



Request for Proposal: Representation in India

August 24, 2022

I. Purpose

The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC), representing the U.S. highbush blueberry industry, is requesting proposals from marketing agencies to represent USHBC and manage its market development activities in India. The chosen agency will enter into a contract with USHBC for the period January 1 through December 31, 2023, which can be renewed annually if USHBC remains satisfied with the agency's performance.

All proposals are due by September 16, 2022, at 5 p.m. Pacific Time.

II. Background Information

The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC) is a federal research and promotion program located in Folsom, California. USHBC, established in 2000, is directed by a 20-member council that includes elected grower representatives from each of four U.S. regions (West, Midwest, East, and South), eight elected state grower representatives from the top eight highbush blueberry production states (Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, California, Washington, Florida, North Carolina and Georgia) as well as eight additional council members (one handler representative, four importer representatives, two exporter representatives and one public member). Learn more about the USHBC at www.blueberry.org.

The blueberries represented by USHBC are available for purchase for direct consumer consumption and industrial food applications. Blueberries are available in numerous forms including fresh, frozen, dried, and further processed (i.e., juice concentrate, powder, and puree). In addition to fresh applications, blueberries can be used as an ingredient in baked goods, dairy products, beverages, and more.

Exports have become increasingly important to the U.S. blueberry industry. In fact, from 2020 to 2021, exports as a share of production increased from 12% to 14% in volume. USHBC aims to continue this export growth through the development of emerging markets. Currently, USHBC runs market development programs in China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia. Activities across these markets vary; however, typical promotions include retail and foodservice campaigns, trade show exhibitions, public relations, and educational seminars. In India, USHBC's recent market development strategy has been limited to promotions with food manufacturers to develop new U.S. blueberry products. In each target market, USHBC relies on expertise from its in-market representatives to help plan and execute marketing strategies that drive sales of U.S. blueberry products.

U.S. blueberries are still relatively new to the Indian market; however, they are quickly growing in popularity. In fact, U.S. blueberry exports to India by volume have increased by 326% in the last five years, from just 61 metric tons (MT) in 2016 to 200 MT in 2021. While this export figure is still relatively low, the rapid growth demonstrates the strong demand for blueberry products in the country.

U.S. blueberry exports to India are primarily frozen, dried and further processed products. Food manufacturers use these products as ingredients in the dairy, bakery, and jam sectors. Additionally, U.S. blueberry products are being increasingly incorporated into traditional food applications, including mithai (sweets) and namkeen (savory snacks). Although U.S. blueberry exports to India are primarily processed products, some fresh blueberries are also exported to the country. Fresh blueberries enter India by air and are therefore priced at a premium in the market. Fresh product is primarily purchased by middle- and upper-income consumers at modern retail outlets.

This RFP is designed to help USHBC find a partner to expand our promotional program in India. Applicants should suggest their strategic approach for how USHBC should target both trade and consumers to increase awareness and sales of U.S. blueberries. Anticipated activities include but are not limited to trade relations, trade shows, public relations, and technical education.

III. Agency Responsibilities

The selected agency will be responsible for the development and execution of an approved marketing program in India for the 2023 marketing year.

1) Trade Representation/Promotion

The selected agency will be responsible for handling all aspects of an approved trade marketing program in India for the period January 1 through December 31, 2023. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Serving as the first point of communication in country with trade and media sources.
- Fostering a network of trade contacts and identifying promising trade leads that can be passed onto U.S. blueberry exporters.
- Developing and implementing USHBC’s strategic marketing strategy and activity plan for India, including:
 - Exhibiting at and participating in trade shows, industry summits, and technology summits.
 - Conducting retail, wholesale, and e-commerce promotions during peak supply periods.
 - Conducting technical and educational seminars for trade.
 - Partnering with leading health professionals and participating in health and nutrition events to highlight the health and nutrition value of U.S. blueberries to consumers.
- Promoting U.S. blueberries to food manufacturing companies in India to develop new consumer-ready packaged foods with blueberries as the key ingredient.
- Managing all promotional and educational activities and subcontractors agreed to in the trade marketing plan, and securing USHBC approval for any adjustments that prove necessary or beneficial for the U.S. blueberry industry.

- Managing the budget as allocated by USHBC, including providing corresponding receipts and backup documentation as required by USHBC and USDA’s export market development program requirements.
- Regularly communicating with USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) staff to participate in collaborative opportunities and provide updates on USHBC’s activities.
- Coordinating market visits by USHBC staff and industry members, including meetings with key trade members and U.S. Embassy and ATO staff.
- Submitting monthly market reports detailing activities undertaken on USHBC’s behalf, including public, trade, and media relations.
- Submitting reports for USHBC council meetings detailing program developments and impact, financials, and performance measure results.
- Assistance with the completion of the Country Progress Report and development of Unified Export Strategy, both requirements of the USDA’s Market Access Program.
- Other duties that advance the interests of the U.S. blueberry industry in India.

2) Consumer Promotion

The selected agency will be responsible for handling all aspects of the approved consumer marketing program in India for the period January 1 through December 31, 2023. This will include, but may not be limited to, the following:

- Developing USHBC’s consumer marketing plan for India for the 2023 program year, including:
 - Collaborating with key opinion leaders, including leading chefs, influencers, health professionals, and more.
 - Conducting creative promotions via online and in-person avenues.
 - Developing and promoting U.S. blueberry recipes to Indian consumers.
- Managing all promotional and educational activities and subcontractors agreed to in the consumer marketing plan and securing USHBC approval for any adjustments that prove necessary or beneficial for the U.S. blueberry industry.
- Managing budget as allocated by USHBC, including providing corresponding receipts and backup documentation as required by USHBC and USDA’s export market development program requirements.
- Regularly updating USHBC’s social media accounts to attract followers and improve engagement.
- Submitting reports on a monthly basis that include activity summaries, results, market conditions, an upcoming activity calendar, and other topics of interest to the U.S. blueberry industry.
- Submitting reports for USHBC’s board meetings detailing program developments and impact, financials, and performance measure results.
- Other duties that advance the interests of the U.S. blueberry industry in India.

IV. Marketing/Proposal Objectives

With this request for proposal, USHBC is seeking to understand the proposed agency’s creative vision for the U.S. blueberry industry in India going forward. This includes determining how USHBC can continue to expand in the market, how key communication

points about U.S. blueberries are to be highlighted to consumers and trade, and how promotions of blueberry ingredients to processed food industries will proceed. Agencies should also identify what they view as the greatest challenges impeding sales of U.S. blueberries and blueberry products in India, and outline how they would address those challenges through generic promotional activity. **Please provide specific strategies and tactics, along with a detailed proposed budget of \$160,000 USD, laying out retainer fees and activity expenses.**

V. Evaluation of Proposal

There is no required format for the proposal; however, proposals should be **limited to 15 pages** and should include the following at a minimum:

- History of your work with agricultural or other food organizations or companies.
- Company information, including prior experience with comparable projects, as well as staff capabilities/backgrounds.
- A 2023 marketing plan that includes an explanation of how the proposed strategy ties into your longer-term vision for what USHBC's program in India would look like in subsequent years.
- Identification of the greatest challenges impeding sales of blueberries in India and an outline describing how you would address those challenges through generic trade and/or consumer promotional activities, including specific strategies and tactics.
- Proposed activity slate and budget (including program management fees). USHBC's preliminary budget for India in 2023 is \$160,000 USD, inclusive of both the trade representation/promotion and consumer promotion scope of work.
- The selected agency will also be asked to attend the Asia Fruit Logistica trade show in Thailand in November 2022. Please include the budget for travel in your proposal.
- Knowledge of USDA's Market Access Program and other grant program regulations.

USHBC will independently review and evaluate each proposal, and a selection will be made based on the following criteria:

- Ability to meet or exceed all requirements.
- Adequacy and availability of professional-level staffing.
- Credentials and related experience.
- Project approach.

VI. Authority

The agency will work under the direct supervision and with the prior approval of USHBC for all program activities. All expenditures must fall within the program budget and must be pre-approved by USHBC.

VII. Non-Discrimination Clause

USHBC does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status.

VIII. Instructions for Submitting Proposals

Proposals should be submitted electronically to:

Shelby Sackett
Bryant Christie Inc.
Shelby.sackett@bryantchristie.com

All proposals are due September 16, 2021, at 5 p.m. Pacific Time. USHBC anticipates making a final decision on a contractor by September 30, 2022, but reserves the right to reach a decision and/or notify applicants of its selection at a later date.

Questions regarding this RFP or USHBC's activities in India should be directed to Shelby Sackett by email.

Thank you for your interest in working with the U.S. blueberry industry.