



**OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE**

**Oregon Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
FY2025 Oregon Project Summaries
compiled from State Plan Project Partner
and Summaries.**

As prepared by
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Summary of the 2025 State Plan Project Partner and Summaries

Prepared By

The Oregon Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

1. Summaries

Community Development Corporation of Oregon

Amount Funded - \$156,530

Community Development Corporation of Oregon is building upon 5 years of collaboration with farmers, community leaders, and local organizations to increase market access, specialty crop competitiveness, and farm business capability for beginning and imperiled farmers growing in the Portland Metro Area. Prior funding has secured access to land, recruited and trained effective communities.

Project Purpose: Grow and widen vendor and broad consumer participation in the Portland Metro regional market for locally grown, high value and niche specialty crops.

Activities

- a) Engage & enroll beginning and imperiled farmers within our network and wider community;
- b) Facilitate and enhance cooperation & aggregation between individual farming businesses;
- c) Develop & promote a branded market presence for local hand-scale farmers in this network;
- d) Support these farmers through training & coaching to vend competitively at premium farmer- direct markets across the region, and;
- e) Increase publicity and visibility of farmer-direct, high value specialty crops to niche markets and the general public through digital media and with physical presence at premium market access points.

Outcomes

- a) Increased participation by beginning and imperiled farmers raising high-value specialty crops in farmer-direct marketplaces throughout the Metro area,
- b) Increased sales volume of specialty crop produce by beginning and imperiled farmers,
- c) Increased competitiveness of locally-grown specialty crops at farmer-direct markets in low- access communities considering price and quality, vis-à-vis nearest grocery store offerings

Ground Up Soil

Amount Funded: \$170,718.50

Peatmoss, with global horticultural usage of 11 million tons annually, is the primary substrate for containerized plant production. However, concerns about availability, cost, shipping, and environmental impact - particularly the destruction of carbon-sink peatlands - have driven the search for alternatives. While coconut coir from overseas offers one substitute, its high cost and limiting physical characteristics make it suboptimal. Oregon's hazelnut industry presents a compelling local solution. With 84,000 acres generating 90,000 tons annually, roughly 45,000 tons of shell waste is produced. Converting this waste stream into growing media could generate over \$2 million annually (charging just 10% of peatmoss prices), benefiting 1,360 hazelnut growers while reducing costs for nurseries and other end users.

Ground Up Soil will execute this project in four phases:

- Research current peatmoss usage and challenges in Oregon industries
- Identify and compare physical, biological, and chemical properties of hazelnuts shell and peatmoss
- Conduct growing trials based on findings
- Receive and process 2,500 tons (4,150 yards)

Annually Deliverables:

- Generate a revenue stream for processors and the 1300+ growers they service.
- Generate approximately 5,000 yards of a lower priced peatmoss alternative for local growers

Clastic Fruit LLC

Amount Funded: \$72,642

Idiot's Grace Farm will partner with Big Barn Organics to establish a grower-governed association of organic and transitional orchards in the Columbia River Gorge, the purpose of which will be to facilitate cooperative

- a) use of and
- b) investment in equipment, labor, and marketing resources in order to innovatively reorganize supply chains and produce new outlets for organic fruit for the region's orchards, namely by jump-starting the production of premium, value-added organic fruit products.

This project will establish a grower-led organization called Columbia River Organic Producers (CROP), which will provide cooperative means to enhance the competitiveness of organic fruit

The information provided in this report is accurate as of Sep. 23, 2025

producers in the Columbia Gorge. In the course of this project,

- 1) CROP will be incorporated as a 501(c)(5) agricultural nonprofit.
- 2) A regional brand identity will be designed to promote the value-added products made from the region's organic fruit.
- 3) An organizational framework will be devised in order to coordinate shared facility, equipment, and labor use, as well as training activities, joint marketing, and strategic planning for increasing the productive capacity and market reputation of organic fruit growers in the region.
- 4) CROP will, for two years, coordinate pilot-scale trials of value-added production and marketing for any organic fruit growers in the Columbia River Gorge and minimize, to the greatest extent possible, the financial risks associated with taking on this new enterprise.

Oregon Farm to School Network

Amount Funded: \$174,880

The Oregon Farm to School Network seeks to expand use of specialty crops in early childhood education (ECE) and K12 school settings through innovative programs and partnerships that address the specific needs and unique opportunities of these education settings. The project will include two components: one that connects ECE programs with farmers who offer Community Supported Agriculture(CSA) shares and the other that brokers sales between local specialty crop producers and processors serving K12 schools. The first component is a pilot project to facilitate meaningful connections between ECE programs and local farmers to offer CSA shares for ECE programs along with training and technical assistance for ECE staff to fully utilize each CSA share. Educational resources for young children and their families will also be shared with each CSA share, maximizing school-home connections and opportunities for increased community connections with growers. The second component will provide technical assistance, marketing support and value chain coordinator to expand market access for specialty crop producers by brokering sales between producers and processors serving the school market. Integrating local crops into ready-to-eat products that meet school demands is a win for schools, producers and processors. As a result of the project, long-lasting relationships and markets for small and mid-scale specialty crop producers will be established with ECE and k12 child nutrition programs and growers and processors serving child nutrition programs.

Oregon State University – Pete Berry

Amount Funded: \$168,159

Oregon State University will conduct field tests and further develop a model designed to identify weeds in tall fescue grass seed production. This project aims to support Oregon tall

fescue seed producers by implementing new technologies that reduce the dependence on manual labor and decrease the overall use of herbicides in seed cultivation. The existing model has a mean Average Precision (mAP) of 86% in detecting weeds, with approximately 95% of the detections accurately identifying actual weed instances. However, to enhance the effectiveness of spot spraying technologies, the model requires further refinement in classifying additional weed species at different crop stages.

The project has two main goals. Firstly, to field test the model using both small plot research technology and grower owned precision sprayers, assessing its accuracy and effectiveness. Secondly, to refine the model based on the outcomes of these tests by expanding its capability to distinguish between weedy grasses and broadleaf weeds. This enhancement aims to achieve more precise herbicide applications, reducing the amount needed.

The anticipated outcome of this project is a refined model capable of efficiently targeting weeds in tall fescue seed production, specifically during periods traditionally managed by hand labor crews. This model will also distinguish between broadleaf and grass weeds, further optimizing herbicide usage. Additionally, the project seeks to integrate this advanced technology into the sprayers used by growers, aligning with modern agricultural practices and reducing labor and chemical inputs.

Oregon State University – Jooyeoun Jung

Amount Funded: \$174,390

Oregon State University aims to reduce plastic use in nursery and greenhouse operations and enhance nursery crop productivity by developing plantable biopots made from 100% plant-based fiber waste (PFW). These biopots will serve as natural fertilizers with antifungal biodegradable coatings. Current biopots face challenges, including increased water consumption, fragility during production and transport, fungal growth, and limited PFW use.

This project addresses these issues through four objectives:

- (1) utilize 100% PFW pulp to produce molded pulp biopots, increasing its incorporation into the current pulp formulation (3 -4% solids) with recycled cardboard;
- (2) develop antifungal sprayable coatings for biopot surfaces to improve wet and dry strength, reduce water use, and mitigate fungal growth;
- (3) evaluate the performance of biopots in supporting the seedling and growth of 3 -4 nursery crops and their biodegradability after planting; and
- (4) assess biopots' effectiveness as natural fertilizers by analyzing nutrient release during biodegradation.

The project will also identify optimal coating application methods, including spray pressure, distance, and coating mass. Pilot-scale pulping and molding equipment will produce biopots

based on findings from objectives 1 and 2. In collaboration with the North Willamette Research and Extension Center, biopots will undergo testing during 2-3-month nursery crop cycles. This initiative advances sustainable practices by replacing plastics with biodegradable solutions that enhance plant health and soil quality.

Oregon State University – Marcelo Moretti

Amount Funded: \$175,000

This project, by Moretti's Weed Science lab at OSU, aims to develop integrated sucker management programs and educational materials to promote a novel sustainable approach to sucker management in hazelnut. This project will improve the environmental and economic sustainability of Oregon's high-value hazelnut crop and allow growers to remain competitive in the global market.

Oregon State University – Mana Ohkera

Amount Funded: \$169,196

The Oregon State University Plant Clinic will develop testing services to detect *Phytophthora* and *Verticillium* species from soil and water using DNA sequencing. Species within *Phytophthora* and *Verticillium* differ in host range and virulence on crops; therefore, identifying which species is present is crucial to make practical management decisions. Current testing methods for *Phytophthora* and *Verticillium* can only provide genus-level identification in most cases and are limited in the range of species it can detect. To overcome these limitations, we will employ long-read metabarcode sequencing, which provides microbial identification to the species-level. The new testing services will benefit Oregon's specialty crop grower by enabling them to:

- 1) determine which non-susceptible crop to plant;
- 2) determine whether fumigation, fungicide application, or disinfestation of irrigation water is necessary; and
- 3) improve environmental sustainability by reducing unnecessary chemical treatments.

Oregon State University – Joy Waite-Cusic

Amount Funded: \$174,645

Researchers and Extension Specialists from Oregon State University will develop quantitative microbial risk assessment models (QMRA) to improve our collective understanding of food safety risks associated with whole dry bulb and fresh cut onions and the potential for specific interventions to influence these risks. This proposal includes the gathering of two sets of critical data that are needed to inform these risk models: microbial behavior in contaminated onions during post-harvest storage and microbial behavior in

peeled and fresh-cut onions under relevant processing conditions. The developed QMRA models will be used as the foundation for several outreach activities (presentations, workshops, and webinars) to the onion industry to inform their food safety decision-making and assist in compliance with Food Safety Modernization Act regulations (i.e., Produce Safety Rule, Preventive Controls for Human Foods, and Food Traceability Rule).

Oregon State University – Yanyun Zhao

Amount Funded: \$174,853

Oregon State University will study effective and affordable strategies to mitigate sunburn damage of berry fruit by developing scientifically based preharvest edible spray coatings that reflect solar radiation, validating their effectiveness in research berry fields, and disseminating the results to stakeholders through grower meetings, field days, and regional and national conferences. Climatic change significantly impacts the production and quality of NW berry fruit crops. Increased temperature, intensive sunlight, and UV radiation have caused significant damage of fruit, leading to substantial losses of the crops. To solve this urgent need of ensuring productivity and quality of berry fruit, a team of experts in edible coating techniques, berry production and quality propose to:

- 1) develop effective sprayable coating formulations that will apply on berry fruit surfaces and reflect solar radiation, a major factor causing sunburn damage of blueberries, raspberries and blackberries;
- 2) develop spray coating delivery methods and timing to determine the best practices for in-field fruit applications;
- 3) evaluate the effectiveness of spray coating formulations on sunburn prevention by examining the effect of the coatings on mitigating sunburn and preventing water loss, color degradation and growth of berry fruit; and
- 4) study the effect of preharvest coating application on fruit quality during extended postharvest storage.

Throughout this project, stakeholders are closely engaged to foster implementation of the developed technology by Oregon berry growers. This project will enhance the productivity and innovation of specialty crop producers by developing a new management strategy for mitigating risks associated with climatic change.

Play Grow Learn

Amount Funded: \$151,635

In 2026 and 2027 Play Grow Learn will operate the 6th and 7th years of its subsidized “low barrier” farmer’s market in Rockwood. The People’s Market originally started as a Black-led project funded by SCBGP in 2020 for:

- dignified, culturally specific food distribution
- economic development for BIPOC producers
- and a community gathering space that welcomes people of all backgrounds

Rogue Valley Food System Network

Amount Funded: \$121,465

The Rogue Valley Food System Network will convene and facilitate a strategic Working Group of specialty crop producers, distributors, and retailers to identify, develop, and implement coordinated solutions to critical market access barriers. This collaborative initiative will expand specialty crop market share through three interconnected strategies:

- (1) conducting an analysis of existing ordering and distribution systems—including the Applegate Valley Food Hub, Rogue Natural Foods, and other regional hubs—to identify strategic alignment opportunities and reduce market barriers,
- (2) expanding market visibility through enhanced Rogue Flavor Guide circulation and targeted point-of-purchase education through the Rogue Valley Farm Tour, and
- (3) launching the annual Rogue Grown Specialty Crop Showcase to connect producers, buyers, and consumers while highlighting the region's exceptional specialty crop quality and diversity.

By leveraging RVFSN's decade of experience in food system coordination while engaging key stakeholders in systematic problem-solving, this project will create lasting improvements in market efficiency, strengthen farm viability, and establish the Rogue Valley as a premier specialty crop region.

Umpqua Valley Farm to School

Amount Funded: \$172,037

This project will continue the forward movement of SOFA (Southern Oregon Food Alliance) into a regional food hub which benefits coastal and inland producers throughout Southwestern Oregon, including the transportation of specialty crops between inland and coastal counties (Douglas, Coos, Curry), and food safety education, expanding food access to food banks, pantries, and underserved communities. Umpqua Valley Farm to School (UVF2S) will lead this project.