



Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Program Description:

The Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 authorizes the United States Department of Agriculture to make grants available to provide assistance for specialty crops. These grants are to be utilized by state departments of agriculture solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Each state submitting an application that is approved by USDA will receive a minimum grant amount of \$100,000 plus an additional amount based on the value of specialty crop production in the state in relation to the national value of specialty crop production. The State of Mississippi is designated to receive \$107,038.75 for fiscal year 2008.

It is the intent of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) to develop a state plan requesting funds to implement projects that will significantly and positively impact the specialty crop industry in Mississippi. This invitation for proposals has been developed to provide all interested parties an opportunity to apply for these funds.

Eligible Grant Applicants:

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is the authorized agency to assume the lead role in the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. According to USDA guidelines, grant funds can not be awarded for projects that directly benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual because these projects do not enhance specialty crop industry competitiveness. Proposals are encouraged from state and local organizations, academia, producer associations, industry or community-based groups, and other specialty crop organizations. Applicants may submit more than one proposal. If more than one proposal is submitted, please prioritize the submissions.

Eligible Grant Projects:

To be eligible for a grant, projects must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops (including floriculture). For a list of examples, see Attachment I.

Examples of “enhancing the competitiveness” of specialty crops include, but is 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.

Specialty crop block grant funds will be awarded for projects that could last up to three years. The maximum grant awarded will be \$30,000. MDAC reserves the right to consider larger requests for projects with exceptional merit.

Restrictions and Limitation on Grant Funds:

Specialty Crop Block Grant Funds shall not be used to cover the following expenses:

- Administrative costs (overhead expenses and indirect costs)
- Paying off existing debt
- Substituting existing efforts or research already funded
- Purchase of equipment, land, or buildings
- Business entertainment or business gifts
- Lobbying or political efforts
- Salary

Application Guidelines:

Completed applications must include a signed Acknowledgement form and a narrative explaining how grant funds will be utilized to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. The style of presentation and length may vary depending on the nature of the project. The acceptable font size for the narrative is 12 pitch. The following format is to be followed:

Acknowledgement. See Attachment II. The Acknowledgement must be signed by the authorized representative(s) of the proposing organization.

Cover Page and Project Abstract. Include the name of the applicant (or lead agency in the case of multi-agency projects) administering the project along with address, name of contact person, phone, fax, and email address. An abstract of 200 or fewer words describing the proposed project is also required.

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

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

Financial Feasibility. Provide a detailed and thorough budget of estimated expenses related to the project. Matching funds are encouraged but not required. Administrative expenses are not covered in this grant but may be considered matching funds.

Expected Measurable Outcomes. Describe at least two 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 percent of target

market reached, market penetration based on sales by geographic region, dollar value of exports, or web site hits.

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

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 and exceed the grant period. If so, provide a timeframe when long term outcome measure will be achieved.

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 will commit to and work toward the goals and outcome measures of the proposed project.

Completed application packets must be **postmarked by January 15, 2009**. An electronic version of the application, preferably in Microsoft Word format, as well as a hard copy is required. Applications can also be sent by fax on or before the application due date.

Mail completed applications to:
Paige Manning, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
P.O. Box 1609
Jackson, MS 39215
Email: paige@mdac.state.ms.us
Phone: (601) 359-1163
Fax: (601) 354-6001

Application Evaluation and Selection Process:

Grant applications will be reviewed by MDAC staff and an MDAC advisory committee. Applications will be evaluated based on the merit of the proposal narrative. See Application Guidelines in the previous section for requirements. The advisory committee may adjust monetary grant requests, proposed scope of work, and/or project budgets.

Reporting Requirements:

Quarterly Reports. Quarterly reports detailing progress being made towards the project along with a breakdown of expenses shall be submitted quarterly to MDAC.

Annual Performance Reports. For projects lasting longer than one year, grantees shall submit an annual performance report to MDAC. Annual performance reports shall include the following: a brief summary of activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals achieved during the reporting period; any unexpected delays or impediments as well as favorable or unusual developments; work to be performed during the next reporting period; and a comment on the level of grant funds expended.

Final Report. Final reports will be submitted to MDAC. Final reports will include the following: an outline of the issue, problem, interest, or need for the project; how the issue or problem was approached via the project; how the goals of the project were achieved; results, conclusions, and lessons learned from the project; how progress has been made to achieve long term outcome measures for the project; and any other notable information.

At the conclusion of the project, any balance of unobligated grant funds advanced to the grantee must be immediately returned to MDAC.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce reserves the right to deny any or all proposals received; request additional information on project proposals; recommend partial funding for proposals that may be less than the amount requested in the grant application; and link the release of project funds to completion of necessary, timely progress reports. All grant funding is subject to the availability and receipt of federal funds.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture & Commerce maintains a policy which prohibits unlawful discrimination based on race, color, creed, sex, age, national origin, physical handicap, disability or any other consideration made unlawful by federal, state, or local laws.

ATTACHMENT I.

Eligible Specialty Crops

Commonly recognized fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops (including floriculture)

Algae	Hops
Chickpeas	Kava
Christmas trees	Lavender
Cocoa	Lentils
Coffee	Maple syrup
Cut flowers	Mushrooms
Dry edible beans	Organic fruits and vegetables
Dry peas	Peppermint
Foliage	Potatoes
Fruit grapes for wine	Seaweed
Garlic	Spearmint
Ginger root	Sweet Corn
Ginseng	Sweet Sorghum for human consumption
Herbs	Vanilla
Honey	Vegetable seeds

Ineligible Commodities

Cotton and cottonseed
Feed crops such as barley, corn, hay, oats, sorghum grain, millet, alfalfa
Flaxseed
Food grains such as rice, rye, wheat
Livestock and dairy products, including eggs
Marine or fresh water aquaculture
Oil crops such as peanut, soybean, sunflower, safflower, rapeseed, canola, mustard seed, evening primrose, borage
Peanuts
Range grasses
Sugar beets
Sod
Sugar beets
Sugarcane
Tobacco
Tofu

ATTACHMENT II.

Acknowledgement

I/we the undersigned applicants, _____ of
(Name/names)

_____, Mississippi, hereby apply for Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
(City/cities)

Funds under the terms and conditions of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and the United States Department of Agriculture, in the amount of \$_____.
(Amount requested)

The undersigned hereby warrants to the State of Mississippi that to the best of my/our knowledge, all information presented in this grant application is factual and true; that I/we understand that if this proposal is funded, I/we will be required to sign a grant agreement and other necessary documentation containing terms and conditions upon which funds will be released; and that I/we understand that I/we will be required to submit progress reports (quarterly and annually) and a final report at the completion of the project as a condition to participating in this grant program. All grant funding is subject to the availability and receipt of federal funds by MDAC.

The undersigned understands that the selection will be determined by MDAC based on criteria designed to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Mississippi. The undersigned understands, due to the availability of a limited supply of funds, that every qualifying project may not be approved or receive funding and that approved projects may be funded in whole or part.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Print: _____ Title: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Print: _____ Title: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Print: _____ Title: _____