



## State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
PO Box 330  
TRENTON NJ 08625-0330

EDWARD D. WENGRYN  
*Secretary*

MIKIE SHERRILL  
*Governor*

DR. DALE G. CALDWELL  
*Lt. Governor*

**April 14, 2026**

Dear Agricultural Organization Representative,

### **Overview:**

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) requests proposals for funding made 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*.

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.

### **Available Funding:**

The NJDA received **\$1,023,883.78** in program funding from the USDA-AMS to support eligible projects. Applicants may request up to \$40,000 in grant funding. There is no cost-share or matching requirement for this program.

### **Eligibility Requirements:**

Eligible applicants include organizations who submit projects that enhance the competitiveness of New Jersey Specialty Crops in either domestic or foreign markets. Applications for grant funds should describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public, rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. To strengthen the competitiveness of your application, single organizations are encouraged to participate and apply as project partners.

Grant funding will not be awarded for projects that promote or provide profit that solely benefits a single organization, institution, or individual. Organizations cannot request grant funds to compete unfairly with companies that provide equivalent products or services.

## **Eligible Project Activities:**

Projects must “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;
4. Addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers; and/or
5. For such other purposes determined to be appropriate by the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with specialty crop stakeholders and relevant State departments of agriculture.

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.

## **Project Examples:**

*Examples of Acceptable Projects:*

- 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

*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 single specialty crop organization requests grant funds to market its organization so that it can increase its membership.

**How to Apply:**

The NJDA requests that all interested organizations representing New Jersey's specialty crop industry submit project proposals through SimpliGov **on or before May 14th, 2026, at 5:00 PM EST**. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered.

To access the application portal, please [click here](#), or go to the [NJDA Specialty Crop Block Grant webpage](#).

Funding for projects up to \$40,000 will be available to selected and approved applicants at a date to be determined.

To ensure your application for Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funding aligns with the intent of the program, please review the NJDA's application scoring criteria found under "Attachment I" of this document.

*If you do not receive confirmation of submission of your application through SimpliGov, please call or e-mail me.*

*Please feel free to forward this to other appropriate parties as needed.*

Sincerely,

*William Conners*

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## ATTACHMENT I – 2026 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT SCORING CRITERIA

- 1) Project Purpose (1- 10 Points)** Applicant should state the specific issue, problem, interest, or need to be addressed. Applicant should explain why the project is important and timely.
- 2) Project Beneficiaries (1 - 20 Points)** Applicant should discuss the number of people or operations affected, the intended beneficiaries of the project, and/or potential economic impact if such data is available and relevant to the project(s).
- 3) Expected Measurable Outcomes. (1 - 20 Points)** Applicant should describe distinct, quantifiable, and measurable outcomes that directly and meaningfully support the 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 percentage of target market reached, market penetration based on sales by geographic region, dollar value of exports, or impact of research efforts.
- 4) Budget Narrative (1 - 10 Points)** Applicant should provide a detailed and thorough budget of estimated expenses related to the project. Matching funds are encouraged but not required.
- 5) Project Commitment and Oversight (1 - 5 Points)** Applicant should describe how all grant partners will commit to and work toward the goals and outcome measures of the proposed project. Describe the oversight practices that will provide sufficient knowledge of grant activities to ensure proper and efficient administration.
- 6) Innovation Bonus; (1 – 15 Points)** Awarded for new approaches to existing challenges, efforts to develop new markets or otherwise innovative projects not previously developed.
- 7) Overall Concept and Quality of the Application; (1-20 Points)** Awarded for the quality of the concept, clarity of purpose, presentation and organization of the application.

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|----------|------------------------|---|
| 1. _____ | <b>(1 - 10 Points)</b> | <b>Project Purpose</b>                                |
| 2. _____ | <b>(1 - 20 Points)</b> | <b>Project Beneficiaries</b>                          |
| 3. _____ | <b>(1 - 20 Points)</b> | <b>Expected Measurable Outcomes</b>                   |
| 4. _____ | <b>(1 - 10 Points)</b> | <b>Budget Narrative</b>                               |
| 5. _____ | <b>(1 - 5 Points)</b>  | <b>Project Commitment and Oversight</b>               |
| 6. _____ | <b>(1 – 15 Points)</b> | <b>Innovation Bonus</b>                               |
| 7. _____ | <b>(1 - 20 Points)</b> | <b>Overall Concept and Quality of the Application</b> |