

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IDOA NOW ACCEPTING SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROPOSALS

Applications for funds are due March 22, 2024

SPRINGFIELD, IL – In an effort to expand the availability of fresh, locally-grown produce and strengthen the competitiveness of the state’s specialty crop industry, the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) plans to distribute more than \$545,000 over a three-year period thanks to funding allocated in the Specialty Crop Block Grant program in the federal Farm Bill.

Application for grant funding is available on the IDOA website and must be returned to the Department by 11:59 pm on March 22, 2024. To be eligible for funding, all projects must begin in calendar year 2025.

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, local and government entities, trade and commodity associations, public and private colleges/universities. Illinois encourages applications that benefit smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities.

To encourage further expansion of this industry, and to take full advantage of the allocated federal funds, the Department invites the development of 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, for example, by developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good Manufacturing Practices,” and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors.
- Investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes.
- Supporting the growth of organic specialty crops.

- Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops.
- Improving pest and disease control.
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops.
- Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems.

Projects that benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual are ineligible. Farmers' markets, roadside stands and community-sponsored agriculture programs should consider submitting proposals to the USDA's Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service defines specialty crops as "fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture)." There are more than 3,200 producers devoting more than 90,000 acres of Illinois farmland to specialty crops production, creating nearly \$500 million in annual sales for Illinois farmers. Nationally, Illinois ranks first for its pumpkin and horseradish production and in the top 10 for the production of asparagus, cauliflower, fresh-cut herbs, peas, mustard greens and lima beans.

Additional information about the program can be found online at the Department's website or by contacting AGR.ISCBG@illinois.gov. Applications must be submitted to the Department no later than 11:59 p.m., March 24, 2024.

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