

2020 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT APPLICATION

Name of Organization:

Department:

Address:

Ste./Floor:

City:

County:

State:

Zip:

Federal Tax ID#:

DUNNS #:

Is your organization registered with the IRS as a 501(c)3?

Yes

No

Grant Management Contact Name:

Phone#:

Fax#:

Email:

Project Coord. Contact Name:

Same as above

Phone #:

Fax#:

Email:

Start & End Dates:

Project Title (15 words or less):

Total Project Cost:

Grant Amt. Requested:

Match Amt.:

Match Type:

Certification: I certify to the best of my knowledge that the information in this application is true and correct and that I am legally authorized to sign and submit this application on behalf of this organization, which is legally eligible to enter into a grant contract.

Yes

No

Initials:

Date:

Return application with all attachments to: Ashley.McDonald@agri.ohio.gov
Applications are due by 5pm EST on Thursday, April 30.

NOTE: Save the application as a Word document as you will be required to submit a Word document to ODA if your project is approved.

Project Partner and Summary: Include a summary of **250 words or less** suitable for dissemination to the public. The summary provides a very brief (one sentence, if possible) description of your project to include: 1. *The name of applicant to lead and execute the project;* 2. *concise outline of the outcome(s);* 3. *Description of general tasks completed during the project period to fulfill the goal.*

For example: The ABC University will mitigate the spread of citrus greening (Huanglongbing) by developing scientifically-based practical measures to implement in a quarantine area and disseminating results to stakeholders through grower meetings and field days.

The Maumee Valley Growers Association (MVGA) seeks to implement a "Plant Something" campaign by testing unique generational purchasing habits of floriculture customers in ten retail greenhouse/garden centers in Ohio.

The floriculture industry generates over \$100,000,000 in revenue in NW Ohio. Exploring how decisions are made to purchase these specialty crops (flowers) is essential to the sustainability of this industry. The "Plant Something" program <http://plant-something.org/> was introduced by the Arizona Nursery Association several years ago to promote the value of specialty crops. MVGA will model that initiative and create greater awareness and education throughout the NW Ohio's region by encouraging private and public awareness of the health, environmental and economic benefits of floriculture.

The typical shopper in the greenhouse industry is primarily female between the age of 40-65 who prefer to visit the greenhouse(s) for purchases. Other generations use social media or websites to research their purchases first then travel to the greenhouse to make their selections. Recently, because of the coronavirus challenges, shopping, and paying online spiked. In response, some growers added a new curbside pickup service for pre-sold items. Many growers did not have this capacity to accept purchases online, and it put them to a disadvantage.

Pew Research and others recently released insightful information listing how different generations of shoppers make purchases. MVGA will use the "Plant Something" program as a marketing platform to explore those buying habits. The intent is to implement the study recommendations to increase specialty crop sales through a broader customer base.

Project Purpose: Provide the specific issue, problem or need that the project will address. (3000 characters with spaces; following page 4000 characters)

In recent years, generational purchasing habits have become more pronounced. Yet, the floriculture industry hasn't changed much, noting that the majority of their customers are female aged 40-65, also reflective of its marketing. This study will examine and implement promotional strategies to expand the industry's competitive edge to other demographic sectors.

The Pew Research Center conducted several generational studies over the years addressing public attitudes on key issues across various demographic groups. Two recent studies in 2019 entitled "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins" and "Millennials stand out for their technology use, but older generations also embrace digital life" continue to look at how different formative experiences (world events and technological, economic, and social shifts) interact with the life-cycle and aging process to shape people's views of the world.

- The Silent Generation: Born 1928-1945 (73-90 years old)
- Baby Boomers: Born 1946-1964 (54-72 years old)
- Generation X: Born 1965-1980 (38-53 years old)
- Millennials: Born 1981-1996 (22-37 years old). There are 83.1 million Millennials in the United States, making them the largest generation in the country's history.
- Post-Millennials: Born 1997-Present (0-21 years old)

Like many Ohio industries, the floriculture industry is facing increasing competition from big-box suppliers and even international competition, in particular, competition from southern Ontario. Pricing and buying impulses need to be better understood across all age groups.

Yet despite these challenges, northwest Ohio's greenhouse industry ranks 4th in the state and 94th in the nation in terms of the dollar value of nursery and greenhouse crops sold. This translates to the top 4% nationally and impacts over 750 local jobs.

This presents a valuable opportunity for new marketing and promotional strategies. MVGA will engage ten retail greenhouse/garden centers to study these challenges in more detail. Confined within a geographic area can compete more effectively when everyone in the region works together to the collective benefit of all stakeholders .

The industry is primarily made up of multi-generational family businesses that, for decades, have developed a symbiotic relationship within their communities. The industry can claim that over 52% of existing greenhouse operations continue to do business at the same location for more than forty decades. Today, however, their livelihood is at risk. Escalating utility costs, increased government mandates, shortages of seasonal help, expensive workers compensation insurance, and changing customer buying habits have gradually squeezed the floriculture industry to the tipping point. More and more, we see children and grandchildren of our most stalwart growers jumping ship and starting new and unrelated careers. For those who remain...staying status quo frequently represents a step backward.

The industry must expand its customer outreach to different age groups and genders to remain competitive. It also must be a grower initiative. One business challenge may likely be another company's solution. MVGA is able to bring greenhouses together and freely share experiences with members and other industry leaders.

This collective, ground-support, and buy-in is important in implementing long-term sustainable practices. MVGA will share these best practices so each grower can decide which marketing strategies make the most sense for their operation.

The grant will enable collaboration of ten retail floriculture greenhouse operations over two years to test several sales and promotion strategies specific to new targeted demographic buyers. This interaction should encourage participants to take this initiative seriously and ensure reliable findings to ultimately maximize profitability and competitiveness.

MVGA will survey customers and grower participants to confirm their perspective of best practices.

Marketing recommendations within a region will be systematic and gradual. MVGA anticipates new opportunities will be created. It will be planned in stages to identify specific areas of testing accurately. If proven successful, it could provide the blueprint for other retail growers to replicate.

Data acquired from the grant focuses on the floriculture industry. These are greenhouses that concentrate on specialty crop items such as cultivated greens, potted flowering, foliage plants, and flower seeds. This includes inventory grown both undercover and in open fields. The study will provide information in both urban and rural greenhouse locations.

The discovery of new niche marketing opportunities is anticipated. Nearly 750 employees and their families in the northwest Ohio region are depending on that.

Project Purpose: Provide a listing of the objectives that this project hopes to achieve. *Indicate each objective by numbering them as follows: Objective 1; Objective 2 and so on. (4000 characters w/spaces; following page 3000 characters)*

Objective 1: Increase Specialty Crop Sales

- MVGA will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased sales.

Objective 2: Use social media to market and promote

- Expand MVGA's current Facebook program to its members and expand "pushes".
- Set up Instagram and Pinterest social media sites.

Objective 3: Website promotion and development

- A new drop-down category on the MVGA Home page will be added specific to specialty crop promotion, value, and benefits.

Objective 4: Retail promotions

- Identify generational purchasing habits.
- Examination of several point-of-purchase display strategies, labeling, and creative packaging to match generational buying interests.
- Promote hand-held devices that will allow purchases throughout the retail facility or at remote locations.

Objective 5: Schedule marketing and promotion campaigns with an education component

- Educational workshops will target both growers and consumers.
- Each session will be filmed, edited, and made available for YouTube distribution.
- The Ohio Proud logo will be associated with all floriculture promotions

Project Beneficiaries: Estimate the number of beneficiaries. *Does this project directly benefit socially disadvantaged farmers as defined in the RFA? Yes or No*

Does this project directly benefit beginning farmers as defined in the RFA? Yes or No

47 MVGA farmers will benefit from the grant including 1 beginning farmer. None socially disadvantaged.

Statement of Solely Enhancing Specialty Crops: Please make a statement below confirming this project **solely** enhances the competitiveness of specialty crops in accordance with the defined by 7 U.S.C.1621. Further information regarding the definition of a specialty crop can be found at www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgrp

This project solely enhances the competitiveness of specialty crops in accordance with the defined section of the Federal Register 7U.S.C1621.

Continuation Project Information: If your project is continuing the efforts of a previously funded SCBG project, address the following:

Describe how this project will differ from and build on the previous efforts. (2500 characters w/spaces)

[Empty text box for continuation project information]

Continuation Project Information: Provide a summary (3-5 sentences) of the outcomes of the previous efforts.

Continuation Project Information: Provide lessons learned on potential project improvements.

What was previously learned from implementing this project, including potential improvements?

How are the lessons learned and improvements being incorporated into the project to make the ongoing project more effective and successful at meeting goals and outcomes? (3000 characters with spaces; 1500 on the next page)

Continuation Project Information: Describe the likelihood of the project becoming self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent on grant funds. (2000 characters with spaces)

Support from Federal or State Grant Programs: The SCBGP will not fund duplicate projects. *Please indicate below if you submitted this project to a Federal or State grant program (name specific grant) other than the SCBG. Is a Federal or State grant program other than the SCBG currently funding the **project**? If yes, please name the grant and describe how the SCBG project differs from or supplements the other grant program's efforts.*

N/A:

MVGA has not, and will not submit this project for any Federal or State grant program other than this 2020 SCBGP application.

External Project Support: Describe the specialty crop stakeholders who will support this project and why (other than the applicant and organizations involved in the project). (1450 characters with spaces)

MVGA was born from a 2003 White Paper written by faculty members representing the University of Toledo and Bowling Green State University. It was to identify solutions to commonly shared problems within the greenhouse floriculture industry which was in a state of decline. Both Universities, Owens Community College, OSU Extension Agency and the USDA's ARS remain strong supporters of the Association. MVGA remains committed to sustaining and growing the local economy both through floriculture and during the last four years expanding its operations by opening up a new division focusing on small farmers and local produce (vegetables) production. The university's support was especially positive knowing MVGA has diversified its outreach to include specialty crops.

Through the "Buy Local" Initiative, there remains strong political support offered by Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, all three Lucas County Commissioners, the Mayor's Office Toledo. MVGA provides an

Expected Measurable Outcomes: Select the appropriate outcomes and indicators/sub-indicators below. (You must choose at least **1 of the 8** outcomes listed below to evaluate the performance of the SCBG project on a national level.) The Expected Measurable Outcomes and Outcome Indicators are also listed in the SCBGP Performance Measures which is attached to the RFP. (1500 characters with spaces; following page 5000 characters)

Outcome 1: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased sales. (Required for all marketing projects.)

Outcome 2: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased consumption.

Outcome 3: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased access.

Outcome 4: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through greater capacity of sustainable practices of specialty crop production resulting in increased yield, reduced inputs, increased efficiency, increased economic return and/or conservation of resources.

Outcome 5: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through more sustainable, diverse and resilient specialty crop systems.

Outcome 6: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increasing the number of viable technologies to improve food safety.

Outcome 7: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased understanding of the ecology of threats to food safety from microbial and chemical sources.

Outcome 8: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through enhancing or improving the economy as a result of specialty crop development.

Outcome Indicators: Provide at least 1 Indicator under the corresponding Measurable Outcome along with the related quantifiable result. These are listed in the SCBGP Performance Measures which is attached to the RFP. If you have multiple outcomes and/or indicators, repeat this for each outcome/indicator.

For Example: **Outcome 2, Indicator 1.a.**

Of the 150 total number of children and youth reached, 132 will gain knowledge about eating more specialty crops.

Outcome 1: Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased sales.

• Indicator 1a: Specialty Crop Sales

Ten participating retail greenhouse growers provided MVGA with each of their gross retail sales specific to floriculture specialty crops only. Those ten locations were collectively added to become our starting gross sales base of \$4,416,105. MVGA anticipates that in year 1 the \$4,416,105 sales will increase to \$4,857,715 representing about a 10% percent increase as result of marketing and/or promotion activities implemented through the "Plant Something" campaign.

MVGA also anticipates a similar increase of at least 10%-20% in year #2 at the conclusion of the grant period.

• Indicator 1b – Social Media

The number of retail growers participating in MVGA 's Facebook social media program increased from 8 members to _____

The number of retail growers participating in MVGA 's Instagram social media program increased from 0 members to _____

The number of retail growers participating in MVGA 's Pinterest social media program increased from 0 members to _____

• Indicator 1c: Website Promotion and Development

MVGA added a new drop-down category on the Home page, specifically promoting specialty crops

Yes _____ No _____

• Indicator 1d: Retail promotions include several point-of-purchase display strategies, labeling, and creative signage to encourage generational interest

Retail stores accepting credit cards Start of Grant _____ After Year 1 _____ After Year 2 _____

Retail stores providing online purchases Start of Grant _____ After Year 1 _____ After Year 2 _____

Retail stores providing drop-off services Start of Grant _____ After Year 1 _____ After Year 2 _____

Retail stores providing remote hand-held POS Start of Grant _____ After Year 1 _____ After Year 2 _____

• Indicator 1e: Marketing and promotion workshops with an education component directed to consumers including the use of the Ohio Proud Logo.

Date Scheduled:

| | | |
|--|----------------|------------|
| Winter Workshop | Jan 2021 _____ | 2022 _____ |
| OSU Reloaded | Feb 2021 _____ | 2022 _____ |
| Retail Roundtable | Mar 2021 _____ | 2022 _____ |
| Home/Garden Shows (public event) | Mar 2021 _____ | 2022 _____ |
| Owen Community College (public event) | Apr 2021 _____ | 2022 _____ |
| Greenhouse Garden Ctr. Tour (public event) | Jun 2021 _____ | 2022 _____ |
| Municipal & Neighborhood Flower Donations (public event) | Jun 2021 _____ | 2022 _____ |

Miscellaneous Outcome Measure: In the unlikely event that the outcomes and indicators suggested by AMS are not relevant to your project, you must develop a project-specific outcome(s) and indicator(s) which will be subject to approval by AMS. *(5000 characters with spaces)*

N/A

Data Collection to Report on Outcomes and Indicators: Explain how you will collect the required data to report on the outcome and indicator in the space below. (5000 characters with spaces)

Outcome 1:

- Indicator 1a: Specialty Crop Sales

Setting benchmarks before the grant begins is critical to measuring the effectiveness of our marketing and promotional sales strategies and implementation. MVGA has established a composite baseline of \$ 4,416,105 in gross retail sales between the initial 10 greenhouse collaborators. This baseline will be reviewed frequently for real-time progress with a critical annual review for analysis annually.

Stimulating new customer sales takes time, creativity, and repeated messaging, so having two full seasons to promote the programs is needed to create meaningful evaluations and recommendations.

Although growth potential is hard to predict, we do know that the industry currently caters primarily to the 40-65-year-old female shopper. That leaves a lot of opportunities to test and influence other generational buying characteristics within our floriculture industry. If MVGA can change just 2 out of 10 new floriculture shoppers, that could conservatively raise sales 10-20%. Sales increases (if any) will be factored into comparisons.

- Indicator 1b: Social Media

All participating growers will be encouraged to use social media, including cross-promoting and even paying for pushes. Counting grower participants is straightforward.

- Indicator 1c: Website Promotion and Development

MVGA will add a new drop-down category on the Home page, specifically promoting specialty crops during the first quarter of the grant. <https://www.maumeevalleygrowers.com/>

- Indicator 1d: Retail promotions include several point-of-purchase display strategies, labeling, and creative signage to encourage generational interest

MVGA will identify and record the usage of credit cards, online capabilities, drop-off services, labeling, signage, and any remote POS systems, etc. that are in place at the start of the grant period. Comments on their functionality will be compared with strategies of best practices recommended to all those participating.

- Indicator 1e: Marketing and promotion workshops with an education component directed to consumers, including the use of the Ohio Proud Logo.

All workshops will be scheduled in the 4th quarter before the following year to best promote the events. Board minutes will reflect the completion and locations of each function.