

Maine SCBGP
RFA#: ARD.SCBGP.2027
Information Session and Written Questions
Questions and Answer Summary

Specialty Crop Definition Questions

Q. What is the definition of specialty crops?

A. The definition and a list can be found at the [USDA Specialty Crop website](#)

Q. Is seaweed considered a specialty crop for the purposes of this program?

A. No

Q. Are there any crops or anything that you are looking at from a scoring perspective that you're putting more of a focus on?

A. All eligible Maine specialty crops will be looked at equally. There is not priority scoring for any specific crops.

Q. Eligible crops: Are cultivated gourmet mushrooms (such as oyster and lion's mane) an eligible specialty crop under the "Other, please specify" sector? Are value-added products made mainly from non-specialty crop ingredients, such as bread, excluded, even when sold alongside specialty crops?

A. Culinary mushrooms such as oyster and lion's mane are eligible specialty crops. Value-added items that are not made primarily from specialty crops must not be included in the project.

General Application and Timeline Questions

Q. Do I understand correctly that only 2 awards will be made?

A. DACF anticipates awarding 1-6 grants and up to \$600,000 through this RFA process.

Q. What proportion of those invited to submit full proposals in 2026 were awarded?

A. Approximately 75% of applicants invited to the 2026 SCBGP Phase 2 were awarded a contract.

Q. For each part of the grant application, are there word counts we need to keep in mind when filling out the application?

A. There is no word count, but you should be clear and concise with your responses.

Q. Do the online Phase I answers have character or word limits? Can the form be saved and finished later before submission?

A. There is no character or word limit, but keep in mind that most questions ask that you be clear and concise. The form will save as long as it remains open. Once the form is closed, there is no way of recovering any information. Applicants are HIGHLY encouraged to save a copy of the application questions in a word processing software program first, then copy and paste their answers into the online application.

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Q. Could you share the dates for submission for phase 1?

A. Phase I grant proposals are due October 30, 2026, by 12:00 p.m., Eastern Time

Q. When might Phase II applications be due?

A. It's anticipated that Phase II applications will be due toward the end of May 2027.

Q. UEI/SAM.gov: Does the applicant need an active UEI or SAM.gov registration by the Phase 1 deadline, or only at Phase 2 or contracting?

A. A UEI needs to be active during Phase 2, before a project can be submitted to the USDA for their review and consideration.

Q. Could the project time frame be shorter than two years?

A. Yes

Q. There is no attachment in Phase 1?

A. Correct, only the application needs to be completed.

Q. What is the difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2?

A. In Phase 1, applicants will describe an overview of the project. In Phase 2, applicants will need to fully describe the details, fine-tune answers, provide measurable outcomes and data projections, and best align their projects with full USDA requirements.

Eligible Applicant Questions

Q. To be a qualified applicant, do you have to be headquartered in the state of Maine?

A. No. However, the Department and/or the USDA may prioritize approval of projects that are lead by applicant entities headquartered in Maine in 2027 SCBGP Phase 2.

Q. Could you please confirm whether an out-of-state public university, is eligible to serve as the lead applicant if the project directly benefits multiple Maine specialty-crop growers and processors? I would also appreciate any specific requirements for out-of-state applicants or Maine-based project partners.

A. Out-of-state entities are eligible to submit a 2027 SCBGP Phase 1 application. However, the Department and/or the USDA may prioritize approval of projects that are lead by applicant entities headquartered in Maine in 2027 SCBGP Phase 2.

Phase 1 will score applications on a variety of factors including:

- benefit to the Maine specialty crop sector and multiple Maine specialty crop producers;
- the likelihood of influencing the competitiveness of one or more Maine specialty crops;

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- how the selected priority area, focus area, and overall project will enhance the competitiveness of Maine-grown specialty crops;
- how clearly the proposal identifies the Maine specialty crop producers who will directly benefit from the project; and
- how clearly the proposal identifies the Maine specialty crop stakeholders who may benefit from the project outcomes;

Phase 1 applicants must identify and describe any organizations, businesses, agencies, producers, educational institutions, community groups, and/or other partners that have committed to supporting the project. Applicants must describe each partner's specific contribution, such as staff time, expertise, facilities, outreach, technical assistance, funding, or other resources and must distinguish between partners that have formally committed to the project and organizations that are only being considered or approached. There are no specific additional requirements for out-of-state project partners. Scoring will be based on how clearly the proposal identifies committed project partners and describes their specific roles, contributions, expertise, or resources.

Q. Would a for-profit company be eligible to apply?

A. Yes

Non-profit and for-profit organizations; local, state, and federal government entities, including Tribal governments (federally and nonfederally recognized); and public or private colleges and universities are eligible to apply. Individuals are not eligible to apply. One applicant entity will not be selected to receive more than 30% of the total amount awarded.

Q. The RFA says individuals aren't eligible. Is an unincorporated sole-proprietor farm business eligible to apply? If I form an LLC after submitting Phase I, can the LLC be the applicant for Phase II and the contract, given that the Phase II applicant must be the same as the Phase I applicant?

A. A sole proprietor is eligible to apply. However, projects that primarily benefit a single business or that business's product, organization, or proprietor will not be funded.

Q. Can a sole proprietor apply?

A. Yes

Q. Is there a limit on the number of proposals that one Project Lead/Principal Investigator can submit?

A. No

Q. If a PI currently has an ongoing project funded through this program, would that affect their eligibility to apply for additional funding?

A. No, a PI having a current or prior project does not exclude the organization's ability to submit a 2027 SCBGP Phase 1 application with the same Project Manager/Principal Investigator. However, duplicative projects are not allowable.

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In 2027 SCBGP Phase 1, applicants must clearly and succinctly describe how their proposed new project is unique from other programs, projects, or initiatives and does not duplicate existing efforts to resolve the stated problem. Applicants must demonstrate that grant funds will not duplicate activities or services already available.

In 2027 SCBGP Phase 2, the Department and/or the USDA may prioritize approval of projects that are not similar to prior SCBGP awarded projects in order to diversify the projects and/or the specialty crops benefiting from the program.

Q. We are a farm that organizes an event that showcases what can be done with locally produced cut flowers for event design through an event that showcases multiple designers/farms and cut flowers suppliers. All from Maine. If the event does not have its own entity, should we apply as our own farm?

A. Yes, the applicant should be the lead project organizer.

Q. Can multiple farm businesses apply together even if they aren't a part of a legal entity together?

A. Yes, but one entity will need to be named the primary.

Q. Could you please confirm whether an individual producer may serve as the applicant/project lead for a project structured to benefit the broader Maine cut-flower industry, and whether a startup producer is eligible?

A. Individual producers may serve as the project lead. Startup producers are eligible. However, up to five points will be based on how the proposal demonstrates a solid understanding of how the organization's background will prepare them for success in the proposed work

Q. Multiple producers: Is there a minimum number of participating farms or producers needed to show "benefit to multiple producers"? Do the partners in Question 12 have to be formally committed by the Phase I deadline, or can some still be under discussion?

A. Phase 1 applicants must identify and describe project partners and must distinguish between partners that have formally committed to the project and organizations that are only being considered or approached. Scoring will be based on how clearly the proposal identifies committed project partners and describes their specific roles, contributions, expertise, or resources.

Allowable Costs and Budget Questions

Q. Are indirect cost allowed?

A. No, indirect costs are not allowed.

Q. Matching Funds: If the USDA requires a possible 25% match, will it be calculated on the grant request or on the total project cost? Can the match be in-kind (for example, volunteer or partner-farm labor, or donated use of a farm site for demonstrations)? Should the Phase I budget show the match?

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- A. The Phase 1 application does not require a matching funds budget or description. We do not have guidance from the USDA on this yet. The requirement for matching funds, if any, will be clarified prior to the request for Phase 2 project proposals. Matching funds are typically calculated on total project cost and often may include the value of project specific personnel, services, and direct and indirect costs. Here is an example of what a 25% match requirement might look like:

Description	Amount
Project A	
Total Project Cost	\$133,333.33
Federal Funds Awarded	\$100,000.00
Matching Funds Required	\$33,333.33
Project B	
Total Project Cost	\$125,000.00
Federal Funds Awarded	\$93,750.00
Matching Funds Required	\$31,250.00

Q. Marketing: The RFA says marketing and advertising aren't considered a benefit to producers, but "Leverage efforts to market and promote specialty crops" is a focus area. Could you clarify what kind of marketing or market-development activity is acceptable, such as a shared buy-local campaign promoting several farms' specialty crops?

A. All projects must have a benefit to multiple Maine specialty crop producers. Marketing and advertising activities may not be considered as the way to share project results and lessons learned to Maine's specialty crop producers to fulfill the benefit requirement.

Marketing and advertising activities are allowable to influence consumer behavior associated with a specific specialty crop(s).

The [USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions](#), starting on page 19, provide additional details on what marketing costs are allowable and unallowable.

Q. Allowable costs for shared activities: Are these allowable for a multi-farm training or demonstration project: workshop venue rental, instructor or consultant fees (contractual), consumable supplies used in demonstrations (such as substrate or spawn), participant travel, and printed educational materials? The RFA lists facility rent as an unallowable indirect cost. Is short-term venue rental for a specific project event treated differently?

A. Workshop venue rental, contractual instructor or consultant fees, consumable supplies, participant travel, and printed educational materials are allowable if they are necessary expenses directly related to an approved project. Additional information on allowable and unallowable costs and activities can be found starting on page 11 of the [USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

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Q. Could you please confirm whether the direct acquisition of specialized beekeeping equipment, which is indispensable for the execution of the research activities, qualifies as an allowable project expense under your guidelines?

A. Equipment is not an allowable expense. Supplies are allowable expenses if directly necessary for the project. Supplies must have a per-unit acquisition cost of less than \$10,000.

Q. In the event that the direct purchase of such equipment is not permissible, I would appreciate clarification on whether it would be possible for the project to rent essential equipment that is personally owned by the applicant.

A. Rental expenses that are directly necessary for the project are allowable. Rental and lease agreements must terminate at the end of the grant award contract.

Q. Given the extensive operational demands, including the placement, meticulous maintenance, ongoing monitoring, transportation, and precise data collection from the research colonies, can the applicant's labor dedicated to these critical tasks be included as an allowable project expense?

A. Labor directly associated with an approved project is considered a personnel cost and would be an allowable expense.

Q. If this grant-funded equipment remains within the state of Maine and continues to be utilized for agricultural research or for purposes that directly benefit Maine's specialty crop growers post-project, are there specific conditions or requirements that govern its ongoing ownership and utilization?

Equipment is not an allowable expense.

Recipients or subrecipients with a remaining inventory of unused (new and unopened) supplies with an aggregated value of greater than \$10,000 at the end of the contract must either use the unused supplies for another approved federal project or compensate the USDA for the supplies that were purchased but unused for the SCBGP project.