

Alabama RFSI Funding Priorities Survey Results

The USDA-AMS Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program seeks to strengthen the middle-of-the-food-supply-chain by providing assistance for projects related to aggregation, processing, manufacturing, transporting, wholesaling, and distributing locally and regionally produced food crops. Eligible crops include specialty crops, dairy, aquaculture, and grains for human consumption.

The State is required by USDA to conduct outreach to ensure that RFSI funding priorities reflect the needs of stakeholders. A survey designed by Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries personnel was used to gather data about needs and potential areas of growth for producers, processors, and other stakeholders throughout the State.

Based on the collected data from survey results and anecdotal evidence from statewide outreach meetings, Alabama's RFSI funding priorities will include:

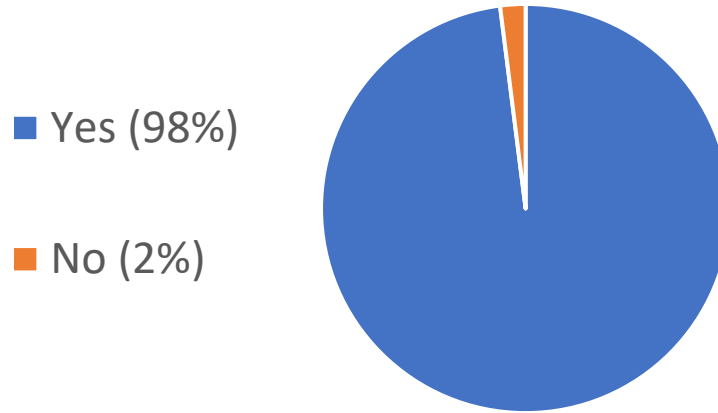
- Projects that increase local producers' abilities to process, aggregate, and distribute agricultural products,
- Projects that construct, expand, or modernize processing/value-added facilities,
- Projects that construct, expand, or modernize distribution facilities,
- Projects that construct, expand, or modernize storage facilities,
- Projects that purchase and/or modernize middle-of-the-food-supply-chain equipment
- Projects that will increase the local food supply to school systems and grocery stores

To increase access to producers and processors across the State, projects that benefit multiple processors, producers, and/or small- and mid-size food businesses rather than an individual entity will be more competitive throughout the review process.

Results from the survey are included below.

Total complete responses: 124

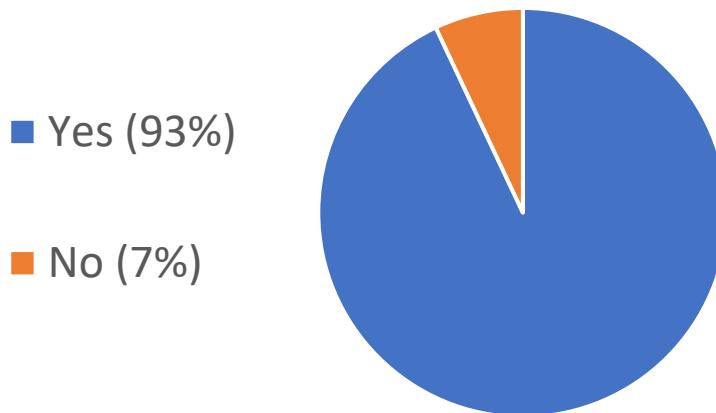
Do you feel that Alabama producers need middle-of-the-supply-chain processing opportunities?



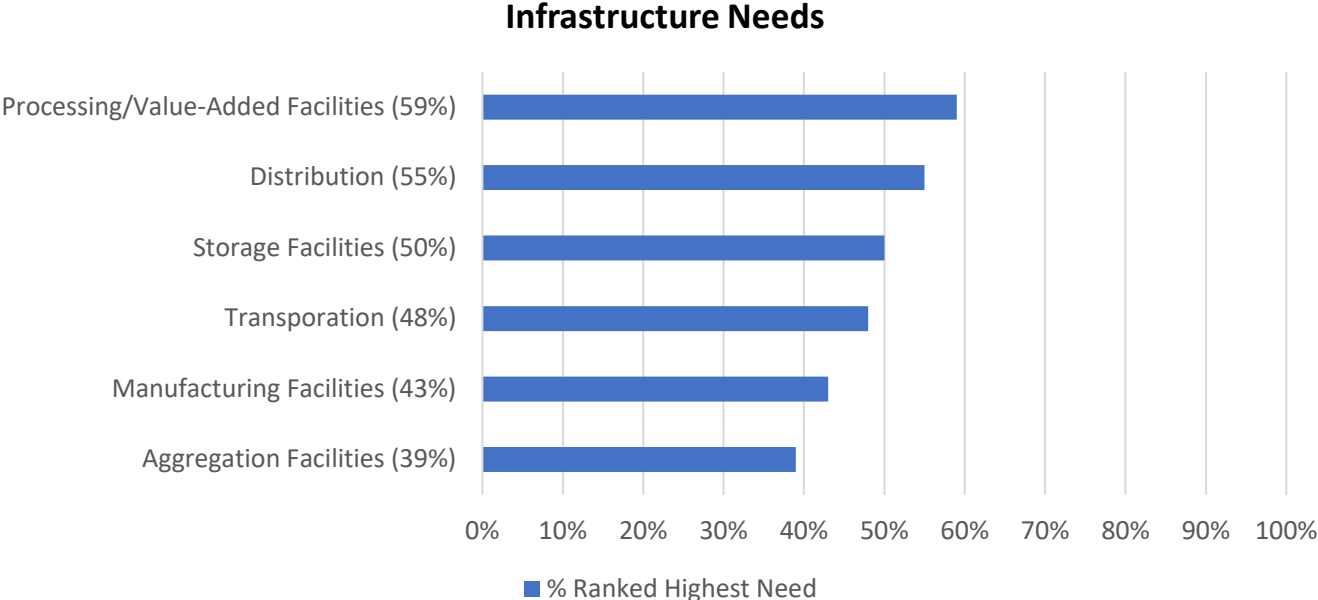
Ninety-eight percent of respondents agreed that middle-of-the-supply-chain opportunities are needed in Alabama. These activities include span from *after* products are harvested to *before* they are sold at their end market. Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Aggregation of products from multiple producers at one facility
- Storage (cold storage, freezer storage, aggregation storage)
- Value-added processing (IQF/flash-freezing, slicing, canning, brining)
- Transportation of agricultural products (refrigerated trucks)
- Distribution of agricultural products to markets including retail and institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.)

Should middle-of-the-supply-chain processing opportunities in Alabama be regionally based?

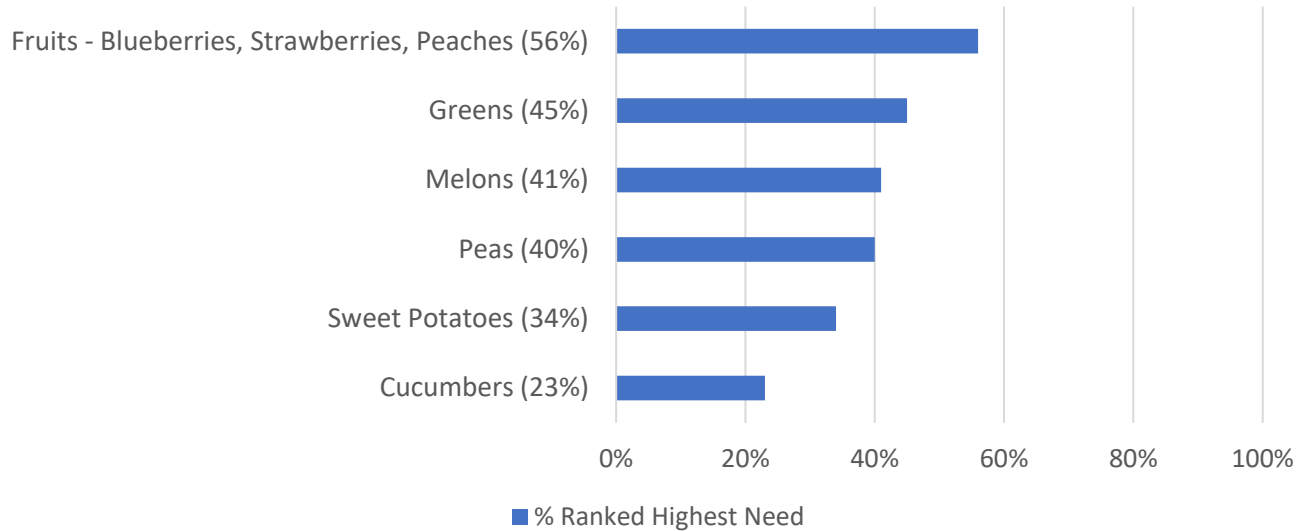


Ninety-three percent of participants agreed that middle-of-the-supply-chain processing opportunities should be available to growers and processors regionally throughout the State. Strategically-located facilities for processing can reduce the burden of transporting fresh product from one end of the State to the other.



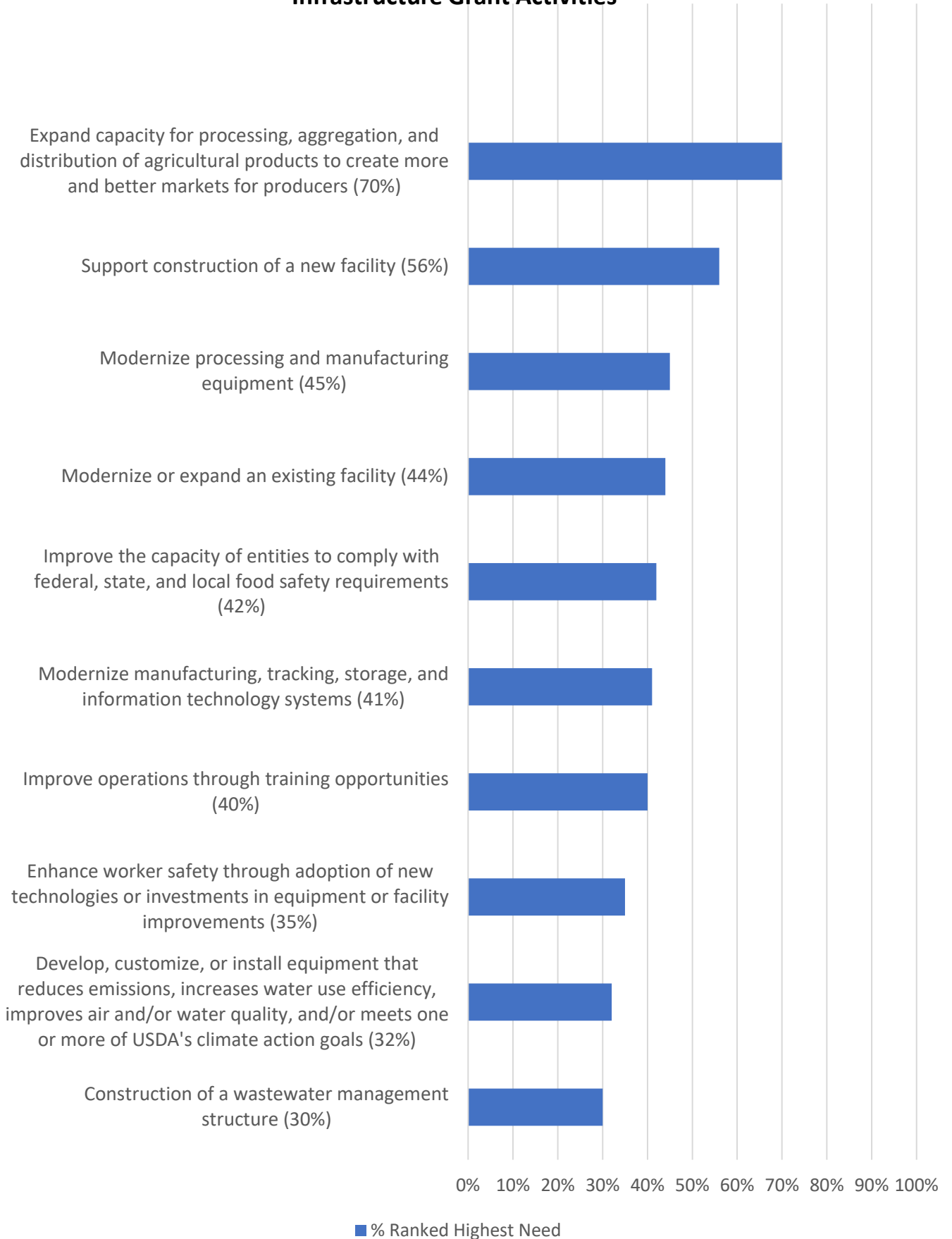
Survey respondents were presented with six types of middle-of-the-supply-chain infrastructure and asked to rate the level of need of each type on a 1 to 5 scale (1=Most Important, 5=Least Important). Percentages of each type of need ranked “1=Most Important” are shown in the chart above. At least half of all participants ranked processing/value-added facilities (59%), distribution (55%), and storage facilities (50%) as the most important infrastructure needs in the State.

Target Commodities



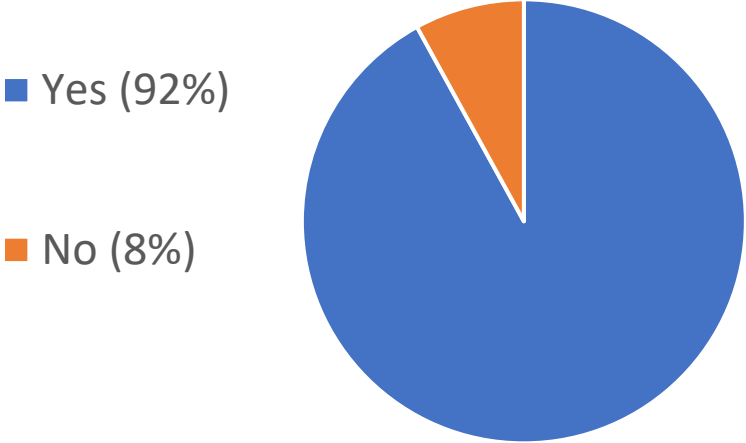
Survey participants were provided a list of target commodities for middle-of-the-supply-chain activities and asked to rank the need for middle-of-the-supply-chain support for each commodity on a 1 to 5 scale (1=Most Important, 5=Least Important). Percentages for each type of commodity ranked “1=Most Important” are shown in the chart above. Fruits including blueberries, strawberries, and peaches (56%), greens (45%), melons (41%), and peas (40%) were identified as commodities that could benefit the most from mid-supply-chain infrastructure support. Additional commodities written in an “Other” option included satsumas, squash, and corn.

Infrastructure Grant Activities



Potential infrastructure grant activities as listed in the RFSI Program Scope and Requirements were presented to survey participants. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of each activity on a 1 to 5 scale (1=Most Important, 5=Least Important). Percentages of each type of activity that ranked “1=Most Important” are shown in the chart above. Seventy percent of participants agreed that activities that “Expand capacity for processing, aggregation, and distribution of agricultural products to create more and better markets” were critically important to the State’s industry. Construction of a new facility (56%), modernizing processing and manufacturing equipment (45%), and modernizing or expanding an existing facility (44%) were identified as the second, third, and fourth most important infrastructure grant activities.

Are the activities you ranked as high need/priority feasible and realistic to be completed within the 3 years of the Infrastructure Grant performance period (May 2024-May 2027)?



Ninety-two percent of participants agreed that the activities they ranked as highest need/priority were able to be completed between the dates of May 2024-May 2027.