DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation and Foreign Agricultural Service

Foreign Market Development Cooperator Program

Summary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, Global Programs, announces this funding opportunity to support the Foreign Market Development Cooperator Program by issuing new awards. This opportunity is available to nonprofit U.S. agricultural trade organizations and is intended to create, expand, and maintain long–term export markets for U.S. agricultural commodities and products.

A. Program Description

Issued By: Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Assistance Listing Number: 10.600

Notice of Funding Opportunity Title: 2025 Foreign Market Development Cooperator Program

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA–FAS–FMD–2025

Authorizing Legislation: The Foreign Market Development Cooperator Program (Cooperator program) is authorized by Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978 (7 U.S.C. 5623(c)), as amended.

Program Overview, Objectives, and Priorities: The Cooperator program is designed to maintain and develop foreign markets for United States agricultural commodities and products through cost–share assistance. Financial assistance under the Cooperator program will be made available on a competitive basis and applications will be reviewed against the evaluation criteria contained herein and in the Cooperator program regulations. Applicants should refer to and have a common understanding of the Cooperator program regulations, 7 CFR Part 1484, and the definitions contained within to fully understand this opportunity. All U.S. agricultural commodities, except tobacco, are eligible for consideration.

B. <u>Federal Award Information</u>

Available Funding for this Announcement: The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 provided no less than $34.5 million for the Cooperator program for each of the fiscal years FY 2019 through FY 2023. Congress has not yet determined funding levels for FY 2025. This NOFO is being released prior to Congress appropriating funding for the Cooperator program for FY 2025. USDA makes no commitment to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards regardless of whether or at what level program funding for FY 2025 is provided.

Total Available Federal Funding: Anticipated to be no less than $34,500,000. If Congress authorizes an amount of funding for the Cooperator program other than $34.5 million, FAS reserves the right to allow applicants to amend their original applications. If FAS authorizes that flexibility, only applicants that submitted eligible applications by the application submission deadline stated in this notice and that are otherwise fully responsive to all of the requirements in this announcement will be allowed to amend their requests.

Anticipated Number of Awards: 20–30 awards. Awards may be granted up to the maximum available program amount of $34.5 million. Applicants should propose an appropriate number of activities and request a sufficient amount of resources to achieve their proposed program goals.

Projected Period of Performance: Awards will be generally granted for a period of performance of three years.

Projected Period of Performance Start Date(s): 01/01/2025

Projected Period of Performance End Date(s): 09/30/2028

Type of Assistance Instrument: USDA/FAS anticipates that grants will be funded pursuant to this funding opportunity. In this type of agreement, the recipient is expected to implement the project autonomously with little programmatic involvement from USDA/FAS. However, USDA/FAS maintains an oversight role, and the recipient must ensure that USDA/FAS is kept apprised of project activities and progress.

C. Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants: To participate in the Cooperator program, an entity must be a non–profit U.S. agricultural trade organization that promotes the exports of one or more U.S. agricultural commodities and does not have a business interest in or receive remuneration from specific sales of agricultural commodities. Funding priority is given to organizations that have the broadest possible producer representation of the commodity being promoted and that are nationwide in membership and scope.

All applicants must have an active registration in the U.S. Government System for Award Management (www.sam.gov) before the application submission deadline of the announcement. Applicants with inactive, expired, pending, or excluded listings will be deemed ineligible. Exceptions, waivers, or extensions will not be considered. Please contact the program officer(s) listed in Section G, Federal Awarding Agency Contact, if you have questions about this requirement. Applicants that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be considered ineligible.

Eligibility Criteria

Eligible Commodities: Eligible commodity means any agricultural commodity or product thereof, excluding tobacco, that is comprised of at least 50 percent by weight, exclusive of added water, of agricultural commodities grown or raised in the United States.

Eligible Activities: Under the Cooperator program, FAS enters into agreements with eligible non–profit U.S. trade organizations to share the cost of certain overseas marketing and promotion activities. Cooperators may receive assistance only for generic activities that do not involve promotions targeted directly to consumers purchasing in their individual capacity. The Cooperator program generally operates on a reimbursement basis.

Cost Share/Match Requirement

To participate in the Cooperator program, an applicant must contribute resources to its proposed promotional activities. The Cooperator program is intended to supplement, not supplant, the efforts of the U.S. private sector. The contribution must be at least 50 percent of the value of resources provided by CCC for activities conducted under the project agreement. The amount of cost share will be specified in a recipient's allocation approval letter.

Promised contributions may be specified in dollars or as a percentage of the amount reimbursed by CCC. If the required promised contribution is not met, the applicant is required to either return to CCC the necessary amount of funds reimbursed by CCC to increase its actual cost share percentage to the required level or pay to CCC, in dollars, the difference between the amount actually contributed and the amount of funds necessary to increase its actual cost share percentage to the required level. Such payment must be made within six months after the end of the Cooperator program year.

The degree of commitment of an applicant to the promotional strategies contained in its application, as represented by the cost share contributions specified in its application, is one factor considered by FAS in Phase 4 of the application review. Cost share may be actual cash invested or in–kind contributions, such as professional staff time spent on the design and implementation of activities. The Cooperator program regulations, including sections 1484.50 and 1484.51, provide a detailed discussion of eligible and ineligible cost–share contributions.

Other Submission Requirements and Information

Applicants are limited to submitting one application per this announcement. In the event an applicant submits more than one application, FAS will contact the applicant to determine which application they want considered.

Organizations interested in applying to the Cooperator program must submit their application to FAS by the application submission deadline through the web–based Unified Export Strategy (UES) system. The UES system is accessible at *https://apps.fas.usda.gov/ues/webapp/*. The suggested UES format encourages applicants to examine the constraints or barriers to trade that they face, identify activities that would help overcome such impediments, consider the entire pool of complementary marketing tools and program resources, and establish realistic export goals. Applications submitted outside of the UES will not be considered.

Organizations that do not have UES access may request access from FAS by following this 3–step process:

1) Navigate to the UES at: https://apps.fas.usda.gov/ues/WebApp/ and, when prompted, use the "Customer" option to create an account at Login.gov.
2) Return to the UES and create a new account in the system.
3) Submit a UES User Access Request Form to the Program Operations Division (POD) UES team via email at uesadmin@usda.gov, who will verify the information and activate your UES account.

Substantial Compliance

All applications will be reviewed for eligibility and must meet the eligibility requirements described in Section C to be considered eligible. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified within 30 calendar days of the application deadline of the ineligibility determination.

Applications must substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section D of this solicitation or they will be rejected. In the event a page limit is expressed in Section D with respect to the application, or parts thereof, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed.

D. Application and Submission Information

This announcement contains all information necessary to apply to this funding opportunity.

Application Submission Deadline: All applications must be received by 5 p.m. Eastern Time, Friday, June 14, 2024. Applications submitted after this date or applications that do not otherwise conform to this announcement and the Cooperator program regulations will not be considered for funding.

Content and Form of Application Submission

To be considered for the Cooperator program, an applicant must submit to FAS an application package consisting of:

(1) A marketing plan that provides the information outlined in this notice;

(2) Standard Form 424, "Application for Federal Assistance" (SF–424). Please email the completed SF–424 to uesadmin@usda.gov with the subject: "2025 FMD SF–424";

(3) A certification (and a written explanation supporting the certification, if requested by FAS) that the information contained in the application is true and accurate, that the organization is eligible to apply to the program, and that any funds received will

supplement, but not supplant, any private or third–party funds or other contributions to program activities; and

(4) A completed SF–LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities) form if the entity applying to this announcement is required to disclose their lobbying activities under 31 USC 1352.

The marketing plan required by this announcement must include the following information:

A. Participant Profile:

   1) The name, address, and URL for the applicant organization;
   2) The name, telephone number, and email address of the applicant's primary contact person;
   3) The name(s) of the person(s) responsible for managing the proposed program;
   4) Tax exempt identification number of the applicant, if applicable;
   5) A description of the applicant organization, including:
      i. The type of organization of the applicant (e.g., nonprofit trade association) and, if applicable, the statutory authorities by which it is constituted and under which it operates;
      ii. A description of the applicant's management and administrative capability;
      iii. An explanation of the organization's strategic planning process and how it identifies priority target markets;
   6) A description of the applicant organization's mission and its membership and membership criteria;
   7) A description of the applicant's consideration of diversity, equity, and inclusion in program design and implementation. The applicant's efforts should reflect a broad

effort to grow export opportunities for diverse (including gender, ethnicity, and geographic diversity) stakeholders and a demonstrated commitment to equity and accessibility of program;

8) An explanation for why Federal funding assistance is needed and why the applicant is unlikely to carry out the proposed program without assistance;

9) A description of the applicant's prior export promotion experience;

10) A discussion of any organizations affiliated with the applicant, including parent organizations, subsidiaries, and partnerships;

B. Industry Goal:

1) U.S. export goals and World Trade amounts for the commodities being promoted. Applicants should provide 5 years of historical data and 6 years of future target goals;

C. Promoted Commodity:

1) A name for each promoted U.S. agricultural commodity, the applicable commodity aggregate code (from the UES), and the percentage of U.S. origin content by weight, exclusive of added water;

2) A description of the domestic situation, outlook, and strengths and weaknesses for the promoted U.S. agricultural commodity;

3) A description of the world market situation, outlook, and competitive threats from other exporters for the exported U.S. agricultural commodity;

4) U.S. and world production and trade data for the promoted commodity;

D. Targeted Market:

1) For each targeted market, provide a market assessment and strategy that discusses the market situation, constraint(s)/opportunity(ies), and the strategy proposed to overcome constraints or take advantage of the opportunities;
2) A discussion of the past performance and results achieved from previous activities in the market, and the projected impact on U.S. exports of the proposed current program;
3) For each targeted market, provide 5 years of the volume, value, and U.S. market share of historical exports of the promoted U.S. agricultural commodity(s) to the targeted market;
4) For each targeted market, provide 3 years of projected U.S. export data and U.S. market share for the promoted U.S. agricultural commodity(s) to the targeted market;

E. Constraint:

1) A description of the constraint impeding U.S. exports or the opportunities present in the market and the proposed strategy;
2) A description of the performance metrics/indicators against which future success in addressing the constraint will be measured. Every constraint must include at least one outcome performance measure;

F. Activity:

1) A description of each proposed activity and the requested budget;
2) A description of the expected results and the overall long term strategic goals to be advanced by the proposed activity for the ensuing 3–5 years;
3) A description of any demonstration projects, if applicable;

G. Admin Activity:

   1) A justification for any new overseas offices, including a list of job titles, corresponding position descriptions, salary ranges, and any request for approval of salaries above the Foreign Service National (FSN) salary plan. To request approval of a salary above the FSN salary plan, the Cooperator shall include a detailed description of both the duties and responsibilities of the position, and of the qualifications and background of the individual concerned. The Cooperator shall also justify, based on a verifiable local salary survey or other documented local salary information, why the highest FSN salary level is inappropriate;

H. Worldwide Personnel:

   1) If applicable, provide an accounting of the number of U.S. citizens employed overseas by the applicant, the number of those U.S. citizens whose salaries will be paid in whole or in part with FMD funds, and the total dollar amount of overseas U.S. citizen salaries and allowances that will be paid with FMD funds;

I. Contingent Liability:

   1) If applicable, provide an accounting of all contingent obligations that would be due if overseas offices supported by program funds were to close on the last day of the marketing year;

J. Promised Contribution:

   1) Value, in U.S. dollars, of proposed contributions from the applicant or the applicant's proposed contribution stated as a percentage of the total dollar amount of CCC resources requested;

   2) Value, in U.S. dollars, of proposed contributions from other sources;

If FAS determines that an applicant made a good faith effort to submit the required marketing plan by the application deadline but identifies that a clarification on the submission is needed, FAS will notify the applicant and request that the applicant provide the clarification within 15 business days. FAS will not review applications until they are complete, which could delay application processing. FAS will not consider any applications that remain incomplete after the 15 business days.

Programmatic Capability and Past Performance

As part of the application evaluation process outlined in Section E, FAS will consider an applicant's past performance under the FAS market development programs and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from USDA/FAS files and from current/prior grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information provided by the applicant). If an applicant has not previously participated in an FAS market development program, they may submit a list of no more than five federally–funded (preferably USDA or USDA/FAS) assistance agreements (assistance agreements include Federal grants and cooperative agreements but not Federal contracts) that your organization performed within the last three years and describe:

i) whether, and how, you were able to successfully complete and manage those agreements;

ii) your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements, including whether you adequately and timely reported on your progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes of those agreements (and if not, explain why not) and whether you submitted acceptable final technical reports under the agreements; and

iii) your organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of your proposed Cooperator program marketing plan, and your staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources (or the ability to obtain them) to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project.

If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the application and you will receive a neutral score for these factors (a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). If you do not provide any response for these items, you may receive a score of 0 for these factors.

Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each applicant is required to:

i) Have an active registration in SAM before submitting its application;

ii) Have assented to the federal assistance certifications in the SAM platform;

iii) Provide a valid Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) in its application; and

iv) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

SAM.gov Registration Instructions

Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active SAM.gov registration. If you have never done business with the Federal Government, you will need to register your organization in SAM.gov. If you do not have a SAM.gov account, then you will create an account using login.gov[1] to complete your SAM.gov registration. SAM.gov registration

[1] Login.gov is a secure sign in service used by the public to sign into Federal Agency systems including SAM.gov and Grants.gov. For help with login.gov accounts you should visit http://login.gov/help.

is FREE. The process for entity registrations includes obtaining a UEI and requires assertions, representations, certifications, and other information about your organization. Please review the Entity Registration Checklist on SAM.gov for details on this process.

If you have done business with the Federal Government previously, you can check your entity status using your government issued UEI to determine if your registration is active. SAM.gov requires you renew your registration every 365 days to keep it active.

Please note that SAM.gov registration is different than obtaining a UEI only. Obtaining an UEI only validates your organization's legal business name and address. Please review the Frequently Asked Question on the difference for additional details.

Contact the Federal Service Desk for help with your SAM.gov account, to resolve technical issues, or to chat with a help desk agent: (866) 606–8220. The Federal Service desk hours of operation are Monday – Friday 8am – 8pm ET.

Applicants must maintain an active SAM.gov registration at all times during which they have active Federal awards or an application under consideration by FAS. FAS will not make an award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM.gov requirements, and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time FAS is ready to make the award, FAS may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive an award and use that determination as a basis for making an award to another applicant.

Intergovernmental Review

Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, may be applicable to awards resulting from this announcement. USDA implemented the Executive Order in 2 CFR 415.5. USDA/FAS may require applicants selected for funding to provide a copy of their application to their State Point of Contact (SPOC) for review. These reviews are not required before submitting an application. Only applicants that USDA/FAS selects for funding under this announcement are subject to the Intergovernmental Review requirement. For more information about USDA's implementation for Intergovernmental Review, please visit https://www.usda.gov/ocfo/federal-financial-assistance-policy/intergovernmental-review#:~:text=Executive%20Order%20(EO)%2012372%2C,of%20proposed%20Federal%20financial%20assistance.

Funding Restrictions

Cooperator program activities are approved for a single program year, with the approval dates specified in the allocation approval letter that is provided as part of the award approval package. Only those Cooperator program activities that are approved in each applicant's allocation approval letter or are subsequently approved by FAS may be implemented, and those activities must be implemented during the 12–month program year specified in the allocation approval letter. Requests for activity changes during the program year must be approved in advance by FAS.

In general, Cooperator program funding may not be used for any activities prohibited by 2 CFR Part 200 and 2 CFR Part 400, the Cooperator program regulations at 7 CFR 1484, and the provisions set forth in this announcement. FAS also will not reimburse unreasonable expenditures or expenditures for any activity made prior to approval of that activity or after the conclusion of a program year Certain types of expenses are not eligible for Cooperator program reimbursement and there are limits on other categories of expenses that may be eligible for Cooperator program reimbursement. Indirect costs are not eligible for reimbursement under the Cooperator program.

Awards issued pursuant to this NOFO may only be used for the purpose set forth in the award, consistent with the statutory authority for the award. Grant funds and non–monetary support may not be used for matching contributions for other Federal grants or cooperative agreements, lobbying, or intervention in Federal regulatory or adjudicatory proceedings. Federal employees are prohibited from serving in any capacity (paid or unpaid) in the development or submission of any application submitted under this program. Federal employees may not receive funds under this award. Also, federal funds may not be used to sue the Federal Government or any other U.S. government entity. FAS may determine, on a case–to–case basis, whether any cost not explicitly listed in the Cooperator program regulations is eligible for reimbursement. Full details are available in sections 1484.54 and 1484.55 of the Cooperator program regulations.

E. Application Review Information

FAS will review all applications for eligibility and completeness. FAS will, subject to the availability of funds, approve those applications that it considers to best meet the objectives outlined in this announcement. When determining funding recommendations, FAS will give priority to organizations that have the broadest producer representation and affiliated industry participation of the commodity being promoted. FAS may require that new applicants participate in the Cooperator program through another Cooperator until such time as FAS determines that they can effectively administer and implement their own program. When appropriate to the subject matter of the application, FAS may also request the assistance of other U.S. Government experts in evaluating applications.

Conflict of Interest

The applicant's Conflict of Interest (COI) Point of Contact as defined in the USDA/FAS Conflict of Interest Policy, must notify the USDA/FAS contact identified in Section G of this solicitation of any actual or potential conflict of interest that they are aware of that may provide the applicant with an unfair competitive advantage in competing for USDA/FAS financial assistance awards within 10 calendar days of becoming aware of the conflict of interest. Examples of an unfair competitive advantage include, but are not limited to, situations in which an USDA/FAS employee reviewed and commented on or drafted all or part of an applicant's application prior to submission. Note that USDA/FAS does not generally consider receiving information from an USDA/FAS employee limited to whether the applicant or the applicant's proposed project is eligible to compete for funding to confer an unfair competitive advantage. In addition, assistance agreements made under this solicitation will include a term and condition notifying recipients of their COI disclosure obligations and responsibilities under the award, including the need to have systems in place to address, resolve, and disclose COIs to USDA/FAS.

Integrity in Performance

Prior to making a Federal award, the Federal awarding agency is required by 31 USC 3321 and 41 USC 2313 to review information available through any OMB–designated repositories of government–wide eligibility qualification or financial integrity information. Therefore, application evaluation criteria may include the following risk–based considerations of the applicant: (1) financial stability; (2) quality of management systems and ability to meet management standards; (3) history of performance in managing federal awards; (4) reports and findings from audits; and (5) ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements.

Prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, currently $250,000, the federal agency is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.gov (currently FAPIIS).

- An applicant, at its option, may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through SAM.gov and comment on any information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.gov.
- The Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR 200.206.

Review and Selection Process

The purpose of the application evaluation is to recommend an appropriate funding level for each application and submit the funding recommendations to the appropriate officials for decision making. The agency will convene a review panel, which may include both federal and non–federal reviewers, to review the eligible applications against the evaluation criteria described below. The reviewers will ensure that the applicant is capable of delivering the programs/activities as described in the announcement based on the applicant's marketing plan and assign a score and provide summary comments based on the evaluation criteria identified below. The review panel will prepare a recommendation list and present it to the selecting official, who is not a member of the panel.

The selecting official may select applications out of rank order in consideration of strategic program priorities, such as geographical distribution, incorporation of minority–serving institutions, or congressional directive. Selection determinations are final and cannot be appealed.

Throughout the evaluation process, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project considering their:

i) past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in response to Section D of the solicitation,

ii) history of meeting the reporting requirements under the assistance agreements identified in response to Section D of the solicitation, including whether the applicant submitted acceptable final technical reports under those agreements and the extent to which the applicant adequately and timely reported on their progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes under those agreements and if such progress was not being made whether the applicant adequately reported why not,

iii) organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project, and

iv) staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project.

Note: In evaluating applicants under items (i) and (ii) of this criterion, USDA/FAS will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the application and you will receive a neutral score for these subfactors (items (i) and (ii) above); a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points. If you do not provide any response for these items, you may receive a score of 0 for these factors.

FAS conducts the following process in reviewing applications and allocating available Cooperator program funds:

Sufficiency Review (Phase 1): In Phase 1, FAS conducts an initial sufficiency review of all applications received to determine the completeness of the application and responsiveness to this announcement. If an applicant is determined to be ineligible per Section C, "Eligibility Information," of this announcement, FAS will not consider the application and will take no further action on it. The agency will notify applicants determined to be ineligible, usually within 5 business days of the application submission deadline. An applicant that feels such a determination is made in error may request reconsideration, highlighting evidence supporting their claim, by email to the program officer(s) listed in Section G, Federal Awarding Agency Contact, within 3 business days of notification. If an application is determined to be incomplete, FAS will notify the applicant and request that the applicant send in the missing information within 15 business days to the address provided by FAS to complete its application. Applications that are deemed eligible and complete will be passed to FAS' Cooperator Programs Division (CoPD) for the Phase 2 review.

Divisional Review (Phase 2): In Phase 2, all applications found sufficient in Phase 1 are assigned to CoPD marketing specialists who will review, score, and provide a funding endorsement for each eligible application. The application's score will be calculated using the following criteria:

Program Strategic Planning (total of 25 possible points):

- Overall Quality and Clarity, and Program Description and Objectives (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the overall quality and clarity of their marketing plan and the extent to which they present a clear and convincing vision of the project reflective of the identified needs and targeted geographic area. Applicants will also be evaluated based on the extent to which the proposed program identifies specific target markets, target audiences, and market share goals, and whether the program prioritizes markets with clear, differentiated, and appropriate marketing strategies.
- Collaborations and Partnerships (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which the long–term strategy includes input from a broad representation of industry and affiliated industries that meet regularly to update the strategic priorities, and any demonstrated partnerships or collaborations that enhance the program's potential success.
- Innovation and Originality (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they showcase uniqueness or innovation in the proposed approach.
- Significance and Impact (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate the importance of the program within the relevant market(s) or region(s), and the potential positive impact of the program on the target market(s) or region(s).
- Alignment with Program Goals (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which the proposed activities align with the program goals stated in this NOFO.

Program Management and Implementation (total of 25 possible points):

- Qualifications and Expertise (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate that they possess: (1) the qualifications, experience, and expertise relevant to the program, (2) adequate resources and capabilities to carry out the program, (3) adequate and appropriate staffing/organizational capacity to implement the program, and (4) collaboration and communication within their industry.

- Methodology and Approach (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate a well–defined program methodology, an appropriate approach to achieve the stated objectives, and a clear timeline for program activities.
- Quality of Constraints/Opportunities and Performance Measures (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the percentage of constraint/opportunities that are appropriate, specific, actionable, and contain at least one outcome performance measure.
- Budget and Budget Justification (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which their proposed budget is reasonable for the proposed activities, and the extent to which they have provided a clear explanation of why Federal funding assistance is needed and why the applicant is unlikely to carry out the programs without assistance.
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (5 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they show consideration of diversity, equity, and inclusion in program design and implementation, reflecting a broad effort to grow export opportunities for diverse stakeholders (including gender, ethnicity, and geographic diversity, historically underserved groups, and veterans) as well as a commitment to equity and accessibility of the program.

Program Evaluation and Results Reporting (total of 50 possible points):

- Reported Results Demonstrate Progress in Markets (10 points): Applicants will be evaluated by assessing past reported results against a participant's performance measures, and determining whether they demonstrate progress towards meeting established goals.

- Program Evaluation Requirements (10 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they have previously submitted evaluation plans that are appropriate and reasonable and address program evaluation requirements.
- Quality of Success Stories (10 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on quality of success stories submitted, and whether they demonstrate linkages between their strategies and target audience behavior change. Success stories should represent the scope of programming (products, markets, and strategies), and provide a linkage between the results reported and the trade situation in the market. More effective success stories can reflect the impact of multiple activities in the market in that year, and/or cumulative program accomplishments over time.
- Past Performance and Feedback Used to Adjust Programming (10 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate that they have previously used the results from past performance, evaluation feedback, and Agency feedback to adjust their programming. Applicants should provide a clear plan for the implementation of recommendations and past examples where programming and/or strategic direction changed as a result of program results and evaluation.
- Demonstrates Linkages Between Programming Results and U.S. Exports (10 points): Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate clear links between their programming and increased exports, maintaining exports, or minimizing losses over time.

After the Phase 2 reviewer scores the application, they will provide a funding endorsement for the application. The CoPD reviewer's funding endorsement will be based on factors such as the application's score, the reviewer's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the application, extent of the applicant's producer representation and affiliated industry participation for the commodity being promoted, the applicant's market development program history and experience, and feedback received from FAS program areas and Posts.

For returning applicants, the marketing specialist will make note of how much funding the applicant received in the prior year and then make a funding endorsement to either "Increase," "Maintain," or "Decrease" that level of funding. For new applicants, the marketing specialist will provide a simple funding endorsement of either "Fund" or "Do Not Fund" the application at up to the applicant's requested funding level.

CoPD Funding Recommendation (Phase 3): In this Phase of the review, the CoPD management team will review the Phase 2 results and develop the funding recommendations for each applicant. When developing funding recommendations, the CoPD management will consider factors such as the application's score, past expenditure rates, ability to meet program requirements, results of recent compliance findings, and the applicant's market development program history and experience, if applicable. The development of the funding recommendations is an iterative process, and CoPD management may make adjustments to a particular application's funding recommendation at any step in the process after consideration of the factors outlined above. The following steps are used in the development of the funding recommendations:

Step 1 – CoPD management will rank the applications from highest to lowest (based on the application scores) and will make note of the reviewers' Phase 2 funding endorsements.

Step 2 – CoPD management will compare the overall availability of funds with the previous program year's level to determine the overall change in year/year funding.

This percentage change (whether positive, negative, or neutral) will establish the "Maintain" recommendation for the new program year and will be applied to the previous year's funding levels for all returning Participants' applications. These maintain levels will be applied as specific dollar amounts, as will all recommendations in Phase 3, and will form the initial recommendations for all applicants that received a "Maintain" funding endorsement in Phase 2. CoPD management will then review the "Maintain" recommendations for any necessary adjustments.

Step 3 – CoPD management will discuss and assign a recommended percentage change from the prior year's funding level for each application receiving a "Decrease" endorsement, starting from lowest to highest score. The decrease percentage will be applied on top of the starting point of the "Maintain" level determined in Step 1.

Step 4 – In this step, CoPD management will consider the new applicants. For new applicants that receive a funding endorsement of "Fund," CoPD management will review the applicant's funding request and determine an appropriate funding level for the new entrant to begin in the program. CoPD management will then review each "Do Not Fund" endorsement and will consider whether the unsuccessful applicant should be rejected outright or should participate in the program through another Participant until such time as FAS determines that the applicant can effectively administer and implement their own program.

Step 5 – Taking into consideration all funding made available in the previous steps, CoPD management will determine an appropriate percentage increase for each applicant with an "Increase" endorsement. Starting with the highest scored application, CoPD management will apply funding increases until all available funds are utilized. The increase is added to the starting point of the "Maintain" level determined in Step 1.

Formula (Phase 4): In this phase of the review process, CoPD's recommended funding levels for each applicant from Phase 3 are adjusted by the following allocation criteria, with the number in parentheses representing the percentage weight of each factor, to determine adjusted funding recommendations for each applicant.

New entrants to the program do not participate in the formula until they have built up enough historical data (i.e., six years' worth) to meet all of the formula criteria. Once they have participated in the program for six years, they will join the formula. In addition, certain Cooperators that represent commodities that overlap directly with other Cooperators and whose export numbers cannot, therefore, be easily parsed for the separate groups also do not participate in the formula. Any Cooperator that does not participate in the formula will be recommended at the unchanged funding level recommended by CoPD in Phase 3.

The Phase 4 formula consists of the following criteria:

(a) Applicant's Contribution Level (40): The applicant's 6–year average share (2020–2025) of all contributions under the Cooperator program compared to the applicant's 6–year average share (2020–2025) of the funding level for all Cooperator program participants.

(b) Past U.S. Export Performance (20): The 6–year average share (2019–2024) of the value of U.S. exports promoted by the applicant compared to the applicant's 6–year average share (2019–2024) of the funding level for all Cooperator participants plus, for those groups participating in the MAP program, the 6–year average share (2019–2024) of all MAP budgets.

(c) Past Demand Expansion Performance (20): The 6–year average share (2019–2024) of the total value of world trade of the commodities promoted by the applicant compared to the applicant's 6–year average share (2019–2024) of all Cooperator program expenditures plus, for those groups participating in the MAP program, a 6–year average share (2019–2024) of all MAP expenditures.

(d) Future Demand Expansion Goals (10): The total dollar value of projected world trade of the commodities being promoted by the applicant for the year 2030 compared to the applicant's requested funding level.

(e) Accuracy of Past Demand Expansion Projections (10): The actual dollar value share of world trade of the commodities being promoted by the applicant for the year 2023 as reported in the 2025 Cooperator program application compared to the projection of world trade of the commodities being promoted by the applicant for 2023 as specified in the applicant's 2020 Cooperator program application.

Final Review and Allocation Decision Making (Phase 5): A summary of all applications and the recommended funding levels for each will be provided to the Office of the Deputy Administrator, Global Programs for the purpose of finalizing the Cooperator program funding recommendations. Once finalized, the recommendations will be presented to the FAS Administrator for final deliberation, determination, and approval. FAS leadership (including the Deputy Administrator, Associate Administrator, and Administrator) may elect to review and adjust the funding recommendations based on factors including, but not limited to: agency priorities, priority markets, program impact, the record of performance of the organization in managing past market development funds, and the organization's likelihood of success.

F. <u>Federal Award Administration Information</u>

Notice of Award

FAS will approve those Cooperator program applications that it determines best satisfy the criteria and factors specified in this announcement. Successful applicants will be notified of the status of their application/award by email. This notification is not authorization to proceed, and such notification should be construed as provisional. Funding for successful applications will be provided through specific agreements. FAS will send an agreement and an approval letter to each successful applicant.

The agreement and the approval letter will outline which activities are approved and will specify approved budgets and any special terms and conditions applicable to a Cooperator's program, including any requirements with respect to cost share and program evaluations. Final agreement shall occur when both parties sign the agreement and the approval letter. The agreement, approval letter, and the program regulations shall establish the terms and conditions of a Cooperator program agreement between FAS and the Cooperator.

The Cooperator program agreement provided to successful applicants will include a Civil Rights checklist and signature card. Both of these documents must be completed and returned as part of the agreement. The Cooperator should designate at least two individuals in its organization to sign agreements and amendments, approval letters, reimbursement claims, and advance requests. Should there be any changes in signatories (*e.g.,* removal or addition of individuals, name changes, etc.), the Participant must immediately notify FAS by submitting a revised signature card.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements

All successful applicants for all grant and cooperative agreements are required to comply with the applicable General Administrative Terms and Conditions, which can be found at https://www.fas.usda.gov/grants/general_terms_and_conditions/default.asp. The applicant is presumed to have read, understood, and accepted these terms when accepting a USDA/FAS award. Applicants with questions about the applicable terms should contact the program officer(s) listed in Section G, Federal Awarding Agency Contact.

The applicable Terms and Conditions will be for the last year specified at that URL. Before accepting an award, the applicant should carefully read the award package (agreement and approval letter) for instructions on administering the award and the terms and conditions associated with responsibilities under Federal Awards. Recipients must accept all conditions in this NOFO as well as any Special Terms and Conditions in the Notice of Award to receive an award under this program.

Subaward and Executive Compensation Reporting

Applicants must ensure that they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the subaward and executive total compensation reporting requirements established at 2 CFR 170, unless they qualify for an exception from the requirements, should they be selected for funding.

Mandatory Disclosures

As required by 2 CFR 200.113, non–federal entities or applicants for a Federal award must disclose, in a timely manner, in writing to the Federal awarding agency or pass–through entity all violations of Federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the Federal award. Failure to make required disclosures can result in any of the remedies described in 2 CFR 200.339 including suspension and debarment.

Reporting

Consistent with 7 CFR 1484.70, FAS requires various financial and performance reporting from Cooperators in accordance with their agreement with FAS. The regulations provide details on each required report and associated deadline. If a Cooperator requires an extension of a reporting deadline, it must ensure that FAS receives an extension request at least five business days prior to the reporting deadline. FAS may decline to consider a request for an extension that it receives after this time period. FAS will consider requests for reporting deadline extensions on a case–by–case basis and will make a decision to grant an extension based on the merits of each request.

Applicants approved for funding must provide an evaluation plan describing the applicant's goals and the applicant's plans for monitoring and evaluating performance towards achieving these goals. This evaluation plan should set forth specific plans to be used to determine the effectiveness of the Cooperator's strategy in meeting specified goals. FAS encourages annual evaluations but will require an evaluation at least every three years. The overall goal of the Cooperator program and of individual Cooperators' programming is to achieve or maintain sales that would not have occurred in the absence of Cooperator program funding. A Cooperator may modify and resubmit this plan for re–approval at any time during the program year. Cooperator failures to provide the required evaluation elements or otherwise satisfy the evaluation requirements will be noted and reflected in the scores for future applications.

There are additional reporting requirements for trip reports and research reports. If requested by FAS, a Cooperator must provide to FAS additional information or reports relating to their agreement. Full reporting requirements are detailed in the Cooperator program regulations in 7 CFR 1484.70 and 7 CFR 1484.72.

Financial Reporting Requirements

Cooperators are required to submit all expense claims and a report detailing actual contributions no later than six months after the end of the program year. All expense claims and contribution reports shall be submitted via the UES system.

Program Performance Reporting Requirements

Cooperators shall submit annual performance reports that includes pertinent information about the Cooperator's progress, measured against established indicators, baselines, and targets, towards achieving the expected results specified in the agreement. This report should be submitted via the UES. The report must include, for each performance indicator, a comparison of actual accomplishments with the baseline and the targets established for the period. When actual accomplishments deviate significantly from targeted goals, the Cooperator must provide FAS an explanation in the report as to why the goal was not achieved. Cooperators also must provide program success stories when appropriate or as required by FAS. At any time during the program year, FAS may review the Cooperator's performance data to determine whether it is accurate and reliable. Cooperators shall comply with all requests made by FAS or representatives designated by FAS in relation to such reviews.

Monitoring

USDA/FAS, through its authorized representatives, has the right, at all reasonable times, to make site visits to review project accomplishments and management control systems and to provide such technical assistance as may be appropriate. During site visits, USDA/FAS will review recipients' files related to the program.

As part of any monitoring and program evaluation activities, grant recipients must permit USDA/FAS, upon reasonable notice, to review assistance agreement–related records and to interview the organization's staff and clients regarding the program, and to respond in a timely and accurate manner to FAS requests for information relating to the program.

Closeout

Within 120 days after the end of the period of performance, or after an amendment has been issued to close out a grant, whichever comes first, FAS will confirm that the Cooperator has supplied all the required reports and will review the reports for completeness and content. Once the required reports are approved, FAS will prepare a closeout letter that advises the Cooperator that the award has been closed out. The notice will indicate that the agreement's period of performance has ended, specify that any remaining funds will be de–obligated, and provide any additional necessary guidance. The Cooperator is responsible for returning any unused funds to CCC.

G. Awarding Agency Contact Information

Contact and Resource Information

For additional information and assistance regarding this announcement, please contact the following during regular working hours 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Eastern Time: Curt Alt, Senior Director, Program Operations Division, Global Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture *by phone*: (202) 690–4784, or *by email* at Curt.Alt@usda.gov.

H. Additional Information

(1) *Extensions.* Generally, extensions to Cooperator program periods of performance will not be allowed.

(2) *Prior Approvals.* The Cooperator shall not, without the prior written approval of FAS, request reimbursement, incur costs, or obligate funds for any purpose relating to the operation of their Cooperator program or activities prior to the start of the approved program

year. FAS must also approve, in advance, any changes to an agreement. A Cooperator may not conduct a new activity without first obtaining from FAS an approved activity budget for such change. To request approval of such activity budget, the Cooperator shall submit a notification to FAS for prior approval. Such notification shall contain the activity description, the proposed budget, and a justification for the transfer of funds.

(3) *Changes to Activities and Budgets*. Per 7 CFR 1484.39(b), advance approval from FAS is required to increase the funding level for existing, approved activities addressing a single constraint or opportunity by more than $25,000, or 25 percent of the approved funding level, whichever is greater. For significant funding changes below that level, prior notification to FAS is not required, but only if the Cooperator submits a notification explaining the adjustments to FAS no later than 30 calendar days after the change. Minor adjustments to existing, approved activities and/or funding levels do not require notification.

(4) *Program Income.* 7 CFR 1484.38 of the Cooperator program regulations defines program income as gross income earned by the Cooperator that is directly generated by a supported activity or earned as a result of the Federal award during the program year. Program income shall be used by the Cooperator in furtherance of its approved Cooperator program activities in the program year during which the funds are available for obligation by the Cooperator or must be returned to CCC.

(5) *Electronic Signatures.* Consistent with the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (ESIGN Act), USDA/FAS uses and accepts electronic signatures for application and award documents. USDA/FAS will neither solicit nor send physical copies of documents.