



Request for Proposal: Representation in Mexico

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 Mexico. 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.

Mexico is a new target market for USHBC, with promotional programming launching in 2024. That said, the U.S. blueberry industry has been exporting significant volumes to the country for the last two decades, with exports totaling 694 MT in 2022, valued at \$3.5 million. This represents a 158% increase in volume and a 149% increase in value from 269 MT of U.S. blueberry production worth \$1.4 million exported in 2021. Positive economic conditions, favorable trade relations, and well-aligned consumer trends have driven this growth. Despite the growth in exports, significant opportunities remain for additional market penetration. In fact, the total market size of blueberries and processed blueberry-containing products in Mexico reached \$1.7 billion in 2022. USHBC aims to capture a broader share of this market through its new market development program, generating increased returns for U.S. blueberry suppliers.

In its strategy to target the Mexican market, USHBC will implement a broad promotional program targeting food manufacturers, food service operators, consumers, and key trade members to increase export growth. U.S. blueberries hold significant potential within Mexico's food processing sector. Thus, USHBC will primarily connect with key food manufacturers to educate them on U.S. blueberries' sales potential as an ingredient within their products. Meanwhile, USHBC will also work to develop consumer awareness of U.S. blueberries, including their health benefits, through social media campaigns and key opinion leader partnerships while driving sales through retail promotions. Finally, USHBC will develop and maintain close relationships with key trade, particularly importers and distributors serving food manufacturers.

This RFP is designed to help USHBC find a partner to help implement a promotional program in Mexico. 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 Mexico for the 2024 marketing year.

1) Trade Representation/Consumer Promotion

The selected agency will handle all aspects of an approved trade marketing program in Mexico 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 Mexico, 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.
- Promotional Activities: Food Service & Food Manufacturing Companies
 - Promoting U.S. blueberries to food manufacturing companies in Mexico to develop new consumer-ready packaged foods with blueberries as the key ingredient.
 - Promoting U.S. blueberries to food service companies in Mexico 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 Mexico 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 Mexico.

2) Consumer & Retail Shopper Marketing

The selected agency will handle all aspects of the approved consumer marketing program in Mexico 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 Mexico 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 Mexican 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 Mexico.
- 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 Mexico 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 Mexico 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 Mexico would look like in subsequent years.
- Identify the greatest challenges impeding sales of blueberries in Mexico, 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 Mexico 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 8, 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 Mexico should be directed to Renata Dalton by email.

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