

Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program

FY 2010 Request for Applications

APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 15, 2010



**U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.319**

DATES: Applications must be received by close of business (COB) on June 15, 2010 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding. Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is requesting comments regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and will be used to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). This section requires the Secretary to solicit and consider input on a current RFA from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education and extension for use in formulating future RFAs for competitive programs. Written stakeholder comments on this RFA should be submitted in accordance with the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice.

Written stakeholder comments should be submitted by mail to: Policy and Oversight Branch; Office of Extramural Programs; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: RFP-OEP@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program** RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA announces the availability of grant funds and requests applications for the **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program** for fiscal year (FY) 2010 to (1) improve the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers; and (2) establish and maintain a national, publicly available farm financial management database to support improved farm management. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2010 is approximately \$1,400,000.

This notice identifies the objectives for FBMB projects, the eligibility criteria, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a FBMB grant. NIFA additionally requests stakeholder input from any interested party for use in the development of the next RFA for this program.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 7208 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, (Pub. L. 110 – 246), amended the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990, by adding section 1672D (7 U.S.C. 5925f), which authorizes the Secretary, acting through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, to establish a competitive research and extension grants program for the purpose of (1) improving the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers; and (2) establishing and maintaining a national, publicly available farm financial management database to support improved farm management.

Selection Criteria - In allocating funds made available to carry out this section, the Secretary may give priority to grants that:

- Demonstrate an ability to work directly with agricultural producers;
- Collaborate with farm management and producer associations;
- Address the farm management needs of a variety of crops and regions of the United States; and
- Use and support the national farm financial management database.

The Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriation Act, 2010 (Pub. L. 111-80) appropriates funds under Title I for this program.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program** is to fund an entity or “National Farm Management Center” which will establish and maintain a national, publicly-available, farm financial management database to support improved farm management. This “Center” will:

- a) Coordinate standardized financial analysis methodologies for use by farmers, ranchers, other agricultural operators, and farm management associations;
- b) Provide the software tools necessary for farm management associations, farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural operators to perform the necessary financial analyses, including the benchmarking of individual enterprises; and
- c) Develop and maintain a national farm financial database to facilitate those financial analyses and benchmarking that is available online to farmers, ranchers, other agricultural operators, farm management associations, and the public.

The purpose of the Farm Business Management and Benchmarking program outlined in this Request for Applications (RFA) is to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of individuals directly involved in production agriculture. Specifically, applications are being solicited for the **Farm Financial Management Center to:**

1. Establish and maintain a national, comprehensive Internet-based farm financial and production management database from actual farm data that can be used for farm financial research and benchmarking, and to expand producer access to the database.
2. Gather data and conduct research on cost of production, farm profitability factors, and farm policy.
3. Develop cooperation and data sharing among existing farm management associations and farm business management education programs across the nation to convert their financial analysis activities to a uniform system.
4. Provide training, assistance, and software to states with farm management associations to facilitate uniform financial procedures and software.
5. Improve the profitability and competitiveness of small and medium-sized farms and ranches by providing access to high quality, uniform farm business management benchmarking information.
6. Improve producers' abilities to successfully manage their agricultural operations through periods of high risk, volatility and financial stress.

C. Program Area Description

The Program Name is: **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking Program** and the Program Code is FBMB for all applications submitted under this announcement.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

NIFA anticipates awarding a single grant under this program. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. **In FY 2010**, approximately \$1,400,000 is available to fund one National Farm Management Center. The maximum length of the award is for a three (3) year project period.

The budget period in the application should commence in FY 2010 and conclude in FY 2012. Proposals should contain a plan of work for each year, a budget and budget narrative for each year, and a consolidated budget covering the entire period. The proposal cover page (See Part IV, this RFA, Application and Submission Information) should include the entire period covered by the proposal and the total amount being requested for the entire period of the grant proposal [e.g., FY 2010 – FY 2012 or three (3) years]. The grant will be made as a standard award which means an award instrument in which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined project period without the announced intention of providing additional support at a future dates.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury’s Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2010, only new applications may be submitted to the **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program**. **A new application is one that has not been previously submitted.**

All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

C. Project Types

National Farm Management Center

It is anticipated that a single grant to support one (1) National Farm Management Center will be provided as a result of this FY 2010 competition.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Pursuant to 7 U.S.C. 450i(b)(7), eligible applicants means : (A) State agricultural experiment stations; (B) colleges and universities; (C) university research foundations; (D) other research institutions and organizations; (E) Federal agencies; (F) national laboratories; (G) private organizations or corporations; (H) individuals; or (I) any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in subparagraphs (A) through (H).

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an application deadline will result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

NIFA does not require matching or cost-sharing support for this program, and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Electronic applications must be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA.

Prior to preparing an application, it is suggested that the PD/PI first contact an Authorized Representative (AR)(also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grant.gov. If the organization is not prepared, the AR should see http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp for steps for preparing to submit applications through Grants.gov.

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

1. To access, complete and submit applications, applicants must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov. This software is essential to apply for NIFA Federal assistance awards. For basic system requirements and download instructions, please see http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp. To verify that you have a compatible version of Adobe Reader, Grants.gov established a test package that will assist you in making that determination. Grants.gov Adobe Versioning Test Package: <http://www.grants.gov/applicants/AdobeVersioningTestOnly.jsp>.
2. The application package must be obtained via Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov>, click on “Apply for Grants” in the left-hand column, click on “**Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Instructions,**” enter the funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-FBMB-003180** in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This Guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If assistance is needed to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms), refer to resources available on the Grants.gov Web site first (<http://www.grants.gov/>). Grants.gov assistance is also available as follows:

Grants.gov customer support
Toll Free: 1-800-518-4726
Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [Federal Holidays](#).
Email: support@grants.gov

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Electronic applications should be prepared following Parts V and VI of the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed to prepare an application in response to this RFA. If there is a discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., portable document format) in Part III section 3 of the Guide. ANY PROPOSALS CONTAINING NON-PDF DOCUMENTS WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. With documented prior approval, resubmitted applications will be accepted until close of business on the closing date in the RFA.

If you do not own PDF-generating software, Grants.gov provides online tools to assist applicants. Users will find a link to “Convert Documents to PDF” on <http://grants.gov/assets/PDFConversion.pdf>.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 4 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. The summary should include the relevance of the project to the goals of **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program**.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

The Project Narrative shall not exceed 15 pages of written text—whether single- or double-spaced—and up to 5 additional pages for figures and tables. This maximum of 20 pages has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices in the Project Narrative are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. The addition of appendices should not be used to circumvent the page limit.

The Project Narrative must clearly address the purpose and priorities outlined in Part I, B&C of this RFA, as appropriate. Moreover, the Project Narrative must include all of the following:

1. A Summary Statement of the applicant's Intentions in submitting a proposal for the National Farm Management Center, including a Rationale for having the Center established at the proposing institution.
2. A clear Statement of Purpose, along with Goals and Objectives for the proposed Center as well as for the farm financial management database.
3. A Discussion of the relevant Body of Knowledge sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's understanding of the needs of agricultural producers for farm financial management and benchmarking capabilities. The discussion should include estimates of the magnitude of the issues and their relevance to stakeholders and to ongoing State-Federal food and agricultural research, education and extension programs.
4. A Description of Planned Data Management and Coordination Efforts and Mechanisms to achieve them, sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's proficiency administering a Center. This description should include discussion of any relevant past activities.
5. A Plan of Work, including Methods and Procedures for establishing the Center, and Action Steps for establishment and implementation of a farm financial management database, collaboration with farm management and producer associations, and direct work with agricultural producers. This plan of work should provide a description of the Facilities in which the Center will operate, along with Personnel Needs, Assignments, and the Division of Labor anticipated for implementation of the proposed plan. The methods and procedures section of the plan of work should include but not necessarily be limited to:
 - a. A description of the proposed project activities in the sequence in which it is planned to carry them out;
 - b. Techniques to be employed, including their feasibility and rationale for their uses in program implementation;
 - c. Kinds of results expected;
 - d. Means by which data will be collected, analyzed, interpreted, and used;
 - e. Details of plans to communicate programming and results to stakeholders and the public;
 - f. Pitfalls that might be encountered and how they might be overcome;
 - g. Limitations of the proposed project; and,
 - h. A project timetable outlining all important phases as a function of time, year by year, for the entire project, including, if appropriate, periods beyond the grant funding period.
6. A Description of Prospective Partners for collaboration and the role each will play in the Center's efforts. The description should include the role of stakeholders in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation, as appropriate.
7. A Description of the Evaluation Component to assess the effectiveness of the Center's coordination efforts and database management and benchmarking outcomes.
8. Evidence and Discussion of Past Experience and Compliance with Federal Reporting Requirements.

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

5. R&R Personal Data – As noted in Part V, 6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

6. R&R Budget

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

7. Supplemental Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 2. Program Code. Enter the program code name “Farm Business Management and Benchmarking Program” and the program code “**FBMB**”.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on June 15, 2010 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding unless there are qualifying extenuating circumstances.

Correspondence regarding submitted applications will be sent using e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, please contact the Program Contact identified in Part VII of this RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

Section 7132 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-246) amended section 1462(a) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3310(a)) on recovery of indirect costs. The recovery of indirect costs on awards made by NIFA under this program may not exceed the lesser of the institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 22 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

Project periods cannot exceed five (5) years, the statutory time limit.

E. Other Submission Requirements

The applicant should follow the submission requirements noted in the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.”

Described below are the requirements for successful submission of an application. All of the following steps must be met for an application to be considered for peer review:

- 1) Meeting the deadline: To electronically send the application to Grants.gov the submit button is hit, which triggers a date and time stamp on the application. The date and time stamp is used to determine whether the application was received by Grants.gov before the deadline, no later than close of business (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on June 15, 2010. An application submitted or resubmitted after the deadline is deemed late and disqualified from eligibility. Consideration of late applications is only given in extenuating circumstances (e.g., natural disasters, confirmed Grants.gov outage) with proper documentation and support of the Agency Contact (see Part VII). The occurrence of one of these situations does not automatically ensure that a late application will be accepted. If an applicant wants a late application considered under an extenuating circumstance, the applicant should contact the Agency Contact accordingly.
- 2) Successful Grants.gov validation: The Grants.gov system performs a limited check of the application, and applicants are notified by Grants.gov of the outcome of the initial review. Applications meeting Grants.gov requirements are made available to the funding agency for further processing. Applications that fail Grants.gov validation may be resubmitted to Grants.gov if the original agency deadline has not passed. (Note that although the Grants.gov system may allow applications to be submitted after the deadline has passed, such applications are considered late by NIFA.)
- 3) Successful Agency validation: NIFA staff perform precursory review of the application. The agency validation process includes, for example, meeting eligibility requirements and following agency application guidelines (e.g., formatting, page limitations, limits on budget requests). Applicants are notified by NIFA of the outcome of this review.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

Each application will be evaluated in a 2-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel.

Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA:

Demonstrate an ability to work directly with agricultural producers – 25 points

The National Farm Management Center must have the capacity to improve producers' abilities to successfully manage through periods of high risk, volatility and financial stress. Furthermore, the Center must have the capability to guide producers and agricultural professionals to sound financial decisions by providing them information on farm financial management, business analysis, credit analysis, and financial benchmarking. What types of "hands-on" opportunities will you provide to producers to improve their bottom line?

Collaborate with farm business management and producer associations, and farm management educators – 25 points

The National Farm Management Center must have the capacity to collect, organize, and transfer data from the individual farm level to a national database. Currently, farm management data is gathered and stored differently throughout the nation. Farm business management associations or education programs operate in many states, helping thousands of producers with record keeping and compiling actual farm data into local databases. How will you convert existing farm management association data from current structures to a uniform structure across the project?

Address the farm management needs of a variety of crops and regions of the United States – 25 points

The National Farm Management Center must have the capability to identify and assess the specific producer needs with respect to their production practices, various crops, and geographic location. This information will be pertinent to the collection, analysis, and transfer of farm business management data that is collected by individual states into a uniform structure. This will be made possible through cooperation and data sharing among existing farm management associations and farm business management education programs across the nation. What strategies will you use to assess the farm management needs across the nation for varying producer conditions?

Use and support a publicly available national farm financial management database to provide training materials and benchmarking information – 25 points

The National Farm Management Center must provide a publicly available database that contains uniform benchmarking information for producers and agricultural professionals. The database will enable individual producers to learn what practices contribute to higher profits. How will your database provide ongoing technical and farm management support and education to producers and farm management educators? How will the database incorporate technical support, software programs, updates to software programs, and customized training and support as needed by individual states?

Applications that provide evidence of the following criteria will be deemed the most competitive. The applicant has already: a) established and maintains collaborative partnerships with more than five (5) farm management associations that are representative of agricultural diversity in multiple regions of the United States; b) maintained and continues to maintain farm financial analysis software applicable to the production and management of a wide range of crop and livestock agricultural commodities (including some organic commodities); c) established procedures that enable producers to i) benchmark the farms of the producers against peer groups; and (ii) to query the benchmarking data base by location, farm type, farm size, and commodity at the overall business and individual enterprise levels; and d) has provided and continues to provide public online access to farm and ranch financial benchmarking databases.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 6400 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 648, Falls Church, Virginia 22042. Phone: (703) 532-2300. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the

extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as needed basis, as part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. NIFA will provide copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the preaward process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors which may exclude an applicant from receiving Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of NIFA shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of NIFA as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations.

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the following:

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the Director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number assigned by the Department;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Director during the project period;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA award terms and conditions);
- (10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to:

2 CFR Part 220 – Cost Principles for Educational Institutions (OMB Circular A-21).

2 CFR Part 225 – Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87).

2 CFR Part 230 – Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122).

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

7 CFR Part 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., OMB Circular Nos. A-21, A-87, and A-122 (now relocated at 2 CFR Parts 220, 225, and 230), and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308 (formerly the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, Pub. L. No. 95-224), as well as general policy requirements applicable to recipients of Departmental financial assistance.

7 CFR Part 3016—USDA implementation of Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of Federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3019—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-110, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Nonprofit Organizations (2 CFR Part 215).

7 CFR Part 3021—Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance).

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations.

7 CFR Part 3407—NIFA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR 3430—Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs-- General Award Administrative Provisions.

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in Federally assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in Federally assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Awardees are required to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's Current Research Information System (CRIS). The CRIS database contains narrative project information, progress/impact statements, and final technical reports that are made available to the public. For applications recommended for funding, instructions on preparing and submission of project documentation will be provided to the applicant by the Agency Contact. **Documentation must be submitted to CRIS before NIFA funds will be released.** Project reports will be requested by the CRIS office when required. For more information about CRIS, visit <http://cris.nifa.usda.gov/>

The funded project will be expected to verify program accomplishments. Accomplishments can include expanded awareness of the National Farm Management Center and greater knowledge of benchmarking tools and strategies among users of the database. Evidence of actual or intended beneficial changes of producers' production practices is particularly desirable, in addition to documentation of producer involvement in program activities. The evidence is expected to include producers' assessment of the value of the database's materials and instruction, and suggestions for addition or deletion of topics and instructional materials.

For informational purposes, the "Federal Financial Report," Form SF-425, consolidates into a single report the former Financial Status Report (SF-269 and SF-269A) and the Federal Cash Transactions Report (SF-272 and SF-272A). The [NIFA Agency-specific Terms and Conditions](#) include the requirement that Form SF-425 is due on a **quarterly basis no later than 30 days following the end of each reporting period. A final "Federal Financial Report," Form SF-425, is due 90 days after the expiration date of this award.**

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact Patricia Hipple; National Program Leader, Economic and Community Systems, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; U.S. Department of Agriculture: STOP 2215; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-2215; telephone: 202-401-2185; fax: 202-690-3162; e-mail: phipple@nifa.usda.gov.

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

Copies of reviews and a summary of review panel comments—redacted of any information that would identify reviewers—will be sent to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, the awardee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

2. Changes in Project Plans

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

b. Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.

d. Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended by NIFA without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. Any extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the awardee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of award.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), for the applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

For the purpose of this program, the following additional definitions are applicable:

- 1) BENCHMARK, BENCHMARKING – The term “benchmark” or “benchmarking” means the process of comparing the performance of an agricultural enterprise against the performance of other similar enterprises, through the use of comparable and reliable data, to identify business management strengths, weaknesses, and steps necessary to improve management performance and business profitability.
- 2) FARM MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION – A public or nonprofit organization or educational program that a) assists farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural operators to improve financial management and business profitability by providing training on farm financial planning and analysis, record keeping, and other farm management topics; and b) is

affiliated with a land-grant college or university, other institution of higher education, or nonprofit entity.

- 3) NATIONAL FARM MANAGEMENT CENTER – An entity that, as determined by the Secretary a) has collaborative partnerships with more than five (5) farm management associations that are representative of agricultural diversity in multiple regions of the United States; b) maintains farm financial analysis software applicable to the production and management of a wide range of crop and livestock agricultural commodities (including some organic commodities); c) establishes procedures that enable producers to i) benchmark the farms of the producers against peer groups; and (ii) to query the benchmarking data base by location, farm type, farm size, and commodity at the overall business and individual enterprise levels; and d) provides public online access to farm and ranch financial benchmarking databases.