



Avena Botanicals

PROFILE: Value Added Producer Grant Recipient

Rockport, ME

Grant Amount

\$250,000

Grant Period

2016–2018
(then they received an extension)

Grant Summary

Grant funds were used to assist with personnel, processing, and marketing costs to increase sales of organic herbal products. Working capital funds were used to help expand the existing customer base and revenues more than 50 percent over the course of the grant period.

About the Grant Recipient

Avena Botanicals makes herbal remedies using fresh, organic & biodynamic herbs in Rockport, Maine. They are the first Demeter-certified biodynamic farm in Maine. Biodynamic agriculture is a holistic and spiritually alive system of organic and ecological practices and philosophies based on the teachings of Dr. Rudolf Steiner. One of the core beliefs and practices of biodynamics is to help heal the Earth.



How is the public engaged with Avena Botanicals?

Avena Botanicals offers indoor and outdoor classes in their gardens and in “The Herbal Classroom,” an octagon-shaped classroom on Avena’s biodynamic farm and apothecary. Classes focus on herbal healing, women’s health, Ayurveda, meditation, biodynamic agriculture, pollinator habitats, and yoga for farmers and gardeners. The gardens are open to the public Monday - Friday year round. A separate production area is fenced off from the public.

“The gardens were founded as a sanctuary for pollinators and people.”

– Amanda Sarkis
Avena Finance Manager



IMPACT OF VAPG FUNDING

Because of the VAPG funding, Avena Botanicals was able to hire marketing staff for the first time, including a marketing manager and a marketing assistant.

“We hired someone from the Portland Area to guide us in the rebrand of all our products. That’s been huge, because our products have really sold through stores, word of mouth, and through Deb being known in the community and speaking at community events. Through increased presence with social media, we’ve seen our sales go up a lot.”

— Amanda Sarkis

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Avena Botanicals used a consultant to write the grant, which worked well.

“Because we have so many products and they’re all regulated by the FDA, redesigning our labels was a huge undertaking. It’s taken over a year longer than we thought,” Amanda Sarkis said. They were able to adjust their timeline and received an extension for the funding. But this meant that their sales and acquisition of new wholesale accounts also took longer than anticipated.

The grant reporting also took time and expertise. The training they received at the beginning of the grant period helped them determine what accounting systems to use, how to track bills, put reports together, and file for reimbursements.

HAS THE VAPG HELPED YOU LEVERAGE OTHER FUNDING?

Avena Botanicals applied for a Community Development Block Grant through the state of Maine the same year they applied for the VAPG. They received that grant for equipment and staff training, which went hand in hand with the VAPG funding.

“The grant reviewers could see that we were scaling up on the production side, and they knew we could use help with the marketing side. It showed the USDA that the State Department of Economic Development was behind our business. Getting letters of support from the community was really important as well,” said Amanda Sarkis.

©2018. Funding provided by the Agriculture Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC), located at Iowa State University, www.agmrc.org. AgMRC is a national website dedicated to providing information to producers and service providers on value-added agriculture businesses. These partners collaborated to create the Value Added Producer Grant Profiles:



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