

Horticultural Netting Infrastructure (Expansion) Program Guidelines

February 2024



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Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



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1. What is the Horticultural Netting Infrastructure (Expansion) Program?

Research indicates that netting delivers productivity benefits by protecting horticulture crops from extreme weather and predators and increasing water use efficiency. Netting helps producers to maintain fruit quality, ensure continuity of supply and manage production risks.

The purpose of the Horticultural Netting Infrastructure (Expansion) Program is to provide funding to eligible primary producers of commercial horticulture crops, excluding wine grapes, for the purchase and installation of new netting over established production areas (a 'project') to increase productivity. Horticulture means plant agriculture, which includes production of flowers, fruits and nuts, vegetables and herbs, as well as ornamental trees.

The Horticultural Netting Infrastructure (Expansion) Program provides grants to protect horticultural production by installation of netting infrastructure. This includes protection of horticultural production to address the issues of damage by weather or pest incursion.

About the Program

The Commonwealth Government has provided an additional \$11.22 million to expand its apple and pear trial program for a total program budget of \$15.9 million. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA) has agreed to implement the Program in Victoria on behalf of the Commonwealth Government.

The Original Program was limited to eligible apple and pear producers operating in Victoria (now closed). The first round of the Expanded Program was open for applications between 17 August to 17 October 2022 (now closed).

The Expanded Program provides for up to 50% of eligible costs to commercially install or purchase new horticultural netting (fixed and demountable), to a maximum of \$150,000 (ex GST). An allowance supporting an applicant's own labour is available within the maximum grant total, should applicants wish to self-install netting.

The netting must be installed over areas already in production or planted prior to 14 December 2021.

The number of grants in the Program is subject to funds being available. No rebates or allowances will be offered beyond the total remaining for this round of approximately \$4.6 million (ex GST).

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that their application is complete and correct, with all required supporting documents provided by the closing date. Successful applicants will be invited to enter into a funding agreement with the Victorian Government to receive payment on the terms of the agreement. Projects are required to be completed with all milestones acquitted no later than 31 May 2025.

Program Dates

Applications for the Program will be open at dates specified in the grants section of the Agriculture Victoria website at <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs>.

Successful projects must be completed with all milestones acquitted by 31 May 2025.

2. Who can apply?

The eligibility criteria for organisations and individuals are outlined below.

Eligibility Criteria

The applicant is a property owner, share farmer or lease holder for the land parcel/s proposed for this project

The applicant operates a primary production business registered in Victoria (as defined in the <i>Income Tax Assessment Act 1997</i>)
The property/s for which the applicant intends to install horticultural netting is/are used for commercial horticultural production (excluding wine grapes) in Victoria
The property/s was/were already used for horticulture production/planted prior to 14 December 2021
The project began after 14 December 2021 and the applicant will complete the project by 31 May 2025
The installed netting mesh size will be 30 mm or smaller
The applicant is a legal entity and is capable of entering into a legally binding agreement with the Victorian Government
The applicant holds an Australian business number (ABN), with primary place of business in Victoria
The applicant earns more than 50% of its gross income from primary production under normal seasonal circumstances
The applicant has complied with the terms and conditions of any previous Victorian Government funding, grant or concessional loan they have received
The applicant will provide a cash co-contribution of at least 50% of the budgeted eligible costs for the project (at least \$1 for every \$1 of grant funding provided). If the Program is undersubscribed, any unallocated funds may be offered in subsequent rounds.
The applicant's co-contribution will not include funds from another government program (loans through the Commonwealth Regional Investment Corporation are permitted)

Businesses that have received a grant under the previous horticultural netting program for the apple and pear industry and/or the first round of the Expanded Program may apply for a grant in this funding round. However, the application must be for a new project on a different area under production. Each business may receive no more than \$300,000 (ex GST) in total across all rounds of the Program.

Funding in this round is limited to 1 grant per business with an Australian Business Number (ABN) registered with the Australian Tax Office as a primary production business in Victoria. Additionally, 2 businesses may not apply for a grant on the same parcel of land. Netting projects may be installed over mixed crops operated by 1 business, but only 1 grant will be available.

DEECA reserves the right to request further information from an applicant or from any party engaged in connection with making the application to assist with assessment of the application or to verify any information provided in the application.

NOTE: Submitted applications may be subject to desk or in-person audit or inspection to determine eligibility in accordance with these Guidelines.

3. What might be funded?

Funding will be provided for costs incurred by businesses to purchase new horticultural netting and associated support structures required for installation.

Self-installation

A fixed-rate allowance of \$7,000 per hectare of netting installed, to a limit of \$50,000 in total, will be available to support applicants' own labour to self-install new horticultural netting and associated support structures.

Commercial installation

Funding will be provided for costs incurred by businesses for installation by an independent commercial third-party provider whose regular business includes installation of agricultural netting ('Third Party Installation') to supply and install new horticultural netting and associated support structures required for installation.

Netting must be installed in the State of Victoria for the purpose of increasing productivity of existing production areas. Productivity gains may be associated with, for example, reducing water use, limiting the impact of adverse weather events or preventing animal predation.

Netting must have a mesh size no larger than 30 mm and be purchased and installed after 14 December 2021 and before 31 May 2025. Mesh netting with integrated rain covers, such as the 'Voen' netting system are also eligible.

The land on which the netting infrastructure has been or will be installed must have been used for commercial production prior to 14 December 2021.

Applications for third-party installation must include written quotes or cost estimates from the preferred third-party supplier.

To be eligible, applicants must attest that the installed or proposed netting and associated support structures comply with all federal and state legislation, regulations and codes in delivery of the Program, for example, relevant planning and building regulations and occupational health and safety standards.

Projects should demonstrate a commitment to Victorian or regional employment and purchasing wherever possible. Businesses should consider hiring from social or First Nations enterprises where possible.

Examples of funding methodology based on eligible projects:

All figures exclude GST.

- A. An applicant requests \$75,000 in grant funding to provide a 50% rebate on \$150,000 of materials and installation costs for netting an existing orchard. Funds are available, and the applicant receives \$75,000 in reimbursement for purchases for a total grant amount of **\$75,000**.
- B. An applicant requests \$200,000 in grant funding to provide a 50% rebate on \$400,000 of materials and installation costs for netting an existing orchard. Funds are available, and the applicant receives \$150,000[#] in reimbursement for purchases for a total grant amount of **\$150,000**. [#]*Maximum reimbursement available under the Program.*
- C. An applicant requests \$80,000 in grant funding to provide a 50% rebate on \$160,000 of material purchases for netting 8 ha of existing orchard. The applicant will self-install the netting for an allowance of \$7,000 per hectare. Funds are available, and the applicant receives \$80,000 in reimbursement for purchases and \$50,000* as a self-installation allowance for a total grant amount of **\$130,000**. **This is the maximum allowance available under the Program.*
- D. An applicant requests \$20,000 in grant funding to provide a 50% rebate on \$40,000 of materials purchases for netting 2 ha of existing orchard. The applicant will self-install the netting for an allowance of \$7,000 per hectare. Funds are available, and the applicant receives \$20,000 in reimbursement for purchases and \$14,000 as a self-installation allowance for a total grant amount of **\$34,000**.
- E. An applicant requests \$75,000 in grant funding to provide a 50% rebate on \$150,000 of materials and installation costs for netting an existing orchard. Funds have already been fully allocated in the

Program and the applicant is informed that they have been wait-listed. After 6 months, the applicant is offered \$50,000 that has become available due to a cancelled project. The applicant may accept or reject the offer, noting that the project must still be completed by 31 May 2025. If they reject the offer, then the next applicant on the wait-list will be offered the funding.

Summarised examples

Example	Eligible Project costs	Available reimbursement	Self-installation allowance request	Available allowance	Total Grant amount (excl. GST)
A	\$150,000	\$75,000	No	\$0	\$75,000
B	\$400,000	\$150,000	No	\$0	\$150,000
C	\$160,000	\$80,000	Yes 8 ha	\$50,000	\$130,000
D	\$40,000	\$20,000	Yes 2 ha	\$14,000	\$34,000
E	\$150,000	\$50,000	No	\$0	\$50,000

4. What will not be funded?

Activities, projects and costs that are not eligible for funding include:

- Projects that have already received assistance from other relevant Commonwealth Government, state or local government grant funds to achieve the same outcomes, including the initial program for the apple and pear industry and round 1 of the Expanded Program. (However, funding obtained through Commonwealth Regional Investment Corporation loans are eligible contributions. Also businesses that have received a grant under the previous horticultural netting program for the apple and pear industry and/or the first round of the Expanded Program may apply for a grant in this funding round. However, the application must be for a new project on a different area under production. Each business may receive no more than \$300,000 (ex GST) in total across all rounds of the Program).
- Projects where the netting and/or associated support structures have been damaged by the bushfires of 2019-20
- Plastic rain covers, such as igloo type or screening over netting; however, the mesh netting component is eligible
- Nursery industry projects where the netting is being used to expand the production area, rather than protect existing stock
- Projects for which insurance has been claimed for damaged netting and/or associated support structures
- Feasibility studies, business cases, reports and development plans
- Costs associated with the preparation of the application for this Program
- Costs for spare netting or infrastructure to cover any wear and tear or accidental damage once installation is complete
- Costs for purchasing equipment and machinery associated with the installation and maintenance of netting infrastructure (drape net rollers are eligible costs)
- Operational expenditure, including wages, utilities, repairs and maintenance (for clarity, staff costs for coordinating installation by a third party are not eligible costs)
- Any activities, projects and costs that DEECA determines to be outside the scope of the Program.

5. What are the funding details?

The Horticultural Netting (Expansion) Program will provide for up to 50% of eligible costs to commercially install or purchase new horticultural netting (fixed and demountable), to a maximum total of \$150,000 (ex GST). An allowance supporting an applicant's own labour is available, should applicants wish to self-install netting. The netting must be installed over areas already in production/planted prior to 14 December 2021.

Across all rounds of the Program, the maximum amount that a business can receive is \$300,000 (ex GST).

Financial co-contributions can include cash contributions from the applicant and other parties, including individuals, financial institutions, businesses, but cannot include contributions from Commonwealth Government programs (however, funding obtained through Commonwealth Regional Investment Corporation loans is an eligible contribution).

The number of grants allocated by the Program depends on the funds available. Once the funds are allocated, subsequent applicants within the eligible period of the current round will be wait-listed in case funds become available. This may happen, for example, if successful applicants (across all rounds) withdraw from the Program or seek a reduced amount of rebate than initially requested. The unallocated funds are returned to the pool to support further applications in the current round.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that their application is complete and correct, with all required supporting documents provided by the closing date. Successful applicants will be invited to enter into a funding agreement with the Victorian Government to receive payment on the terms of the agreement.

Applications for the Program will be open at dates specified in the grants section of the Agriculture Victoria website at <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs>.

Successful projects must be completed with all milestones acquitted by 31 May 2025.

6. What are the assessment criteria?

Applications will be checked against the eligibility criteria listed in section 2 above to make sure that the applicant and their activity are eligible for funding.

Financial, probity and reputational checks will be performed.

DEECA reserves the right to request further information from you or from any business or individual you have engaged to carry out the eligible project, to assist in assessing the application and to verify any information provided in your application.

The assessment will also consider whether a project, or elements of a project, could be more appropriately funded by other Commonwealth Government, state, and/or local government or industry programs.

Completed applications will be processed for funding in order of receipt. If applications meet the eligibility criteria, then they are eligible for funding where funding is available.

State Not Liable for Claims Arising from Project

The State of Victoria will not be liable for any action or claim arising from or in connection with the proposed netting project.

By making this application, you acknowledge that the Guidelines and any discussions you may have with any DEECA representative are for information only, and do not constitute advice. Applicants should seek independent professional advice before making an application or entering into an agreement with the State.

7. What supporting documents will need to be provided?

Please submit the following documents with your application:

1. Applicants must demonstrate their eligibility by completing the application form (available at: <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs/horticultural-netting-grants-program>) and attaching supporting documents, including those listed below:

2. Letter from an accountant stating that:
 - more than 50% of gross income for the business is earned from primary production under normal seasonal circumstances
 - the owner operates a primary production business (as defined in the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*)
3. Evidence of ownership arrangement (owners, share farmers or lease holders) for the land parcel proposed for this project, e.g., Council rate notice, lease contract, share farming agreement (copies)
4. A property plan or map showing netting installation location on property, crop type/s and number of hectares being covered under each net
5. For **self-installation**, written quotes or paid receipts/invoices for eligible costs
For **third party installation**, receipted invoices or written quote / estimate from your preferred commercial netting company/service provider (including ABN) confirming total project cost
6. Evidence of sufficient funding to fund your co-contribution, for example, bank statements or letter from your financier (not required for those who have already purchased and installed netting)
7. Documentary evidence of payment if you are seeking a rebate for costs already incurred – such as a copy of bank statements, letters from financial institutions confirming contribution (documents should include the value and nature of the commitment and any conditions relating to this commitment and be signed by the authorised representative).

8. What are the funding conditions?

Funding agreements

Successful applicants must enter into a grant agreement with DEECA.

Any letters or invitations to successful applicants to enter into a grant agreement will not constitute a formal contract and are not legally binding on the State unless and until a formal written grant agreement is executed by both parties.

DEECA may negotiate with applicants on details of a project under the grant agreement to meet any requirements the Minister may impose as a condition of funding and specific milestones the applicant will be required to meet.

The grant agreement will outline all conditions for the provision of funding. Successful applicants will be expected to meet all terms and conditions of the grant agreement, including governance and reporting requirements. Applicants must comply with all Commonwealth Government and state legislation, regulations and codes in the delivery of the Program, for example, relevant planning and building guidelines and Occupational Health and Safety Standards.

Funding recipients will be required to cooperate with DEECA in any promotional, marketing or evaluation activities relating to the Program. All funded projects may be publicly listed on Agriculture Victoria's website and have their business name associated with the Program.

Legislative and regulatory requirements

In delivering the activity, grant recipients are required to comply with all relevant Commonwealth Government and state/territory legislations and regulations, including but not limited to:

The Privacy Act 1988

The Freedom of Information Act 1982

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004

Financial, probity and reputational checks

If the applicant is a company, DEECA will undertake checks to confirm any recordings of actions, claims, disputes with any of the directors, or that none of the directors have been disqualified from acting as a director, or that there are any adverse findings against the applicant by a regulator.

Applicants requesting funding of over \$50,000 may be required to provide recent financial statements to enable a more comprehensive risk assessment to be completed. DEECA will advise if this requirement is necessary during the assessment period.

Tax implications

Applicants should consult the Australian Taxation Office or seek professional advice on any taxation implications that may arise from this grant funding.

Acknowledging the Victorian Government's support

Successful applicants are expected to acknowledge the Victorian Government's support. Promotional guidelines (<https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/grants>) will form part of the funding agreement. Successful applicants must liaise with the departmental program area regarding any public events or announcements related to the project.

Payments

Payments will be made as long as:

- grant recipients provide the milestone deliverables specified in the grant agreement, such as evidence of payment, evidence of installation, final reports and statutory declarations;
- other terms and conditions of funding continue to be met.

Monitoring

Grant recipients are required to comply with project monitoring and reporting requirements as outlined in the funding agreement. This may include progress reports, photographic evidence, site inspections, completion reports and acquittal documentation.

Privacy

Any personal information about you or a third party in your application will be collected by DEECA for the purposes of administering your grant application and informing Members of Parliament of successful applications. Personal information may also be disclosed to external experts, such as members of assessment panels, or other government departments for assessment, reporting, advice, comment or for discussions regarding alternative or collaborative grant funding opportunities. If you intend to include personal information about third parties in your application, please ensure that they are aware of the contents of this privacy statement.

Any personal information about you or a third party in your correspondence will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and other applicable laws.

DEECA is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. You can find the DEECA Privacy Policy online at www.delwp.vic.gov.au/privacy.

Requests for access to information about you held by DEECA should be sent to the Manager Privacy, P.O. Box 500 East Melbourne 8002 or contact by emailing Foi.unit@delwp.vic.gov.au.

9. What is the application process?

Applications are submitted online using the Grants Online portal.

To apply, go to the Program website at: <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs/horticultural-netting-grants-program> and click on the 'Start new application' button. Complete the application form and attach supporting documents, including those listed at point 7 above.

Attaching required documents

Supporting documents must be in an acceptable file type, such as Word, Excel, PDF, or JPEG. The maximum file size for each file is 10 MB.

You will receive an application number when you submit an application online. Please quote this number in all communications with the department relating to your application.

If you have documents to submit that cannot be attached to your online application you can email them to hort.netting@agriculture.vic.gov.au quoting your application number. Attach all documents to one email, zipping the files if required.

Make sure your application is submitted by **5:00 pm on 8 April 2024** before the system closes to applications.

Note: No hard copy applications will be accepted. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

10. Additional information

Additional information is available at the Program web page <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs/horticultural-netting-grants-program>.

If you require assistance submitting your application online, email grantsinfo@delwp.vic.gov.au.

11. What is the notification process?

Applicants will be notified in writing after the assessment process is completed. All decisions are final and are not subject to further review.

12. Key dates

Applications open	5 February 2024
Applications close	8 April 2024
Grant agreements executed	30 June 2024
Final acquittal reports submitted	31 May 2025

13. Checklist

Read these guidelines and the information about this grant Program at <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs/horticultural-netting-grants-program> before applying and complete the following checklist.

Have you:

- Read the guidelines carefully?
- Checked that you will be able to comply with all relevant laws and regulations in delivery of your activity?
- Checked that your business is eligible for grant funding?

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- Got your ABN ready?
- Obtained a written quote or cost estimates, if not yet installed, for the required netting and infrastructure, and where applicable, third-party installation costs?
- Obtained receipts/proof of purchase and evidence of payment, for netting already installed?
- Prepared a property plan or map showing the location and area of the netting project and the crop type/s being covered?
- Obtained a letter from your accountant, stating that more than 50% of gross income for the business is earned from primary production under normal seasonal circumstances and that that the owner operates a primary production business (as defined in the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*)?