

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Fiscal Year 2026 Information and Guidelines

Grant Application Due Date:

**Tuesday, March 10, 2026
5:00 PM EST**



**North Carolina Department of Agriculture
& Consumer Services**

1001 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1001
(919) 707 - 3000

Steve Troxler - Commissioner

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Additional copies of this publication may be obtained from our website at:
<http://www.ncspecialtycropgrant.org>

Program Solicitation Information

Funding Opportunity Title from USDA AMS: Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – Farm Bill

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.170

Dates: Applications must be sent electronically to Jenni Keith, Program Administrator at jenni.keith@ncagr.gov by **5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 10, 2026**. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

Executive Summary: The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2026 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). Projects will be reviewed, selected, and modified as necessary and compiled into one submission (State Plan) to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). North Carolina anticipates receiving approximately \$1.2 million in funding. These funds are for projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Funding of these grants is dependent upon the release of USDA AMS's 2026 Notice of Funds Availability. These guidelines and instructions are based on the [USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) and are subject to change.

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

PURPOSE

The SCBGP assists State departments of agriculture in the 50 States, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to enhance the competitiveness of U.S. 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 confronting specialty crop producers.
- (5) for such other purposes determined to be appropriate by the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with specialty crop stakeholders.

Specialty crops are fruits, vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). Additional information on specialty crops, including a table of examples of the most common commodities, is available at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop>.

Projects must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets. Projects will be chosen for funding on potential increased impact to the specialty crop industry in North Carolina.

NCDA &CS always welcomes suggestions for funding priorities to be considered for future NC SCBGP solicitations. These should be sent to specialtycropgrant@ncagr.gov.

PROJECT TYPES

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers the SCBGP. USDA encourages projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

- Enhancing specialty crop 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, by developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good Manufacturing Practices,” and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems (including USDA GroupGAP) 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

NORTH CAROLINA FUNDING PRIORITIES

- Increasing Consumption of NC Specialty Crops/Encouraging consumers to support local growers
- Specialty crop research projects: Post harvest handling and storage, labor reduction strategies, disease and pest management, soil health and nutrient management
- Sustainability and Conservation Practices

PROJECTS MORE RELEVANT FOR OTHER FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS

Entities that engage in projects that support the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase and/or include technologies for benefit redemption systems should consider submitting those projects to the [Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program](#).

Entities that engage in projects that support domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, other direct producer-to consumer market opportunities, local and regional food business enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, or store locally or regionally produced food products should consider submitting those projects to the [Farmers' Market Promotion Program](#) (FMPP) and [Local Food Promotion Program](#) (LFPP) and [Regional Food System Partnership](#) (RFSP) Program.

Entities that engage in projects that support biobased products and bioenergy and energy programs, including biofuels and other alternative uses for agricultural and forestry commodities (development of biobased products) should see the [USDA energy website](#) for information on how to submit those projects for consideration to the energy programs supported by USDA.

ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

State and/or local governmental units, academia (Universities and Colleges), and non-profit organizations, including producer associations, community-based organizations and other specialty crop stakeholders are eligible to apply. Individuals and for-profit organizations (businesses) are not eligible to apply.

NC SCBGP grant funds will be awarded for projects of up to **two (2) years and six (6) months duration**. **Projects will not be extended past June 30, 2029.**

More than one project application packet per applicant may be submitted.

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. **AMS will not award grant funds for projects whose products or services promote or provide profit that solely benefits a single organization, institution, or individual.** In addition, recipients and subrecipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

ELIGIBLE AND INELIGIBLE SPECIALTY CROPS

Commonly recognized specialty crops are fruits and tree nuts, vegetables, culinary herbs and spices, medicinal plants, as well as nursery, floriculture, and horticulture crops. Please see [What is a Specialty Crop?](#) [Agricultural Marketing Service \(usda.gov\)](#) for comprehensive listing.

DEFINITION OF A PROJECT

A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive, distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period of time and within specific limitations (cost, performance/quality, etc.). Additionally, it uses resources that are specifically allocated to the work of the project and usually involves a team of people. Projects are different from other ongoing operations in an organization because, unlike operations, projects have a definitive beginning and end – they have a limited duration. A project has an overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks.

EXAMPLES OF ACCEPTABLE PROJECTS

- The State request funding to contract with a university to establish a Backyard Demonstration Garden that is open to the public.
- Marketing apples through a targeted promotional campaign.
- Researching new cultivars

EXAMPLES OF UNACCEPTABLE PROJECTS

- A company request funds to purchase starter plants to cultivate and grow a specialty crop to make a profit, or to expand production of a single business or organization.
- Government entity requests grant funds to make grants to individual specialty crop businesses or roadside stand to promote their individual business.
- A single non-profit organization request funds to promote their organization's website rather than promoting specialty crops.

MULTI-STATE PROJECTS

The NC SCBGP is not participating as a lead State in the Specialty Crop Multi-State Program (SCMP).

II. FUNDING

FUNDING SOURCE AND AVAILABLE FUNDS

The NCDA&CS anticipates awarding approximately \$1.2 million using a competitive review process. Project funding is contingent on available funding from the USDA-AMS. The USDA is the funding entity and has the final approval for projects submitted to the USDA for the NC Specialty Crop Block Grant.

The NCDA&CS reserves the right to offer an award amount less than the amount requested in the application.

The NCDA&CS will award multiple grants from these funds for the fiscal year 2026 grant cycle.

The maximum grant request for 2026 can be no more than \$200,000.

III. COMPLIANCE

GENERAL COMPLIANCE

All awarded grant projects must comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations and the terms of the grant award. The Grantee shall comply, as applicable, with the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004 of Public Law 108-465 (7 U.S.C. § 1621 note); specialty crop block grant program regulations at 7 C.F.R. Parts 1290 and 1291; and uniform federal grant regulations at 7 C.F.R. Parts 3015, 3016, 48 C.F.R. Subpart 31.2 and 2 C.F.R. Part 200.

PERMITTING REQUIREMENTS

NC SCBGP funded projects may involve conducting work that requires permits and clearances from various agencies. The NCDA&CS and NC SCBGP do not determine which, if any, permits are required for specific projects, nor does it review permits for accuracy or appropriateness. Applicants are responsible for determining that all necessary permits that apply to their project are identified and obtained.

ARBITRATION

To the extent required pursuant to North Carolina General Statute and any successor statute, the parties agree to use arbitration, after exhausting all applicable administrative remedies, to resolve disputes arising out of the Grant Award Contract.

DISAGREEMENT PROCESS

The NC SCBGP reserves the right to reject any application packet due to ineligibility or requirements not met as stated in this grant information packet. Disagreements will be addressed pursuant to the North Carolina General Statutes.

INDEMNIFICATION

The parties involved with a fully executed contract awarding funds to carry out a NC SCBGP project agree that the State of North Carolina, its departments, agencies, boards and commissions shall be indemnified and held harmless by the contractor for the vicarious liability of the State as a result of entering into this contract. However, the parties further agree that the State of North Carolina, its departments, agencies, boards and commissions shall be responsible for its own negligence. Each party to a contract is responsible for its own negligence.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Grantee agrees to comply with Federal and North Carolina General Statutes prohibiting discrimination in employment. Information on filing a claim with the NC Civil Rights Division can be found at <https://www.ncoah.com/civil/>.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Successful applicants must provide a copy of their approved current conflict of interest policies pursuant to North Carolina General Statute.

NON-AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

Every payment obligation of the State under a Grant Award Contract will be conditioned upon the availability of funds appropriated or allocated for the payment of such obligation. If funds are not allocated and available for the continuance of the Contract, it may be terminated by the State. No liability shall accrue to the State in the event this provision is exercised, and the State shall not be obligated or liable for any future payments or for any damages as a result of termination under this paragraph.

FEDERAL FUNDING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY ACT (FFATA)

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) requires that all entities receiving federal funds register in the Federal System for Award Management (SAM) database and submit required information as determined in the FFATA regulation. SAM is a Federal Government owned and operated free website that consolidates the capabilities in CCR/FedReg, ORCA, and EPLS. As such, all selected applicants shall register in the SAM database, <https://www.sam.gov> and submit any additional forms and/or documentation requested to fulfill the FFATA reporting requirements as outlined by the NCDA&CS. **SAM registration must be maintained and the SAM account must remain active during the entire life of the Grant Award Contract.**

RECORDS REQUIREMENTS

Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute and 7 C.F.R. §§ 3015.21 & 3016.42, the Grantee shall retain and shall contractually require each subcontractor to retain all Records for a period of five years after completion date indicated in the Contract and until any litigation, claim, negotiation, audit, cost recovery, or action involving the Records has been completed. All Records shall be subject to inspection and audit by the State and/or USDA at normal business hours. Upon request, the Grantee shall produce the original of any or all Records.

MONITORING

The NCDA&CS and NC SCBGP reserve the ability to perform site monitoring visits to any and all grantees to ensure that work is progressing within the required time frame and that fiscal procedures are followed accurately and appropriately. Monitoring includes both financial and program information as well as site visits.

IV. APPLICATION

TIMELINE

January 15, 2026	Grant opportunity announced
March 10, 2026	Application due, 5:00 pm EST
March-April 2026	Applications reviewed
May, 2026	Final Application submitted to USDA by NC SCBGP
Late September/Early October 2026	Awarded projects announced by USDA
October-December 2026	Grant agreements/contracts sent to grantees
January 1, 2027	Anticipated project start date

PROJECT PROFILE TEMPLATE

Do not modify the Project Profile Template. Do not password protect the project profile template. The complete 2026 application packet, including the application cover page and 2026 Project Profile Template can be found on the NC SCBGP website at www.ncspecialtycrops.com. Be sure to use the most current template. Project title must be six words or less. **Pay close attention to all italicized instructions in the project profile template.** Do not alter or remove any portions of the template. Be sure to include an answer for every question, even if the answer is N/A. Do not include charts, graphs, or images in your narrative.

REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS

- Cover Page
- Project Profile Template (Do not modify template)
- IRS Tax Exempt Status for your organization
- Biographical Sketches- Provide a resume or biographical sketch of each person who has primary responsibility for developing and implementing the project. Information should clarify each person's duties and highlight their qualifications.
- Letters of Support- At least one letter, but no more than three, providing evidence of support for the project from people outside the organization that are not involved in the project.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Project Profile Template should include the project details and necessary information to fulfill the goals objectives of the project. Project must select at least 1 outcome and 1 indicator. Limit outcomes and indicators to those that are most relevant to the project. Use the guidance provided at [SCBGP Performance Measures](#). Provide an estimated quantifiable result for each indicator. Describe clear data collection methods that are achievable and can be measured directly. Note: If the project is selected, the progress of each indicator must be reported in the Performance reports and the result must be reported in the Final Performance report. This should be carefully considered in the number of outcome/indicators selected.

ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COSTS

A summary of allowable and unallowable costs in can be found in the [General Terms and Conditions](#) section 8.0. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive. Reference [Subpart E-Cost Principles of 2 CFR part 200](#) for a complete explanation of the allowability of costs. These terms and conditions are subject to change with the release of the FY 2026 USDA-AMS SCBGP General Award Terms and Conditions.

Indirect or administration costs are not allowed. Please put \$0 in this section on the application. Equipment purchases are not allowed. Please put \$0 in this section on the application.

Travel costs including meals, lodging and mileage must follow the policies set forth in the [State of North Carolina Budget Manual](#). The current rates are effective as of July 1, 2025 and are subject to change.

The budget narrative must be completed to the nearest penny. Do not round.

APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING

NCDA&CS's intent is to fund projects that can produce the highest degree of measurable benefits to North Carolina specialty crop producers in relation to each dollar spent. NCDA&CS staff will review all applications received prior to the deadline to make sure it is complete, ensure the plan meets the statutory purpose of the program, all application criteria are fulfilled in accordance with application submission instructions, and that costs are allowable. NCDA&CS will also assess an organization's ability to account for the use of Federal funds and monitor the performance associated with these monies using the guidance provided by 2CFR 200.206.

All qualifying applications will be evaluated by a confidential review panel of industry representatives. The review panel will review each application using standard and consistent review criteria. After the applications have been evaluated and rated, contract offer recommendations will be made to the NC SCBGP staff. The review panel may recommend adjustments to the project proposal, scope of work and/or project budget.

Project applications will be scored on the following scale:

Project Partner and Summary	15 points
Project Purpose/Objectives	20 points
External Project Support	10 points
Expected Measurable Outcomes	20 points
Data Collection	15 points
Budget	20 points
Total:	100 Points

The NC SCBGP reserves the right to fund the project in part, add and delete tasks, and ask for clarification. No contract will be entered into until the NCDA&CS and NC SCBGP are satisfied with all the specifications of the project.

The NC SCBGP will then make funding recommendations to the Director of Agricultural Project Management on the rating and the strength of the project proposal as determined by the review panel. Upon approval, all projects will be compiled in a State Plan for final approval from the USDA. USDA is the funding entity and will make the final award decisions.

Previous performance: If an organization has previously received funding through the NC SCBGP, up to 20 points may be deducted if the recipient organization failed to provide invoices and/or reports in a timely manner or otherwise failed to properly administer the project in compliance with the requirements of the SCBGP.

V. POST AWARD INFORMATION

NOTIFICATION OF AWARD

All eligible applications will be reviewed. Successful applications will be chosen on the merits of the project and previous performance as determined by the NC SCBGP Review Panel and will be included in the North Carolina State Plan. This will be submitted to USDA no later than the final deadline which they set for the receiving of applications for approval. Applicants will be notified via email whether or not their project is selected for inclusion in the North Carolina State Plan. Funding is not guaranteed if the project is included in the State Plan.

Following approval of the North Carolina State Plan by USDA, applicants will be notified and will then be required to supply several supplemental forms (i.e. Conflict of Interest Policy, Sworn Statement of No Overdue Taxes, etc.) prior to being sent a Contract Award Agreement. The Contract Award Agreement will require grantees to agree to the clauses of the Contract and Special Provisions. The NC SCBGP anticipates that contract awards and notifications will be made in late 2026.

After contract awards have been made, all application packets may be made available to the public. The NC SCBGP may determine that trade secrets or proprietary information may continue to be held confidential. If you believe that any of the information contained in your application packet should be held confidential you must designate that information as “confidential” in your application packet and provide an explanation as to why it should be held confidential.

REPORTING

- **Interim and Annual Performance Reports:**

For the 2026 Specialty Crop Block Grant, grantees must submit the Interim Performance Report by **April 30th each year**, and Annual Performance Report by **October 31 each year**.

- **Final Report:**

A Final Report **will be due within 60 days following the completion of the project** or expiration of the Grant Award Contract. 20% of the Grant Total will be withheld until the Final Performance Report is approved by the NC SCBGP.

Forms for reporting are available on the [NC SCBGP website](#).

Failure to submit timely reports may result in the forfeiture of reimbursements.

REIMBURSEMENTS

Reimbursement requests may be submitted no more than monthly or when expenses have been incurred. Reimbursement request forms can be found on the [NC SCBGP website](#). Each payment is conditioned upon receipt and approval by the NC SCBGP Administrator of the deliverable(s) **specified in the Scope of Work** and shall be accompanied by reasonable assurance (documentation, proof of payment, receipts, invoices, etc.) that the goods and services for which payment is requested were received and performed. The NCDA&CS, NC SCBGP has the right to disallow costs determined inappropriate or unreasonable.

AMENDMENTS

Grantees are highly encouraged to include ample time for project completion. There is no penalty for completing all tasks in the work plan early. **Contract extensions are not encouraged and will only be granted in extreme circumstances.**

Contract Award shall be modified by mutual written consent only through a Contract Award Amendment executed by the NCDA&CS and the Grantee. Unauthorized changes to a Contract Award shall be void and without effect, and the Grantee shall not be entitled to any claim under a Contract based on those changes. Contract Awards are intended to incorporate all provisions required by federal and state law. If the NCDA&CS learns that a provision required by federal or state law has not been incorporated in the Contract, the parties agree to promptly amend the Contract to include the provision.

Prior to initiating any paperwork, the NC SCBGP Administrator should be contacted. The Administrator will provide the information needed to begin the initial steps and forms needed to request a Contract Award Amendment.

BUDGET REVISIONS

If a project budget adjustment is needed during the project period, a written request may be made to the NC SCBGP to reallocate budget funds between budget categories. However, the total budget amount, as dictated by the approved grant award, cannot be adjusted. Grantees may not spend funds from line items not approved in the Contract Award. **No deviation from the approved budget will be allowed without prior written approval by the NCDA&CS.**

Grantees shall inform the NC SCBGP of the potential for unexpended awarded grant funds prior to the end of the grant period.

VI. CONTACT INFORMATION

Jenni Keith- Program Administrator
North Carolina Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Jenni.keith@ncagr.gov
(919) 707-3158

VII. Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Can SCBGP funds be used to purchase a greenhouse?**
No, SCBGP funds cannot be used to purchase buildings.

2. Can NC SCBGP funds be used to purchase equipment?

No, equipment purchases are not allowed.

3. The project calls for the purchasing of many parts that will be used to make one piece of equipment. Should this be listed as supplies?

The total amount of the parts and inputs should be totaled. If the amount is over \$10,000 they are unallowable.

4. What regulations are to be used when calculating travel expenses for the grant?

Travel expenses must comply with the current State of North Carolina travel regulations.

5. When can work begin on my project?

The process for approval is as follows: After USDA approval of the State Plan, the NCDA&CS will advise if your project was approved and is eligible to receive funding. Meanwhile efforts will be underway to complete and execute the contract, and you may be required to submit additional documents and forms after the eligibility of award announcement and prior to a contract being executed. The NC SCBGP anticipates a project start date of January 1, 2026. You can begin efforts on your project upon the receipt of a fully executed Contract Award. Any expenditures PRIOR to receiving a fully executed Contract Award are the grantee's responsibility.