



Request for Proposal: Representation in Canada

November 9, 2023

I. Purpose

The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC), representing the U.S. highbush blueberry industry, requests proposals from marketing agencies to represent USHBC and manage its market development activities in Canada. The chosen agency will enter into a contract with USHBC for the period of January 1 through December 31, 2024, which can be renewed on an annual basis if USHBC remains satisfied with the agency's performance.

All proposals are due by December 15, 2023, at 5 p.m. Pacific Time.

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 21-member Council, which includes elected grower representatives from four U.S. regions (West, Midwest, East, South), eight elected state grower representatives (Florida, Georgia, California, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, and Michigan) as well as 13 additional Council members (four importer representatives, four exporters representative, and one public member). Learn more about the USHBC at <https://ushbc.blueberry.org/about-ushbc/council-members/>.

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 2022, exports accounted for 19% of the U.S. domestic production volume. USHBC aims to continue this export growth through the development of emerging markets. Currently, USHBC runs market development programs in China, India, Canada, South Korea, and Southeast Asia (Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam). Activities across these markets vary; however, typical promotions include retail, food service campaigns, food manufacturing campaigns, trade show exhibitions, public relations, and educational seminars. 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.

Canada is a new promotional market for the USHBC, though the United States has been exporting blueberries to its northern neighbor for several decades. The value and volume of

shipments have been growing dramatically over the past few years, rising from \$106.5 million and 23,551 metric tons (MT) in 2018 to \$151.8 million (+42.5%) and 36,942 MT (+56.8%) in 2022. This growth has positioned the United States as the largest exporter of blueberries to Canada, with Peru, Chile, Mexico, and Morocco falling behind. While Canada is also a major producer of blueberries, the U.S. can supply the fruit much earlier in the year, and USHBC believes there is room to grow in the mutual relationship between the countries.

As Canada's closest neighbor, a top supplier of blueberries, and main trade partner, U.S. blueberries have a bright future in the market. Canadians are experienced consumers of blueberries, knowing how to incorporate them into their regular meals and during special occasions. With the rise of healthy eating and the love for produce grown closer to home, U.S. blueberries are likely to be well-received and enjoyed by Canadian consumers.

In its strategy to target the Canadian market, the USHBC plans to prioritize increasing its market share, building demand, and increasing awareness of the benefits and flavor of U.S. blueberries, fresh, frozen, and dried. USHBC aims to build off of the already existing prominence of U.S. blueberries in Canada by emphasizing the unique qualities of their member's products. Promotional efforts will be planned and conducted, including trade education and relationship-building activities with retailers, importers, wholesalers, and distributors.

Beyond trade-focused promotions, USHBC aims to conduct consumer-oriented promotions, including public relations campaigns, social media partnerships, and in-store activations. These promotions will focus on the unique quality and flavor of U.S. blueberries and their incorporation into a healthy lifestyle.

This RFP is designed to help USHBC find a partner to help implement a promotional program in Canada. Applicants should suggest their strategic approach for USHBC targeting 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 trade and consumer marketing program in Canada for the 2024 marketing year.

1) Trade Representation/Consumer Promotion

The selected agency will handle all aspects of an approved trade marketing program in Canada from January 1 through December 31, 2024. This can include, but may not be limited to the following:

- Serving as the first point of communication in the country with trade and media.
- Fostering a network of trade contacts and identifying promising trade leads that can be issued to U.S. blueberry exporters.
- Developing and implementing USHBC's strategic marketing strategy and activity plan for Canada, including:

- o Exhibiting at and participating in trade shows, industry summits, and technology summits.
- o Conducting retail, wholesale, and e-commerce promotions during peak supply periods.
- o Conducting technical and educational seminars for trade.
- o 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.
- Promotional Activities: Food Service & Food Manufacturing Companies
 - o Promoting U.S. blueberries to food manufacturing companies in Canada to develop new consumer-ready packaged foods with blueberries as the key ingredient.
 - o Promoting U.S. blueberries to food service companies in Canada to develop new menus with blueberries as the key ingredient.
 - o Experience or ability to partner with culinary experts/chefs for the purpose of food innovation and ideating on how to create consumer demand through new products using blueberries as a 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.
- Developing USHBC’s consumer marketing plan for Canada for the 2024 program year, including:
 - o Collaborating with key opinion leaders, including leading chefs, influencers, health professionals, and more.
 - o Conducting creative promotions via online and in-person avenues.
 - o Developing and promoting U.S. blueberry recipes to Canadian consumers.
 - o Regularly updating USHBC’s social media accounts to attract followers and improve engagement.
- 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.
- Submitting a monthly report that includes activity summaries, results, market conditions and new product developments, 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 Canada.

2) Consumer & Retail Shopper Marketing

The selected agency will handle all aspects of the approved consumer marketing program in Canada from January 1 through December 31, 2024. This will include, but may not be limited to the following:

- Developing USHBC's consumer marketing plan for Canada for the 2024 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 Canadian 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 monthly 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 Canada.
- Develop or garner consumer and/or shopper insights for the purpose of directing marketing plans.
- Robust media buying skillset online and offline, including paid social and paid search bid strategies.
- Experience in the use of AI technologies for SEO execution, as well as generative AI for digital creative assets production, is preferred.
- Experience in branding category-level commodities is the desired strategy and tactics.
- Knowledge of the nuances of the country by geography area including variances in food preferences and diet, insights on health and nutrition, media use and availability, cultural nuances, etc.

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 Canada going forward. This includes determining how USHBC can continue to expand in the market, how key communication points about U.S. blueberries will 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 Canada 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 \$300,000 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 and staff capabilities/backgrounds.
- A 2024 marketing plan that explains how the proposed strategy ties into your longer-term vision for what USHBC's program in Canada would look like in subsequent years.
- Identify the greatest challenges impeding sales of blueberries in Canada, and provide 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 Canada in 2024 is \$300,000 USD, including the trade representation/promotion and consumer promotion scope of work.
- Knowledge of USDA's Market Access Program and other grant program regulations.
- Specifically, respondents will be evaluated on their historically demonstrated ability to think outside the box/creatively regarding strategy and tactics for execution in the consumer and trade marketing spaces. The response to this RFP should include case studies of executed assignments that did NOT deliver against stated goals with the original strategy and tactics. Then, what was done on subsequent attempts strategically and tactically that was different than the original attempt to accomplish the goal.

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

VII. Non-Discrimination Clause

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

VIII. Instructions for Submitting Proposals

Proposals should be submitted electronically to:

Renata Dalton
Director, Global Business Development
rdalton@nabcblues.org

All proposals are due December 15, 2023, at 5 p.m. Pacific Time. USHBC anticipates making a final decision on a contractor by December 30, 2023 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 Canada should be directed to Renata Dalton by email.

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