format and comply with the enclosed USDA guidelines.

Please see the enclosed application information.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (609) 913-6628 or deelip.mhaske@ag.nj.gov. ***If you do not receive confirmation, please call or e-mail me.* *Please feel free to forward this application to other appropriate parties as needed.***

Sincerely,

Deelip Mhaske

Grants Administrator

Division of Marketing & Development

New Jersey Department of Agriculture

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cc: Joe Atchison III, Director of Marketing & Development