OMB No. 0581-0240

Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Regional Food System Partnerships

Fiscal Year 2024 Request for Applications

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-24-0027

Publication Date: February 27, 2024

Application Due Date: 11:59 PM Eastern Time on May 14, 2024

Program Solicitation Information

Funding Opportunity Title: Regional Food System Partnerships

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-24-0027

Announcement Type: Initial

Assistance Listing Number: 10.177

Dates: Applications must be received on or before 11:59 pm Eastern Time on May 14, 2024, through Grants.gov. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

Executive Summary: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2024 Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) grant program. RFSP purpose is to support partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local and regional food systems.

Approximately $5 million will be available to fund applications under this solicitation, minus administrative expenses. RFSP Planning and Design projects range from $100,000 to $250,000, while Implementation and Expansion projects range from $250,000 to $1,000,000. RFSP is part of the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP). AMS welcomes applications that meet LAMP goals (see ***section 1.1***) to support the development, coordination, and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises, and value-added agricultural products. Eligible entities and activities remain the same as in previous years. A 25% cash match is required.

In the FY 2023 application cycle, AMS funded 10 (13%) of the 74 applications received.

AMS will competitively award grants to eligible applicants for projects that meet the purpose of the program, meet all program requirements, and are of high quality. All applications are reviewed using merit and customary evaluation procedures. This announcement provides information regarding eligibility criteria for applicants and projects, details on match requirements, and the forms and instructions needed to apply for an award.

AMS encourages applications from partnerships that engage with smaller farms and ranches, beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. For grants intending to serve these entities, applicants should engage and involve those beneficiaries when developing projects and applications.

USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encourages applicants to consider including goals and activities related to reducing and stabilizing the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere or adapting to the already occurring climate change in their project's design and implementation.

Stakeholder Input: AMS seeks comments about this Request for Applications (RFA). We will consider the comments in developing the next RFA for the program. Email written stakeholder comments within one year of the publication date of this RFA to: AMSGrants@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 commenting on the **Regional Food System Partnerships RFA**.

2024 Highlights and Changes

Below are highlights of major changes to the program since last year.

- The AMS General Terms and Conditions have been updated to reflect recent changes to the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200) and Buy America preference for infrastructure projects.
- The Farm to Institution project type is no longer available under RFSP.
- Applications applying under the 'areas of concentrated poverty' priority area must provide additional information on the Project Narrative (***section 1.3.5***).

Application Checklist

AMS requests applicants to read the entire RFA prior to submitting their application to ensure that they understand the program's requirements. This application checklist provides the required documents for an application package.

This program requires that **all application packages** include the following:

- ☐ SF-424 – Application for Federal Assistance (Grants.gov)
- ☐ SF-424A – Budget Summary (Grants.gov)
- ☐ Project Abstract Summary (Grants.gov)
- ☐ Project Narrative Form (***section 5.2.4***)
    - ☐ Must use required template
    - ☐ Executive Summary is no more than 250 words
    - ☐ Ensure it does not exceed the page limit
    - ☐ Ensure the application excludes unallowable costs and activities per ***section 4.4***
- ☐ Signed Letter(s) Verifying Matching Funds for each match resource
- ☐ Signed Letter(s) of Commitment from each partner

If applicable, packages may also be required to include the following documents:

- ☐ Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)

Tips for Applicants

- To do business with the Federal Government and to submit your application electronically using Grants.gov, you must—
    - Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN);
    - Be registered in SAM.gov, the Government's primary registrant database;
    - Provide your UEI number and TIN on your application; and
    - Maintain an active SAM registration with current information throughout the application review period and, if you are awarded a grant, during the project period.
- Register in Grants.gov and submit applications early. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE DAY OF THE APPLICATION DEADLINE**. AMS encourages to submit your application at least two weeks before the application deadline to ensure all certifications are met.
- The applicant organization registration process may take **more than four weeks** to complete. You must complete the organization registration to allow enough to meet the required application submission deadlines. See ***section 5.3.1*** for more information.
- Thoroughly read this RFA and follow all instructions.

- Thoroughly review the AMS General Terms and Conditions to understand allowable and unallowable costs.
- Apply to the correct grant program in Grants.gov using the correct Assistance Listing Number "**10.177**" and Funding Opportunity Number "**USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-24-0027**."
- Ensure you have the most recent copy of Adobe Reader installed on your computer and that it is compatible with Grants.gov software.
- Limit Application File Size/ File Name Characters (50 or less).
- Avoid Special Characters in File Names ($, %, &, *, Spanish "ñ", etc.).
- When uploading attachments, click the "Add Attachments" button (do NOT use the "paperclip" icon in Adobe Reader)
- Do not password-protect your documents and make sure all tracked-changes are "accepted".
- Input the correct UEI (formerly DUNS) number on the SF-424 form cover page.
- Review the Grants.gov Applicant User and Registration Guides:
  https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-faqs.html
  https://www.grants.gov/applicants/workspace-overview.html

Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Name	Regional Food System Partnerships
Assistance Listing	10.177
Funding Opportunity Number	USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-24-0027
Project Types	Planning and Design Implementation and Expansion
Available Funding	$5M
Application Deadline	May 14, 2024
Grant Duration	24-36 months
Award Range	$100,000- $1,000,000

Timing to Obtain and Submit Grants.gov Required Elements

Required Action	*Timing to Obtain/Submit*
AMS Deadline to receive final application and all supporting materials through Grants.Gov	May 14, 2024 – 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time
Obtaining Your Organization's UEI Number (if you do not already have one)	7-10 business days
Establishing an Active SAM.gov Account (if you do not already have one)	7-10 business days
Obtaining a TIN/EIN (if you do not already have one)	Up to 2 weeks
Creating your Grants.gov profile and registering your Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) authorization	Up to 2 weeks

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1.0 FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

1.1 LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) is authorized by subtitle A of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (7 U.S.C. § 1627c), as amended. LAMP supports the development, coordination, and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing; local and regional food markets and enterprises; and value-added agricultural products. The primary goals of LAMP are to:

- Connect and cultivate regional food economies through public-private partnerships.
- Support the development of business plans, feasibility studies, and strategies for value-added agricultural production and local and regional food system infrastructure.
- Strengthen capacity and regional food system development through community collaboration and expansion of mid-tier value chains.
- Improve income and economic opportunities for producers and food businesses through job creation; and
- Simplify the application processes and the reporting processes for the Program.

The Regional Food System Partnerships Program (RFSP), Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP), and Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG) Program are implemented under LAMP. RFSP and FMLFPP are administered by AMS and VAPG is administered by the Rural Business-Cooperative Service under Rural Development. This RFA is for RFSP.

1.2 PURPOSE

The RFSP supports partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. The RFSP focuses on building and strengthening the viability and resilience of the local or regional food economy.

Applicants must partner to promote the development of local or regional food systems. Applicants will coordinate efforts within the partnership to set priorities, connect resources and services, and measure progress towards common goals.

Partnerships receiving a grant may:

- Determine the size and scope of the local or regional food system in which the project's goals, outreach objectives, and eligible activities are to be carried out.
- Coordinate with AMS to receive technical assistance; and
- Conduct outreach and education for potential participation in the partnership agreement and eligible activities.

Partnerships must bring a variety of innovative financial and technical capabilities, demonstrate experience or readiness to work effectively and collaboratively with public and private entities across sectors, and present sustainable and measurable approaches to achieving the project's goals.

RFSP recipients may apply for other LAMP programs on behalf of eligible entities that wish to participate in eligible activities under the RFSP partnership agreement.

1.3 PROJECT TYPES

RFSP offers **Planning and Design** and **Implementation and Expansion** project types.

1.3.1 PLANNING AND DESIGN PROJECTS

Planning and Design projects support partnerships in the early stages of convening, envisioning, goal setting, and identifying strategies for developing local or regional food systems. Specifically, these projects support food system's efforts to build community connections (public and private) that allow a region to drive the discovery and promotion of collaboration opportunities within the food system. Applicants should seek public and private partners that operate across the regional food economy and can access diverse non-Federal financial and technical resources. Examples of eligible project activities for these partnerships include but are not limited to:

- Convening partners to define the regional food system scope and structure, share opportunities and challenges, and develop inclusive approaches to address challenges and improve connection and success across the regional food system.
- Creating and conducting feasibility studies and data-driven implementation plans that achieve measurable goals for the partnership's work in developing the regional food system.
- Conducting research on specific market, mid-tier value chain, or infrastructure investments (including studies analyzing the capital needs or gaps of the regional food system) to prioritize next steps at the local, regional, state, or tribal government level.
- Connecting food value chain entities with partners and funders to engage in activities that strengthen the regional food system.
- Researching and developing metrics to measure and evaluate the partnership's early development work and establish performance benchmarks for achieving partnership goals.

1.3.2 IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPANSION PROJECTS

Implementation and Expansion projects support partnerships building on prior or ongoing efforts within a local or regional food system. Partnerships funded in this track will have already completed most or all the activities discussed for Planning and Design projects. Applicants should describe how the goals, objectives, and activities in the application build on previous efforts within the food system, engage entities with a shared commitment to the regional food system and maintain a diverse public-private network that enhances food system development. Examples of eligible project activities for these partnerships include but are not limited to:

- Creating value chains in which producers, manufacturers, buyers, and other related actors form collaborative, transparent partnerships with a commitment to shared operational values and social mission goals.
- Developing processes for ongoing community and business engagement to provide a forum for ideas, concerns, and updates across the regional food system.

- Analyzing capital needs and gaps and identifying resources to support the regional food system.
- Identifying resources for food system enterprises, providing technical assistance for partners and stakeholders, and applying for programs and resources that align with regional food system efforts, including other LAMP programs or capital investments.

1.3.3 RFSP PARTNERSHIP FUNCTIONS

RFSP is intended to fund the partnership functions and to build capacity for decision making and coordination efforts, obtaining additional resources, planning direction, and related activities. The partnership or its member entities must identify and use other resources to cover the costs of implementation where such other resources exist. RFSP partnerships are encouraged to focus on activities not commonly funded under other USDA programs, including but not limited to, value chain coordination, convening multiple types of partners and stakeholders for strategic planning, grant-writing, and program exploration on behalf of partners and entities.

AMS recognizes that businesses may source or market some of their food products outside of the defined locality or region. These businesses may participate in RFSP projects as long as they meet the eligibility requirements (see ***section 3.0***). Awarded applicants may use Federal award funds only to build a business' capacity to develop, improve, and/or expand local or regional supply chain activities, and not to support supply chain activities for food items originating from or being sold to areas outside the defined locality or region.

1.3.4 PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING

Projects are not eligible for funding if the proposed activities:

- Are for agricultural production-related expenses, including crop production and the purchase of farm equipment, tools, materials, supplies, and other related costs.
- Are to purchase land, or for construction of a building or structure.
- Are to purchase general purpose equipment. – general purpose equipment can be leased, but not leased-to-own or purchased. See ***section 4.4***.
- Benefit only one agricultural producer or individual.
- Depend upon the completion of another project or the receipt of another grant.
- Duplicate activities in a project that has received a Federal award from another Federal award program.
- Provide capital for revolving loan funds or seed equity funds.

1.3.5 PRIORITY AREAS

AMS will prioritize applications that:

- Leverage significant non-Federal financial and technical resources **and** coordinate with other local, State, Tribal, or national efforts. Any match above and beyond the match requirement (see ***section 4.1***) may lend support to the application.

- Cover an area that includes distressed low-income rural or urban communities with areas of persistent poverty that provide significant opportunities for high impact investment, as demonstrated by a "distressed "or "at-risk" score on the Distressed Communities Index (DCI) developed by the Economic Innovation Group.
- Have multiple entities and partners, although such partners need not be based in the partnership's defined region.

Applicants are not required to meet these priorities to be eligible to apply or receive grant funds. AMS will review and apply priority consideration, based on applicant narrative responses, during its administrative review process (see ***section 5.2***). To the maximum extent practicable, AMS will ensure geographical diversity in selecting partnership grant recipients from high-scoring applications.

2.0 AWARD INFORMATION

2.1 TYPE OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

AMS will use a Grant Agreement to provide a federal award to successful applicants.

2.2 TYPE OF APPLICATIONS

New Application. New applications will be evaluated competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in ***section 6.0***.

2.3 AVAILABLE FUNDING

AMS anticipates approximately $4.5 million will be available in FY2024. The availability and level of funding may be contingent on Federal appropriations actions.

2.4 FEDERAL AWARD PERIOD DURATION AND SIZE

AMS expects applicants to complete their projects within the required performance period. AMS encourages applicants to take the full performance period to allow ample time to complete projects. However, it is acceptable to complete a project before the scheduled performance period end date. The applicant must indicate the start date and end date on Block 17 of the SF-424 "Application for Federal Assistance".

Award size varies by project type. Applicants may not request less than or more than the respective minimum/maximum award amounts. Applicants must justify the requested award funding amounts within the RFSP project narrative.

Project Type	Duration (Months)	Start Date	End Date	Minimum Award	Maximum Award
Planning & Design	24	September 30, 2024	September 29, 2026	$100,000	$250,000
Implementation & Expansion	36	September 30, 2024	September 29, 2027	$250,000	$1,000,000

3.0 ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS - PARTNERSHIPS

Only eligible partnerships may apply to RFSP. A partnership is an agreement between one or more eligible entities (see ***section 3.2***) and one or more eligible partners (see ***section 3.3***). The agreement may be in the form of any official documentation such as a contract or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

An application may be submitted either by an eligible entity or an eligible partner on behalf of the partnership. The partnership must specify in its application which organization in the partnership is responsible for receiving and managing the award.

Partnerships that include organizations that engage and provide technical assistance services to historically underserved farmers and ranchers in addressing their needs are strongly encouraged to apply.

All applicants must be domestic entities owned, operated, and located within the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or Tribal Governments.

3.2 ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

Eligible entities include:

Entity Type	Description
Producer	An owner-operator or tenant that produces a crop or handles livestock and is entitled to a share of the farm income.
Farmer or Rancher Cooperative	A business or service organization (1) that is owned and democratically controlled by the people who use its services and (2) whose benefits (services received and earnings allocations) are distributed to the user-owners based on how much they use the cooperative.
Producer Network or Association	Producer group- or member-owned organizations or businesses that provide, offer, or sell agricultural products or services through a common distribution system for the mutual member benefit of the owners, as well as organizations or other businesses that assist, represent, or serve producers or producer networks.
Majority-Controlled Producer-Based Business Venture	A venture with greater than 50 percent of the ownership and control held by one or more producers or one or more entities that are wholly owned and controlled by one or more producers. Entities described here include legal partnerships, limited liability corporations, limited liability partnerships, and corporations.

Entity Type	Description
Food Council	Food policy council or food and farm system network that represents multiple organizations involved in the production, processing, and consumption of food, and local, Tribal, and State governments.
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Network or Association	Formal groups of farms that work collectively to offer consumers regular (usually weekly) deliveries of locally grown farm products during one or more harvest season(s), often on a subscription or membership basis. This includes organizations or other businesses that assist, serve, or represent CSAs or CSA networks.
Local Governments	Any unit of government within a State, including a county; borough; municipality; city; town; township; parish; local public authority, including any public housing agency under the United States Housing Act of 1937, or public transportation agency; special district; school district; intrastate district; council of governments, whether or not incorporated as a nonprofit corporation under State law; and any other agency or instrumentality of a multi-, regional, intra-state, or local government.
Nonprofit Corporations	Any organization or institution, including nonprofits with State or IRS 501 (c) status and accredited institutions of higher education, where no part of the organization's or institution's net earnings inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.
Public Benefit Corporations	Corporations organized to construct or operate a public improvement, the profits from which inure to the benefit of one or more State or to the people therein.
Economic Development Corporations	Organizations whose missions are to improve, maintain, develop, and/or market or promote a specific geographic area.
Regional Farmers Market Authorities	Entities that establish and enforce State, regional, or county policies and jurisdiction over State, regional, or county farmers markets. State agencies are eligible if their State's regulatory statutes identify the specific State agency as a regional farmers market authority.
Tribal Governments	Governing bodies or governmental agencies of any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community (including any native village as defined in Section 3 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, 85 Stat. 688 (43 U.S.C. § 1602)) certified by the Secretary of the Interior as eligible for the special programs and services provided through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

3.3 ELIGIBLE PARTNERS

Eligible partners include:

Entity Type	Description
State Agencies or Regional Authorities	Planning commissions, councils of governments, regional economic development organizations/districts, and similar organizations.
Philanthropic Corporations	An independent, corporate, or private foundation established to support charitable activities serving the common welfare, primarily through grantmaking.
Private Corporations	A company that is owned by one person or a small group of people, for example a family, and whose shares are available only to specific individuals and are not traded on a stock market.
Institutions of Higher Education	Educational institutions that meet the requirements specified at 20 U.S.C. § 1001.
Commercial, Federal or Farm Credit System Lending Institutions	An accredited financial organization such as a bank, credit union, or finance company that makes agriculture loans and may or may not also be a depository institution.

3.4 LIMIT ON NUMBER OF AWARDS

Applicants may submit multiple project applications to RFSP. If panel scores indicate a recommendation for more than one award, applicants are still limited to receiving **one** award per funding cycle. If the applicant is recommended for multiple awards, AMS staff will contact the applicant to discuss the options.

Applicants must close out an active RFSP award to be eligible to apply for another RFSP award. For example, a Planning & Design award recipient must close out that award prior to applying for an Implementation & Expansion award. The applicant must submit all required close out documentation by the application due date mentioned in ***section 5.5.*** Please refer to the General Award Terms and Conditions, available on the "How to Administer the Award" webpage, for closeout instructions.

4.0 FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 COST SHARING AND MATCHING

This funding opportunity requires matching funds from non-Federal sources in the form of cash contributions equal to or greater than 25% of the amount of Federal funds being requested.

Cash match contributions are generally defined as an actual cash contribution (not the 'value' of someone's time/effort) from the applicant's general revenue/reserves/savings/line of credit, or 3rd-party partner(s), or other non-Federal grants. The applicant must be able to track and show the source

of the match funding and that the funding source was dedicated entirely to the grant project and produce records to that effect (for example, taking the cash match in your accounting system, or from your partner, and placing it into a special 'grant project' account).

Cost sharing for the required match must be in the form of allowable direct costs. Refer to 2 CFR § 200.306 for additional Federal requirements and definitions, including the basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions.

Any match amount exceeding the requirement will be considered voluntary and must be documented and secured at the time of the award. Any match amount exceeding the requirement may be considered under the Priority Area for leveraging significant non-Federal financial and technical resources (see ***section 1.3.5***). For match funds in excess of the required minimum 25% cash match, contributions may be in the form of cash or in-kind resources, such as a partner's cash contribution to the project or professional volunteer services as described in 2 CFR § 200.306.

In-kind match contributions are generally defined as the value of goods or services provided by the contributor for the benefit of the grant project, where no funds transferred hands. For example, a partner, such as a Tribal community member, may volunteer their professional expertise as an in-kind match contribution to the project as described in 2 CFR § 200.306(e).

Match contributions (either cash or in-kind) cannot be used for RFSP if they are already being used toward satisfying a match requirement under any other Federal grant agreement to which the applicant is a party.

All matching contributions **must be committed or secured** at the time an applicant is recommended for an award. An award will not be issued unless all matching funds over the life of the grant are secured. Additional anticipated matching funds not in place by the time the project commences cannot be counted toward the matching requirement.

Applicants must indicate the total match amount and how it will specifically align with their requested funding when completing the fiscal plan and resources sections of the RFSP Project Narrative (see ***section 5.2.4*** and submit signed letter (s) verifying the match for EACH cash and in-kind resource (see ***section 5.2.5.***

Indirect costs may count as an in-kind match, but not as a cash match contribution (see ***section 4.2.1***).

Applicants may not use program income (as defined in 2 CFR § 200.1) or Federal funds of any kind as a match or cost share.

4.2 INDIRECT COSTS

Indirect costs (also known as "facilities and administrative costs"—defined at 2 CFR § 200.1) are those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.

In accordance with 2 CFR § 200.414 (f), any non-Federal entity that does not have a current negotiated (including provisional) indirect cost rate, except State and Local Government and Indian Tribe Indirect

Cost Proposals, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC). The de minimis rate does not require documentation to justify its use and may be used indefinitely. As described in 2 CFR § 200.403, costs must be consistently charged as either direct or indirect costs and may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. Once elected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until a recipient chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the recipient may apply to do at any time.

All applicants who elect to charge a de minimis rate must use the MTDC as the base. MTDC are defined in 2 CFR § 200.1 as all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first $25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDCs exclude equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of $25,000. Other items may be excluded only when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

If an applicant has a negotiated indirect cost rate approved by its cognizant agency, the applicant must submit a copy of its approved NICRA with its application. Entities that would like to negotiate an indirect cost rate must contact their cognizant agency. For assignments of cognizant agencies, see 2 CFR § 200.1.

4.2.1 USING INDIRECT COSTS FOR COST SHARING OR MATCHING

The maximum indirect costs allowed for a project may be included under the Federal portion of the budget or, alternatively, may be offered as an in-kind matching contribution if no indirect costs are requested on the Federal portion of the budget. For example, if a proposed project's maximum allowable indirect costs are $8,000, the applicant may include $8,000 on the Federal portion of the budget or $8,000 as a matching in-kind contribution, but not both. Please note that indirect costs may not be used for the required cash match in this program, but only for in-kind contributions.

The applicant may split the indirect cost allocation between the Federal and non-Federal portions of the budget only if the total amount of indirect costs does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowed. Alternatively, the recipient may request any other combination that, when combined, does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowable. Refer to 2 CFR §§ 200.413 and 200.414 for additional information on determining if costs charged to the award are direct or indirect.

4.3 SUBAWARDS

The recipient may use sub-awarding and/or sub-contracting methods with eligible partners via its partnership agreement to accomplish the proposed project.

The recipient may not use the grant to competitively "re-grant" funds in mini-grant programs, or for activities that are not central to the purpose of the project, or for unknown costs. However, the recipient may use its match to offer mini-grants if so desired, as long as they further the project's purposes and comply with Federal match requirements at 2 CFR § 200.306. If the recipient chooses to offer project mini-grants with non-Federal funds that do not comply with these regulations, those funds

should not be included as part of the required match for this grant. For more information, refer to ***section 3.4***.

4.4 ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES

All AMS awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the AMS General Terms and Conditions.

Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing this document should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under ***section 8.0***.

4.5 COORDINATOR MEETING TRAVEL

Recipients are expected to attend an AMS sponsored grants management meeting during the project's period of performance. The proposed budget must include travel funds for the Project Coordinator and any additional key personnel as reasonably determined by the recipient and AMS.

To estimate these costs in the budget section, please account for flight, hotel, per diem, and ground transportation expenses for a 3-day, 2-night stay. Location and dates are to be determined with a possibility of a virtual conference. If the conference is virtual, recipients will be able to reallocate those funds to another allowable item.

5.0 APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

5.1 ELECTRONIC APPLICATION PACKAGE

Applicants MUST apply for this program electronically via Grants.gov. No other submission method is accepted. AMS urges applicants to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process, see Grants.gov's How to Apply for Grants webpage. This RFA contains the information needed to obtain and complete required application forms and AMS-specific attachments. More information about applying through Grants.gov can be found in ***section 5.3***.

Applicants can find the opportunity under either the Assistance Listing number "**10.177**," or the RFSP Funding Opportunity Number "**USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-24-0027**".

5.2 CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

5.2.1 SF-424 APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Required: Form SF-424 is available via the opportunity at Grants.gov. Applicants may use the following supplemental instructions associated with specific blocks on the SF-424.

Box	Instructions
1 - Type of Submission	Select Application
2 - Type of Application	Select New
8.c - Organizational Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)	Enter applicant UEI for the organization submitting the application.

Box	Instructions
8.d – Address	Enter the organization street address as it appears in SAM.gov. P.O. Boxes will not be accepted. Enter a 9-digit zip code
10 - Name of Federal Agency	AMS, USDA
11 - Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (Assistance Listing Number)	Enter 10.177
12 - Funding Opportunity Number	Enter USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-24-0027
13 - Competition Identification Number	Not applicable
14 - Areas Affected by Project	Enter cities, counties, States affected by project
15 - Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project	Provide a short descriptive title of the project
16a - Congressional Districts for Applicant	Enter the Congressional district where the applicant is located
16b - Congressional Districts for Program/Project	Enter the Congressional district where your project will be implemented, or "All" if the project will be implemented in more than one location
17 - Proposed Project Start Date and End Date	Enter Start Date: September 30, 2024 Enter End date: No later than September 29, 2026 (for Planning projects) or September 29, 2027 (for Implementation projects)
18.a - Estimated Funding - Federal	Enter the total Federal amount requested
18.b – 18.f Estimated Funding – Applicant	Enter the total match amount from the applicant organization and/or other partners
19 - Is Applicant Subject to Review by State Under Executive Order 12372 Process?	See ***section 5.6***

5.2.2 SF-424A BUDGET INFORMATION

Required. SF-424A is available via the application package in Grants.gov. Most information blocks on the required form are either self-explanatory or adequately explained in the form instructions. However, for RFSP applications the following supplemental instructions must be used for specific boxes on the form.

On SF-424A, please complete **only** Sections A, B, and C. Do **not** complete Sections D-F.

Section A – Budget Summary

Box	Instructions
1.a – Grant Program Function or Activity	Enter "RFSP – Federal"
1.b – Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number	Enter "10.177"
1.e – Federal	Enter the amount of Federal funding requested for the project
1.f – Non-Federal	Enter the **total** match contribution amount provided for the project

Section B – Budget Categories

Box	Instructions
6.a – 6.j – Object Class Categories	In Column 1, enter the amount of Federal funds requested for each Object Class Category. Do **not** include match funding. For example, if you are requesting $2,000 in Federal funds for "Travel", enter 2000 in Column 1, box 6.c

Section C – Non-Federal Resources

Box	Instructions
8.a – Grant Program	Should auto-populate from Section A, Box 1.a
8.b – 8.d	Enter the match amount being provided from each source (Applicant, State, or Other) for the project

5.2.3 PROJECT ABSTRACT SUMMARY

Required. The Project Abstract Summary form will be used as the award description for the overarching Federal award. This is separate from the RFSP Project Narrative form. The Project Abstract Summary must include:

- Project purpose
- Activities to be performed
- Deliverables and expected outcomes
- Intended beneficiary(ies): Who will benefit from this beyond the applicant organization?
- Subrecipient, key partner, and collaborator activities. Identify the key partners, collaborators and subrecipients you know will be part of the work are and how their engagement will support the program goals.

5.2.4 PROJECT NARRATIVE

Required. Applicants MUST prepare and submit a narrative using the RFSP Project Narrative form. The Project Narrative must clearly describe the project's partners, actual or potential definition of "region," objectives and goals, types and sequence of project activities, monitoring and evaluation strategies associated with the proposed activities, and how the applicant will manage the project.

The Project Narrative must be typed and single-spaced in an 11-point font and must not exceed fifteen (15) 8.5 x 11 pages (excluding pre-existing form content). For example, if the form is 15 pages before you begin entering your project narrative information, your form may be up to 30 pages in length when completed (15 original pages + 15 pages of applicant content). DO NOT modify the margins of the Project Narrative form or delete or change any text in it. Applicants must submit the RFSP Project Narrative form as a PDF and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Project Narrative Attachment Form" on the application package. Handwritten applications or applications submitted in MS Word will not be accepted.

Prior to submitting the application to Grants.gov, please make sure no tracked changes or mark-up edits and comments are visible.

The supporting documents listed below do not count toward the 15-page limit.

5.2.5 MATCHING FUNDS LETTERS OF VERIFICATION

Required: Applicants MUST have written verification of match commitment from any party, including the applicant, who will contribute cash or in-kind matching non-Federal resources to the project.

Submit one letter verifying the match for EACH cash or in-kind resource, signed by the matching organization. For example, if the match contribution will be provided by the applicant organization and two partners, a total of 3 match verification letters are required.

AMS has posted **A SUGGESTED MATCH VERIFICATION TEMPLATE LETTER** on the grant program's application website. We highly encourage you to use this template. If you do not use this template, your match verification document must minimally include the following:

- Project Applicant
- Project Title
- Cash Commitment per year (if applicable) and Total Cash Match
- In-kind Contribution per year (if applicable) and Total In-kind Match. Break down items into categories as applicable:
    - Salaries (employee name, title, duties, pay rate/hour, amount matched per year)
    - Items/Activities (fair market value per unit, how value determined, and amount matched per year)
- Explanation of how each type of match will correspond to the budget or be used by the Applicant
- Signature of Matching Organization Representative with typed name and title

Instructions for organizations submitting Matching Funds Verification Letters: Submit *Matching Fund Letters of Verification* on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top of the documents that they are **MATCH VERIFICATION LETTERS**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. **AMS will not accept unsigned letters**.

Letter(s) must be attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under Form SF-424 item #15.

5.2.6 LETTERS OF COMMITMENT FROM PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Required: Applicants MUST provide letters of commitment (not support) from all project partners at the time of application. More information can be found on partners in ***section 3.3***.

AMS has posted a **PARTNER ORGANIZATION TEMPLATE** on the grant program's application website. We highly encourage you to use this template. If you do not use this template, the Letters of Commitment must include at least the following information:

- Project Applicant
- Project Title
- A short introduction describing the partner entity's mission and its reason(s) for joining the partnership
- The specific role(s) the entity is committing to for the project, including the participation of specific individuals, as applicable
- A statement that these individuals and the entity agree to abide by the management plan contained in the application

Instructions for organizations submitting *Letters of Commitment:* Submit letters on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top that they are **LETTERS OF COMMITMENT**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. AMS will not accept unsigned letters or letters emailed separately.

Letter(s) must be attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under SF-424 item #15.

PLEASE NOTE: RFSP does not require Congressional letters of support and such letters do not carry additional weight during the evaluation process.

5.2.7 NEGOTIATED INDIRECT COST RATE AGREEMENT (NICRA)

Required if the applicant has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA). Refer to ***section 4.2*** for more information. The NICRA must be in PDF format and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under SF-424 item #15.

5.3 APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS

5.3.1 HOW TO REGISTER TO APPLY

Applicants MUST have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), an active SAM.gov account, and a Grants.gov account to submit an application. AMS recommends that applicants start the registration process in these systems immediately to allow enough time to meet application submission deadlines. Registration in these systems collectively may in some cases take **more than four weeks** to complete. The steps below provide details on how to complete each registration.

Individual applicants eligible to apply for this grant funding opportunity can find complete instructions here: https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:
https://apply07.grants.gov/help/html/help/Register/OrganizationRegistration.htm

1. Obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI): Entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a UEI from SAM.gov. Applicants must enter the UEI number in the data entry field labeled "Organizational UEI" on the SF-424. Getting a UEI requires validation steps in SAM.gov. Applicants are encouraged to start this process as early as possible, and, if applicable, this includes providing guidance to subapplicants on getting their own UEI.

2. Register with the System for Award Management (SAM): In addition to having a UEI number, organizations applying online through Grants.gov must register with SAM. Current SAM.gov registrants have already been assigned their Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and can view it within SAM.gov. All organizations must register with SAM to apply online. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. **SAM.gov accounts must be updated annually, and your organization must have an active SAM.gov account to submit your application to Grants.gov. Organizations must maintain an active SAM registration with current information throughout the application review period and, if you are awarded a grant, during the project period.**

3. Create a Grants.gov Account: The next step in the registration process is to create an account with Grants.gov. Applicants must know their organization's UEI number to complete this process. Completing this process automatically triggers an email request for applicant roles to the organization's E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) for review. The EBiz POC is a representative from your organization who is the contact listed for SAM. To apply for grants on behalf of your organization, you will need the Authorized Organization Role (AOR).

    a. Watch the video on how to Register in Grants.gov and create an institutional profile. Applicants are required to use Login.gov to sign into Grants.gov. See the Grants.gov help article for more information on logging in with Login.gov credentials. The Grants.gov validation process also includes a check for an active SAM.gov registration. Applicants without a current SAM.gov registration will be rejected.

4. Authorize Grants.gov Roles: After creating an account on Grants.gov, the EBiz POC receives an email notifying him or her of your registration and request for roles. The EBiz POC will then log in to Grants.gov and authorize the appropriate roles, including the AOR role, thereby giving you permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been approved as an AOR.

5. Track Role Status: After registering with Grants.gov and authorizing the applicant AOR, Grants.gov allows you to track your status.

6. Electronic Signature: When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization's AOR who submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application, serving as the electronic signature. The EBiz POC must authorize individuals who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization to act as an AOR; **this step is often missed, and it is required for valid and timely submissions.**

5.3.2 HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO AMS VIA GRANTS.GOV

Applicants can apply using Grants.gov Workspace. Workspace is a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different web forms within an application. For each funding opportunity announcement (FOA), an applicant creates individual instances of a workspace.

1. *Create a Workspace*: This allows you to complete your Workspace online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.
2. *Complete a Workspace*: Add participants to the workspace, complete all the required forms, and check for errors before submission.
    a. *Adobe Reader*: If you decide not to apply by filling out the webforms, you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace so that they will appear similar to other Standard or AMS forms. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local storage device, network drive(s), or external drives, and then accessed through Adobe Reader.

    NOTE: You may need to visit the Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov to download the appropriate version of the software. There is no cost for Adobe Reader Software.

    b. *Mandatory Fields in Forms:* Fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color are mandatory fields you must complete to successfully submit your application.
    c. *Complete SF-424 Fields First*: The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant's name, address, and UEI number. To trigger this feature, an applicant must complete the SF-424 information first. Once it is completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.
3. *Submit via a Workspace*: Submit your application through Workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. Grants.gov recommends submitting your application package **at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date** to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

    SPECIAL NOTE: Grants.gov **does not** check for AMS required attachments. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all required attachments listed in ***section 5.2***.
4. *Track via a Workspace*: After successfully submitting a workspace package, Grants.gov automatically assigns a Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) to the package, which will be listed on the Confirmation page generated after submission.

Applicant Support: Grants.gov provides additional training resources, including video tutorials. Applicants may also call the 24/7 toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726, or email support@grants.gov. Grants.gov will issue a ticket number to which you and Grants.gov can refer if the issue is not resolved. For questions related to the specific grant opportunity, use the contact information described in ***section 8.0.***

5.4 APPLICATION SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

AMS will not consider any applications received after the deadline, any applications submitted by fax, email, or postal mail and any applications not responsive to the requirements of this RFA (eligibility, incomplete application, missing required attachments documents, etc.). See AMS' Late Applications, Denials and/or Appeal Procedures Policy.

Ensure that all components are complete before submission. Allow enough time for the application process, as it may take more than one attempt before your application is successfully submitted. AMS encourages you to submit your application at least two weeks before the application deadline to ensure all certifications and registrations are met.

Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov using an electronic date/time stamp generated when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant AOR will then receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

Special Note for Applicants with Slow Internet Connections: Applicants using slow internet, such as dial-up connections, may experience significantly longer transmission times when submitting their application to Grants.gov, especially if there are large attachments contained in the upload. Again, Grants.gov will provide either an error message or a successfully received transmission notification via email to the applicant AOR.

5.5 SUBMISSION DATE AND TIME

Applicants must submit applications electronically via Grants.gov by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on May 14, 2024. AMS cannot consider applications received after this deadline for funding. See AMS' Late Applications, Denials and/or Appeal Procedures Policy.

5.6 INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW

This program is not subject to Executive Order 12372 (Intergovernmental Review-SPOC List), which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials.

6.0 APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

6.1 PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each application that meets the initial qualification screening requirements (see ***section 6.2***) will be reviewed and scored competitively based on the extent to which it addresses the following criteria:

Alignment and Intent ..... **25 Points**

1. The application identifies specific issues of the local or regional food system and describes the project's objectives and their relevance to those issues.
2. The application describes a strong history of collaboration and engagement among partners to ensure high levels of participation or provides a clear and concise plan for how such engagement will occur. In particular, the partnership includes organizations that engage and provide technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
3. The application describes the project's proposed geographic focus area and why it is the most appropriate place to conduct partnership activities.
4. The application describes how the partnership adds value to the local or regional food system, as opposed to each entity/partner acting independently of one another.
5. The application identifies the intended benefits of the project and specifies how partners will be involved in achieving them (NOT required if the application is solely for a planning or feasibility project).
6. The application complies with all written instructions and requirements described within the RFA and Project Narrative Template.

Technical Merit ..... **25 Points**

1. The application describes technical resources that partners will be contributing to the project's development, implementation, and/or management.
2. The application presents a clear, well-conceived, and suitable Work Plan that describes how the partners will work together to achieve the goals and objectives of the proposed project.
3. The application presents a realistic schedule for implementing and completing the proposed project during the award project period.
4. The application identifies potential challenges to partner recruitment and engagement, and achievement of goals or outcomes, and describes possible strategies to address the challenges.
5. If the applicant proposes to build upon previous partnership activities, the previous lessons learned are clearly incorporated into the proposed project.

Achievability **15 Points**

1. The selected Outcome(s) and Indicator(s) are appropriate for the scale and scope of the proposed project.
2. The application describes a monitoring and evaluation plan that identifies potential feedback mechanisms and metrics that measure the results of project activities (the Outcome Indicator Measurement Plan).
3. The applicant provides a comprehensive plan to distribute the project's results (both positive and negative) electronically and/or in person to target audiences, stakeholders, and interested parties.
4. The application describes how the partnership will be sustained beyond the project's period of performance (without grant funds).

Expertise and Partners **25 Points**

1. The application represents a substantial, effective, and diverse array of relevant partners to accomplish the project's goals and objectives and meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries, including:
    a. Commitment from the key staff, demonstrated through Letters of Commitment from Partner Organizations.
    b. The key staff who will be responsible for managing the projects and the individuals (name and title) who comprise the Project Team; and
    c. The expertise and experience of the Project Team necessary to successfully manage and implement the proposed project.
2. The application demonstrates a commitment from partners to perform specific roles in order to achieve project goals and outcomes.
3. The application demonstrates a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants in partnership activities.
4. The application describes plans for coordination, communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the partnership and other stakeholder groups.

Fiscal Plan and Resources **10 Points**

1. The Budget and Justification provides a clear description for each budget line item and is consistent with the size and scope of the project.
2. The Budget and Justification relates logically to the project narrative.
3. The fiscal plan clearly describes the intended use of partner resources (cash or in-kind).
4. The applicant demonstrates its partners' contributions of non-Federal cash or in-kind resources are available for the project as evidenced through the submitted Match Verification Letters.

6.2 REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Step 1: Initial Qualification Screening

Each application is initially reviewed for overall completeness, as well as compliance with eligibility and program requirements as set forth in this RFA. If an application does not meet these requirements, it is removed from consideration. Please see ***section 5.4*** and AMS' Late Applications, Denials and/or Appeal Procedures for more information.

Step 2: Technical Review

Each application that passes initial screening (Step 1) is evaluated by a panel of independent peer reviewers. AMS makes every attempt to match reviewers with applications in their areas of expertise. Each reviewer signs a conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement regarding any assigned applications. The peer review panels evaluate their assigned applications using instructions prepared by AMS officials. Individual reviewers score applications and then confer with other panel members. The scoring and discussion serve as the basis for awarding and allocating grant funds and focuses on strengths and weaknesses of each proposal.

Step 3: Administrative Review

AMS will conduct a final administrative evaluation of each review panel's top rankings and recommendations. In addition to the rank and scores, AMS reviews each application to ensure that potential recommended projects align with the scope of the RFA, allowability of budget items, available funding, geographic diversity (including across program years), and program priorities, as described in ***section 1.3.5***. AMS staff will work with top-ranked applicants to negotiate any revisions if necessary and possible. AMS will also assess an organization's ability to account for the use of Federal funds and monitor the performance associated with these monies using the guidance provided by 2 CFR § 200.206.

7.0 AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

7.1 AWARD NOTICES

Upon announcement of the Federal awards, AMS will prepare and send a Notice of Award (NOA) to each recipient for signature by the appropriate official. The NOA will be signed by AMS and the AOR.

The NOA will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in 2 CFR § 200.211 and a reference to the AMS General Terms and Conditions.

7.2 UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Unsuccessful applicants will be contacted by AMS via email as soon as possible after the RFSP awards are announced. The unsuccessful applicants will receive anonymous review panel consensus comments regarding their application as feedback.

7.3 ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

As part of the NOA, all AMS recipients must abide by the AMS General Terms and Conditions, which reference applicable *Administrative and National Policy Requirements*.

7.4 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting and award closeout requirements are included in the AMS General Terms and Conditions. If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those will be identified in the award.

7.5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF USDA SUPPORT

Proper acknowledgement of your USDA-AMS funding in published solicitations (e.g., for state competitions), presentations, press releases, and other communications is critical for the success of our agency's programs. Grantees must meet the acknowledgement requirements outlined in the updated AMS General Terms and Conditions.

8.0 AGENCY CONTACTS

8.1 PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

After closely reviewing this RFA in its entirety, applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact the RFSP staff by e-mail with questions about the grant program at IPPGrants@usda.gov.

For additional information, please visit the RFSP Website: https://www.ams.usda.gov/rfsp.

8.2 AVAILABLE RESOURCES

AMS provides resources and information on the RFSP website (https://www.ams.usda.gov/rfsp) that may be helpful to applicants, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's), descriptions of funded projects, and required application forms. AMS staff is available to provide timely technical assistance.

8.3 ADDRESS

Regional Food System Partnerships
USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 1510-S South Building
Stop 0264
Washington, DC 20250-0264
https://www.ams.usda.gov/rfsp

8.4 GRANTS.GOV QUESTIONS

All questions regarding Grants.gov technical assistance must be directed to Grants.gov's Applicant Support. Applicants may also call the 24/7 toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726 or email support@grants.gov.

9.0 OTHER INFORMATION

9.1 DEFINITIONS

Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers Four groups are defined by USDA as "Historically Underserved," including farmers or ranchers who are: Beginning; Socially Disadvantaged; Veterans; and Limited Resource as described at Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers | Natural Resources Conservation Service (usda.gov), and below:

> Beginning Farmer or Rancher means a participant who has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years, and substantially participates in the operation.
>
> Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher means a participant with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous two years, and Who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years. A Self-Determination Tool is available to the public and may be completed on-line or printed and completed hardcopy at: https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/.
>
> Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher means an individual or entity who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. A socially disadvantaged group is a group whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. This groups consist of: American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics.
>
> Veteran Farmer or Rancher is a producer who served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve component thereof, was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable, and has not operated a farm or ranch or has operated a farm or ranch for no more than 10 years or who first obtained status as a veteran during the most recent 10- year period.

Local and regional food means food that is raised, produced, aggregated, stored, processed, and distributed in the locality or region where the final product is marketed to consumers, so that the total distance that the product travels between the farm or ranch where the product originates and the point of sale to the end consumer is kept to a minimum, or both the final market and the origin of the product are within the same State, territory, or tribal land.

Local or Regional Food Business or Enterprise means an organization or business entity that functions as an intermediary between producers (farmers or growers) and buyers by carrying out one or more local or regional food supply chain activities—including aggregating, storing, processing, and/or distributing locally or regionally produced food products—to meet local and regional market demand.

Mid-tier Value Chain means a local or regional supply network that links independent producers with businesses and cooperatives that market value-added agricultural product in a manner that:

- Targets and strengthens the profitability and competitiveness of small and medium-size farms and ranches that are structured as a family farm; and
- Obtains agreement from an eligible agricultural producer group, farmer or rancher cooperative, or majority-controlled producer-based business venture that is engaged in the value chain on a marketing strategy.

Value-Added Agricultural Product means any agricultural commodity or product that:

- Has undergone a change in the physical state or form of the product, such as milling wheat into flour or making strawberries into jam.
- Is produced in a manner that enhances the value of the agricultural commodity or product, such as organically produced products.
- Is physically segregated in a manner that results in the enhancement of the value of that commodity or product, such as an identity preserved product.
- Is a source of farm- or ranch-based renewable energy, including E–85 fuel; or
- Is aggregated and marketed as a locally produced agricultural food product and, as a result of the change in physical state or the manner in which the agricultural commodity or product is produced and segregated, the customer base for the commodity or product is expanded and a greater portion of revenue derived from the marketing, processing, or physical segregation is made available to the producer of the commodity or product.

9.2 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) **mail**: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
(2) **fax**: (202) 690-7442; or
(3) **email**: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

9.3 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966 (5 U.S.C. § 552) (FOIA) and the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a), as implemented by USDA's regulations (7 CFR § 1, Subpart A7 CFR § 1, Subpart A) govern the release or withholding of information to the public in connection with this Federal award. The release of information under these laws and regulations applies only to records held by AMS and imposes no requirement on the recipient or any subrecipient to permit or deny public access to their records.

FOIA requests for records relating to this Federal award may be directed to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, FOIA/PA Officer, Room 2055-S, Stop 0201, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0201, Telephone: (202) 302-0650; or email: AMS.FOIA@usda.gov.

9.4 PAPERWORK REDUCTION

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501), an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581-0240.The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 4 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.