

# **Notice of Funding Opportunity Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems**

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2026

APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 12, 2026

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING: \$3,702,297

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

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-OP-011738

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.330

## ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture

**Assistance Listing Number (ALN):** The Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems Program (ASAFS), formerly known as Alfalfa and Forage Research Program, (AFRP) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.330. Note, AFRP still remains as the Program Code when using any NIFA system.

**Table 1:** Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
<b>Application:</b>	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, June 12, 2026
<b>Applicants Comments:</b>	Within six months from the issuance of this notice <i>(NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)</i>

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the extent permitted by law, will no longer make grants or otherwise fund programs or activities that improperly discriminate on the basis of race or sex, including discrimination in the name of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies. Instead, USDA will prioritize merit and efficiency. USDA recognizes programs and initiatives will have the greatest impact when these programs and initiatives put American farmers, ranchers, and foresters first by:

- solving the most pressing challenges they face;
- protecting America’s food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security;
- supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers;
- expanding and developing domestic markets;
- training the next generation of agriculturalists; and
- fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is committed to advancing these principles and encourages applicants to actively engage farmers, ranchers, and foresters when applying for funding opportunities to ensure relevancy and adherence to them. NIFA also encourages agricultural leaders to engage in the peer review panel process to ensure American producers are better served through research, education, and extension activities.

Projects submitted under this NOFO should align with [USDA Secretary’s Memorandum 1078-020](#) Directive on Departmental Research and Development Priorities:

1. Increasing Profitability of Farmers and Ranchers
2. Expanding Markets and Creating New Uses of U.S. Agricultural Products
3. Protecting the Integrity of American Agriculture from Invasive Species
4. Promoting Soil Health to Regenerate Long-Term Productivity of Land
5. Improving Human Health through Precision Nutrition and Food Quality

**Stakeholder Input.** NIFA seeks comments on all Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) 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 NOFOs 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](mailto:Policy@usda.gov). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems NOFO.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The amount available for grants in FY 2026 is approximately \$3,702,297.

NIFA requests applications for the ASAFS. 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; and improving production and quality of alfalfa seed. This is an integrated research and extension program.

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

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ANNOUNCEMENT ..... 2**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 4**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... 5**

**TABLE OF KEY INFORMATION..... 6**

**PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION ..... 7**

A. Legislative Authority.....7

B. Purpose and Priorities.....7

**PART II. AWARD INFORMATION ..... 9**

A. Available Funding .....9

B. Application Restrictions .....9

C. Project and Grant Types .....9

D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects .....9

**PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION..... 10**

A. Eligibility Requirements.....10

B. Cost Sharing or Matching.....10

**PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION ..... 11**

A. Method of Application .....11

B. Content and Form of the Application .....11

C. Funding Restrictions.....15

**PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS ..... 16**

A. NIFA’s Evaluation Process .....16

B. Evaluation Criteria.....16

C. Organizational Management Information.....17

D. Application Disposition.....17

**PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION ..... 18**

A. General .....18

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.....18

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements .....18

**PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION ..... 19**

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget.....19

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards .....20

C. Regulatory Information .....20

D. Language Access Services.....20

**APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT..... 21**

**APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS..... 22**

**APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS ..... 23**

## TABLE OF KEY INFORMATION

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines.....	2
Table 2: Program Key Information.....	8
Table 3. Steps to Obtain Application Materials.....	11
Table 4: Help and Resources .....	11
Table 5: Key Application Instructions .....	12

## PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### A. Legislative Authority

The authority for this program is contained in [7 U.S.C. 5925\(d\)\(8\)](#) to support high-priority research and extension initiatives.

### B. Purpose and Priorities

Alfalfa is essential to agricultural production systems and rural economies. It offers significant benefits, including soil health, nitrogen fixation, crop rotation benefits, and wildlife habitat. To sustain these benefits, alfalfa production must be profitable for farmers through strong market opportunities that encourage continued or expanded acreage.

ASAFS supports integrated projects only, focused on research and extension (but may include education) that emphasize technology transfer to improve overall agricultural productivity, profitability, and support of natural resources through conventional and organic alfalfa seed and forage production systems. ASAFS 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 universities, federal agencies, and industry organizations and states, ASAFS projects seek to enhance the effectiveness of limited state, federal, and industry resources and so produce greater long-lasting impacts.

In FY 2026, under Assistance Listing 10.330, ASAFS will support the development of improved alfalfa seed and forage production systems, practices, and supporting technologies. NIFA is soliciting applications for FY 2026 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 mechanization and 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 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.

***Regional and National Coordination:*** ASAFS supports integrated projects that must include both research and extension objectives (but can include an education component). NIFA requires regional coordination and encourages national coordination of ASAFS projects. For projects with the goal of regional coordination, at least **two states from the same region** (see list 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.

**Table 2:** Program Key Information

Title	Description
<b>Program Code:</b>	AFRP
<b>Program Code Name:</b>	Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems
<b>ALN:</b>	10.330
<b>Project Type:</b>	Integrated, must include Research and Extension
<b>Grant Type:</b>	Standard
<b>Application Deadline</b>	June 12, 2026
<b>Grant Duration:</b>	24-36 Months
<b>Anticipated # of Awards:</b>	4 - 5
<b>Minimum Award Amount:</b>	\$150,000 per year for a maximum of 3 years
<b>Maximum Award Amount:</b>	\$300,000 per year for a maximum of 3 years

## **PART II. AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The amount available for ASAFS in FY 2026 is approximately \$3,702,297. The total project budget requested cannot exceed \$300,000 per year for a project period of up to three years. 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 NOFO.

### **B. Application Restrictions**

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO. Application for FY2026 is limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO 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. Project and Grant Types**

The following describes the types of *projects* or *grants* that are eligible for funding:

1. Project Types. Applicants must propose integrated projects that include research and Extension objectives. An education component to the integrated project may be added to research and extension but is not required.
2. Grant Types. ASAFS solicits standard grants only.

### **D. 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

Applicants for the ASAFS must meet all the requirements discussed in this NOFO. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria by the application deadline may result in exclusion from consideration or preclude NIFA from making an award. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's [About Grants](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

Applications for ASAFS 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.

USDA **will not accept** competitive applications for grants and cooperative agreements submitted for due dates after June 20, 2025, and/or research and development (R&D) contract proposals submitted to solicitations issued after June 20, 2025, for dangerous gain-of-function research, as defined in [Section 8 of E.O. 14292](#).

**Duplicate or Multiple Submissions** – duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions.

### B. Cost Sharing or Matching

**Match Required** – Applicants **MUST** provide matching contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis for all Federal funds awarded under the ASAFS. NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if one of the following applies:

1. The results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or
2. The project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

## PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

### A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this NOFO electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this NOFO 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 33.** Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
<b>Step One: Register</b>	<i>New Users</i> to <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> must register early with <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> prior to submitting an application).
<b>Step Two: Download Adobe</b>	Download and Install <a href="#">Adobe Reader</a> (see <a href="#">Adobe Software Compatibility</a> for basic system requirements).
<b>Step Three: Find Application</b>	Using this funding opportunity number <b>USDA-NIFA-OP-011738</b> , search for application here: <a href="#">Opportunity Package</a> .
<b>Step Four: Assess Readiness</b>	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
<a href="#">Grants.gov Online Support</a> Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035  Email support: <a href="mailto:support@grants.gov">support@grants.gov</a> Self-service customer-based support: <a href="#">Grants.gov iPortal</a>  Customer service business hours 24/7, except <a href="#">Federal holidays</a> .	Email: <a href="mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov">grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov</a>  Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except <a href="#">Federal holidays</a> .

### B. Content and Form of the Application

The [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is part of the corresponding application package for this NOFO. The NOFO 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 NOFO. 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 <a href="#">NIFA Grants Application Guide</a> )
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 <a href="#">Grants.gov helpdesk</a> for technical support and keep a record of the correspondence.	N/A
Contact NIFA if applicant does not receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 30 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 project goals of the ASAFS. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates.
2. **Field 8. Project Narrative (PN).** The PN must not exceed 18 *1.5 spaced* pages of written text, figures, and tables (the font size for written text should be 12-point type and for figures and tables should be no smaller than 11 point, Times New Roman. Pages should have no less than 1-inch margins). The page limits outlined here ensure fair competition. Appendices to the PN 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 five program areas you are applying for and the percentage of your project in each area. Clearly state the high priority needs 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) A summary of previous work related to this proposal, (c) A description of 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 (d) A discussion of 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: (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) Outreach Plan - A detailed description of how findings and transfer technologies will be communicated to users.
  - e. **Logic model:** A logic model must include elements detailing the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the proposed project. The logic model planning process is a tool that should be used to develop a project before writing the application. This information may be provided as a narrative or formatted into a logic model chart. There is a three-page limit per logic model. The logic model does not count towards the 18-page limit for the PN. For more information and resources, see [Logic Model Planning Process](#) located on the NIFA website.
  - f. **Response to previous review:** Not to exceed one (1) page (in addition to the 18 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. This does not count towards the page limit for PN.
3. **Field 12. Add Other Attachments.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).
- a. **Appendix A: Project Management Plan** – Not to exceed five pages. Include the project timeline and a clear description of each team member’s roles and responsibilities.
  - b. **Data management plan (DMP):** A DMP is required for this program, not to exceed two pages. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project (see [NIFA’s Data Management Plan](#)). The DMP will be considered during the merit review process. The Data Management Plan should detail how project data will be curated and made available once the project is completed (included as Other Attachment).
  - c. **Mentoring Plan (MP):** An MP is required for all grant types that involve student or participant training or mentoring. The guidelines below apply to all grant types.

There is a two-page limit for standard grant applications. Mentoring plans should be included as a separate attachment and uploaded to Field 12 of the grant application. All student/trainee types can be included in the same mentoring plan.

The Mentoring Plan should describe:

1. Past or proposed training of individuals who will serve as mentors including equipping, mentoring, or monitoring activities they have received or will receive to help them effectively mentor students and trainees during the project;
2. Groups of students or individual trainees to be mentored on the project, including students grades 9-12, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, professionals and any other individuals to be trained or mentored on the project;
3. Detailed mentoring activities to be delivered throughout the project to each distinct category or group of students and/or trainee participants, including those activities provided through research, education, Extension or outreach efforts; and
4. Expected outcomes derived from the mentoring activities and prospective impact(s) on the food and agricultural sciences.

**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 NOFO 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 NOFO 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, C](#) of this NOFO 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](#).

**C. Funding Restrictions**

Indirect Cost (IDC) is not to exceed 30 percent of the recipient's Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA). [7 U.S.C. 3310](#) limits the recovery of IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of the TFFA under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum allowable IDC amount recoverable under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the following and is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

- a. the sum of an institution's negotiated indirect cost rate and the indirect cost rate charged by sub-awardees, if any; or
- b. 30 percent of TFFA.

If the result of number one is the lesser of the two amounts, 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 amount charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If the result of number two is the lesser of the two amounts, then the maximum IDC 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 indirect cost 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\(f\)](#)). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de minimis rate of 15 percent of modified total direct 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](#).

## **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 NOFO. All administrative requirements must be met in order 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, taking into account 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., agricultural producers, range or forest managers/operators, researchers, educators, evaluators, 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 with regard to the reviewer's area of expertise, geographic area, and entity type, as appropriate.
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**

NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate applications to this program:

1. **Conceptual adequacy** (20 points). 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 points). 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. The application includes discussion of expected products, results, and an evaluation plan.
3. **Appropriate use of a regional, interdisciplinary, and industry-engaged approach** (10 points). 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 points). 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 points). 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 points). Budget allocations should reflect the personnel and tasks associated with the activities needed to accomplish your objectives.
7. **Data Management Plan and Mentoring Plan** (5 points). Evaluate the suitability and feasibility of the Data Management Plan and Mentoring Plan.

### **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 NOFO. 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 NOFO may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the program-specific laws and regulations, NIFA General Awards Administrative Provisions ([7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E](#)), USDA Regulations for Grants and Agreements ([2 CFR Chapter IV](#)), Office of Management and Budget Uniform Guidance ([2 CFR part 200](#)), [NIFA-specific terms and conditions](#), [USDA General Terms and Conditions for Federal Awards](#), and approved budget and project plans.

The Notice of 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 NOFO (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute or award-specific requirements, [NIFA Federal Assistance 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 required);
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 [2 CFR Part 300 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;
9. Salary rates of pay exceeding an Executive Level IV salary range (see “Rates of Pay for the Executive Schedule” under the “Executive & Senior Level Employee Pay Tables” header at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) require prior NIFA approval. This rate does not include any fringe benefits, general and administrative (G&A), overhead, or other expenses. Requests for approval must include the salary rate of pay and a justification for the rate and be sent to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) to [awards@usda.gov](mailto:awards@usda.gov);
10. No more than 50 percent of the total dollars of this award may be subcontracted to another party(ies) without prior written approval of the ADO, except subcontracts to Federal agencies;
11. Transferring funds between the construction and non-construction work under a Federal award; and
12. A no-cost extension (meaning, an extension of time that does not require the obligation of additional Federal funds) of the period of performance, other than any one-time extension authorized by the Federal agency in accordance with paragraph 2 CFR 200.308(g)(2). All requests for no-cost extensions should be submitted at least 10 calendar days before the conclusion of the period of performance. The Federal agency may approve multiple no-cost extensions under a Federal award if not prohibited by Federal statute or regulation.

**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. Language Access Services**

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](#).

## APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

For Programmatic questions please email [AFRP@usda.gov](mailto:AFRP@usda.gov)

For administrative questions related to;

1. Grants.gov, see [Part IV](#) of this NOFO
2. Other NOFO or application questions, please email [grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov](mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov)
3. Awards under this NOFO, please email [awards@usda.gov](mailto: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 and Forage Research Program (former name but still Program Code) – AFRP

Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems Program (new name) - ASAFS

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Authorized Departmental Officer – ADO

Authorized Representative – AR

Data Management Plan – DMP

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Notice of Funding Opportunity – NOFO

Project Director – PD

Project Narrative – PN

Project Summary - PS

Total Federal Funds Awarded – TFFA

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**

##### **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.