



REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2024

NOTIFICATION OF INTENT DEADLINE: April 4, 2024

APPLICATION DEADLINE: May 2, 2024

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING: \$3,703,893

MAXIMUM INDIVIDUAL AWARD RANGE: \$300,000 per year for a maximum of 3 years

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-OP-010554

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.330

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems Program, formerly known as Alfalfa and Forage Research Program, (AFRP) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.330.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern, May 2, 2024,
Notification of Intent:	5:00 P.M. Eastern, April 4, 2024
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (<i>NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month</i>)

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when equity is grounded in the programs. NIFA is committed to enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of programs and encourages individuals, institutions, and organizations from underserved communities to apply to funding opportunities as lead, co-lead, or subaward recipient(s), and to engage as leaders in the peer panel review process to support the development of strong networks and collaborations. NIFA encourages applications that engage diverse communities and have broad impacts through research, education, extension, and integrated activities to address current and future challenges.

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all request for applications (RFAs) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments to the extent possible when developing RFAs, and uses comments to help meet the requirements of Section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 ([7 U.S.C. 7613\(c\)\(2\)](#)). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@usda.gov (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NIFA requests applications for the Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems program, formerly known as Alfalfa and Forage Research Program (AFRP), for fiscal year (FY) 2024. Areas of potential research include increasing yield and quality; improving harvest and storage systems; developing methods to estimate forage yield and quality to support marketing and reduce producer risks; exploring new and novel uses for alfalfa; improving production and quality of alfalfa seed; and documenting the contribution of alfalfa production systems to climate-smart agriculture, including the sequestration of carbon. This is an integrated research and extension program.

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of a full appropriations act for FY 2024. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. The amount available for grants in FY 2024 is approximately \$3,703,893.

This notice identifies the objectives for AFRP projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The authority for this program is contained in [7 U.S.C. 5925\(d\)\(8\)](#): High-priority research and extension initiatives as amended by Section 7209 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018.

B. Purpose and Priorities

Alfalfa is essential to sustainable agricultural production systems and is an economic engine for rural communities. Value for soil conservation, nitrogen fixation, energy savings, crop rotation benefits, and wildlife habitat is high. However, to provide these societal benefits, the production of alfalfa must be profitable to farmers through market outlets so they will be willing to maintain or expand the use and acreage of alfalfa.

The AFRP is aligned with the following:
[USDA Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026](#) goals:

Strategic Goal 2: Ensure America’s Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous

Strategic Goal 3: Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers

Strategic Goal 4: Provide All Americans Safe, Nutritious Food

Strategic Goal 5: Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities

[USDA Science and Research Strategy, 2023–2026](#) priorities:

Priority 1: Accelerating Innovative Technologies & Practices

Priority 2: Driving Climate-Smart Solutions

Priority 4: Cultivating Resilient Ecosystem

The AFRP is an integrated research and extension program that supports technology transfer to improve overall agricultural productivity, profitability, and conservation of natural resources through conventional and organic alfalfa seed and forage production systems. AFRP encourages applicants to establish interdisciplinary and multi-location regional research and extension networks to address national priorities or regional science needs of the U.S. alfalfa industry. By bringing together expertise across multiple university, federal agency, and industry organizations and states, AFRP projects seek to enhance the effectiveness of limited state, federal, and industry resources and so produce greater long-lasting impacts.

In FY 2024, under Assistance Listing 10.330, AFRP will support the development of improved alfalfa seed and forage production systems, practices, and supporting technologies. NIFA is soliciting applications for FY 2024 under the following areas:

1. Increasing alfalfa forage and seed yields and forage quality through improved management practices, plant breeding, and other strategies to reduce biotic and abiotic stresses and costs of production.

2. Improving alfalfa forage and seed harvest and storage systems, including automation that reduces labor costs, to optimize economic returns to alfalfa producers as well as end-users including milk producers.
3. Developing methods to estimate alfalfa forage yield and quality to support marketing as a livestock feed and instruments to reduce producer risks.
4. Exploring new uses for alfalfa such as in fish feeds, nutritive supplements, alternative protein sources for human consumption, high-value chemical manufacturing, or other novel uses.
5. Developing improved insect, disease and weed management strategies, including spotted aphid in alfalfa seed production and potential herbicide carry-over issues.
6. Documenting the contribution of alfalfa production systems to climate-smart agriculture, including the sequestration of carbon.

Regional and National Coordination: AFRP projects must integrate both research and extension objectives. NIFA requires regional coordination and encourages national coordination of AFRP projects. For projects with the goal of regional coordination, at least **two states from the same region** (see chart below) must have significant involvement in the project. For projects with the goal of national coordination, **states from at least two regions** must have significant involvement in the project and at least two states from each participating region must be involved.

Regional balance and the involvement of new investigators may be taken into consideration during the development of funding recommendations.

1. **Eastern Region:** Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia.
2. **Central Region:** Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin.
3. **Western Region:** Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Traditional ecological knowledge may or may not be a topic to satisfy the above-mentioned objectives.

Global Engagement. NIFA supports global engagement that advances U.S. agricultural goals. NIFA recognizes that collaboration with international partners may be necessary to attain the agency's goals for U.S. agriculture, promote global competence of our nation's future agricultural workforce, and promote safe and nutritious food security in a growing world. Therefore, although application to this RFA is limited to eligible U.S. institutions, applicants may collaborate with international partners, to include subcontracts to international partners or other institutions. Applications must clearly demonstrate benefits to the U.S.

For a program informational webinar please visit the [NIFA calendar](#) for dates, event registration, and link. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in any of the informational webinars listed, please contact the event host listed no later than 10 days prior to the event.

Table 2: Program Key Information

	Title	Description
Program Code:	AFRP	
Program Code Name:	Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems	
Assistance Listing (CFDA) Number	10.330	
Project Type:	Integrated Research and Extension	
Grant Type:	Standard	
Application Deadline	May 2, 2024	
Grant Duration:	Maximum 36 months	
Anticipated # of Awards:	4	
Maximum Award Amount:	\$300,000 per year for a maximum of 3 years	

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of a full appropriations act for FY 2024. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. The anticipated amount available for AFRP in FY2024 is approximately \$3,703,893. The total project budget requested cannot exceed a maximum of \$300,000 per year for a project period of up to three years, including indirect costs. NIFA will award funds as standard grants. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. The [Automated Standard Application for Payments](#), operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA. Application for FY2024 is limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).
2. *Resubmitted application*: Resubmitted applications must include a response to the previous review panel summary and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).

C. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

In accordance with sections [2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422](#), institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients must, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training. See [Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#) for further information.

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

Applications for AFRP may only be submitted by (1) State agricultural experiment stations; (2) Colleges and universities; (3) University research foundations; (4) Other research institutions and organizations; (5) Federal agencies; (6) National laboratories; (7) Private organizations, foundations or corporations; (8) Individuals who are United States citizens or nationals; or (9) A group consisting of two or more of the entities described in (1) through (8). Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – Submission of duplicate or predominantly overlapping applications is not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits multiple applications that are duplicative or substantially overlapping to NIFA programs within the same fiscal year. In the case of multiple submissions of an application to the same RFA, the application with the most recent time stamp will be considered for acceptance. If the application is recommended for funding, NIFA will require all other submissions to other federal agencies for funding of the proposed project be withdrawn as Federal funding may be provided for each objective only once. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's [Grants Overview](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

The matching funds requirements for this program may be found at [7 U.S.C. 5925\(a\)\(2\)](#). In general, an entity receiving a grant shall provide non-Federal matching funds (including funds from an agricultural commodity promotion, research, and information program) equal to not less than the amount of the grant unless the program is granted a waiver as indicated in paragraph (C) of [7 U.S.C. 5925\(a\)\(2\)](#) below.

1. Matching funds requirement

- a. In general, Subject to subparagraph ©, an entity receiving a grant under paragraph (1) shall provide non-Federal matching funds (including funds from an agricultural commodity promotion, research, and information program) equal to not less than the amount of the grant.
- b. In-kind support: Non-Federal matching funds described in subparagraph (A) may include in-kind support.

C. Waiver: The Secretary may waive the matching funds requirement under subparagraph (a) with respect to a research project if the Secretary determines that-

- i. the results of the project are of a particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, but those results are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or

the project involves a minor commodity, deals with scientifically important research, and the recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Notification of Intent to Submit an Application

Prospective applicants are asked to email a Notification of Intent to Submit an application by 5 p.m. Eastern time on April 4, 2024, to AFRP@USDA.gov. This notification is not required and does not enter into the review of a subsequent application. The information it contains will be used by program staff to plan the review process. It will not be used for screening for project appropriateness or applicant eligibility, nor will feedback be offered.

This email should include the following information:

1. Descriptive (draft) title of proposed research
2. Name of the Project Director and Applicant Institution name
3. Names of other potential co-Project Directors and their affiliations, if applicable
4. Priority area(s) addressed
5. Subject line of email should read: AFRP – Intent to Submit
6. E-mail should be sent to AFRP@USDA.gov

Notification of intent should be succinct. Please do not include abstract, bios, or information other than what is requested.

B. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [Grants 101](#). **Table 3** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part III** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) contains detailed information regarding the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) registration process. The [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is contained in the specific funding opportunity package or a sample of the guide can be found [here](#). When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package.

Table 3: Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
Step One: Register	<i>New Users</i> to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov, prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install Adobe Reader (See Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements).
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity number USDA-NIFA-OP-010554 , search for application here: Opportunity Package .
Step Four: Assess Readiness	Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization's readiness to submit an electronic application.

Table 4: Help and Resources

Grants.gov Support	NIFA Support
Grants.gov Online Support Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035 Email support: support@grants.gov Self-service customer-based support: Grants.gov iPortal Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays .	Email: grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except federal holidays

C. Content and Form of the Application

The [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA overrides the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. Applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA’s review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that meet the requirements of this RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 5** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: Key Application Instructions

Instruction	References (All references are to the NIFA Grants Application Guide)
Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format.	Part IV
Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format.	Part IV
Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission.	Part IV
Follow the submission instructions.	Part IV
Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R.	Part V
Contact the Grants.gov helpdesk for technical support and keep a record of the correspondence.	N/A
Contact NIFA if applicant does not received correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 10 business days of the application deadline.	N/A

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for the required certifications and assurances.

SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s). See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

R&R Other Project Information Form. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. **Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract.** The PS must show how the project goals align with the program goals of the AFRP. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested [templates](#). Please use the Project Summary template provided.
2. **Field 8. Project Narrative (PN).** The PN must not exceed 18 *1.5 spaced* pages of written text using 12-point type and one-inch margins and up to 4 *1.5 spaced* additional pages for figures and tables (the font size for tables should be no smaller than 11-point). If figures and tables are imbedded in the text, the PN must not exceed 22 *1.5 spaced* pages. The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Some appendices to the PN are required and others are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN must include all the following:
 - a. **Introduction:** Identify which of the six program areas you are applying for and the percent of your project in each area. Clearly state the high priority need of the alfalfa industry, who will benefit and how they will benefit, and the research goals. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities related to your proposed research, citing the work of key project personnel or others that is relevant to the project. Preliminary data or information pertinent to the proposed research should be included in this section.
 - b. **Rationale and significance:** Concisely present the rationale behind the proposed research as it relates to alfalfa forage or seed production. This section should address: (a) The priority-setting process and method of engaging stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation of the research, evaluation, and utilization of results; (b) Describe any coordination of the research in national or regional efforts, and how this research complements other work conducted by land-grant and other universities, Federal agencies, and industry; and (c) Discuss novel ideas or contributions that the proposed project offers.
 - c. **Objectives:** Include a list of project objectives.
 - d. **Approach:** Describe how you will address each stated objective. Include in your approach: (a) Methods to be used in carrying out the research and extension components; (b) Means by which results will be analyzed, assessed, and interpreted; and (c) A detailed description of how you will communicate your findings and transfer technologies to intended users.
 - e. **Data management plan (DMP):** A DMP is required for this program. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see Part V, B of this RFA, NIFA's Data Management Plan). Not to exceed 5 pages (in addition to the 22 pages for the PN). The Data Management Plan should detail how project data will be curated and made available once the project is completed.

- f. **Mentoring Plan (MP).** Not to exceed 2 pages for each educational level (in addition to the 22 pages for the PN). A MP is strongly recommended if the proposal requests funding for student or postdoctoral support, including scholarships or fellowships. If various tiers of students or scholars are represented in the proposal, please provide a separate MP for each educational or professional level targeted (e.g., high school students, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows). The MP should not exceed a maximum of two pages for each educational level and for all recipients (including subawards). The MP will not count against the limit of the project narrative. The MP should incorporate the following as appropriate: a.) the roles and responsibilities of the Project Director and Co-Project Directors in managing the mentoring process; b.) training for and/or credentials of individuals who will serve as mentors (i.e., mentor training). Mentors may be experienced mentors from academia, industry, or government, or student peers at various levels who are expected to provide guidance, cultural support, and sense of community with the activities and facilitate the amplification of program-specific perspectives and accomplishments of the mentees; c.) a description of mentoring activities that may include, but are not limited to, peer mentoring or layered mentoring, whereby a set of mentees are progressively mentored by others at a higher level in their careers; d.) a description of processes to ensure reasonable accommodations for program participants with disabilities or challenges with accessing program activities. Please incorporate mentoring activities into the overall project timeline. Scholarship programs should also include plans to accommodate scholarship recipients who find it necessary to interrupt their program of study because of health, personal, or other reasonable non-academic and non-disciplinary cause(s).
- g. **Response to previous review:** Not to exceed 3 pages (in addition to the 22 pages for the PN). If this application is a resubmission of a previous application, a response to the previous review is required. Include the application number of the previous application in your response.

3. **Field 12, Add Other Attachments.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). The following Appendix is **REQUIRED**. Appendices should use 12-point font with one-inch margins and 1.5 spacing between lines.
 - a. **Appendix A: Project Management Plan** – Not to exceed 5 pages. Include in this appendix the project timeline and a clear description of each team members' roles and responsibilities.

R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded). See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for profile requirements, details about the biographical sketch, and suggested support templates.

R&R Personal Data. This information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award (see **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#)).

R&R Budget. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. **Match** – If an applicant concludes that the matching requirements described under [Part III, B](#) of this RFA is not applicable to them; the applicant must include an explanation of their conclusion in the *budget justification*. NIFA will consider this justification when

determining final matching requirements or if required matching can be waived. NIFA retains the right to make final determinations regarding matching requirements.

Grants that require matching funds as specified under [Part III, B](#) of this RFA must list in their *budget justification* the matching sources, the identification of the entity(ies) providing the match, and the total pledged amount. A written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement) is not required. However, applicants are subject to the documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, as specified in [2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards \(the Uniform Guidance\),”](#) and [7 CFR 3430, “Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions.”](#)

2. **Indirect Costs (IDC)** – See [Part IV, D](#) of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding IDC, and [Part V](#) of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for additional information.

Supplemental Information Form. See [Part V](#) of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. Field 2. **Program to which the applicant is applying.** Enter the program name “(*Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems*)” and the program code “(*AFRP*)”. Accurate entry is critical.
2. Field 8. **Conflict of Interest List.** See [Part V](#) of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

D. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Cost (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) of the recipient. Per 7 U.S.C. 3310, Section 1462(a) and (c) of the [National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 \(NARETPA\)](#) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum IDC rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

1. The sum of an institution’s negotiated IDC rate and the IDC rate charged by sub-awardees, if any; or
2. 30 percent of TFFA.

The maximum allowable IDC rate under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the two rates above.

If the result of number one above is the lesser of the two rates, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated IDC rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee’s negotiated IDC rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated IDC rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the IDC rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If number two above is the lesser of the two rates, then the maximum IDC rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the IDC of the prime awardee plus the sum of the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

In the event of an award, the prime awardee is responsible for ensuring the maximum IDC allowed for the award is not exceeded when combining IDC for the Federal portion (i.e., prime, and sub-awardee(s)) and any applicable cost-sharing. Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections [408](#) and [410](#) of [2 CFR 200](#).

If the applicant does not have a negotiated rate and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant may request an IDC rate. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process and need only to calculate a rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete IDC proposal package to obtain a negotiated rate.

Organizations that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate, may elect the De Minimis rate ([2 CFR 200.414](#)). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de Minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described above and in [2 CFR 200.403](#), costs must be charged consistently as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If elected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which it may do at any time.

See [NIFA Indirect Costs](#) for information including [additional resources](#) and [NIFA Indirect Cost Guidance Chart](#).

Funds made available for grants under this subsection shall not be used for the construction of a new building or facility or the acquisition, expansion, remodeling, or alteration of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architect fees).

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements set forth in this RFA. All administrative requirements must be met for the application to proceed to the next level of review. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that have met the administrative requirements using a review panel (see [NIFA Peer Review Process](#)).

Scientific Peer Review Process:

NIFA selects reviewers for the review panel based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, considering the following factors:

1. 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.
2. The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields.
3. The need to include 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.
4. The need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations.
5. The need to maintain a balanced composition regarding minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution.
6. The need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

After each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of NIFA will recommend that your project is either approved for support from currently available funds or declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, *not* including the identity of reviewers, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

Conflicts of interest. NIFA takes extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may influence the review or evaluation (see [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#)).

B. Evaluation Criteria

A reviewer's written evaluation entails two levels of assessment. First, the reviewer summarizes how well the application addressed each evaluation criterion. Second, once the application has been assessed for strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, the reviewer then evaluates the

overall likelihood that the project will have significant outcome and impact. These written reviews are used to begin panel discussions with other reviewers serving on the peer review panel. Through these discussions, peer review panelists come to consensus on the final rating and ranking of proposals. A complete description of NIFA's peer review process can be found at the NIFA website: [The NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#). NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate applications for AFRP.

1. **Conceptual adequacy** (20%). Application clearly states which research area(s) of alfalfa forage or seed production systems is/are to be addressed, and the specified objectives are relevant to RFA purpose and priorities and potentially attainable within project time, scope, and budget.
2. **Design** (40%). The application's methodologies and analytical approaches are appropriate to project objectives, and effectively integrate the research and extension activities. The application demonstrates understanding of a whole system(s) approach and discusses how the project will contribute to a part or the whole of an integrated solution to the identified problem. Even if a single component is the focus of the project, the proposal must provide a thorough analysis of the broader systems context for why that component is critical.
3. **Appropriate use of a regional, interdisciplinary, and industry-engaged approach** (10%). Application documents the bringing together of needed expertise in biological sciences, physical sciences and engineering, socio-economic sciences, extension, and program evaluation, as well as participation from principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address ways to increase the productivity and profitability of alfalfa forage and seed production systems.
4. **Outreach plan** (15%). Application includes a detailed Extension-other engagement-outreach plan and schedule for how information, knowledge, and technology will be delivered to those served by the project. A description of how impacts will be measured and reported is included.
5. **Probability of success** (5%). The likelihood that the project will help maintain or expand the use and acreage of alfalfa grown in the U.S.
6. **Appropriateness of budget** (5%). Budget allocations should reflect the personnel and tasks associated with the activities needed to accomplish your objectives.
7. **Data Management Plan** (5%). The Data Management Plan described in Appendix B ensures the integrity of the data generated by the project.

C. Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only need to provide an update if there was a change in previously provided information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

D. Application Disposition

Applicants may withdraw at any time before NIFA makes a final funding decision. NIFA will retain all applications, including withdrawn applications and unfunded applications.

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant must 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. 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 may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and [NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions, 7 CFR Part 3430, subparts A through E](#).

Award Notice. The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information as described in [2 CFR 200.211](#) (See [NIFA's Terms and Conditions](#)).

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute or award-specific requirements, [NIFA Policy Guide](#) applies to all NIFA awards.

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the Award Notice.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

Delegation of fiscal responsibility. Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees 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.

Changes in Budget or Project Plans. In accordance with [2 CFR 200.308](#), awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons (the awardee is subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award):

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring).
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project.
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with [2 CFR 200 Subpart E \(Cost Principles\)](#), or [45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, \(Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals\)](#), or [48 CFR](#), unless waived by the federal awarding agency, [48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
5. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense. ([2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs](#));
6. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see [2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards](#)), unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
7. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity.
8. The need for additional federal funds to complete the project.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of NIFA transaction records, which are available to the public. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, applicants should clearly mark any information within the application they wish to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary. NIFA will retain a copy of an application that does not result in an award for three years. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An applicant may withdraw at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C. Regulatory Information

This program is not subject to the provisions of 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](#).

D. Limited English Proficiency

NIFA offers language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, free of charge. If you need interpretation or translation services, please visit [NIFA Language Access Services](#) or contact Lois Tuttle, Equal Opportunity Specialist, at Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov or (443) 386-9488.

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Program Contacts

Bisoondat (Mac) Macoon
National Program Leader
Bisoondat.Macoon@usda.gov

Vance Owens
National Program Leader
Vance.Owens@usda.gov

Heather Hall
Program Specialist
Heather.Hall@usda.gov

For administrative questions related to

1. Grants.gov, see [Part IV](#) of this RFA.
2. Other RFA or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
3. Awards under this RFA, please email awards@usda.gov

U.S. Postal Mailing Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems Program (formerly known as Alfalfa and Forage Research Program) – AFRP

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Authorized Representative – AR

Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 – AREERA

Data Management Plan – DMP

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Request for Application – RFA

Research, Education, and Economics – REE

United States Department of Agriculture – USDA

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

Refer to [7 CFR 3430 Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for additional definitions.

Definitions

Continuation Award:

An award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined period of time with a statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date, provided that performance has been satisfactory, appropriations are available for this purpose, and continued support would be in the best interest of the federal government and the public.

Matching:

The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources.

New Application:

An application not previously submitted to a program.

Resubmitted Application:

A project application that was previously submitted to a program, but the application was not funded.