



# PENNSYLVANIA VEGETABLE MARKETING & RESEARCH PROGRAM

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## *Request for Marketing Proposals*

*October 22, 2021*

### **1. Background and Introduction**

The Pennsylvania Vegetable Marketing and Research Program is a state marketing ordering that includes all the vegetable growers in Pennsylvania. The Program has two purposes: to fund practical vegetable production research and to promote Pennsylvania-grown vegetables.

The Program functions as an instrumentality of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania under the Department of Agriculture. The Program is governed by a Board composed of the Secretary of Agriculture (or his/her designee), twelve growers appointed by the Secretary (four from each of the western, central and eastern districts of the state) and a sales agent representative also appointed by the Secretary. The Board contracts for part-time administrative services.

The Program was established in 1988 and for the first 10 to 15 years contracted with marketing agencies to develop and implement a comprehensive promotion effort for Pennsylvania grown vegetables. When a routine pattern of providing point-of-purchase materials, conducting a press relations campaign, and doing limited paid advertising developed, the Program's contracted administrative staff assumed these and other promotional duties. Beginning several years ago, the Program was successful in regularly securing USDA Specialty Crop Block Grants (SCBG) through the state Department of Agriculture. It became necessary to hire marketing consultants to assist in completing these SCBG projects with the marketing consultants being contracted on a project-by-project basis.

The Program is currently using the following methods/media to promote Pennsylvania-grown vegetables:

- design, production and distribution of point-of-purchase materials – primarily to growers who retail their produce;
- press campaign – both print media and more recently digital media;
- press and special events;
- website – [www.paveggies.org](http://www.paveggies.org);
- online grower directories;
- PA Produce Month – month-long promotion event;
- social media – primarily Facebook and Instagram (see PAVeggies)
- consumer email campaigns; and
- digital cookbook.

In the past, the Program has also used the following methods/media:

- outdoor advertising/billboards;
- radio advertising – sponsorship of traffic reports and state network news;
- paid television interview and
- vegetable recipe contest.

The Program has used several different logos to identify locally grown Pennsylvania vegetables. Since 2018, the Program has used the “PA Produce” logo at the top of this page to identify both the Program and Pennsylvania vegetables in graphics, point-of-purchase materials, digital platforms, and other media. The Program wishes to continue to use this logo to strengthen its brand identity for consumers (and growers).

The Program's goal is to serve all the vegetable growers of Pennsylvania (currently there are over 2,000 on the Program's list of growers) and hopefully increase their sales of fresh market vegetables and therefore their profitability through the Program's promotion efforts. However, the growers use a diverse set of methods to market their vegetables as shown by the table below:

<b>Fresh Market Marketing Survey Information</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>2020</b>		
<b>Total Responses</b>	1,090	<u>% of all</u>	
<b>Sell Retail</b>	668	61%	
<b>Sell Retail Only</b>	235	22%	
<b>Sell Wholesale</b>	771	71%	
<b>Sell Wholesale Only</b>	338	31%	
<b>Retail Outlets</b>		<u>% of all</u>	<u>% of retail</u>
<b>Roadside Market</b>	530	49%	79%
<b>Community Farmers Market</b>	178	16%	27%
<b>CSA</b>	61	6%	9%
<b>Other</b>	55	5%	8%
<b>Wholesale Outlets</b>		<u>% of all</u>	<u>% of whsle</u>
<b>Produce Auction</b>	664	61%	86%
<b>Chain Store Warehouse</b>	56	5%	7%
<b>Direct Store Delivery</b>	142	13%	18%
<b>Wholesaler/Broker</b>	142	13%	18%
<b>Restaurant</b>	65	6%	8%
<b>Cooperative</b>	88	8%	11%
<b>Other</b>	51	5%	7%
<b>Growing Method</b>			
<b>Certified Organic</b>	61	6%	
<b>Sustainable</b>	208	21%	
<b>Conventional/IPM</b>	717	73%	

The Program is prohibited by law from using any of its funds to promote individual farms or companies since the assessment funds come from all the growers. The Program does provide promotional aids and materials to growers which they can use in their markets. Many of these materials are available on the Program's website – [www.paveggies.org](http://www.paveggies.org) – under the Farmer's Resources tab.

## **2. Goals and Scope of Services**

The Program is seeking a marketing consultant/agency to assist it in promoting Pennsylvania-grown vegetables – specifically fresh-market Pennsylvania-grown vegetables. As noted above, the Program has been regularly securing SCBG funding for specific projects, contracting with consultants to complete these projects on a project-by-project basis with the Program's contracted administrative staff completing some components of the SCBG projects and routine promotion efforts. The Program has also been successful in receiving matching promotional grants from the state Department of Agriculture.

While many of the current methods and media should be continued, the Program is always seeking innovative and more effective ways to promote Pennsylvania vegetables. The grant process generally encourages innovations as well.

The consultant/agency would be expected to manage or maintain the following activities, providing fresh and relevant content to make them effective:

- design and production of point-of-purchase materials;
- press campaign;
- press and special events;
- website – [www.paveggies.org](http://www.paveggies.org);
- PA Produce Month – month-long promotion event;
- social media – primarily Facebook and Instagram; and
- consumer email campaigns.

However, the Program does encourage regular evaluation of all activities so that they can be adjusted or eliminated to maintain the effectiveness of the overall efforts of the Program's promotion efforts within available resources. Likewise, other initiatives and methods would be considered by the Program's Board if they would improve the effectiveness of the promotion efforts.

Funding to conduct a robust promotion effort is dependent on the Program successfully securing SCBG funding and/or state promotional matching grant funding. Thus, the consultant/agency is expected to be the lead in developing grant proposals, executing the proposals and preparing the required reports. The consultant/agency would work with the Program's staff and Board in developing the proposal concepts.

The Program normally would only have about \$5,000 available from regular assessment funding to potentially fund a contract with the consultant/agency. In recent years the Program has been successful in securing SCBG funding of \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually and in one case as much as \$50,000. The Program has also received \$8,000 to \$10,000 in state matching grants. Naturally, future grant income is not guaranteed and is dependent on funds being appropriated for the grant programs and on the Program submitting successful proposals for funding.

Currently the Program has contracted with a consultant/agency after successfully securing a grant even though it was necessary to have the consultant/agency involved in developing and submitting the proposal. The Program's intent is to have the consultant/agency contracted on a retaining basis even though the amount of compensation will be dependent on the Program successfully securing grant funding.

SCBG Concept Papers are typically due in late December or January with final proposals due in March or April for projects that would begin October 1. For the Program's promotion season (May to October), that means developing the concepts and proposals a year in advance of execution. State matching grants timelines vary.

### **3. Anticipated Selection Schedule**

The Request for Proposal timeline is as follows:

- RFP issued - October 22, 2021
- Deadline for Bidders to submit questions – November 8, 2021
- Program will respond to questions – November 15, 2021, or before
- Written proposals due – November 30, 2021
- Program will notify bidders if oral presentation is requested – December 6, 2021, or before
- Oral presentations will be made to the Board (virtually) – December 13, 2021
- Board will select successful bidder – December 13, 2021 unless further consideration is deemed necessary in which case final selection may not be until February, 2022

### **4. Time and Place of Submission of Proposals**

The RFP will be posted on the Program's website at [www.PAVeggies.org](http://www.PAVeggies.org) on October 22, 2021.

Questions should be submitted by email to the Program at [pvmrp@embarqmail.com](mailto:pvmrp@embarqmail.com) by November 8, 2021.

Answers to questions will be posted on the website as they are received and able to be answered but no later than November 15, 2021.

Final proposals should be submitted to the Program by email at [pvmrp@embarqmail.com](mailto:pvmrp@embarqmail.com) by November 30, 2021.

## **5. Contract Period**

The Program expects to contract with the successful bidder for a period of three years subject to one-year extensions beyond the initial contract period. If the successful bidder is identified at the December 13, 2021, meeting, work could begin directly to prepare a SCBG Concept Paper for the 2022 round of grants.

## **6. Elements of Proposal**

A proposal should include the following elements and be limited to 10 to 12 pages:

- description of the firm that includes a general overview, names and credentials of creative team, number of full-time employees;
- a one-page narrative outlining the firm's strengths and distinguishing skills or capabilities as they might relate to the Program;
- a proposed overview of promotion activities the Program should consider over the next three years;
- a tentative outline of concepts to be developed for a SCBG proposal that would be executed in 2023 (proposal to be submitted in 2022) with a tentative budget;
- a outline of what basic services could be provided with the Program's baseline annual budget of \$5,000 if no grant funding is available;
- a representative selection of relevant materials created for current and past clients (hyperlinks to online materials can be used); and
- three customer references with email and telephone contact information.

## **7. Evaluation of Proposal**

Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- relevance of proposed promotion activities and initiatives to the Program's growers;
- demonstrated success in providing similar services to previous customers;
- competitive costs of services as demonstrated in tentative SCBG budget and \$5,000 baseline budget;
- previous experience with and/or a demonstrated understanding of Pennsylvania agriculture; and
- flexibility in being willing to work with the Program's limited baseline budget and uncertain grant funding.

## **8. Possible Roadblocks or Issues**

The Program has been in existence since 1988. However, the Program's existence is subject to a grower review referendum every five years, with the next one being set for the spring of 2023. While the Program has enjoyed comfortable margins in recent referendums, the outcome is never guaranteed.

The Program's contracted staff is retiring at the end of 2023 so there will be a transition taking place during that time.

The Program expects to contract with its existing marketing consultant for the execution of the SCBG project it was awarded in 2021 that will be executed during the 2022 season so that activities for 2022 would be limited to developing SCBG application for 2023 activities.

## **9. Budget**

As stated previously, the Program normally would only have about \$5,000 available from regular assessment funding to potentially fund a contract with the consultant/agency for basic promotion services including working with the Program staff and Board to develop proposals for the SCBG program and the state's Ag Promotion matching grant program. Thus additional budget money would be contingent on submitting successful grant proposals. In recent years the Program has been successful in securing SCBG funding of \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually and in one case as much as \$50,000. The Program has also received \$8,000 to \$10,000 in state matching grants. Ideally, successful grant proposals would essentially fund the consultant/agency's contract.