

2025-26 KHC Research Grant Program Guide



Scoring Rubric

All proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria, regardless of the program area of focus:

1. **Farm Impact (40%)**
 - Potential to deliver measurable benefits to Kentucky horticultural producers, such as increased productivity, profitability, resource efficiency, or market access.
 - Alignment with the current needs and challenges faced by Kentucky growers.
2. **Innovation and Practicality (20%)**
 - Novelty of the proposed approach or solution.
 - Feasibility and clarity of implementation within the project timeline.
3. **Scalability and Broader Application (20%)**
 - Potential for research findings to be adopted by multiple producers or applied across regions or industries.
 - Contribution to long-term industry growth or sustainability.
4. **Engagement and Collaboration (10%)**
 - Strength of partnerships with commercial producers or industry stakeholders.
 - Integration of producer feedback in project design and execution.
5. **Clarity and Organization (10%)**
 - Clear, concise, and well-structured proposal.
 - Defined objectives, methodologies, timelines, and metrics for measuring success.

Program Areas / Definitions

Building Production Capacity

Definition: Developing and adopting advanced production systems and practices to enable Kentucky's horticultural operations to meet growing consumer demand effectively. This includes enhancing growers' technical knowledge, integrating innovative technologies, and improving operational efficiencies to boost yields and product quality.

Examples:

- Researching protected agriculture technologies like greenhouses, high tunnels, and controlled environments.
- Exploring open-field production techniques to optimize yield, quality, and cost management.
- Developing strategies to address labor shortages through automation or other resource-efficient approaches.
- Educating producers on emerging best practices to improve production literacy.

- Testing new crop varieties or production methods suited to Kentucky's unique climate.
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Expanding Market Opportunities

Definition: Identifying new sales channels, building connections between growers and buyers, and enhancing producers' ability to navigate evolving market demands. This includes improving producers' understanding of market trends and equipping them with tools to succeed in competitive and emerging markets.

Examples:

- Exploring new markets such as regional food hubs, wholesale buyers, or direct-to-consumer sales.
 - Evaluating consumer trends to identify opportunities for Kentucky-grown specialty crops.
 - Supporting producers with tools to enhance market literacy (e.g., pricing, branding, e-commerce).
 - Addressing barriers to market entry, such as logistics, packaging, or compliance requirements.
 - Encouraging collaborative marketing strategies among growers.
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Enhancing Food Safety and Nutrition

Definition: Ensuring safe production practices while emphasizing the role of nutritious specialty crops in supporting public health. The "food is medicine" framework highlights the value of local horticultural products in improving health outcomes across Kentucky communities.

Examples:

- Researching and implementing food safety practices to meet regulatory requirements (e.g., GAP certification).
 - Integrating specialty crops into nutrition-focused programs like farm-to-school or CSA initiatives.
 - Studying the health benefits of Kentucky-grown specialty crops.
 - Educating growers and consumers about the links between nutrition, health, and local produce.
 - Connecting producers with public health or healthcare partnerships.
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Driving Economic Development

Definition: Studying how the horticulture industry contributes to local and regional economic growth, creates jobs, and strengthens communities. This involves evaluating horticulture businesses as

economic drivers in Kentucky.

Examples:

- Assessing the economic impact of specialty crop production on local and state economies.
 - Identifying opportunities to develop the horticulture value chain from farm to consumer.
 - Examining horticulture's role in revitalizing rural communities and supporting ancillary businesses.
 - Evaluating the impact of public investments, such as grants or cost-share programs, on industry growth.
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Maximizing Resource Efficiency

Definition: Optimizing the use of limited resources—such as water, energy, and heat—to improve productivity and reduce costs on Kentucky farms. This includes exploring innovative tools and strategies to make farming operations more resilient and cost-effective.

Examples:

- Researching efficient irrigation techniques for protected and open-field agriculture.
 - Investigating renewable energy or energy-efficient practices for greenhouses and controlled environments.
 - Developing strategies to improve soil health and nutrient management.
 - Evaluating technologies that reduce labor costs, such as precision agriculture tools.
 - Exploring ways to reduce waste, such as reusing byproducts or improving post-harvest handling.
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Examining Policy Frameworks

Definition: Investigating the overarching system of policies, regulations, and laws that govern and influence Kentucky's horticulture industry. This includes social, economic, and legislative factors that shape how producers operate, access resources, and comply with standards.

Examples:

- Researching state and federal agricultural regulations (e.g., food safety, labeling, pest management).
- Examining policies related to land use, water management, and energy resources.
- Analyzing social policies affecting labor, workforce development, and equitable access to markets.
- Evaluating legislative trends or priorities affecting specialty crop production.
- Identifying barriers or incentives that influence the adoption of new technologies or practices.