SPECIALTY CROP GRANTS IN CALIFORNIA – GETTING MORE BANG FOR THE BUCK

By Kari Hamerschlag, M.A.

Senior Analyst
Environmental Working Group

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ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP

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The findings, conclusions and recommendations in this report are solely the responsibility of the Environmental Working Group.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By Kari Hamerschlag, M.A.
Senior Analyst
Environmental Working Group

The federal Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) program, though tiny compared to the billions that flow to growers of commodity crops such as corn and soy, is one of the government's most important efforts to promote cultivation and sale of fruits, nuts and vegetables. The funding is especially important to California, which grows nearly half of the nation's fruit and vegetable crops and gets roughly $17 million a year in these block grants. California received more than 30 percent of the $55 million total paid out nationally in these block grants in 2011.

The program is funded under the federal farm bill to increase "the competitiveness of the specialty crop sector" and is overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) manages the grant-making process and defines the program's priorities in the Notice of Funding Availability (hereafter referred to as the "technical guidance document"), which fall in three broad categories: Research, Marketing and Nutrition. In 2009, grant requests in California totaled $65 million, nearly four times the amount of funding available to the state. The SCBG Program is among the most important sources of support for food and agriculture projects in California.

Environmental Working Group reviewed the program's performance over the past three years to assess whether its funding priorities and decision-making process are in line with CDFA's top priorities and strategies as defined by the California Agricultural Vision, a strategic plan for agriculture adopted by the agency in 2010 after a broad consultative process involving multiple stakeholders. CDFA cited the "Ag Vision" prominently in the plan it submitted to USDA for implementing the block grants, and CDFA Secretary Karen Ross refers often to the plan as a guiding document for the agency's priorities.[1]

The "Ag Vision" identified 12 strategies to address three principal goals:

- achieving better health and wellbeing for Californians by meeting their nutritional needs;
- protecting the environment by better agricultural stewardship of natural resources;
- helping communities thrive by boosting economic growth through food production.

The Verdict: A Promising Program with Room for Improvement

EWG's analysis shows that the specialty crop program yields good value for the state's $19 billion specialty crop industry and for state residents who benefit from research, marketing and educational investments in healthy fruits, nuts and vegetables. It funds dozens of innovative and worthwhile projects that align in many respects with the "Ag Vision priorities," especially in the area of environmental stewardship. However, EWG's analysis also identified several shortcomings and ways that the program could be modified to have greater impact and align even better with the "Ag Vision's" priorities.

Our findings in brief:

- There are major imbalances among the three broad categories of grants. With more than half of all funding allocated to research, relatively little is left for projects to expand markets for growers or increase access to and consumption of healthy food, both key priorities in the "Ag Vision."
- The grants provide valuable support for improving environmental stewardship, yet relatively few projects were explicitly focused on reducing fossil fuel-based inputs or adapting to a changing climate, key goals for the "Ag Vision." Just 1 percent of program funding was geared toward supporting organic agriculture despite its numerous economic, public health and environmental benefits.
- Under the leadership of CDFA Secretary Karen Ross, funding has increased dramatically in recent years for projects that enhance healthy eating, food security and local and regional food systems. Yet projects that

expand access to healthy food and local and regional infrastructure are still critically underfunded.

- Funding does not align well with some aspects of the "Ag Vision," with too few projects geared toward grower outreach, beginning and disadvantaged farmers, and farm labor issues.
- Too much funding in the Marketing category is directed to general marketing, communications and educational projects that are likely to have little impact on growers' profitability or boosting consumption of fruit and vegetables. Several communications/PR projects received questionable funding that would be better financed by private grower associations.
- Other federal grant programs could readily fund many research and international trade projects.
- The scoring process does not adequately link to or reflect the technical guidance document's goals and strategies, thus limiting its weight in the decision-making process as well as its usefulness in guiding prospective grant applications. The scoring system also does not favor projects likely to address multiple priorities, missing an opportunity to prioritize projects that could have a greater overall impact. Examples include nutrition projects that, our analysis shows, are likely to achieve many objectives simultaneously (e.g. increasing consumption and access to healthy food, creating new markets, strengthening local and regional food systems and providing economic benefits for growers).
- CDFA's process for deciding on final grant awards (after the technical committee has done its work) is not fully transparent, and limited information is available on approved and rejected grants. Insufficient information is provided to applicants of rejected projects.

EWG's Recommendations

For the California Department of Food and Agriculture:

EWG recommends that CDFA close funding gaps, distribute funds more equitably among grant categories and give priority to projects that generate multiple economic, public health and environmental benefits in line with the California "Ag Vision." Chief among these are projects that increase local, healthy and sustainable food consumption while delivering direct economic benefits to growers. Adoption of these recommendations will also ensure greater transparency in decision-making and reduce funding for projects that are in conflict with priority goals and/or could be funded through other private or other public funding sources.

More specifically, the agency should:

- Align the technical guidance document and scoring criteria more closely with the "Ag Vision," giving preference in the scoring process to projects that address the technical document's priorities and are likely to achieve multiple objectives.
- Establish guidelines for allocating funding more equitably among grant categories, reducing support for research and international trade projects that could be readily funded by other farm bill sources and increasing grant awards in the Marketing and Nutrition categories to deliver more immediate economic and public health benefits.
- Revise Marketing grant criteria to give priority to farm profitability, sustainability, local and regional infrastructure and nutrition/public health benefits. Eliminate broad communications/marketing grants that are more appropriately funded through private grower associations..
- Require research proposals to include a grower outreach and/or information dissemination component and expand support for grower outreach and beginning and disadvantaged farmers in the Marketing category.

- Give priority in the research area to projects that address multiple natural resource concerns, especially reduced chemical fertilizer and pesticide use; enhanced water quality and conservation; and climate protection and adaptation.
- Give priority to projects in the Nutrition category that increase consumption and access to healthy food while creating direct benefits and linkages for growers.
- Increase transparency by clarifying how final grant decisions are determined and publishing timely, detailed information on approved, denied and completed grants.
- Expand outreach to organic, beginning and disadvantaged farmers and farmworker communities and continue to diversify the membership of the Technical Review Committee that evaluates proposals.
- Reject proposals that undermine or conflict with the "Ag Vision" goals.

For Federal Policy:

Although CDFA can make the improvements outlined above with no change in federal policy, EWG urges several changes in federal policy as well. They include:

- Broaden the SCGB program mandate to put more emphasis on increasing consumption and availability of locally and regionally produced specialty crops and improving the profitability, ecological sustainability and competitiveness of specialty crop producers.
- Mandate transparency requirements to ensure that state grant-making agencies make available more information on the decision-making process, as well as full project proposals, timely progress reports and final performance reviews of specialty crop block grants.
- Revise USDA rules to require that grants give priority to projects that achieve multiple ecological, economic and public health benefits.

A. Introduction

Specialty Crop Block Grants – though small compared to the billions that flow to growers of commodity crops such as corn and soy – are one of the federal farm bill's most important programs for promoting fruits, nuts and vegetables and meeting other critical needs of specialty crop farmers, who typically benefit very little from other farm bill provisions.

The program, created in 2004 by the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act (H.R. 3242), was expanded significantly in the 2008 farm bill to provide $178 million over five years in block grants to state agriculture departments.[2] California, which produces nearly half of the nation's fruits and vegetables and 90 percent of its nuts, received $17 million in 2011, more than 30 percent of the total $55 million budget that year. This funding, distributed by California's Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), supports programs that help specialty crop growers address their myriad economic and environmental challenges and boost public access to and consumption of these healthy foods. Funding falls far short of the demand. California alone generated requests for $65 million in grants 2009, nearly four times the amount of grant money available to the state that year.[3]

Under federal law, the purpose of specialty crop block grants is to "increase the competitiveness of the specialty crop sector," defined as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and nursery crops such as house plants. Through its rulemaking process, the USDA has broadened the grants to address a range of issues, including:

- increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;
- improving the efficiency of distribution systems and reducing their costs;
- developing good manufacturing practices;
- research on conservation and environmental outcomes and other issues;
- enhancing food safety.[4]

California is a nationwide leader in its efforts to craft a broader state strategy that goes well beyond USDA's minimal guidelines. The state's Department of Food and Agriculture issued a comprehensive technical guidance document as part of its "Notice of Funding Availability," which gives funding priority to eight sub-areas within three broad categories: Research, Marketing and Nutrition. (Some states, such as Florida, Washington, Vermont and Pennsylvania, only provide a short list of funding priorities, and others rely entirely on USDA's list of possible funding targets.)

Table 1. Specialty Crop Block Grant Awards: Top 5 States (in millions)

	2009	2010	2011
California	$16.3	$17.3	$18.7
Florida	$4.1	$4.8	$4.4
Washington	$2.9	$3.7	$3.1
Texas	$1.8	$1.8	$1.7
Oregon	$1.7	$1.8	$1.4
National Funding	**$48.6**	**$54.4**	**$54.3**

Source: USDA, Agricultural Market Service [1]

To assess how California allocates specialty crop funding and how well its grants address the key challenges facing the state's growers and consumers, the Environmental Working Group undertook a detailed analysis of the program's operations and grants for the three-year period 2009-11.

The following sections present the results of EWG's review. Specifically, this paper:

a. summarizes project funding in 2009-11 across the three primary categories and eight sub-areas listed in the "Notice of Funding Availability," here referred to as the "technical document;"

b. assesses the current block grant portfolio using available grant abstracts against the priorities

outlined in the "Ag Vision" document adopted in 2010 by the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the State Board of Food and Agriculture;

c. reviews and evaluates the technical document's current priorities, objectives and areas of emphasis;

d. assesses the decision-making process.

B. Where Does The Money Go?

Over the three-year period 2009-2011, 51 percent of the block grants funded were in the Research category, 35 percent in Marketing and just 14 percent in Nutrition (Figure 1). The $24.2 million spent on research grants (Figure 2) was more than for marketing ($16.4 million) and nutrition ($6.6 million) combined. Relative funding across these categories remained fairly constant from year to year, with the important exception that nutrition grant funding tripled from 2010 to 2011 (Figure 2). Despite this increase, a disproportionate share of the total funding was allocated to Research grants.

Figure 1.Imbalance in grant funding categories, 2009-2011

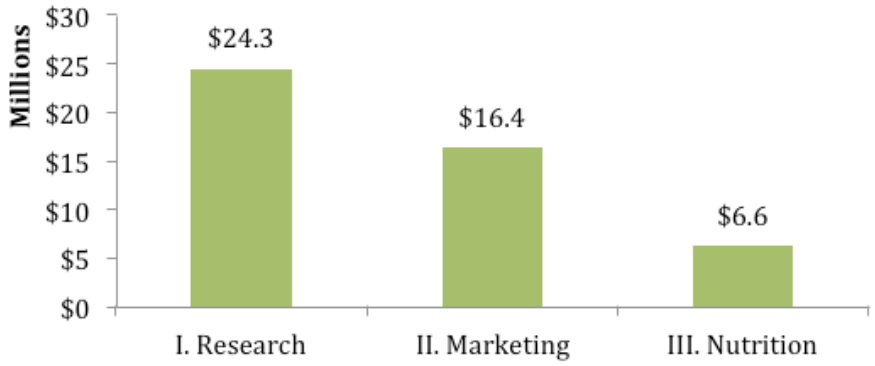


Figure 2. Grant funding by sub-area (2009-2011)

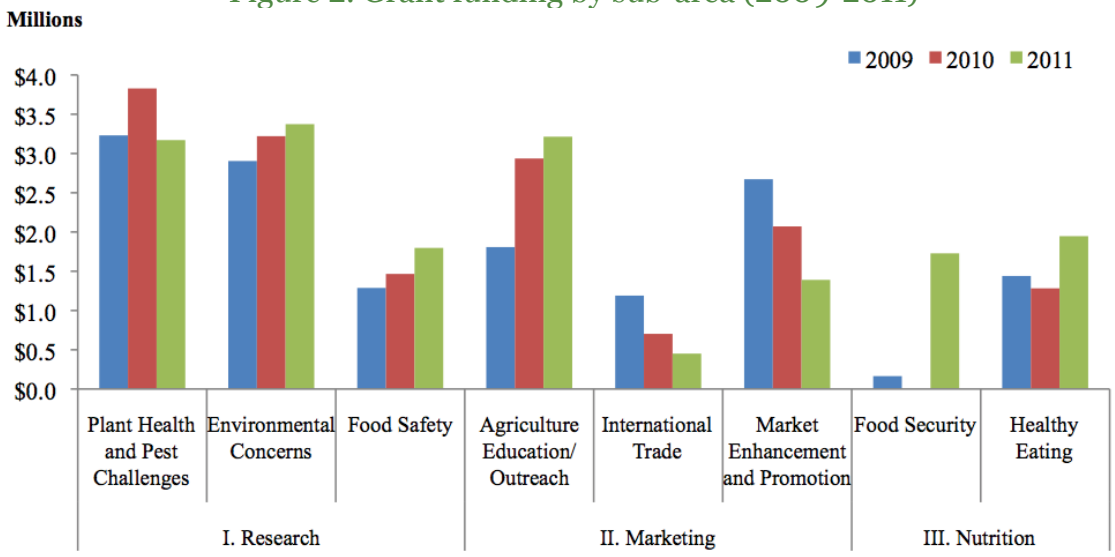
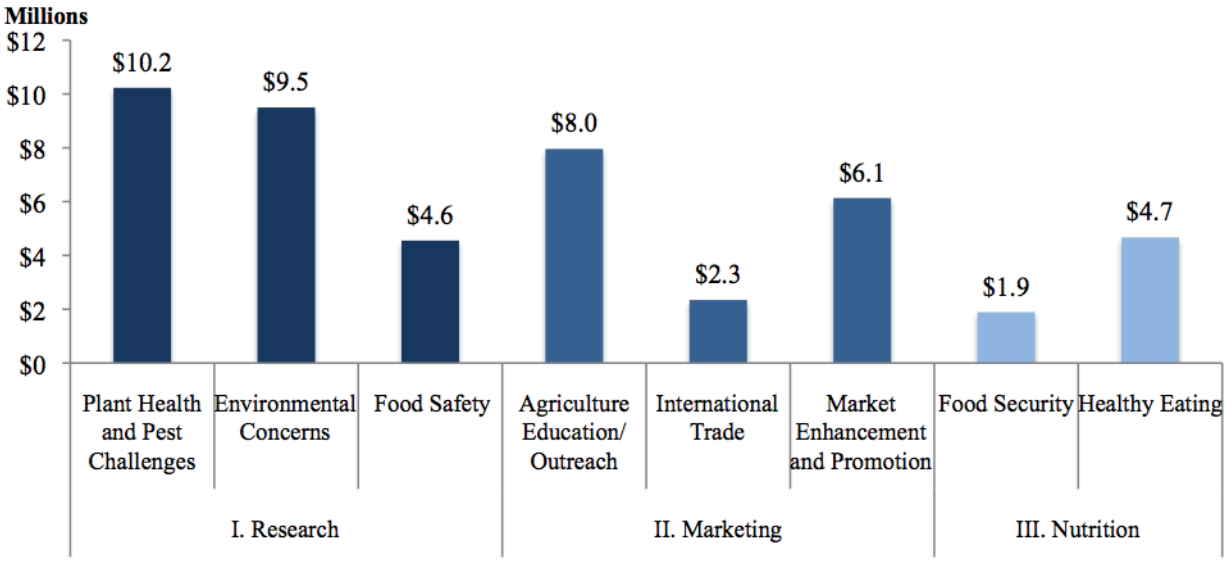


Figure 3. Total specialty crop block grants by sub-area, 2009-2011



C. How Well Do Specialty Crop Grants Fit State Priorities?

In an era of tight budgets, funding must address key state priorities within the parameters of the federal mandate and in a way that delivers maximum impact. The best-value projects are often those that address more than one priority.

I. California's Agriculture Vision:

Since there are differing views on priorities, EWG assessed SCBG grants and technical review documents in light of many of the consensus goals and strategies outlined in the California "Ag Vision" document adopted in 2010 following a consultative process involving more than 100 stakeholder groups. The process was not perfect and some interests were under-represented – especially organic growers, consumers, nutrition and food justice advocates – but the effort did result in a set of 12 priority goals and strategies that were approved and embraced by CDFA and the State Board of Food and Agriculture. CDFA referred prominently to the "Ag Vision" in the state plan for the SCBG program that it submitted to USDA.[5]

Key priority goals of the "Ag Vision" include:

- improving access to safe, healthy food for all Californians;
- easing the burden of regulation while maintaining health, safety and environmental standards;
- securing an adequate supply of water for agricultural purposes;
- assuring a strong labor force through fairness to agricultural workers and employers;
- effectively detecting, excluding and controlling invasive species;
- conserving agricultural land and water resources;
- expanding environmental stewardship on farms and ranches;
- promoting renewable energy and substitutes for fossil fuel-based resources (including pesticides);
- assuring agricultural adaptation to climate change;
- promoting robust regional markets for all California producers;

- cultivating the next generation of farmers and ranchers;
- promoting agricultural research that anticipates 21st century challenges.

These overarching goals for the state's agricultural industry apply directly to the challenges facing the state's specialty crop sector (which accounts for just over half of the state's agricultural production).

II. Assessing the Grant Portfolio Against Ag Vision Goals

In order to assess how well the SCBG's portfolio is addressing these priority areas, EWG evaluated the SCBG-funded project grant abstracts based on their likelihood for having a positive impact on 11 goals (Figure 4). We condensed four closely related "Ag Vision" goals (including research for the 21st century) into one broader "environmental stewardship" goal to streamline our analysis[6] and separated the first goal into two, access to food and enhancing food safety, since these are very different issues. We also included in our analysis relevant goals (e.g. increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and grower outreach) that were not among the 12 key "Ag Vision" strategies but were prominently cited in background discussion of its healthy food and research recommendations.

Our analysis assessed: 1) the number of grants that would likely contribute to achieving each of the 11 goals based on the limited information provided in the grant abstract (figure 4); and 2) the amount of grant money that was allocated to projects that would have, at least in part, an impact on achieving each of these goals (figure 5).

Since many projects address more than one priority goal, the total we allocated to each goal exceeds the actual total amount allocated by the grant program in a given year.

Because some of these grants will only partially address each goal, it is important not to misconstrue these numbers as delivering full value to these objective areas. For example, a $750,000 research project with a small grower outreach component will only devote a portion of that grant to that component. Since it was impossible to determine what percentage of the grant should be attributed to each goal, it is an imperfect way of fully assessing how well the portfolio addresses the "Ag Vision" goals. Despite this limitation, we felt that this approach was the best way to estimate the program's attention to the "Ag Vision" priorities. Appendix 1 provides a chart showing how each project was classified.

III. Projects and Funding Directed to Ag Vision Goals

a. Enhancing environmental stewardship and/or sustainable resource use: Over the three-year period reviewed, $20.8 million in grants went to projects that will have a positive impact on achieving environmental stewardship and sustainable resource goals.. Eighty percent of these grants were in the Research category. They included a wide range of projects to preserve agricultural land and soil, water, habitat and biodiversity; address climate change mitigation/adaptation; and improve water quality. This is a major and welcome commitment to solving environmental problems. A key concern, however, is that very few of the grant abstracts mentioned an outreach component to growers and/or peer-to-peer sharing. Such outreach is critical to ensure that research leads to the adoption of better practices. In addition, few, if any, of the Marketing/Nutrition grants included an explicit sustainability component to further the goals of better environmental stewardship.

Between 2009 and 2011, projects receiving $8.6 million to address environmental stewardship also had the potential to reduce use of fossil fuel-based resources (inputs) such as chemical pesticides and fertilizers, a priority in the "Ag Vision." Most of these projects involve research on biological insect control, but it is difficult to determine whether they will actually lead to a reduction in chemical use since few incorporated any follow-up or grower outreach components. Only a handful of projects made reduced use of fossil fuel-based inputs an explicit priority. In addition, only 1 percent of program funding ($0.6 million) was geared toward supporting organic

Figure 4. Number of Grants Fully or Partially addressing Ag Vision Goals

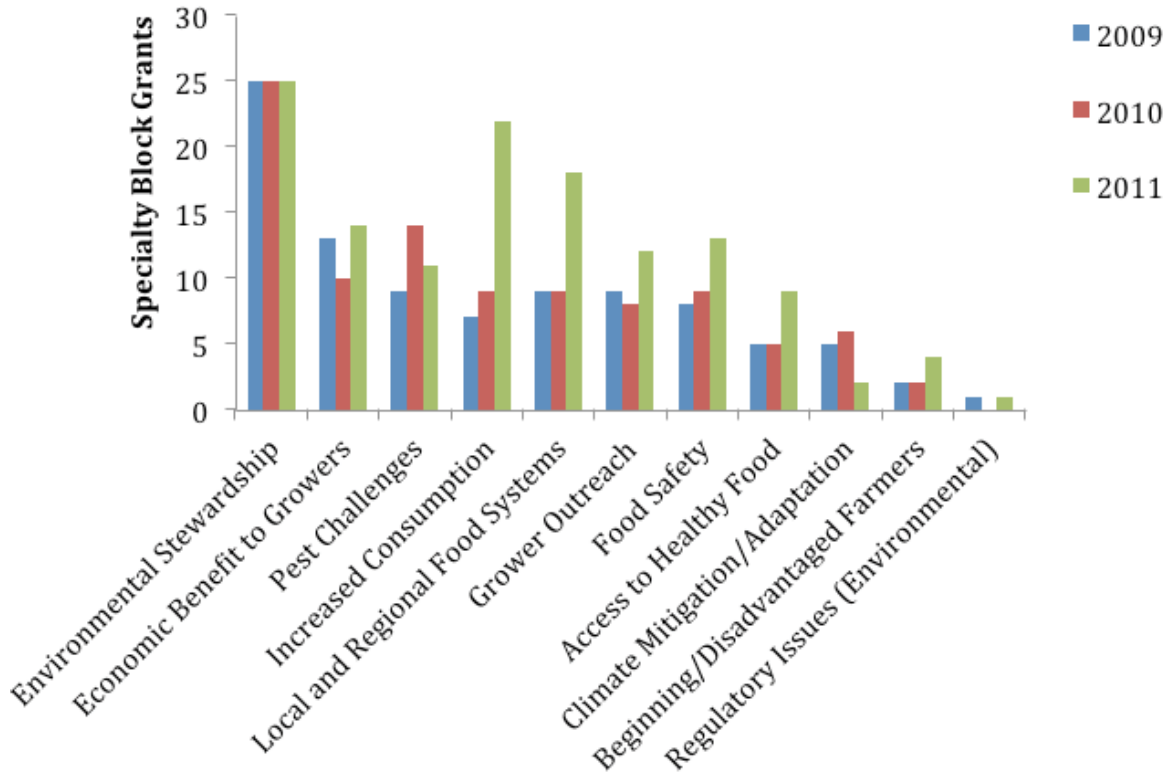
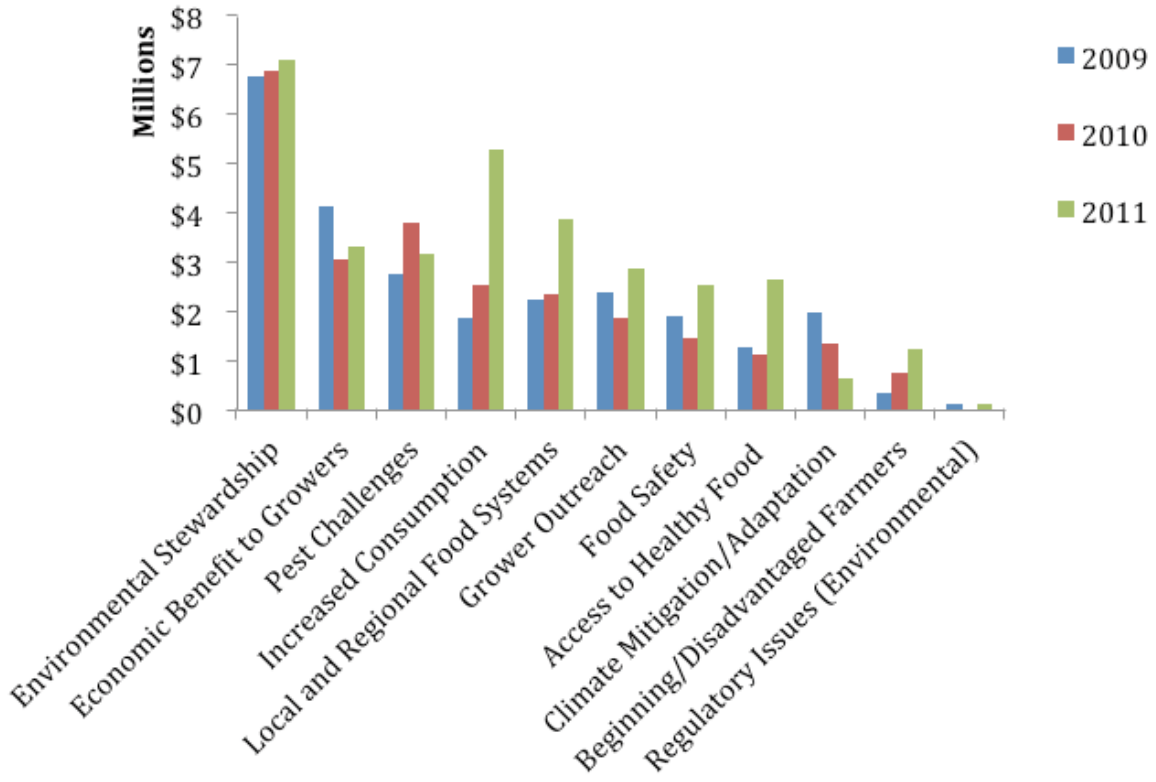


Figure 5. Specialty Crop Funding For Projects that Address "Ag Vision" Priorities, 2009-2011



agriculture, despite its ability to yield environmental, economic, climate mitigation and public health benefits. This represents a lost opportunity, since California is the leading organic state in the nation and the market for organic food is growing steadily. SCBG grants could be an effective tool to build on that success.

b. Direct economic benefit to growers: Given that a goal of the program is to increase economic opportunity for specialty crop growers, it is striking that only $10.6 million went to grants that were geared, at least in part, toward projects that will provide a direct economic benefit to producers. EWG includes in this category projects that are likely to deliver a direct economic benefit, including those aimed at increasing sales or market share, earning a higher return, direct marketing or value-added products.[7] CDFA classified many of these direct benefit projects in the Nutrition category because they focused on enhancing direct markets that service low-income communities. In light of the gap between retail and farm-gate prices (on average, farmers receive 16 cents of the retail dollar[8]) and farmers' need to increase their profitability, this analysis also placed in this grouping a small subset of projects, amounting to $2.6 million over the three years (5 percent of total SCBG grants), that are likely to increase farm profitability by returning a higher percentage of the selling price to growers, supporting value-added production or achieving other efficiencies.

c. Pest Challenges/ Invasive Species: The state approved $9.8 million in grants over the three years for 34 projects that will have some impact on combatting pest challenges. Eighteen projects ($4.9 million) emphasized biological or cultural control and only three focused on chemical control. Another 16 projects received $4.8 million to address invasive species. Two were specifically targeted to preventing invasions, one (the CDFA Programmatic Impact Report) covered all aspects of the problem, and the rest focused on invasive species control. CDFA funded only three projects (one a year) seeking alternatives to methyl bromide, missing an opportunity to support a key priority for growers in light of the phase-out of this highly toxic fumigant.

d. Increased consumption: Thirty-eight grants totaling $9.7 million were approved for projects that are likely to increase consumption of fresh fruits, nuts and vegetables. Funding in this classification more than doubled from 2010 to 2011. EWG's analysis included in this classification projects aimed at teaching children the value of specialty crops, which does not necessarily increase access to healthy fruits and vegetables but could lead to greater consumption. Also included are regional and California branding campaigns that often have educational components that may not increase access but could increase consumption. Projects focused solely on increasing one crop's market share were not included, since such efforts do not necessarily expand overall consumption. Since fewer than 20 percent of Californians get their recommended allowance of fruits and vegetables,[9] and these kinds of projects can also expand markets, CDFA should increase funding for these higher impact projects that deliver multiple benefits.

Table 2. Specialty crop funding for projects that partly address "Ag Vision" priority goals, 2009-11

Priority Issue	Millions of dollars	Total grants
Environmental stewardship	$20.9	76
Economic benefit to growers	$10.6	37
Pest challenges	$9.8	34
Increased consumption	$9.7	38
Local and regional food systems	$8.5	36
Grower outreach	$7.2	29
Food Safety	$5.9	32
Access to healthy food	$5.1	19
Climate change	$4.0	13
Mitigation	2.7	7
Adaptation	1.3	6
Beginning farmers	$2.4	8
Regulatory issues	$0.2	2

e. Grower outreach: This grouping included 29 projects totaling $7.2 million that had components designed to increase farmers' knowledge about agronomic practices, sustainability, marketing, food safety, human resources or other issues integral to their success. This amount may be overstated, since grower outreach was just a small component of several large research grants. Few project abstracts explicitly include outreach or educational components, a significant omission in light of the dearth of other resources to assist specialty crop growers and the needs identified in the "Ag Vision" and elsewhere. The University of California Cooperative Extension has just 200 on-farm advisors and 119 specialists for roughly 80,000 California farmers, a 40 percent decline from the early 1990s.[10] Only 10 percent of the funding in the Research category (12 projects) and 16 percent of funding in Marketing category (14 projects) included a grower outreach component. Not one project in the Plant Health and Pest Challenges sub-area included a grower outreach component, and in 2011 just one project in the food safety sub-area included grower outreach.[11] These numbers highlight the need to elevate this component in the guidance document and scoring criteria.

At least one other major specialty crop state, Florida, considers grower outreach and/or information dissemination so important that it requires all projects to "have very strong information dissemination and outreach component where results from projects are shared with others who may benefit from results."[12]

f. Strengthening Local and Regional Food Systems
The California SCBG program has allocated $8.5 million of its funding over three years to projects that will likely strengthen local and regional food systems.[13] Most of these projects, which nearly doubled in funding from 2010 to 2011, are funded through the Nutrition category, rather than through Marketing. However, only $1.7 million of this amount went to projects that had a component devoted to developing local and regional food infrastructure (food hubs/distribution systems/local processing/technical assistance), which is a critical need in order to meet the growing demand for locally and regionally sourced food. Our analysis did not count statewide marketing programs, such as "California-Grown," a grower-supported non-profit statewide marketing campaign, because such grants do not explicitly aim to strengthen local or regional markets. Instead, they focus more broadly on promoting all California-grown produce and growers. We also did not include nutrition education/healthy eating projects in this category unless they include a specific link to promoting local and regional markets.[14]

h. Food Safety: Projects with food safety components totaled $5.9 million over three years. Most of the funding focused on research on sources of contamination, how it spreads and how to prevent and control outbreaks. Only a few focused on the "Ag Vision's" specific objective of "assuring… the highest level of food safety without compromising environmental quality." Many approved projects target salmonella and E. coli. Like other research projects in the environmental stewardship area, there is very little emphasis on grower outreach and education, and only one project in the grower outreach category focused on food safety approaches for small and midsize and disadvantaged farmers, who have been hit particularly hard by new food safety regulations. Over three years, only four food safety projects had an explicit grower outreach component – and three of these are in the grower outreach category, rather than in the food safety sub-area.

i. Access to healthy food: Although this is a top priority in the "Ag Vision" document, just $5.1 million in SCBG grants over the three-year period went to projects that are likely to increase access to healthy food. This amount falls far short of the demonstrated need, as these projects both improve people's nutrition and create new markets for growers. This analysis included in this category projects that lead to greater institutional purchasing of specialty crops, such as farm-to-school programs that provide fresh produce in school meals (e.g. increased access) while also creating new markets for growers. In a significant shift, funding for projects that are likely to increase access

to healthy food more than doubled from $1.1 million to $2.6 million from 2010 to 2011.

h. Climate change mitigation/adaptation: The abstracts of only 13 projects, totaling $4 million over three years, explicitly mentioned climate change mitigation or adaptation as a goal. Of this amount, two-thirds ($2.7 million, seven projects) was geared to mitigation (reducing emissions or carbon sequestration) and one third ($1.3 million, six projects) to adaptation. The latter included projects aimed at changing agricultural practices or developing plant breeds adapted to higher temperatures and/or changes in precipitation and extreme weather events. Another $12.2 million in grants supported 44 projects involving activities that have the potential to mitigate and/or adapt to climate change, such as reducing fossil fuel-based inputs, improving nutrient management or soil health and increasing water use efficiency and water conservation.

i. Beginning and Disadvantaged farmers: Statewide, the average age of principal farm operators is 58, and nearly 20 percent are 70 or older. From 1992 to 2002, the number of farmers under 35 dropped by 43 percent.[15] Because of these disturbing trends, the state "Ag Vision" identified an urgent need to increase opportunities for beginning farmers, but only a tiny percentage of SCBG grants – 8 grants totaling $2.4 million over the 2009-11 period – went to projects that will directly benefit beginning and disadvantaged farmers. Other farm bill programs address this need, but less than $1 million of this funding comes to California.

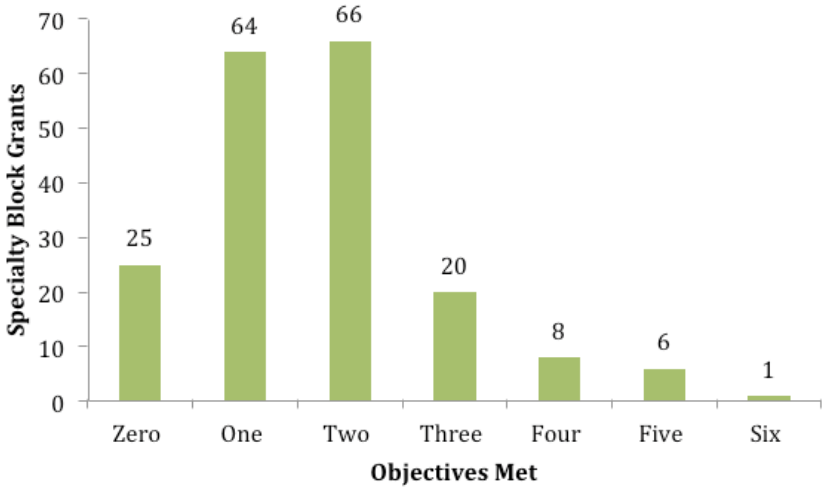
j. Regulatory issues (environmental protection): Only two grants totaling $200,000, less than 1 percent of the total, went to programs designed to address regulatory issues while improving or preserving environmental protection and conservation. Another $600,000 went to projects that address regulatory issues but without a specific focus on the environment.

IV. Few Projects Meet Several Priority Objectives

In order also to understand how many projects were likely to achieve multiple goals and/or benefits, this review categorizes the projects according to their likelihood for achieving impact the goals outlined below (See Figure 6). While a project's ability to meet several objectives and deliver multiple benefits is just one measure of its potential impact, we believe that it is an important one to consider as a means to efficiently address many of the state priorities: in other words, to get more bang for the taxpayer's buck. Other issues such as scope and reach of the project are very important – but in many cases, it was difficult to judge, based on the limited information provided, how many people would benefit from a given project.

Of the 190 projects funded by the program, 25 (13 percent) did not have goals and objectives that directly address the stated priority goals/strategies in the "Ag Vision." Most of these were focused on agricultural education outreach, international trade and market enhancement and promotion, with only vague or indirect benefits. As noted below, several of these projects lack a focus on either increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, increasing marketing capacity or generating direct economic benefit for growers. As noted below, many of these grants fund projects with goals and objectives that would be more appropriately addressed through other funding sources, including private industry

Figure 6. Few Projects Meet More than Two Priority Objectives



associations or other larger federal farm bill programs, such as the Marketing Assistance Program (MAP).

Projects that are likely to achieve many objectives simultaneously generally are funded in the Nutrition category and often focus on increasing consumption and access to healthy food, while creating new markets, strengthening local and regional food systems and providing direct economic benefits for growers. Nearly half benefit beginning and/or disadvantaged growers and have grower outreach and environmental stewardship components. Interestingly, only three out of 30 of the projects that touched on three or more objectives were in the Research category (environmental sub area); 17 were in the nutrition category and nine were in the Marketing area.

Seven Projects That Address 5 or 6 Objectives Simultaneously

1. Specialty Crop Solutions for Health-Distressed Communities (6 objectives addressed)
2. Linking Ethnic Specialty Crop Producers and Low-Income Consumers through Marketing and Nutrition Education
3. Ecology Center Nutrition Food and Farming Policy Programs
4. Mandela Market Place Emerging Markets
5. Cultivating a Community Nutritional Health Network
6. North Coast Opportunities Farm2Fork Project
7. Building Successful Farm to School Models to Enhance Markets for Specialty Crops

While projects that focus on a single objective can also have great benefits, integrated projects with multiple objectives are a great way ensure a number benefits and deliver good "bang for the buck."

D. The Technical Guidance Document And Funding Priorities

CDFA's Notice of Funding Availability includes a section, referred to here as "the technical guidance document," that lists three broad funding categories and eight sub-areas and areas of emphasis, that identify "potential types of projects and approaches to consider," but it adds that other projects will be considered.

EWG evaluated the technical guidance document's current priorities, objectives and areas of emphasis in each sub-area to assess clarity, focus, expected impact and whether they effectively address the priorities of the "Ag Vision." This review also identified some problematic projects that received SCBG funding.

The categories and sub-areas are:

I. Research
- plant health/pest challenges
- environmental concerns and conservation
- food safety

II. Marketing
- agriculture education/outreach
- international trade
- market enhancement/promotion

III. Nutrition
- food security
- healthy eating

I. Research:

a. Plant Health and Pest Challenges: The SCBG program funded dozens of important projects to address pest and disease problems affecting specialty crops. There are six areas of emphasis, including enhancing the speed and reliability of detection; new tools for eradication; developing

resistant plants; and pest protocol programs for a subsector of specialty crops. Despite the lack of explicit guidance in this area, most proposals funded in the plant health and pest challenge were primarily focused on prevention or on biological pest management.

> Findings: The document does not include an explicit focus on non-toxic approaches, and no priority is given to preventing infestations or reducing use of toxic pesticides. There is no mention of finding alternatives to methyl iodide, methyl bromide or other fumigants, even though this is a serious concern for many growers and consumer groups.

b. Environmental Concerns and Conservation: Funding in this sub-area has supported many significant projects that seek to enhance conservation of agricultural land, water, habitat and biodiversity, address climate change mitigation/adaptation and improve air and water quality. Areas of emphasis include water use efficiency, climate change adaptation, best practices for water conservation and improving air and water resources. Many projects funded in this sub-area addressed more than one issue.

> Findings: The areas of emphasis stress water use efficiency three times but make no mention of improving water stewardship or water quality by improving nutrient management or reducing pesticide and fertilizer use, a critical need in the state. The document does not clearly give priority to projects that explicitly seek to foster improved environmental performance or that address multiple resource concerns, although this may be the intention of language that refers to "integrated resource base issues." The most significant omission is that the document does not emphasize projects with a strong grower outreach component, which would greatly increase their value to growers and the likelihood of translating the funded work into action on the ground.

c. Food Safety: The guidance document lists no specific objectives or areas of emphasis for this sub-area, giving full discretion to UC/Davis' Western Center for Food Safety, which is responsible for awarding these grants. Most of the funding focuses on researching sources of contamination, how outbreaks spread and how to prevent and control them. Many approved projects target salmonella and E. coli. Roughly half concentrated on a single crop, often in line with the interests of the Western Center's partners.

> Findings: There is very little emphasis on grower outreach and education and no approved projects focused on scale-appropriate food safety approaches for small and midsize farmers, who have been hit particularly hard by new food safety regulations. Over the three years, only one food safety project in this sub-area had an explicit grower outreach component.

While all three sub-areas in the Research category address high-priority issues, there are significant alternative sources of farm bill funding that could support some of the projects in this category. This is an important consideration, given that the SCBG program allocated more than half of its funds to research over the three-year period, far more than the average 15 percent allocated to research in other states.[16] Among the alternative sources of funding are the farm bill's $45 million Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention programs, which distributed nearly $19 million in 2011 to California for the same kinds of projects funded in SCBG's plant health and pest challenge sub-area.[17] California was awarded another $2.5 million that year in National Clean Plant Network funds to strengthen pest- and disease-resistant plant stocks. In addition, various pots of money are available for conservation research in the form of Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), including its Specialty Crop Research Program and the Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education program. In 2010, California received $108 million in all for agriculture-related research, and undoubtedly a significant portion of that went to the

specialty crop research.[18] In the food safety sub-area, it is problematic that CDFA has given one entity sole responsibility for administering the grants – while providing minimal guidance.

II. Marketing:

a. Agriculture Education/Outreach: This broad sub-area includes educational projects targeted to the general public as well as education/outreach to growers and workers, among them "specialty crop career technical education for job training in sustainable agriculture and economies" and "science-based information to specialty crop growers." Other areas of emphasis listed in the guidance document include improving "the public's knowledge of and understanding of specialty crop agriculture and its beneficial importance to the health and wellbeing of all Californians" as well as efforts to "educate consumers about California's specialty crops and agriculture and promote California specialty crop and strengthen the connection between specialty crops and agriculture."

> Findings: A relatively small percentage of marketing projects, just 16 percent, included an explicit grower outreach component. Despite the inclusion of workers and career technical education in the area of emphasis, very few, if any, projects have been targeted to workers or technical education. In 2011, three of five grower outreach projects in this classification focused on food safety, just one on how to access new markets.

In 2010, CDFA allocated $1.5 million out of the $7.5 million spent for marketing on general consumer education/communication-oriented projects largely focused on enhancing the image of the specialty crop industry, rather than on increasing sales. Two linked general communications grants totaling $940,000, both managed by Western Growers on behalf of the "California Specialty Crop Communications Alliance (CSCCA)," lacked clear and measurable objectives, raising questions about whether this use of taxpayer funds was appropriate. These projects followed two similar grant awards in 2009 in the agriculture education sub-area.

BOX 1

Image Building and PR: Out of Bounds

The stated objective of the California Specialty Crop Communications Alliance's $481,000 Promotion Campaign was to "create and execute a promotional campaign that communicates the value of the specialty crop industry to the consumer." A second related project provided $460,000 for a social media campaign. The specialty crop industry has a right to educate consumers about the value of its products, but it appears that this project was primarily about building up the public image of the industry. Also, the overtly political intent of its proposal – stating that federal funding will be used to influence the regulatory environment and public policy in favor of specialty crops and industry partners – raises significant ethical, legal and political issues. The content of the industry's newsletter and the website supported by the grant, www.KnowACaliforniaFarmer.com, indicate that the funding is being used to support coalition building and indirectly influence policy in areas beyond the specialty crop industry, a questionable use of taxpayer funds.

The California Specialty Crop Communications Alliance, which won the SCBG grant in this case, has now evolved into the California Agricultural Communication Coalition (CACC), which includes many players beyond specialty crops. There was no mention of such a plan in the original grant proposal, raising the questions of whether this funding is being used to advance the interests of rice growers, dairy farmers and others who have been promoting their farms and policy agendas on the SCBG-funded website without clearly informing USDA how the two projects intersect. A review of the "Know a California Farmer" blog from Jan. 1 to Feb. 21, 2012 found that of 48 blog posts, 32 focused on rice; 11 on dairy issues; two on livestock and three on general agriculture stories. Not one addressed specialty crops. A review of blogs between June and December 2011 revealed a similar mix, and of the 150 blog posts from January to May 2012, just nine focused on specialty crops. At least two posts from 2011 by rice growers extolled the virtues of rice subsidies (see Annex B). Beyond the questionable legality of the use of these funds for this industry-wide effort, it is clear that there are far more effective ways to use these funds to increase the profitability of specialty crop growers and/or consumption of fruits, nuts and vegetables.

In the same sub-area, CDFA also awarded $180,000 in 2010 to the Alliance for Food and Farming, an industry communications group, to support a highly controversial project titled "Correcting Misconceptions about Pesticide Residues." This grant funded a campaign targeting EWG's Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce that was "designed to counter claims such as those of the Environmental Working Group's 'dirty dozen' report, which lists twelve items identified as having high levels of pesticide residues…" The grant application went on to say: "Because the proposed [AFF] campaign seeks to assure consumers about the safety of produce with respect to pesticides, this effort is very important in slowing or stopping increasing consumer concern about pesticide residues and the resulting reduction in purchase and consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. If such a campaign is not initiated, consumer concerns will continue to grow unchecked."

In the absence of a clear focus on increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables or generating direct economic benefit for growers, large grants have been awarded in this sub-area for generic marketing, communications and educational programs that have no documentable impact on growers' bottom lines or marketing capacity or on consumption of fruits and vegetables. Grants in this sub-area also include projects with goals and objectives that would be more appropriately addressed through other funding sources, including private industry associations. The guidelines for this sub-area emphasize educating young people and supporting "outreach" to adult consumers about specialty crops, but the projects receiving awards largely lack specific, measurable objectives such as increasing consumption, expanding sales or delivering other economic benefits to growers.

In addition, the AFF grant clearly contradicted both the SCBG program's priorities of enhancing sustainable resource use as well as state policies seeking to reduce chemical use. Using taxpayer money to fund industry communications initiatives against legitimate public interest concerns or to single out particular public interest groups is highly problematic. This grant positioned the department squarely in opposition to the public's interest in reducing pesticide exposure. A significant body of scientific research has expressed valid concerns about the health risks posed by some of these chemicals, and it is wrong for state and federal officials to take the side of conventional agribusiness in this ongoing scientific and policy debate.

b. International Trade: Over the past three years, a total $2.3 million (14 percent of this category) went to support international marketing, but funding for this sub-area declined significantly from year to year.

> Findings: Projects funded by these SCBG grants largely duplicate efforts that get strong support through other funding sources, specifically the Market Assistance Program (MAP), which channeled $23 million to California growers in 2010. The SCBG grants supported trade promotions in foreign markets, public private partnerships in international marketing, international promotions for California branding and documenting foreign trade barriers. Other areas of emphasis identified in the technical document are less clearly supported by MAP, including export training focused on small and mid-sized and/or new enterprises and developing solutions to transportation and storage logistics.

c. Market Enhancement and Promotion The technical document says the goal of this sub-area is to "develop long-term sales and competitiveness of specialty crop products." Areas of emphasis include statewide promotion and awareness of specialty crops, marketing of local and regional agricultural production; increasing sales at farmers' markets and support for cooperative marketing and promotion. Over the past three years, funding for this sub-area declined by nearly 50 percent, but grants for local and regional marketing initiatives increased substantially in 2011, in large part due to the rising demand for locally produced food.

> Findings: Promoting farmers' markets and cooperative marketing and promotion are vital strategies, but the goals in this sub-area do not include increasing grower

profitability, a key objective for most farmers. Such a focus would support projects that deliver greater benefits than simply expanding sales. Also absent is an emphasis on developing infrastructure (food hubs, distribution systems, grower technical assistance and local processing) to help growers overcome barriers to reaching local and regional markets. There is also little emphasis on strategies that reward growers for implementing organic, fair labor or other sustainable practices that generate higher returns, such as value-added production or values-based supply chains.

III. Nutrition.

a. Food Security: Areas of emphasis include: increasing participation in federal nutrition assistance programs; developing community and school gardens and urban farming; increased access to nutritious food in ways that foster self-reliance and environmental sustainability; and other projects that support local and regional food systems. Examples include a recent $500,000 grant to expand the use of CalFresh (SNAP) benefits at farmers' markets and a project that supports the expansion of community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects in low-income communities.

Findings: The technical document highlights several valuable strategies in the food security area, but there are significant gaps. There is no emphasis on giving priority to projects that would increase access and consumption while enlarging markets and opportunities for California farmers. That could include expanding the use of CalFresh benefits at farmers' markets or in community supported agriculture (CSA) projects or supporting fruit and vegetable prescription programs.[19] SCBG grants already support such win-win projects, but this sub-area doesn't clearly articulate that priority should go to nutrition and healthy food access programs that directly improve market opportunities for farmers. A key strategy for increasing access to healthy food – getting more fresh fruits and vegetables into "food desert" locations – is also noticeably missing.

b. Healthy Eating: Areas of emphasis are very broad, including vigorous marketing, promotion and public/private partnerships to increase consumption of specialty crops through farm-to-school programs, farm-to-fork networks that link institutional and retail markets directly to local agriculture, and projects that demonstrate the health benefits of specialty crops.

Findings: There is understandable overlap between the two critically important sub-areas of food security and healthy eating. Both encourage projects that will improve consumption of specialty crops, especially those grown locally. However, the first is more focused on increasing access to and production of healthy food via CalFresh, urban farms and community gardens; the second is more focused on strategies that will actually change the eating habits of Californians, most of whom eat less than the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. There is no distinction between garden projects that are linked to nutrition education and healthy eating and those that are more about production and increased access to healthy food. It is important to make a clear distinction between them.

In the healthy eating sub-area, the first emphasis is on marketing, making it somewhat similar to grants in the broader Marketing category. It's fair to ask whether generic marketing of healthy food is the best way to change lifelong habits that result in very low fruit and vegetable consumption. Such marketing programs are part of the solution, but their impact is difficult to measure and perhaps less effective than hands-on strategies that read-

ily help people consume more fruits and vegetables, such as cooking classes, garden education projects, tastings and teaching shopping/home economics skills. Given the lifelong benefits of teaching healthy eating habits to youth, the current focus on young people and farm-to-school and farm-to-fork makes sense, but the guidance should be clarified to make this section more about the educational aspects, while the infrastructure and marketing aspects belong in the Marketing category.

E. How Grant Awards Are Decided

1. Volunteer Committee Plays a Crucial Role

a. The Technical Review Committee

Each year the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) names a peer-based Technical Review Committee of volunteers to evaluate proposals and recommend which projects to fund with Specialty Crop Block Grants. CDFA conducts a public recruitment process, and the appointees come primarily from the conventional (non-organic) specialty crop industry, with some representation from academia and public health, nutrition and environmental organizations and governmental agencies. CDFA looks for candidates who have expertise in key areas of SCBG funding.

The size of the committee varies considerably from year to year. In 2011, there were 63 members. Nearly a third represented federal agencies (mostly research/environmental); about 15 percent came from environmental groups; five had a background in public health and nutrition; and most of the rest represented growers and industry associations. In 2010, the committee had 31 members. Five represented environmental concerns, three had expertise in nutrition and one was an organic farmer. In 2009, the panel had 20 members, including one organic farmer, two nutrition/hunger experts, two academics, one environmental representative, one public agency representative and one representative of the general public. The remainder came from conventional specialty crop interests.

b. Two-Phase Process and Scoring Criteria

The technical review committee is divided into groups according to funding sub-areas (Figure 2). Each group reviews proposals in its sub-area based on the general guidelines described in CDFA's "Notice of Funding availability, request for concept proposals." EWG interviewed committee members and CDFA officials, but it remains unclear how much weight this document actually carries in the final scoring and decision-making process on grants.

After an initial administrative review to assess whether basic requirements are met, successful projects are selected in a two-phase process. In Phase 1, applicants submit an initial Concept Proposal "for projects that enhance competitiveness of California's specialty crops." Proposals with the highest scores are then invited to submit a Grant Proposal, which is considered in Phase 2.

In both Phases 1 and 2, the technical review committee scores proposals according to a set of "scoring criteria" in 5 and 10 categories respectively. Phase 1 has a maximum combined total of 50 points, and Phase 2 proposals can score as many as 100 points. (see Appendix 3 for a description of the scoring criteria). The scores are then sent to CDFA for review. Depending on the total number of proposals received, CDFA encourages reviewers to weed out a certain percentage of those submitted.

CDFA staff then assigns mean scores to each proposal in each sub-area and groups them according to whether they earned a high, medium or low score. Next, reviewers hold two in-person meetings (one for each phase) to review the scores. They break into groups according to sub-area and

often engage in detailed and sometimes passionate discussions of the merits and weaknesses of each proposal, focusing on those on which there was a significant difference of opinion. Several past reviewers noted that scoring differences sometimes arise because some reviewers lack information about the needs in the field. Scores may be adjusted upward or downward for some projects before final recommendations are submitted to CDFA. According to several reviewers, the projects are then classified into top tier, second tier or no-fund projects.

At least one CDFA staff attends each of the reviewers' meetings, noting disagreements and comments that emerge.

c. Basis of Final Decisions Is Murky

It is unclear how CDFA allocates funding to each broad funding category and sub-area and how it decides which proposals to forward to USDA for approval. Interviews with CDFA officials and several reviewers did not clarify these questions. CDFA Program Manager Kathy Alameda said, "The determination is made based on a number of factors such as the Technical Review Committee's scores, how many proposals are submitted under each sub-area and the amount of funding requested in each sub-area."

At least two reviewers agreed that the process is very unclear, citing at least two instances in which very high scoring proposals were ultimately rejected by CDFA while others with lower scores were approved. In response to written questions about the final decisions, Ms. Alameda said, "If the total recommended funding exceeds the amount available for funding, [only] the highest ranking proposals are submitted to USDA for approval."

As long as the proposals meet the technical requirements of the program, USDA approves the proposals submitted by CDFA for funding

2. Scoring Criteria do not Reflect Policy

a. Most of the scoring criteria do not reflect the technical document's goals and strategies.

All the scoring criteria questions in Phase 1 and most of the questions in Phase 2 are designed to measure the general quality of the proposal, rather than its likely impact or its ability to achieve priority objectives in the technical guidance document. In fact, there seems to be a disconnect between the scoring criteria and the technical guidance document. In Phase 1, for example, the questions could as easily relate to housing or economic development as to food and agriculture. For example:

- "Does the proposal explain the beneficiaries and how they will be impacted?"
- "How well do the activities relate to the proposal's objectives?"
- "Are the outcomes appropriate?"

Similarly, in the scoring criteria for Phase 2, most of the questions relate to general issues and do not reflect the specific policy objectives identified in the technical document. For example:

- "Does the proposal include a line item budget; how reasonable and appropriate is the amount of the budget request?"
- "Does the proposal clearly describe how the project will potentially impact the specialty crop industry? Are the intended beneficiaries identified? Is it clear how many beneficiaries will be impacted? Is the economic impact provided?"
- "Does it have at least one distinct, quantifiable and measurable outcome that directly supports the project's purpose, and is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries?"

There are two partly substantive policy-oriented questions in Phase 2. Question #3, a yes-or-no question, asks whether the proposal has the potential to enhance the competitiveness of non-specialty crops. And Question #5 asks, "Does the proposal clearly describe how the project will potentially impact the specialty crop industry?" That same question also asks whether the proposal specifically address the project's economic impact.

Even these two questions are fairly general and simply ask whether the proposal adequately describes the expected impact. They do not address the specific objectives set forth in the technical guidance document. Such questions might ask:

- Does the proposal effectively addresses the priority concerns and include key strategies described in the technical guidance document?
- Will the project likely have an economic impact commensurate with the amount invested?
- Does the project enhance ecological sustainability; increase consumption of healthy foods; and/or deliver direct economic benefits to growers?

While the current questions do shed light on whether a project is likely to succeed, the scoring process does not enable a reviewer to express an opinion as to whether it will have meaningful and positive impacts on the objectives in the technical review document. Nor does the scoring mechanism allow proposals that address multiple priorities or have other substantive desirable characteristics (beyond quality) to score higher.

In interviews, several committee members indicated that their decision-making process did take more policy-oriented questions into account, but there is no way to incorporate these assessments into the score. The current system gives reviewers too much discretion and only indirectly accounts for them in the scoring. By failing to make a direct link between the scoring criteria and the strategies and areas of emphasis in the technical document, the process misses an opportunity to direct funding toward higher impact projects and strategies that meet the priority objectives of CDFA and the state.

b. Wording of the technical guidance document is vague and is not reflected in the Phase 2 scoring criteria.

In defining the review criteria, the language of the technical document is very general, stating only that "CDFA's intent is to fund projects that can produce the highest degree of measurable benefits to California specialty crop producers in relation to each dollar spent." While this would seem to favor projects that deliver multiple benefits, the Phase 2 scoring criteria do not ensure that high impact projects get the highest scores. In fact, EWG's review found that CDFA awarded several large grants – primarily in the communications arena – to projects that deliver negligible economic or environmental benefits.

3. Allocation of Funding is Imbalanced

Because the technical document does not establish specific funding targets or priorities among the major categories and sub-areas of grants, research projects receive 52 percent of the total funding, short-changing other equally important needs.

EWG does not advocate setting strict percentage allocations for each category since this could

limit the ability to fund the best projects, but there should be a better balance between supporting long-term research and addressing the more immediate economic, health and food security needs in the Marketing and Nutrition categories. Proposals in the Research category may have an advantage because they are more likely to be developed and written by professionals with greater experience and skill in grant writing than those who submit applications in other funding areas, and it is important to recognize this factor and take steps to level the playing field and ensure that food security, nutrition or marketing are not chronically disadvantaged. CDFA should also take into account that funding from other farm bill programs is more likely to be available in the research area.

6. Lack of clear objectives and specified outcomes

Some sub-areas in the technical document do not identify specific priority objectives or the desired impact of funded projects. The document states that "areas of emphasis" are suggestions and should not be considered exclusive. This leaves it unclear how grants will be evaluated against one another and limits CDFA's ability to encourage submission of proposals that address key gaps and needs.

5. Lack of Transparency

The are significant problems of lack of transparency and access to information in the SCBG program:

The process for awarding grants is opaque. The overall state plan for the program is not publicly available. The scoring criteria are available on request, but little information is available publicly on the how funding is allocated across the three categories and how final grant awards are decided. The process is opaque even to some volunteers who have been members of the technical review committees.

Little information is available on approved and rejected proposals. The programs provides little more than short abstracts about approved projects. These often do not make clear which objectives of the technical document they are designed to address. No interim reports are available, and not until four years after a project begins are final project reports available on USDA's website. This makes it difficult to learn from the program's experience and results and to assess whether grants were used effectively. No information at all is available about rejected proposals. The lack of statistics about the numbers of projects submitted, approved and rejected in each sub-area makes it difficult for stakeholder groups or others to assess where greater outreach is needed to encourage higher quality proposals.

Rejected grant applicants get little feedback: Many unsuccessful applicants say they were told little as to why they were rejected or how their proposals could be improved, making it difficult for them or others to develop better proposals, especially in sub-areas that award few grants.

F. Recommendations

Overall, EWG believes that the SCBG Program provides valuable public investment in research, production and promotion of healthy foods. However, our analysis identified several ways the program can be improved to ensure greater balance, impact and alignment with the "Ag Vision's" priorities. The adoption of EWG's recommendations below would ensure that funding is better targeted to higher impact projects with multiple economic, public health and environmental benefits. Chief among these are projects that increase consumption and access to local, healthy and sustainable food while delivering direct economic benefits to growers. These recommendations will also ensure greater transparency in decision-making and reduce funding for projects that are in conflict with priority goals and/or could be funded through other private or other public funding sources.

For the California Department of Food and Agriculture:

1. Align the technical guidance document more closely with the "Ag Vision."

General

a. Develop more robust scoring criteria that give priority to projects that address the technical document's primary objectives and areas of emphasis and achieve multiple benefits.

b. Establish clear and transparent guidelines and priorities for allocating funding across funding categories and sub-areas, reducing support for projects that could be funded by other farm bill sources (e.g., in the Research category, Conservation Innovation Grants and NIFA; in the international trade category Market Assistance Program. Ensure that no one category receives more than 40 percent or less than 20 percent of total funding.

c. Increase grant awards in the Marketing and Nutrition categories to deliver more immediate economic and public health benefits and ensure greater balance.

d. Expand outreach to organic, beginning and disadvantaged farmers, farmworker and food insecure communities in order to ensure higher proposal submissions from these groups, taking into account that their grant applications may not be as professional as proposals submitted by Ph.D. researchers.

Research:

e. Require all proposals to incorporate a grower outreach and/or information component (in partnership with other organizations, as appropriate).

f. In the Plant Health/Pest Control sub-area, give priority to projects that emphasize non-toxic approaches, with particular emphasis on alternatives to methyl iodide and other fumigants.

g. In the Environmental Concern and Conservation sub-area, give priority to projects that address multiple resource concerns, especially reducing chemical fertilizer and pesticide use; improving water quality, water conservation and stewardship; and promoting organic agriculture, soil conservation and climate change adaptation. Reduce duplication in areas of emphasis.

Marketing:

h. Give preference to projects that can demonstrate an ability to increase farm profitability and sustainability; improve farmers' knowledge of markets; enhance distribution capacity for locally or regionally produced foods; and/or promote domestic consumption, access to and/or affordability of edible specialty crops, particularly in low-income communities.

i. Eliminate general marketing/communication grants that do not have such outcomes for specialty crops.

j. In the Outreach sub-area, create a stand-alone sub-area focused specifically on outreach to growers, technical assistance providers and workers and/or ensure that outreach is fully integrated into other grant sub-areas.

k. Revise the Agricultural Education sub-area to give priority to youth-oriented projects likely to increase their nutritional knowledge and consumption of specialty crops, or to farmers, especially beginning and disadvantaged farmers to enhance their understanding of the technical requirements of new markets.

l. Replace the International Marketing sub-area with a new one focused on building local and regional markets, including emphasis on farm-to-institution programs, food hubs,

processing and other technical assistance and infrastructure needs.

Nutrition:

m. Give priority to projects that: a) increase healthy food access in underserved communities as well as opening new markets and/or delivering other economic benefits to growers; b) increase use of CalFresh and other federal assistance programs to boost sales at farmers markets and community supported agriculture.

n. Revise the Healthy Eating sub-area to focus on educational aspects of farm-to-fork programs and emphasize strategies known to change eating habits, including group cooking classes, garden education, tastings and food economics/shopping literacy projects.

2. Revise the scoring criteria in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 so as to:

a. align them more closely with stated priorities in the technical guidance document

b. give highest scores to projects that are most likely to achieve benefits that align with the "Ag Vision," with higher points for those that address numerous objectives such as:

- enhancing growers' profitability or providing other economic benefits;
- increasing consumption of and access to fruits, nuts and vegetables by California residents, especially in underserved communities;
- enhancing grower knowledge through outreach and extension efforts;
- enhancing sustainable resource use and organic farming and reducing use of chemical pesticides or fertilizers;
- supporting beginning and disadvantaged farmers;
- strengthening local and regional food systems and infrastructure;
- increasing the food system's resilience, adaptation to and/or mitigation of climate change ;
- addressing invasive species threats by preventative and non-toxic approaches;
- improving labor conditions or enhancing human resource management.

While the scoring system should generally favor proposals that deliver multiple benefits, it should not exclude carefully selected projects that more narrowly address specific high-priority needs.

c. CDFA should review and revise the scoring criteria periodically as new priorities emerge and assign bonus points to projects that respond to those needs. (Other states, such as Vermont, have done this with great success.20) It should also publicize its interest in receiving proposals focused on new and/or high priority issues.

d. All proposals and abstracts should detail how the proposal addresses priorities identified in the technical guidance document.

3. Reject projects that undermine or conflict with priority goals of the guidance document.

4. Increase Transparency

CDFA should solicit periodic stakeholder comments about all aspects of the program and publish on its website:

- annual statistics on how many proposals were submitted (by category, sub-area and geographic location); how many are rejected in the Phase 1 review; and how many were invited to submit for Phase 2. (These data would also be helpful for CDFA's internal tracking system and could help identify where more outreach

is needed.)

- a full explanation of the decision-making process, including scoring criteria, names of review committee members, etc.
- full project proposals; timely biennial progress reports and the final performance reviews.

5. Ensure diversity (including regional) on the Technical Review Committee and engage its members in continual improvement of the decision-making process.

For Federal Policy:

EWG recommends these changes in federal specialty crop policy to provide more funding for projects that expand markets and profitability for growers while also increasing domestic consumption of and access to fruits and vegetables.

1. Broaden the federal mandate to include the goals of increasing consumption and availability of locally and regionally produced fruits and vegetables as well as boosting profitability, ecological sustainability and competitiveness of specialty crop producers.
2. Mandate transparency requirements to ensure that state grant-making agencies make available more information on the decision-making process, as well as full project proposals, timely progress reports and final performance reviews of specialty crop block grants.
3. Revise federal law to give priority to that grants that yield multiple ecological, economic and public health benefits.

Endnotes

1. American Farmland Trust to the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the State Board of Food and Agriculture. 2010.. California Agriculture Vision: Strategies for Sustainability. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC. http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/agvision/

2. National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. Specialty Crop Block Grants: http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/local-food-systems-rural-development/specialty-crop-grants/

3. Association of State Departments of Agriculture. 2011. The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program After the 2008 Farm Bill.

4. United States Department of Agriculture Agriculture Marketing Service. Commodity Areas: http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&navID=SpecialtyCropBlockGrant0Program&rightNav1=SpecialtyCropBlockGrant0Program&topNav=&leftNav=CommodityAreas&page=SCBGP&resultType

5. Telephone interview with Kathy Alameda, CDFAs Manager of Federal Programs (January 18, 2012). We were unable to confirm this since the State Plan is not publicly available for review.

6. We include ag research, substitutes for fossil fuel-based inputs, environmental stewardship and land and water conservation under the broader environmental stewardship category

7. We do not include in the direct economic benefit classification general international marketing projects, pest prevention/plant health and other research projects since these only indirectly provide economic benefits, and over a much longer time frame.

8. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Food Dollar Series Documentation: http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/FoodDollar/documentation.htm

9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2009. State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables, 2009. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA. http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/downloads/StateIndicatorReport2009.pdf

10. California Climate and Agriculture Network. March 2011. Ready… Or Not? An Assessment of California Agriculture's Readiness for Climate Change. California Climate and Agriculture Network, Sebastapol, CA. http://calclimateag.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/ready-or-not-full-report.pdf

11. Our assessment is based only on the information provided in the short abstracts of the project. It is possible that some of these had outreach components that were not made clear in the short abstracts provided to the public. Also three projects in the outreach sub-area were focused on food safety issues.

12. Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. 2012 Florida Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – Farm Bill (SCBGP-FB) Application Instructions and Guidelines: http://www.freshfromflorida.com/grants/specialty_crop.html

13. In the local and regional classification, this analysis includes projects that foster and strengthen links between production, processing, marketing, distribution and consumption of specialty crops within specific foodsheds and/or geographically defined regions within the State of California, such as Bay Area, North Coast, Central Valley or adjacent counties.

14. For this reason, our funding totals differ than those generated by USDA's Know Your Farmer program, which include statewide branding and garden-based nutrition education in its list of local/regional food system projects.

15. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2009. 2007 Census of Agriculture. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, p. 194. http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/usv1.pdf

16. The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program After the 2008 farm bill, Association of State Departments of Agriculture, 2011.

17. EWG unpublished research based on analysis of USDA grants in this program

18. Ibid

19. Wholesome Wave. Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program™ (FVRx™): http://wholesomewave.org/fvrx/

20. Vermont's 2011 proposal application contains additional points for projects that benefits a) beginning farmer or rancher; or b) socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher; and demonstrates multi-state partnership; promotes access to Vermont grown specialty crops for low income Vermonters and promotes organic or sustainable agriculture.

Appendix 1: Specialty Crop Block Grant Funding 2009-2011: List of Projects, Funds Allocated and Key Priorities Addressed.

2009	**Environmental Stewardship**	**Direct Economic Benefit to Growers**	**Pest Challenges**	**Grower Outreach**	**Local and Regional Food Systems**	**Climate Mitigation/ Adaptation**	**Increased Consumption**	**Access to Healthy Food**	**Food Safety**	**Beginning / Disadvantaged Farmer**	**Regulatory Issues (Environmental)**	**Award Amount**
	I. Research											**$7,422,619**
	A. Plant Health and Pest Challenges											**$3,230,794**
Detection and control of Verticillium wilt on lettuce												$446,447
Development of almond, stone fruit, and walnut rootstocks with improved resistance to soilborne pathogens	x		x									$471,740
Sustainable Grape Pest Management for California Using Weather Data, Models and Cultural Controls	x		x									$497,179
Area-wide Biological Control of Diaprepes root weevil	x		x									$384,347
Refining chemical control of vine mealybug to manage resistance, enhance natural enemy conservation and promote integrated control			x									$294,012
Acquisition of a Variable-Pressure Scanning Electron Microscope (VP-SEM) to enhance diagnostics of pests affecting Specialty Crops			x									$277,314
Development of an Integrated Pest Management Program for Vole Control in Artichokes	x		x									$127,197
Host Specificity Testing of Exotic Parasitoids for Biocontrol of Asian Citrus Psyllid	x		x									$283,690
Cotton Aphid Management in Pomegranate: Slowing the Spread of Citrus Tristeza Virus in the San Joaquin Valley	x		x									$227,714
Refined Management of Arthropod Pests of Mint to Improve Sustainability and Protect Water Quality	x		x									$221,154
	B. Environmental Concerns											**$2,904,310**
Reducing Our Footprint: Minimizing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Nitrogen Leaching in Vineyards, and Enhancing Landscape Carbon Stocks	x					x						$498,252
Coupling conservation tillage with overhead, low-pressure precision irrigation of vegetables: A new production and irrigation paradigm for increased resource use efficiencies.	x			x								$275,764

Soil and water management to reduce water losses, energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions in tomato rotations	x					x						$417,656
Multi-Commodity Sustainability Practices Program	x			x								$185,400
Developing a Sustainable Practice Benchmark Tool for California Pears	x			x								$75,000
Almond Sustainability Initiative: Integrated Water and Nutrient Resource Management	x			x								$345,000
Minimizing Water Use and Fertilizer Loss in California Container Nurseries by Precision Control	x											$304,825
Implementing the Partial Root Drying Technique to Increase Water Use Efficiency for Processing Tomatoes	x			x		x						$184,924
California Roundtable on Food Supply and Water	x											$88,683
Tree phenology models for climate change projection and improved water and nutrient management	x					x						$405,903
Determining the Potential Impact of Vegetable Food Safety Regulations on Wildlife and the Environment	x								x		x	$122,903
	C. Food Safety											**$1,287,515**
Evaluation and Optimization of Postharvest Intervention Strategies for the Reduction of Bacterial Contamination on Tomatoes									x			$296,440
Reducing tomato contamination with Salmonella through cultivar selection and maturity at harvest.									x			$62,271
Using Leafy Green Marketing Agreement Audit Data to Determine Non-Compliance Areas and Preparation of Training and Recommendations for Improvements in Future Growing Seasons				x					x			$136,040
Differential Susceptibility of Spinach Grown under Slow- and Fast-Growth Conditions to Enteric Bacterial Contamination									x			$86,563
Wildlife survey for E. coli O157:H7 and Salmonella spp. in the central coastal counties of California	x								x			$300,000
Survival of E. coli on soil amendments and irrigation water in leafy green field environments									x			$112,100
Assessing Postharvest Risks for Salmonella in Pistachios									x			$244,805
Establishment of Critical Operating Standards for Chlorine Dioxide in Disinfection of Dump Tank and Flume Water for Fresh Tomatoes									x			$49,296
	II. Marketing											**$5,669,874**
	A. Agricultural Education/Outreach											**$1,807,859**
Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Honey Bees Pollinating California's Specialty Crops	x			x								$254,400

Technology transfer campaign to increase conservation cropping systems (CCS) and winter cover crops in California specialty crops	x			x		x						$497,115
Building Leaders for the Future	x	x			x							$261,100
California Food System Alliance Project	x				x							$128,544
Building Sustainable Farming Systems Through Grower and Consumer Outreach	x	x		x	x							$275,000
California Specialty Crop Communications Plan												$391,700
	B. International Trade											**$1,189,899**
Upgrade and Expansion of the California Stone Fruit Trade and Regulatory Database												$75,000
California Canned Peaches to India												$75,000
The Impacts of Changes in Agricultural Transportation Sector on the Competitiveness of the California Specialty Crop Industry												$167,266
Use of 1-MCP after harvest to improve fruit quality after long-distance shipment and storage.												$100,000
Export Training for Specialty Crops		x										$448,308
California Grown Marketing in Japan												$324,325
	C. Market Enhancement and Promotion											**$2,672,116**
Improving Long-Term Sales and Competitiveness of Monterey Area Wine grape Growers		x										$199,485
California First: Spotlight on California Wine Regions		x										$450,000
Improving Grower Sales and Competitiveness by Promoting Prune Juice to Younger Consumers		x					x					$450,000
Measuring and Understanding the Pattern of Margins between Farm and Retail Prices for California Specialty Crops to Increase Grower Returns.												$292,007
California Grown Campaign 2		x										$500,000
WPA Pistachio Industry Recovery and Re-building Effort									x			$500,000
Specialty Crop Growers Partner with City of San Francisco (SF) for Healthy People and Bottom Lines		x			x							$280,624
	III. Nutrition											**$1,604,591**
	A. Food Security											**$164,558**
Specialty Crop Solutions for Health-Distressed Communities	x	x		x	x			x		x		$164,558
	B. Healthy Eating											**$1,440,033**
A Growing Movement to Seed Healthy Eating		x			x		x	x				$314,988
Ecology Center Nutrition, Food, and Farming Programs		x			x		x	x				$100,000

Head Start Nutrition Garden Program							x					$135,170
Linking Ethnic Specialty Crop Producers and Low-Income Consumers through Marketing and Nutrition Education		x			x		x	x		x		$210,376
Healthy Food Access, Small Farms and Nutrition in Six California Foodsheds: A Consortium Promoting SNAP and WIC Voucher Links with Farmers Markets		x			x		x	x				$499,249
Food for Thought							x					$180,250
Total	**$6,770,334**	**$4,153,688**	**$2,784,347**	**$2,393,201**	**$2,234,439**	**$2,003,850**	**$1,890,033**	**$1,910,418**	**$1,289,171**	**$374,934**	**$122,903**	**$14,697,084**
2010	**Environmental Stewardship**	**Direct Economic Benefit to Growers**	**Pest Challenges**	**Grower Outreach**	**Local and Regional Food Systems**	**Climate Mitigation/ Adaptation**	**Increased Consumption**	**Access to Healthy Food**	**Food Safety**	**Beginning/ Disadvantaged Farmer**	**Regulatory Issues (Environmental)**	**Award Amount**
	I. Research											**$8,514,899**
	A. Plant Health and Pest Challenges $3,828,385											
California Invasive Species Advisory Committee (CISAC)			x									$152,250
Olive Fruit Fly: Managing an Ancient Pest in Modern Times	x		x									$235,032
Area Wide Mating Disruption for Vine Mealybug in Grapes	x		x									$489,628
Development of High Throughput Assay for Rapid and Accurate Detection of Regulated Citrus Pathogens			x									$438,442
Management of Asian Citrus Psyllid in Organic Citrus	x		x									$339,650
Accelerated Development of Pest Resistant Baby Leaf Lettuce Cultivars	x		x									$327,826
Development of a Steam Injection System for Control of Replant Disease in Fruit and Nut Orchards without Fumigants	x		x									$221,330
Monitoring and Management of Mealy Plum and Leaf-Curl Plum Aphids in Prunes Using Sex Pheromones	x		x									$74,861
Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) Mating Disruption in Caneberries	x		x									$81,837
Best Management Practices for Hybrid Onion Seed Production to Improve Crop Sustainability in California	x											$248,890
Increasing Sales of California Mandarins by Identifying and Preventing Dryness												$300,000
Spinosad Resistance in California Olive Fruit Fly (Bactrocera oleae) Populations			x									$137,765

Unified Production Nursery Systems Approach for Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Best Management Practices (BMP)	x		x									$296,603
Statewide Specialty Crop Protection Program – Environmental Compliance			x									$484,271
	B. Environmental Concerns $3,220,546											
Improving Forage Resource for Pollinators of California's Specialty Crops	x											$260,675
Data-Driven Targeted Education to Speed Adoption of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices	x											$374,250
Scalable Solutions to Reduce Water Use & Salinity in California Winery & Food Processing Cleaning Operations	x			x								$449,553
Extending Knowledge of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for Orchard Crops	x		x									$134,140
Assessing Grower Needs to Accelerate Adoption of Beneficial Management Practices in Specialty Crops	x			x								$98,199
California Almond Sustainability Program (CASP): Integrating Resource Issues with Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) Implementation	x		x	x								$404,505
Bird Depredation to Almonds, Lettuce, Melons and Ginseng												$149,944
Heat-tolerant Lettuce and Spinach Varieties for Adaptation to Global Warming and Low Land Cost Areas of California						x						$295,218
On-Farm Practices to Manage Water Supply and Supply Reliability Risks	x			x		x						$128,987
Carbon Dynamics of Orchard Floor Applied Chipped Almond Prunings as Influenced by Irrigation Methods, Soil Type, Cover Crop Management and Farm Practices	x					x						$304,254
California Cut Flower Industry Sustainability Study	x					x						$74,900
Field Testing a Carbon Offset and Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) Model for California Wine Grape Growers to Drive Climate Protection and Innovation	x					x						$449,921
Host a Plenary Panel on the Essential Role of Specialty Crops in Meeting the Growing Food and Energy Demands of the World. Also Participate in the Sixteenth United Nations (UN) Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Kyoto Protocol						x						$96,000
	C. Food Safety											**$1,465,968**
Developing and Validating Practical Strategies to Improve Microbial Safety in Composting Process Control and Handing Practices	x								x			$296,368

Evaluation of Amphibians and Reptiles as Potential Reservoirs of Foodborne Pathogens and Risk Reduction to Protect Fresh Produce and the Environment	x			x					x			$142,523
Escherichia coli O157:H7 in Bioaerosols from Cattle Production Areas: Evaluation of Proximity and Airborne Transport on Leafy Green Crop Contamination									x			$296,360
Rapid Testing of Flume Water Organic Load to Better Assess the Efficacy of Free Chlorine Against Escherichia coli O157:H7 During Commercial Lettuce Processing									x			$70,104
Non Invasive Imaging Approaches to Evaluate Potential Infusion Of Pathogens During Vacuum Cooling Of Lettuce Leaves and Real Time Dynamics of Microbes on Leaf Tissues as a Function of Moisture Content									x			$45,008
Developing Buffer Zone Distances Between Sheep Grazing Operations and Vegetable Crops to Maximize Food Safety									x			$169,575
Developing a Program to Educate the Walnut Supply Chain as it Pertains to Product Handling and Safety				x					x			$58,554
The Likelihood of Cross-Contamination of Head Lettuce by E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella and Use									x			$330,541
Influence of the Pre-Harvest Environment on the Physiological State of Salmonella and its Impact on Increased Survival Capability									x			$56,935
II. Marketing								**$5,709,848**				
	A. Agricultural Education/Outreach $2,936,105											
Multi-Commodity Sustainability Programs: Assessment and Implementation	x			x								$360,413
California Specialty Crop Communications Coalition Promotional Campaign							x					$481,163
Engaging Social Media - The Voice of California's Specialty Crops												$161,408
Developing Internet Resources for California Specialty Crops												$289,233
What's Growin' On? 10th Edition - Focus on Specialty Crops					x		x					$145,237
Correcting Misconceptions about Pesticide Residues												$180,000
Sacramento Valley Beginning Farmer Training and Incubator Program	x				x					x		$500,000
Spanish Strawberry Production Manual and Outreach				x						x		$256,226
California Specialty Crop Communication Coalition Social Media Outreach Plan												$461,112
Launching a Cal Ag Almanac: Putting California Specialty Crops on the Map					x							$101,313
	B. International Trade $702,550											

California Specialty Crops to Europe		x										$294,600
California's Specialty Commodity Opportunity Outlook: Global Analysis and Prioritization of Leading and Emerging Export Market Opportunities for Specialty Commodities												$132,950
California Grown Marketing and Public Relations Campaign in Canada		x										$275,000
	C. Market Enhancement and Promotion $2,071,193											
California Grown Grower Profile Campaign		x					x					$441,343
California Granny Smith Maturity Standardization												$80,000
Expanding Usage and Consumption of Prunes Through Introduction of Healthy, High Fiber Prune Breakfast Bread		x										$450,000
Contra Costa Community - Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)		x			x		x	x				$150,960
Developing New Fig Products to Increase Grower Returns		x										$82,000
Building Successful Farm to School Models to Enhance Markets for Specialty Crops	x	x			x		x	x				$497,990
Development of Market Based Best Practices for California Kiwifruit												$125,000
Paso Robles Distinct & Different Direct-To-Consumer Marketing Campaign		x			x							$243,900
III. Nutrition								**$1,282,425**				
	A. Food Security $0											
	B. Healthy Eating $1,282,425											
Promoting Specialty Crops to Federal Nutrition Benefit Clients		x			x		x					$498,576
Garden-Enhanced Nutrition Education Grants for Pre-school							x	x				$107,842
Ecology Center Nutrition Food and Farming Policy Programs	x	x			x		x	x				$150,000
Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: A Centerpiece for a Healthy School Environment (FFVCHSE)								x				$220,000
Woodland Community Garden Project	x				x		x					$75,000
California Strawberries and Insulin Resistance (IR) in Humans: Combating a Major Risk Factor for Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease Through Diet												$231,007
	$7,017,335	**$3,084,369**	**$3,818,140**	**$1,898,960**	**$2,362,976**	**$1,349,280**	**$2,548,111**	**$1,126,792**	**$1,465,968**	**$756,226**	**$15,507,172**	
Total												**$15,507,172**

2011	Environmental Stewardship	Direct Economic Benefit to Growers	Pest Challenges	Grower Outreach	Local and Regional Food Systems	Climate Mitigation/ Adaptation	Increased Consumption	Access to Healthy Food	Food Safety	Beginning/ Disadvantaged Farmer	Regulatory Issues (Environmental)	Award Amount
	I. Research 3											**$8,341,38**
	A. Plant Health and Pest Challenges											**$3,170,455**
Development of an Effective Lure for Reliable Detection and Control of the Female Navel Orangeworm (NOW) Moth	x		x									$190,593
Alternative Strategies for Pest Control in Commercial Potato Production	x		x									$139,252
Navel orangeworm biological control	x		x									$460,198
Broad spectrum rootstocks to manage disease and pest infestation in orchard and vineyard crops in California	x		x									$445,843
Development and Implementation of Sustainable Production Methods for Bedding and Container Color Plants	x		x									$277,596
Increase fumigation efficacy with alternatives to methyl bromide using low permeability tarps	x		x									$483,362
Integrated Pest Management for Light Brown Apple Moth in California Ornamental Nurseries	x		x									$255,598
Development of tools for rapid detection, identification and interdiction of Torradoviruses before they invade and establish in California			x									$362,410
Optimizing Applications of Plant Systemic Insecticides Against Vine Mealybug (VMB)			x									$290,455
Mass rearing and identification of imported parasitoids for the Asian Citrus Psyllid	x		x									$153,220
Addressing Urgent Research Needs for Red Palm Weevil in California			x									$111,928
	B. Environmental Concerns											**$3,373,797**
Evaluation of Winter Cover Crops to Reduce Nitrate Leaching and Increase Yields in Drip- irrigated Tomato Rotations	x											$483,316
Review of Regulatory Efficiencies for Specialty Crop Producers											x	$119,780
Sustainable Methods for Extracting High Quality Oil from Fruit and Vegetable Seeds	x											$219,502

Improved Tracking of Water Use in Specialty Crops	x											$378,028
California Berry Crops: Improving Water-Use Efficiency While Maintaining Crop Quality	x											$495,750
Development of Sustainable Infrared Dry-Peeling Technology for Fruits and Vegetables	x											$382,462
Drought-tolerant Lettuce and Spinach Varieties for Adaptation to Climate Change	x					x						$333,838
An assessment of springtime temperature inversion conditions and the usefulness of wind machines for frost protection in California coastal winegrape regions	x											$59,961
Torrefaction of Specialty Crops Pomace to Produce High-Energy Density Fuels	x											$226,117
Best management practices (BMPs) for Cal. native blue orchard bees (BOBs) and BMPs for wildflower seed production in orchards and vineyards.	x											$280,138
California Wine Climate Protection Initiative: Calculating Scope Three Greenhouse Gas Emissions to Mitigate Climate Change, Reduce Costs, and Address International Market Demand	x					x						$308,632
Improving Water Use Efficiency in High Elevation (HE) Vineyards	x											$86,273
	C. Food Safety											**$1,797,131**
Evaluation of sampling protocol to provide science-based metrics for use in identification of Salmonella in irrigation water testing programs in mixed produce farms in the Suwannee River watershed.									x			$254,888
Toward a rapid and reliable pathogen detection system in produce.									x			$152,591
Sources and mechanisms of transfer of Salmonella in the production and post-harvest tree nut environment.									x			$157,604
Distribution of Salmonella in pistachios and development of effective sampling strategies.									x			$95,206
Validating Salmonella inactivation during thermal processing of the physically heat-treated chicken litter as soil amendment and organic fertilizer.									x			$147,344

Glucosinolate-derived compounds as a green manure for controlling E. coli O157:H7 and Salmonella in soil.	x								x			$175,229
Assessment of Escherichia coli as an indicator of microbial quality of irrigation waters use for produce.									x			$84,580
Validation of testing methods for the detection and quantification of Escherichia coli O157:H7, Salmonella spp. (several species), fecal coliforms and non-pathogenic Escherichia coli in compost.									x			$121,015
Comparative assessment of field survival of Salmonella enterica and Escherichia coli O157:H7 on cilantro (Coriandrum sativum) in relation to sequential cutting and re-growth									x			$96,729
The role of riparian zones in bacteria dispersal to produce farms	x								x			$161,945
Development of an On-line Traceability Tool for California Tomato Farmers												$350,000
	II. Marketing											**$5,054,997**
	A. Agricultural Education/Outreach											**$3,213,833**
Helping Small, Latino, and Hmong Specialty crop producers to profit from new values based marketing channels		x		x	x					x		$86,851
Presenting California Specialty Crops to Families through Interactive Garden-to-Kitchen-to-Table Activities and Mixed-media Educational Tools							x					$369,300
San Joaquin County AgVenture					x		x					$75,250
The Centennial Farm Specialty Crop Educational Project					x		x					$350,000
Family Farm Food Safety Outreach Program for California Specialty Crop Growers				x				x		x		$292,576
Food Safety Manager Certificate Program for California Strawberry Farms				x				x				$299,450
California Avocado Grower GAP Education Series	x			x				x				$150,000
Consumer Education - California Country Television Program												$500,000
A Guide to Promoting Asian Specialty Produce							x					$101,931
Delivering best practices and sensory training to benefit California olive growers and processors	x			x								$105,023

Expand Specialty Crops Education and Outreach in the Schools and Community					x		x					$131,750
Ag In Motion												$268,217
Urban Farmer Training Program	x			x						x		$483,485
	B. International Trade											**$451,003**
Domestic and International Market Potential of the California Olive Industry												$135,883
California Blueberry Commission International Market Survey												$65,000
California Leafy Greens Consumer Public Relations Campaign in Canada		x					x					$250,120
	C. Market Enhancement and Promotion											**$1,390,161**
Lake County Rising, Promotional Campaign		x		x								$204,017
Enhance the Competitiveness of Placer County Mandarin oranges		x					x					$111,599
Reducing spoilage and expanding growth in California specialty olives through improved fermentation management												$90,851
Implementing the California Standard to Increase Navel Orange Consumption		x					x					$96,062
Improving Analytical Methods and US Standards to Increase Competitiveness of California Table Olives and Olive Oil												$111,997
Increasing Market Vitality and Enforcement through Market Manager Training and Certification at California Certified Farmers Markets					x							$216,818
Green from Grapes to Glass: A Marketing Communications Campaign for California Wine	x	x		x								$392,500
Solano Grown Marketing		x			x							$50,000
Specialty Crop Market Enhancement and Promotion, Buy Fresh Buy Local North Valley		x		x	x		x					$116,317
	III. Nutrition											**$3,674,995**
	A. Food Security											**$1,727,954**
Food Bank as Food Hub: Building a Local Food System		x			x		x	x				$318,673
Mandela Market Place Emerging Markets		x			x		x	x		x		$405,000

From the Mouths of Babes: A Children's Campaign for Home-Based Food Access					x		x					$249,050
City Farm Phase II: Bringing the First Crops to Harvest					x		x					$255,237
Cultivating a Community Nutritional Health Network		x		x	x		x	x				$499,994
	B. Healthy Eating											**$1,947,041**
Specialty Commodities Promotion in Disadvantaged Communities					x		x	x				$106,910
Oak Park Farmers Market		x			x		x					$50,068
Ecology Center Nutrition Food and Farming Policy Programs					x		x	x				$150,026
Plant It, Grow It, Eat It!					x		x	x				$479,162
North Coast Opportunities Farm-2Fork Project		x		x	x		x	x				$261,866
Expanding the Promotion of Specialty Crops and Increasing Healthy Food Access to Federal Nutrition Benefit Clients		x			x		x	x				$498,682
California Hotel Community Crops Project					x		x	x				$52,244
Healing Meals for Healthy Communities							x	x				$348,083
Total	**$7,127,861**	**$3,341,749**	**$3,170,455**	**$2,892,079**	**$3,874,736**	**$642,470**	**$5,277,324**	**$2,641,478**	**$2,539,157**	**$1,267,912**	**$119,780**	**$17,071,375**

Appendix 2: June 2011 Blog Postings from the California Know Your Farmer website, a project funded by a Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

A valuable safety net

By Josh Sheppard | June 17, 2011 |

Can you guess one of the riskiest professions out there? Even though we all need to eat, you might be surprised that farming can be a real rollercoaster and is far from a secure job.

Uncooperative weather can do a real number on your crop. Also, my crop is in competition with rice grown around the world. If markets plummet, it could really take a bite out of my bottom line.

That's where the farm bill comes into play. This is sometimes criticized, but many people don't understand how little of the dollars in the farm bill actually go to support California rice farmers. It's less than one percent of the total federal spending on agriculture. Many rice farmers don't participate in crop insurance, because it's very expensive and not effective for our situation, so the farm bill provides support to help us through challenging times.

Those in Washington, DC are exploring options to the farm bill. Perhaps one day they will find a suitable alternative. For now, this relatively minimal investment is important to help family farms survive through tough times of weather and low prices that could come at any time.

Investing Wisely

By Sean Doherty | June 17, 2011 |

One of the most important things about my job is making sure wise decisions are made to ensure we will keep this family farm going well into the future. I make decisions virtually every day that affect the long-term viability of this business.

It helps having a safety net through the federal farm bill. This is an area that is criticized from time to time, but when a person really studies it, I hope they can see the benefits.

The Commodity Title of the farm bill is a relatively small part of overall spending in the bill – for California rice growers it's less than one percent of total federal spending on agriculture. What it provides is a safety net for growers, so we can survive through a crop failure or if prices plummet. When our farms are strong, we can continue to provide wildlife habitat for millions of birds along the Pacific Flyway.

For California rice, the farm bill helps us continue to be an important part of this state.

Appendix 3: Scoring Criteria for Phase 1 and Phase 2

2012 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Phase I, Concept Proposal

SCORING CRITERIA	
1. PROJECT PURPOSE	**Maximum Points**
a) Is the issue, problem or need addressed? b) Is proposal important and timely? c) Are objectives identified?	**10**
2. POTENTIAL IMPACT	
a) Are beneficiaries identified? b) Is impact to beneficiaries explained? c) Does the number of beneficiaries justify the investment?	**10**
3. EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES	
a) Is at least one distinct, quantifiable measurable outcome that supports the proposal's purpose described? b) Are the outcomes appropriate?	**15**
4. WORK PLAN	
a) Do the activities relate to the proposal's objectives? b) Can the activities be performed within the proposed timeline?	**10**
5. BUDGET	
a) Is the amount requested reasonable and appropriate?	**5**
TOTAL	**50**
OVERALL COMMENTS:	

SCORING CRITERIA	Maximum Points
1. PROJECT PURPOSE Is the specific issue, problem, or need that the project will address clearly described? Does the proposal explain why the issue is relevant to the purpose of the SCBGP?	15
2. PRIOR YEAR PROJECTS *(Non-Scoring Criteria)* If applicable, does the proposal provide a detailed explanation of how the project compliments or builds upon a previously SCBGP funded project?	Yes/No
3. SPECIALTY CROP ENHANCEMENT *(Non-Scoring Criteria)* If applicable, does the proposal have the potential to enhance the competitiveness of non-specialty crops? If yes, are the steps and measures taken to ensure that all SCBGP funds are being used to solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops clearly described?	Yes/No
4. FUNDING SOURCES *(Non-Scoring Criteria)* If applicable, does the proposal identify other Federal and/or State grant programs the project was submitted to or received funding from? If yes, does the proposal clearly explain how multiple fund sources will not be used to duplicate project activities?	Yes/No
5. POTENTIAL IMPACT Does the proposal clearly describe how the project will potentially impact the specialty crop industry? Are the intended beneficiaries identified? Is it clear how many beneficiaries will be impacted? Is the economic impact provided?	10
6. EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES Has at least one distinct, quantifiable, and measurable outcome that directly and meaningfully supports the project's purpose and is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries identified? Does the proposal quantify and document the benefits and indicate when outcome measures will be achieved?	15
7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING PLAN *(Attachment)* Does the proposal include a Performance Monitoring Plan? Does the Performance Monitoring Plan describe the process of collecting and analyzing data to meet the measurable outcomes? Does the plan indicate who will perform the activities and include timeframes?	15
8. WORK PLAN *(Attachment)* Does the proposal include a Work Plan? Does the Work Plan identify activities necessary to accomplish the project objectives and identify who will accomplish the task? Is the timeline for accomplishing each activity outlined? Is the timeline reasonable?	15
9. BUDGET *(Attachment)* Does the proposal include a line item Budget? How reasonable and appropriate is the amount of the budget request?	5
10. BUDGET NARRATIVE *(Attachment)* Does the proposal include a Budget Narrative? Is the Budget well justified? Does the Budget Narrative support the Budget identified and the project goals and objectives?	15
11. PROJECT OVERSIGHT Does the proposal clearly describe the oversight practices that provide sufficient knowledge of all grant activities to ensure proper and efficient administration of the project? Are the persons responsible for overseeing the project activities identified? Are timelines included?	5
12. PROJECT COMMITMENT Does the proposal clearly describe how all grant partners commit to and work toward the goals and outcome measures? Are the grant partners identified?	5
13. MATCHING FUNDS/IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS *(Non-Scoring Criteria)* If matching funds and/or in-kind contributions have been secured, is there applicable documentation confirming the type(s), amount(s), and source(s) of secured matching and/in-kind contributions?	Yes/No
TOTAL	**100**