



**OREGON  
DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE**

## Specialty Crop Block Grant Program 2024 Program Summaries

As prepared by  
Natural Resources Program Area Smoke Management Program  
635 Capitol Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-6473  
[oda.direct/scbqp](https://oda.direct/scbqp)

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## 2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Project Summaries

Prepared By:

The Oregon Department of Agriculture Market Access and Certification Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

### 1. Introduction

This summary is prepared annually by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) to provide the summaries of the funded projects.

### 2. Project Summaries

#### 1. Oregon Department of Agriculture

Title: Expanded Support for Areawide Biocontrol of Brown Marmorated Stink Bug

Amount: \$164,363

ODA Insect Pest Prevention and Management and OSU Extension Hood River will expand access to biological control for brown marmorated stink bug (*Halyomorpha halys*), an invasive pest of specialty crops (hazelnuts, apples, pears, cherries, beans, and more). Stink bug feeding damages the developing fruit, nuts and vegetables, preventing growth and destroying the marketability. We will do this by mass-rearing its natural enemy the Samurai Wasp (*Trissolcus japonicus*), providing growers with beneficial insect releases, and monitoring the wasps success at reducing pest pressure.

#### 2. Adalente Mujeres

Title: Expanding Capacity Building Development for Latine Specialty Crop Farmers

Amount: \$175,520

Adelante, will establish a contractual relationship with the State Department of Agriculture to lead and execute this project. Adelante and its key partners (Regional, Higher Education, and Local Non-profits) will collaborate to sustain and expand capacity building training for Latine specialty crop growers in rural Washington County, Oregon.

During the grant period, we will support our current Latine specialty crop-grower capacity

building through education, training, and market access opportunities while expanding our programming and capacity to meet the needs of the Specialty Crop Industry.

Adelante will achieve the following outcomes:

- 8 Regenerative Agriculture Courses and 20 workshops provided.
- 8-10 growers with access to land.
- 300 Coaching Hours.
- 4 Market Access Opportunities
- 1 Distributor-CSA Program Analysis

We will achieve the above outcomes through the following activities:

- Provide culturally specific training to Latine growers on regenerative growing practices and farm business development through courses and workshops.
- Provide course graduates and alumni with access to farmland in Gaston to cultivate specialty crops through regenerative agriculture methods.
- Provide 1:1 technical assistance to Farm Businesses (new and sustained) to support their growth and reduce barriers to sustainability (address regulatory burdens, marketing, access to markets, investments in value-added products).
- Provide numerous market access opportunities through farmers markets and provider contracts.
- Develop an analysis for program expansion through the creation of a Distributor-CSA program.

With Adelante's 21-year track record as a culturally specific organization, supporting our specialty crop grower community, our staff is prepared to work with each participant to determine if a grower's qualifications.

### 3. Black Food Sovereignty Coalition

Title: Black Community Food and Engagement Evaluation Program

Amount: \$172,339

Black Food Sovereignty Coalition will expand our farm based experiential learning

opportunities through community-led events at Black Futures Farm in order to promote the awareness, consumption, and value of Oregon Specialty Crops in Black communities. Additionally, these programs will serve as vehicles in curating evaluation mechanisms to develop a standardized feedback toolkit for our partners who execute culturally specific agricultural activities with Oregon Specialty Crops in our local and regional food systems network.

#### 4. High Desert Partnership

Title: Developing Harney County's agricultural market and economy for underserved residents.

Amount: \$111,128

High Desert Partnership will serve as the applicant organization that convenes the Biz Harney Opportunity Collaborative Food Systems Committee. This committee of diverse partners are dedicated to building food security in Harney County by growing Harney County's agricultural market and local economy through the production of specialty crops, including direct business development for producers, establishing and operating a farmers market, advertising for local food businesses, and more.

#### 5. Northwest Cider Association

Title: Oregon Craft Cider Market Development and Access through the NW Cider Symposium

Amount: \$174,680

The Northwest Cider Association (NWCA) is the applicant and will execute this project to address market development and access issues that will benefit up to 80 Oregon cideries and 200 specialty crop producers who supply them. Craft, alcoholic ciders are value-added products that utilize Oregon farmers' supplies of apples, grapes, cane berries, stone fruit, cranberries, hops and botanical herbs.

The NW Cider Symposium is the only place in our region where cidemakers can go annually to get access to current market information and research, network with others across the industry, and build their skills to effectively produce, market, and sell high-quality products. The objective of this project is to enhance the competitiveness of the Oregon cider industry by expanding the existing 2025 and 2026 NW Cider Symposiums and panels to include

Oregon-specific content and attendees.

Activities to accomplish this objective include creating a culinary track to pair craft ciders with other Oregon specialty crops such as hazelnuts and marionberries. We will also create and disseminate content on Oregon-specific research, regulatory compliance, tourism, and collective marketing and sales. The proposed project approach, objective, and activities were developed through a rigorous, industry-driven process designed to drive immediate and long-term sales.

## 6. Oregon Raspberry and Blackberry Commission

Title: Buyer Research and Market Development for Oregon Caneberries and Strawberries

Amount: \$121,002

The Oregon Raspberry & Blackberry Commission, partnering with the Oregon Strawberry Commission, proposes to engage with retail, food service and manufacturing buyers of frozen Oregon berries for a three-part grant proposal in 2025. The first phase of the project will execute market research to determine current buyer attitudes and perceptions of Oregon berries. This research will help the industry pinpoint the priorities and potential obstacles when buyers are choosing frozen fruit from Oregon or other growing regions in the current economic market. Market research results will be a guide towards meeting the expectations and concerns of buyers, in order to increase sales of Oregon berries as a premium product.

The results will inform the second phase of the project, a buyer field/processing tour and focus on the identified top priorities from the market research phase of the project. Tours and presentations at other facilities such as the North Willamette Research & Extension Center breeding program and the Oregon State University Food Innovation Center will further enhance buyer's understanding of processed Oregon berries.

Bringing buyers directly to Oregon farms to have one-on-one conversations with growers has proven to be the best way to showcase the industry and is a specific request made by growers.

The project will conclude with fall workshops of growers, processors, and USDA/ARS/OSU personnel, taking the market research and feedback from the tour to develop strategic plans for the industry moving forward. The strategic planning would include production research, food safety, consumer marketing, education, and international development

## 7. Oregon State University – PI – Buckland

Title: Technology to reduce and improve pesticide use in vegetable and seed production

Amount: \$174,931

Fresh vegetable and vegetable seed production, spanning 70,000 acres and valued over \$186 million in 2020, are critical sectors of Oregon's agriculture. However, weed control presents significant challenges, potentially reducing fresh vegetable yields by up to 37%. Current practices rely on labor-intensive hand weeding, costing \$200-300 per acre due to limited alternative management techniques. Precision agriculture, characterized by technological advancements like sensors, GPS technology, and data analytics, offers promising solutions to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

To meet the demand for more resilient production, this project examines the adoption of robotics and aerial drone technologies. The FarmDroid, an autonomous planting and weeding robot utilizing real-time kinematic GPS, offers a revolution for conventional farming practices. Powered by solar energy, Farmdroid's net-zero carbon footprint makes it suitable for Oregon's fresh market vegetable growing season. Additionally, drone technology advancements provide on-farm services such as pesticide spray applications, plant health scouting, and irrigation management, addressing the unique challenges of Oregon's diverse and smaller acreage farms.

Despite the benefits, grower adoption of advanced technology faces challenges like initial costs, implementation, and concerns about data privacy. Oregon State University aims to evaluate the FarmDroid efficacy at reducing weeds as well as the efficacy of aerial application of fungicides to reduce disease in fresh vegetable and vegetable seed production. Research plots will assess and validate the system and provide evidence-based insights to mitigate risks for growers. These findings will be disseminated at grower field days and industry meetings, facilitating informed decision-making and strengthening Oregon's agricultural sustainability and competitiveness.

## 8. Oregon State University – PI – Lightle

Title: Reducing regulatory burden from Endangered Species Act label implementation

Amount: \$172,304

Oregon State University and Compliance Services International will develop a project that addresses the issue of grower and pesticide applicator compliance with US Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA) requirements enacted for protection of threatened and endangered species. This project will work with Oregon specialty crop pesticide users to reduce the current burden of navigating FIFRA Endangered Species Act mitigations. We will 1) leverage Oregon stakeholder collaborations to define implementation needs and requirements, 2) develop a program that will streamline Endangered Species Act mitigation requirements, 3) create references for applicators and producers to use to aid in compliance, and 4) provide workshops with hands-on training to navigate and demonstrate compliance with Endangered Species Act mitigations.

## 9. Oregon State University – PI – Qin

Title: Evaluating Soil Fumigation and Cover Crops in Potato Fields

Amount: \$175,000

Researchers at the Oregon State University-Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension (OSU-HAREC) will lead and execute this project. The Columbia Basin is one of the most important potato production regions. Growers often use soil fumigation practices to eliminate potential pest issues. However, it is not clear how soil fumigation, especially various fumigant compounds, such as metam sodium, Telone, and chloropicrin impacts soil health and crop production, while they eliminate soilborne diseases and nematodes. Over the years, growers have used cover crops such as mustard and wheat as bio-fumigants and/or for soil health improvements, but the benefits of the cover crops in potato fields are not quantified. Particularly, little information is available on identifying the effect of soil fumigation and cover crops on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This project will address these issues based on field trials at OSU-HAREC with comprehensive sampling and analysis. Our objectives are to 1) determine the impact of soil fumigation and cover crop on soil health under field conditions, 2) To quantify greenhouse gases and ammonia emissions and soil carbon in the potato fields, 3) to understand the interaction of soil fumigation and cover crops on soil nutrient availability, especially nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, and 4) to conduct extension activities to introduce the research findings to growers and crop industry. The research findings will fill the knowledge gaps in understanding soil health, and GHG emissions with soil fumigation practices and cover crops and help growers sustain soil and crop productivity in the Columbia Basin region.

## 10. Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association

Title: Market Research and Campaign to Increase Oregon Christmas Tree Sales.

Amount: \$173,000



The Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association is launching a pilot advertising project with a marketing agency. Through comprehensive market research, the project aims to craft a strategic campaign promoting Oregon-grown Noble Fir and Douglas Fir trees in West Coast regional markets. The primary objective is to boost sales of Oregon Christmas trees, expanding the market and fostering growth for growers local to Oregon and nationwide.

## 11. Pratum Co-op

Title: Increasing Turfgrass Sales Through Sustainable Lawns Education and Marketing

Amount: \$175,000

Soaring input costs and the growing movement of US homeowners transitioning their traditional grass lawns to alternative landscapes are threatening the viability of the state's turfgrass growers. The production value of Oregon-grown grass seed - Oregon's 5th largest agricultural commodity - declined 11 percent from 2018-2020 according to the most recent Oregon Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics & Directory. In the US, 60% of the population believes the environmental sustainability of their lawn is important (Civic Science). Opportunity exists to boost specialty crop turfgrass seed sales by appealing to the consumer demand for sustainable landscaping.

Through educating consumers on environmentally friendly, sustainable, and high-quality turfgrass (Project Purpose), Pratum Co-op, a grower-owned cooperative representing 356 specialty crop producers, will leverage the rising demand for eco-conscious lawns to increase the value of Oregon turfgrass to benefit producers and increase the competitiveness of the turfgrass seed industry.

The project goal is to increase retail sales of Oregon turfgrass seed by 5% by marketing to US homeowners (Outcome Measure). This goal will be accomplished through the following objectives and deliverables: 1) online media campaign; 2) an influencer partnership; 3) point of purchase marketing collateral; and 4) tradeshow attendance. Beneficiaries are the entire Oregon turfgrass industry estimated at 992 (US Census of Agriculture), including the 356 grower members of Pratum Co-op, with benefits extending far beyond one organization.

Data for the project will be collected through Pratum's internal systems and the Oregon Department of Agriculture Statistics & Directory and with progress biannually to Pratum's Board of Directors.