

2021 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Proposed 2021 Program Priorities

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Table of Contents

About the Program.....	1
Funding Areas, Funding Categories, and Program Priorities	3
Additional Assistance Proposals.....	8
Public Comments.....	11
2021 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Timeline.....	12

About the Program

Purpose

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds projects that enhance the competitiveness of California specialty crops. The SCBGP is designed to support all sectors of California's specialty crop industry and improve the performance of California specialty crops within local, domestic, and international markets. Specialty crops are fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture). Visit USDA's

[What is a Specialty Crop? website](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop)

(<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop>) for a list of eligible and ineligible commodities and a comprehensive definition of specialty crops.

Funding and Duration

CDFA anticipates that up to \$22 million will be awarded to projects enhancing the competitiveness of California specialty crops. Grant amounts range from \$50,000 to \$450,000. The maximum grant duration is two (2) years, six (6) months, and grant funds cannot be expended before November 1, 2021, or after April 30, 2024. CDFA reserves the right to offer an award amount less than the amount requested.

Separate of the competitive process, CDFA may award up to \$3 million to for projects that address urgent or critical issues affecting California specialty crop agriculture, including prioritizing projects that address impacts of COVID-19 on California's specialty crop industry.

Eligibility

Non-profit and for-profit organizations; local, state, and Federal government entities, including tribal governments; and public or private colleges and universities are eligible to apply. Individuals are not eligible to apply. There is no limit on the number of concept proposals applicants may submit; however, each concept proposal must be for a wholly unique project.

Additional notes to help determine eligibility:

- Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. For example, the program will not fund a project to start or expand a farm or business venture.
- Recipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with private companies that offer equivalent products or services.

- Projects must enhance the competitiveness of California specialty crops. Projects benefiting non-specialty crops will not be selected for funding.
- Projects must address at least one of the program priorities identified by CDFA.
- Additional Assistance proposals have additional eligibility restrictions as outlined within this document.

Funding Areas, Funding Categories, and Program Priorities

CDFA has developed three funding areas, with one to three categories within each area. Funding areas, funding categories, and program priorities are intended to clearly define the 2021 SCBGP priorities and help prospective applicants to develop their projects and submit projects to the most appropriate category.

Funding Area I: Market Enhancement

Projects in this funding area will focus on increasing sales of California specialty crops through promotion of the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California, developing new markets, increasing opportunities in existing markets, improving availability, and increasing demand.

Market Enhancement Category A: Grown in California

In this funding category, CDFA will consider projects that enhance the marketability and long-term competitiveness of specialty crops by leveraging the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California. Specifically, these projects should seek to increase the awareness and consumption of specialty crop products through the development of markets (local, regional, institutional, national, and international) for all California producers through cooperative promotion and partnerships.

All projects submitted to Market Enhancement Category A must address at least one of the following program priorities:

- 1) Increasing marketing opportunities for California Specialty crops by leveraging the California Grown Identity.
- 2) Expanding opportunities for specialty crop producers, marketing orders, and other specialty crop stakeholders through innovative marketing and promotional activities that incorporate multiple specialty crop products leveraging the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California.
- 3) Creating economic opportunities for specialty crop producers through specialty crop market development activities that focus on local, regional, institutional, and international markets by leveraging the unique qualities of specialty crops grown in California.
- 4) Emphasizing the quality, food safety, and healthy lifestyle benefits of specialty crops grown in California.

- 5) Developing environmental stewardship educational initiatives that expand the consumer marketability of California specialty crops leveraging the California Grown identity.
- 6) Promoting California grown specialty crops by highlighting California's specialty crop farmers, including farmers of color and women farmers and their contributions to California's rich agricultural history.
- 7) Supporting market opportunities for small and mid-sized farmers through regional aggregation and distribution.

Funding Area II: Access, Education, and Training

Projects in this funding area will focus on improving the competitiveness of California specialty crops through improving access to and consumption of California specialty crops, providing nutritional education for consumers in order to increase consumption, and providing training for producers and growers to equip them for current and future challenges in specialty crop agriculture.

Access, Education, and Training Category A: Healthy Specialty Crops for All Californians

In this funding category, CDFA will consider projects that improve access to and consumption of specialty crops in underserved communities and/or improve the public's knowledge and understanding of specialty crop agriculture and its beneficial importance to the health and well-being of all Californians. Projects submitted to the Healthy Specialty Crops for All Californians category should seek to improve access to and consumption of healthy, safe California specialty crops for improved nutrition and overall health.

All projects submitted to Access, Education, and Training Category A must address at least one of the following program priorities:

- 1) Education to increase specialty crop consumption through healthy eating habits.
- 2) Increasing knowledge of how to produce, prepare, or preserve specialty crops.
- 3) Increasing the awareness of and demand for locally sourced specialty crops.
- 4) Increasing the availability of specialty crops in homes, schools, the workplace, hospitals, prisons, and in other underserved communities.

- 5) Increasing specialty crop production and/or distribution capacity into underserved urban and rural communities.
- 6) Increasing consumption of healthy California specialty crops in schools by developing connections between farmers and school nutrition directors/officials that include tools and resources for building strong partnerships.

Access, Education, and Training Category B: Equity, Opportunity, and Education for All California Specialty Crop Growers

In this funding category, CDFA will consider projects that benefit current and future specialty crop farmers by providing education and training for all California specialty crop growers, including improving equity through culturally appropriate education and training for socially disadvantaged farmers in areas including business development and regulatory compliance. Projects submitted to the Equity, Opportunity, and Education for all California Specialty Crop Growers category should seek to ensure the viability of California specialty crops by investing in training for growers/producers/operators to address current and future challenges.

All projects submitted to Access, Education, and Training Category B must address at least one of the following program priorities:

- 1) Training and equipping the next generation of young, beginning, veteran, and urban socially disadvantaged farmers in agronomic, economic, and environmental stewardship skills.
- 2) Introducing and recruiting members of socially disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, including women and veterans, to the variety of specialty crop career opportunities.
- 3) Providing support to specialty crop producers in adopting the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act.
- 4) Providing training to support specialty crop producers in adopting environmentally responsible farming methods.
- 5) Creating and implementing workforce training programs to develop and maintain the technical skills required to keep the California specialty crops sector competitive.
- 6) Assisting specialty crop farmers in adapting to workplace health and safety requirements resulting from COVID-19.

- 7) Assisting specialty crop farmers in adapting to changing market conditions and uncertainty resulting from COVID-19, including partnering with organizations such as food banks to create additional market outlets for California specialty crops.

Funding Area III: Research

Projects in this funding area will focus on improving the competitiveness of California specialty crops through projects that invest in specialty crop research, including research that focuses on conservation and environmental outcomes, pest and disease control, and organic and environmentally sustainable production practices. While research may be the primary objective of projects in this funding area, all SCBGP projects are required to include an outreach component that communicates project efforts to specialty crop stakeholders. In developing the outreach component, applicants are strongly encouraged to include outreach to historically underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers.

Research Category A: Environmental Stewardship and Conservation

In this funding category, CDFA will consider projects that address specialty crop agriculture's potential to mitigate and/or adapt to climate change, contribute to conservation of agricultural land and water, and/or enhance soil health. Projects submitted to the Environmental Stewardship and Conservation category should seek to expand stewardship practices and natural resource conservation to improve the environmental and financial performance of California specialty crop growers.

All projects submitted to Research Category A must address at least one of the following program priorities:

- 1) Developing strategies and tools to enable specialty crop growers to mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon.
- 2) Developing strategies and tools to enable specialty crop growers to adapt to climate change.
- 3) Developing innovations in water use efficiency and drought resilience.
- 4) Improving soil health by identifying specific specialty crop management practices that build the soil organic matter content.
- 5) Research to develop new methods to expand organic and/or environmentally sustainable production practices.

Research Category B: Plant Health and Pest Management

In this funding category, CDFA will consider projects that address pests and diseases that affect the production of California's specialty crops. Projects submitted to the Plant Health and Pest Management category should incorporate research related to the probability and impact of invasive pest, disease, and weed threats to specialty crops, as well as research to develop tools to detect, eradicate, and control pests and diseases.

All projects submitted to Research Category B must address at least one of the following program priorities:

- 1) Developing new tools to detect, eradicate, and control pests and diseases.
- 2) Preventing and managing pests and diseases to minimize economic and environmental harm to specialty crop growers.
- 3) Enhancing speed and reliability of detection methods.
- 4) Utilizing innovative solutions to address threats, integrated pest management techniques, biologically integrated farming systems, as well as other engineering or cultural solutions.

Research Category C: Food Safety (Separate proposal solicitation)

CDFA will continue its partnership agreement with the Center for Produce Safety Foundation (CPS) to utilize the technical expertise of their grant reviewers in the area of food safety. CPS will release a separate food safety proposal solicitation.

Additional Assistance for Historically Underrepresented Organizations

The intent of this program is to provide a process through which organizations that have been historically underrepresented in the SCBGP can participate and successfully implement their SCBGP projects. Non-profit organizations and Tribal governments that have not previously received SCBGP funding, do not have technical expertise with grant writing, and who work directly in either supporting socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers of color or providing nutrition education and/or access to specialty crops in underserved communities are eligible to apply for this program. Applicants to this program will complete the same questionnaire and attachments as all other funding areas. Concept proposals selected for advancement under this process will receive assistance from CDFA to develop a full proposal for submission to USDA.

This program will provide:

- Application assistance and guidance to submit a full proposal to the program.
- One-on-one technical assistance throughout the project as needed.
- Opportunities for direct feedback and support in order to successfully implement the project.
- Networking opportunity with other grant recipients in this category to foster informal support networks among grantees.

Supporting Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Specialty Crop Farmers

In this category, CDFA will consider projects that benefit beginning and/or socially disadvantaged specialty crop farmers through education and training and increase socially disadvantaged farmer engagement with the agricultural industry. Engagement may include outreach and education to socially disadvantaged farmers to increase knowledge and participation in state, local, and federal resources.*

**note that SCBGP funds may not be used to increase participation in another state or federal grant program*

Projects should address one of the priorities in Access, Education, and Training Category B and/or at least one of the following program priorities:

- 1) Providing culturally competent and appropriate outreach and training on agronomic, economic (farm business and marketing skills), and/or

environmental stewardship skills to socially disadvantaged California specialty crop producers.

- 2) Providing training on historical or cultural solutions to plant health, conservation practices and pest management concerns.
- 3) Highlighting and encouraging awareness of culturally significant specialty crops and/or cultivation practices for farmers and/or consumers.
- 4) Developing culturally appropriate networking and training opportunities for socially disadvantaged specialty crop farmers to develop business and technical skills to enhance their specialty crop business.

Improving Specialty Crop Nutrition Education and Access for All Californians

CDFA will consider projects that improve the public's knowledge and understanding of specialty crop agriculture and its beneficial importance to the health and well-being of all Californians and/or improve access to and consumption of specialty crops in underserved communities. Projects submitted to this category should seek to improve access to and consumption of healthy and safe California specialty crops for improved nutrition and overall health.

Projects should address one of the priorities in Access, Education, and Training Category A and/or at least one of the following program priorities:

- 1) Increasing the availability of specialty crops in underserved urban and/or rural areas with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables.
- 2) Providing outreach and educational opportunities in underserved communities about growing, purchasing, and/or consuming specialty crops.

Additional Information

This program includes the following additional restrictions:

- Individuals; for-profit organizations; local, state, and Federal government entities; and public or private colleges and universities are not eligible to apply.
- Organizations that have submitted concept proposals under other funding categories for the 2021 SCBGP are not eligible to apply.

- Projects cannot request funding that exceeds \$100,000 and must be for at least \$25,000.
- Projects cannot have a timeframe that exceeds two years.
- Applicants to this program may submit no more than one proposal.

Public Comments

CDFA is seeking to ensure that the proposed program priorities best meet the current needs of California’s specialty crop industry. Comments from specialty crop stakeholders regarding the proposed program priorities are strongly encouraged.

Interested parties may attend a public listening session and/or submit comments to grants@cdfa.ca.gov beginning August 17, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. until August 31, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. For the health and safety of all, listening sessions will be held via webinar only. To register for one of the listening sessions, please email grants@cdfa.ca.gov. Public comments received will be published, unedited, on the [CDFA SCBGP website](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/SCBGP) (www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) and will be considered in the development of final program priorities for 2021.

Listening Session Schedule

Event	Date/Time
Webinar 1	August 20, 2020 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. PDT
Webinar 2	August 26, 2020 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. PDT

2021 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Timeline

Schedule for Phase I: Concept Proposal

Schedule	Date
Release Request for Concept Proposals (RFCP)	September 2020
Workshops and webinars	September - October 2020
Concept proposals due	October 2020

Schedule for Phase II: Grant Proposal (by invitation only)

Schedule	Date
Invitation to submit grant proposals	January 2021
Grant proposals due	February 2021
Grant proposals to USDA for approval	May 2021

Schedule for Awards

Schedule	Date
Announce and award funding	Fall 2021