

MARYLAND POSTHARVEST INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT (PHI)

Empowering Rural Communities Through Local Food



Request for Proposals

(updated June 01, 2026)

Application Due Date:
June 14, 2026 11:59 pm EST

Request for Proposals (RFP)	3
Postharvest Infrastructure Grant Program.....	3
1. Program Overview and Purpose	3
Implementation Timeline	3
2. Eligible Applicants and Beneficiaries	4
2.1 Eligible Applicants.....	4
2.2 Primary Beneficiaries.....	5
3. Expected Measurable Outcomes.....	5
4. Grant Award Information.....	6
5. Eligible Projects, Costs, and Reporting	6
5.1 Eligible Project Activities.....	6
5.2 Ineligible Products \Processes and Unallowable Costs.....	8
5.3 Grant Administration and Compliance.....	9
6. Application Instructions, Requirements and Documentation	10
6.1 Application Process.....	10
6.2 Required Documentation for PHI application	10
6.3 Executive Summary	11
6.5 Project Purpose	11
6.7 Detailed Budget Narrative Requirements	12
6.8 Personnel & Fringe	12
6.9 Transportation	12
6.10 Equipment (\$10,000+ per unit)	12
6.11 Supplies (<\$5,000 per unit)	12
6.12 Contractual.....	13
6.13 Minor Renovations.....	13
6.14 Budget Summary	13
7. Grant Program Accounting System & Financial Capability Questionnaire	13
8. Evaluation and Scoring Rubric.....	14
9. Contact Information.....	15

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Postharvest Infrastructure Grant Program

1. Program Overview and Purpose

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) is pleased to announce the Postharvest Infrastructure Grant Program (PHI). This initiative is a core component of the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP), a five-year federal initiative funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) through the Maryland Department of Health. Future funding is contingent upon both the availability of resources and the program's ability to achieve its initial objectives. The Rural Health Transformation Program was authorized by H.R. 1 (2025) (Section 71401 of Public Law 119-21) and empowers states to strengthen rural communities across America by improving healthcare access, quality, and outcomes by transforming the healthcare delivery ecosystem. Through innovative system-wide change, the RHTP invests in the rural healthcare delivery ecosystem for future generations.

The Postharvest Infrastructure Grant Program (PHI) is designed to strategically establish postharvest infrastructure within Maryland rural communities to expand food aggregation and distribution capacities. By bolstering the operational capacity of Maryland food providers—encompassing fresh produce, dairy, grains for human consumption, meat, poultry, eggs, herbs, and Maryland seafood—this initiative seeks to enhance the accessibility of nutritious, locally sourced products for rural Marylanders.

Implementation Timeline

Grant Deadline:	June 14, 2026 at 11:59 pm
Grant Review Committee:	June 2026
Decisions forwarded to MDH and CMS for approval:	June 2026
Grantees notified by (subject to CMS approval):	August 2026
Grant agreements distributed for execution by:	September 2026
Signed Grant agreements to MDA:	October 2026
Funds obligated by:	October 30, 2026
Funds spent by grantee by:	September 30, 2027

2. Eligible Applicants and Beneficiaries

Applicants must meet specific eligibility criteria and demonstrate that the proposed project serves the intended beneficiaries through postharvest infrastructure, storage, and distribution. Applicants must address all information requested in the application to be considered for funding. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed. Projects will be evaluated and scored based on the feasibility and impact they will have on the health of rural Marylanders. All funded activities must operate in and serve a Maryland rural county and align with the RHTP goal of empowering rural Marylanders to eat for health.

Rural Counties: State-determined rural counties are Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico and Worcester.

2.1 Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible to apply:

- **Agricultural producers or seafood processors (priority):** Agriculture individual producers or organized groups of producers and seafood processors. Entities must be independently owned, Maryland-based and for-profit enterprises. Agricultural Producer, Independent Producer or Producer means a for-profit agricultural business, or entity that is 100 percent owned and controlled by an individual, entity or Family Farm that produces an Agricultural Commodity through participation in the day-to-day labor, management, and field operations. Seafood processor: A seafood processor has operations that cut, package, can, or shuck marine products.
- **Nonprofit Organizations:** Must hold 501(c)(3) status and be registered as a charity with the Maryland Secretary of State (SoS). Maryland-based.
- **Maryland Local Government Entities:** Municipal or county governments involved in the postharvest storage of agricultural products.
- **Maryland Institutions:** Universities, schools, hospitals, prisons and care centers seeking to establish cooperative infrastructure or shared equipment for the benefit of multiple local producers in the areas of postharvest handling and storage.

2.2 Primary Beneficiaries

Projects must demonstrate a direct positive impact on:

- Maryland agricultural producers or seafood processors in rural counties.
- Rural Marylanders

3. Expected Measurable Outcomes

You must choose Metric #5 and at least one other outcome listed below. If awarded funds, you will be required to track and report the outcomes.

Metric	Baseline Data (Current)	Expected Numbers (Projected Increase)
1. Number of cold storage units/refrigerated vehicles purchased		
2. Number of local food producers benefiting from infrastructure		
3. Number of cold storage units modernized through upgrades/repairs		
4. Number of employees trained in food safety/nutrient management		
5. Total pounds of local healthy food (produce, meat, poultry, seafood) distributed in Maryland's rural areas on an annual basis.		

4. Grant Award Information

Grant award amounts are subject to funding availability. If approved and awarded, MDA will enter into a grant agreement with subgrant recipients. MDA will provide subgrantees with a lump-sum disbursement of 100% of the total grant funds. Subgrantees need to be registered with the Maryland Comptroller's Office to receive electronic payment. MDA maintains the authority to suspend or terminate the grant agreement and demand immediate repayment of any or all disbursed funds should MDA determine the subgrantee has failed to comply with the project's scope of work.

Available Funding: \$3,6000,000

Minimum award: \$30,000

No maximum award

Project start date: October 15, 2026

Project end date: June 30, 2027

No match requirement

All partners and subawardees of Maryland's RHTP cooperative agreement with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) must agree to and comply with RHTP terms and conditions included in:

- [CMS Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#)
- [CMS NOFO - Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Maryland Notice of Award Terms and Conditions](#)
- [CMS RHTP Frequently Asked Questions—April 2026](#)

5. Eligible Projects, Costs, and Reporting

Getting fresh food from the farm to the community safely is a crucial step in our local food system. This project bridges the gap between the farm and the wholesale or retail marketplace by funding key postharvest activities including: cold storage, transportation, and distribution. Grant funds cannot be used for cultivation, harvest or retail marketing of eligible foods.

5.1 Eligible Project Activities

- Cold Storage Infrastructure (priority)
 - Purchasing and installing walk-in coolers, CoolBotx, or freezers to hold harvested produce, meat, dairy or seafood.
 - Storage Climate Control: Upgrading HVAC, ventilation, or humidity-control systems in existing dry storage facilities.
 - Backup Power Systems: Installing heavy-duty generators specifically for cold storage units.

- Insulated Transit Bins: Purchasing reusable, heavy-duty insulated macro-bins used strictly for keeping harvested goods temperature-stable while waiting for transport.
- Preventative maintenance plan to support the cold storage for a period of time.
- Minimal Processing
 - Food must retain its inherent characteristics.
 - Equipment for washing, peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, or shucking.
 - Vacuum packing, bagging or pasteurizing milk.
- Transportation and Fleet Upgrades
 - Purchasing or leasing refrigerated trucks (reefers) or vans.
 - Refrigerated Vehicle Acquisition: Purchasing or leasing refrigerated trucks (reefers) or vans.
 - Fleet Retrofitting: Upgrading existing farm or distribution vehicles for cold storage.
- Distribution Logistics and Technology
 - Implementing logistics software to map the most efficient distribution routes, minimizing fuel costs and reducing the time highly perishable food spends in transit.
 - Route Optimization Software: Implementing logistics software to map the most efficient distribution routes, minimizing fuel costs and reducing the time highly perishable food spends in transit.
 - Cold Chain Data Loggers: Purchasing digital temperature monitors (RFID or Bluetooth-enabled) to place inside trucks and storage units to ensure food safety compliance.
 - Inventory Tracking Systems: Software that tracks the location and distribution status of pallets or bins as they move from storage to the wholesale or retail destination. *If you don't have this system, you are encouraged to apply for it to report on your outcomes for Metric #5.*
- Handling and Loading Infrastructure
 - Installing dock levelers or weather seals to allow refrigerated trucks to back up and load goods without breaking the cold chain.
 - Loading Dock Upgrades: Installing dock levelers or weather seals to allow refrigerated trucks to back up and load goods without breaking the cold chain.

- Material Handling Equipment: Purchasing forklifts or pallet jacks to move pallets of harvested food from the storage cooler onto the distribution truck.
- Transport Sanitation Stations: Installing commercial power-washing stations to sanitize distribution vehicles and transport bins between deliveries to maintain food safety standards.
- Food Safety Modernization
 - Purchasing commercial-grade bin washers or high-temperature steam-cleaning systems used to sanitize reusable distribution crates (RPCs), pallets, and the interiors of refrigerated trucks between deliveries.
 - Transport and Bin Sanitization: Purchasing commercial-grade bin washers or high-temperature steam-cleaning systems used strictly to sanitize reusable distribution crates (RPCs), pallets, and the interiors of refrigerated trucks between deliveries.
 - Storage Facility Upgrades: Retrofitting existing packing or holding areas with food-grade, easily washable wall panels, or installing heavy-duty air curtains.
 - Environmental Monitoring and Alarms: Installing automated, cloud-based temperature and humidity monitoring systems in walk-in coolers and transport vehicles.
 - Recall and Traceability Software: Implementing lot-tracking systems (using barcode scanners or RFID) to maintain a precise chain of custody from the farm's cooler to the buyer's loading dock, ensuring rapid recall capabilities if an issue arises.

5.2 Ineligible Products \ Processes and Unallowable Costs

Ineligible Products \ Processes

- Animal feed and forage products
- Fiber
- Landscaping products
- Seed
- Cut flowers
- Tobacco
- Wineries/distilleries/breweries
- Dietary supplements
- Cooking
- Canning and preserving
- Adding fillers or additives

Unallowable Costs

The following activities are not eligible for PHI funding:

- Acquiring real property (including pre-existing buildings and land purchases).
- Activities that have received a Federal or State award from another Federal or State award program. Postharvest infrastructure grants may build on the success of prior federal grants to fund subsequent projects.
- Claim expenses that have been or will be reimbursed under any Federal, State or local government funding.
- Construction or building expansion, purchasing or significant retrofitting of buildings, cosmetic upgrades, or any other cost that materially increases the value of the capital or useful life as a direct cost.
- Duplicate payments for services already covered by insurance or other federal/state programs.
- Activities that have received a Federal award from another Federal award program.
- Purchase of food.
- General Purpose Equipment, e.g., office furniture, non-refrigerated passenger vehicles.
- Pre-award costs.
- Goods or services not allocable to the approved project.
- Subcontracting to another entity.
- Purchase of certain telecommunications and video surveillance equipment (See 2 CFR 200.216) as well as financial assistance to households for installation and monthly broadband internet costs.
- Lobbying and influencing the enactment of legislation, appropriations, regulation, administrative action, or executive order proposed or pending before the Congress or any State government, State legislature, local legislature or legislative body.
- Meeting matching requirements for other federal funds.
- Costs of promotional items and memorabilia, including models, gifts, and souvenirs. Costs of advertising and public relations designed solely to promote the subgrantee.
- Profit to any recipient even if the recipient is a for-profit organization. Profit is any amount in excess of allowable expenses.

5.3 Grant Administration and Compliance

Grant Agreements: Awardees are required to execute a grant agreement.

Record Keeping and Reporting: Subgrantees will be required to record expenditures and submit Quarterly Program & Financial Reports. All must be accompanied by supporting documentation such as time sheets, receipts and paid invoices.

Quarterly Program & Financial Reports Due Dates:

First Quarter:	July - September 2026	Report due: October 15, 2026
Second Quarter:	October - December 2026	Report due: January 15, 2027
Third Quarter:	January - March 2027	Report due: April 15, 2027
Fourth Quarter:	April - June 2027	Report due: July 15, 2027

Project end date: June 30, 2027
Final report due: October 1, 2027

6. Application Instructions, Requirements and Documentation

6.1 Application Process

- MDA has partnered with the Rural Maryland Council and its grant portal. You can access the grant portal from the MDA or RMC websites.
- Create an account: Select "Create New Account". Complete the Organization Information section with details from your business or organization and the User Information section with the applicant details. Provide an email address to act as your username. Please retain a record of your login information as you will need it in the future to access your in-progress applications and your online application history.
- Executive Officer Section: If you are the primary business owner of your farm or organization, answer yes to this question.
- Create a secure password. If at any time you forget your password, simply click 'Forgot Password' and you can easily generate a new one.
- Begin application: Select "See Opportunities" and then "Apply" on the Postharvest Infrastructure Grant window. It is recommended that you draft your project summary in Word or Google Docs and paste it into the portal once finalized. Your application will autosave, but you may save progress by scrolling to the bottom and selecting "Save Application". You may also invite collaborators to join the portal.

6.2 Required Documentation for PHI application

- Postharvest Application: Submitted via the [online portal](#).

- W-9 Form: Must be signed within two years of the application date; address must match the application.
- Certificate of Good Standing: Proof of "Good Standing" with the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT).
- Nonprofit Documentation: Proof of 501(c)(3) status and a screenshot of the Maryland Secretary of State (SoS) Charity Registry.
- Letters of Support: A minimum of one letter from community stakeholders or beneficiaries.
- Quotes: All equipment and renovations must include signed quotes on contractor letterhead or formal internet search results. Vehicles quotes must include a justification on the purpose of the vehicle, bought vs lease, make, and model.

6.3 Executive Summary

Executive Summary (Strict 300-word limit): Provide a concise narrative including the applicant organization name, the specific technical purpose of the postharvest equipment to be acquired, and a summary of the primary tasks/activities to be executed during the performance period. This information will be used for public information dissemination.

6.4 Applicant Entity Type:

- Agricultural Producer
- Seafood Processor
- Nonprofit 501(c)3
- Local Government
- Institution

6.5 Project Purpose

Eligible Project Type (Select all that apply):

- Cold Storage Infrastructure
- Transportation and Fleet Upgrades
- Distribution Logistics and Technology
- Handling and Loading Infrastructure
- Food Safety Modernization

6.6 Statement of Need

Describe the specific postharvest infrastructure gap this project addresses. Detail how the proposed project facilitates the supply of healthy food (produce, meat, poultry, or seafood) to rural Maryland populations.

6.7 Detailed Budget Narrative Requirements

The budget narrative must provide a "cost-per-unit" derivation for all expenses and explain how they relate directly to project objectives. There is no match requirement for PHI. Applicants are encouraged to "stack" funds with MDA's PHI grant and RMC grants but don't apply to both organizations for the same project.

6.8 Personnel & Fringe

List the names and titles of all staff dedicated to the project.

- Requirement: Specify the Level of Effort (number of hours or % Full time equivalent (FTE)).
- Note: While Payroll Expenditure Reports are a post-award requirement for reimbursement, the budget narrative must be itemized by individual name and title to facilitate future compliance.
- Personnel and fringe benefits should not exceed 10% of the grant request.
- It is strongly recommended to include a statement of sustainability in the budget justification.

6.9 Transportation

Transportation is limited strictly to the transportation of agricultural or seafood products.

- Requirement: Rates must align with GSA/Federal Travel Regulations. Provide a breakdown of estimated mileage, destination purposes, and number of travelers.

6.10 Equipment (\$10,000+ per unit)

This category covers "Special Purpose Equipment" with a useful life of more than one year.

- Requirement: Describe how the equipment (e.g., a commercial freezer or refrigerated truck) is essential for postharvest activities.

6.11 Supplies (<\$5,000 per unit)

List materials required for the storage and distribution of products.

- Requirement: Itemize packaging materials, labeling supplies, and storage bins.

6.12 Contractual

Detail any services provided by third-party consultants or contractors.

- Requirement: List names/organizations, hourly or flat rates, and specific project activities. If you list an hourly rate, please include the total number of hours in the Contractual Justification section.
- None of the funds appropriated in this title shall be used to pay the salary of an individual, through a grant or other extramural mechanism, at a rate in excess of Executive Level II. The Executive Level II rate changes each year, refer to the most recent information posted on the [Office of Personnel Management website](#). The January 2026 salary cap is [here](#).

6.13 Minor Renovations

Renovations are defined as repairs, improvements or modernizations made to an existing facility or vehicle.

- 75% Project Cap: Costs for minor renovations to existing facilities are allowable but are capped at 75% of the individual project budget and subject to funding availability.
- CMS Restrictions: All minor renovations are subject to CMS Prior Approval.
- Prohibition: Major construction (new builds from the ground up or significant structural changes to real property) is prohibited under CMS regulations.

6.14 Budget Summary

You will need to manually input the subtotal information from each cost category into the Budget Summary.

7. Grant Program Accounting System & Financial Capability Questionnaire

Recipients of Federal funds must maintain adequate accounting systems that meet the criteria outlined in 2 CFR §200.302 [Standards for Financial and Program Management](#). The responses to the questionnaire in the grant application will be used to assist in the Maryland Department of Agriculture's evaluation of your accounting system to ensure the adequate, appropriate, and transparent use of Federal funds. Failure to comply with the criteria outlined in the regulations may preclude your organization from receiving an award.

8. Evaluation and Scoring Rubric

Applications will be scored on a 100-point scale.

Scoring Category	Max Points	Criteria
Rural Communities	10	<p>Does the project clearly take place in or directly serve a designated rural area?</p> <p>Does the producer lack existing post-harvest agricultural infrastructure?</p>
Project Need and Alignment	25	<p>Does the project demonstrate a clear link to the funding priorities, e.g., lack of cold storage, poor transit logistics?</p> <p>Does the project focus on allowable activities (storage, transportation, distribution) with no funds requested for cultivation, processing, or retail marketing?</p>
Outcomes & Beneficiaries	25	<p>Does the project benefit rural farmers, seafood providers and community members?</p> <p>Are the projected outcomes quantifiable and realistic, e.g., specific volumes of food in cold storage or transported?</p>
Budget & Feasibility	30	<p>Is the budget directly tied to the proposed outcomes?</p> <p>Do the costs make sense for the volume of food or number of farmers \ community members impacted?</p> <p>Are the costs necessary, realistic, and based on actual quotes for equipment, transportation and renovations?</p> <p>Is there an achievable, logical timeline for purchasing, installing, and utilizing the logistics infrastructure?</p> <p>If other grants are mentioned, is there clear evidence that funds are not being duplicated?</p>

External Support	10	Are there high-quality support letters that are signed on letterhead from potential buyers or food access programs confirming they are ready to receive the transported goods?
------------------	----	--

9. Contact Information

Contact Information: For questions regarding this RFP or application, please email: postharvest.mda@maryland.gov.

The Maryland Rural Health Transformation Program is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award to the Maryland Department of Health, totaling \$168,180,837.61 with 100 percent funded by CMS/HHS. The contents of this RFP are of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.