Rural Development's Investments in Food Supply Chains

Notice Of Funding Opportunity

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-RD-RBCS-InvestFSC-23

Grants.gov Posting Date: August 9, 2023
Application Due Date: September 8, 2023

PROGRAM SOLICITATION INFORMATION

Funding Opportunity Title: Evaluation of Rural Development's Investments in Food Supply Chains

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-RD-RBCS-InvestFSC-23

Announcement Type: Notice of Funding Opportunity

Assistance Listing Number: 10.890 Rural Development Cooperative Agreement Program

Dates: Completed electronic applications must be submitted through www.grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on September 8, 2023. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Executive Summary: This Notice announces that Rural Development (RD or the Agency) is accepting proposals to evaluate the impact of RD's grants and loan programs on regional food supply chains. This funding opportunity will be administered by the RD Innovation Center, in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA). The Agency is announcing $750,000 in competitive cooperative agreement funds in fiscal year (FY) 2023. The Agency may select one (1) or no Cooperator. RD reserves the right to withhold the awarding of any funds. Applications must receive a minimum score of at least 60 points to be considered. This Notice lists the information needed to submit an application for these funds.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

The application must include the documents in the checklist located below. Failure to submit all required documents will result in an application being deemed ineligible for the grant program. Please review Section 4.2 for more information and details on the required documents and supporting information.

Document	Details
1. SF424 Family of Forms (a) Standard Form 424, "Application for Federal Assistance" (b) Standard Form 424A, "Budget Information—Non-Construction Programs." (c) Standard Form 424B, "Assurances—Non-Construction Programs." (d) Execute Form RD 400–1 "Equal Opportunity Agreement."	Maximum period of performance is 36 months
All applications shall be accompanied by the following supporting documentation in concise written narrative form: (a) Evaluation Plan (b) Staffing Plan (c) Management Plan (d) Alignment of Budget to Workplan (e) Relevant Past Performance	Maximum page length of 20 pages.

Document	Details
Negotiated Indirect Cost Agreement	See Section 4.2.

Tips for Applicants

- To do business with the Federal Government and to submit your application electronically using https://www.grants.gov, you must—
    - Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN);
    - Be registered in https://sam.gov (System for Award Management), the Government's primary registrant database;
    - Provide your UEI number and TIN on your application; and
    - Maintain an active SAM registration with current information throughout the application review period and, if you are awarded a grant, during the project period.
- Register and submit applications early. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE DAY OF THE APPLICATION DEADLINE**.
- Thoroughly read this request for applications and follow all the instructions.
- Thoroughly review the guidelines and policies as outlined in this notice to ensure the application is received and eligible for consideration, and to understand allowable and unallowable costs.
- Apply for the correct grant program.
    - Assistance Listing Number "10.890" and Funding Opportunity Number "USDA-RD-RBCS-InvestFSC-23"
- Make sure you have the most recent copy of Adobe Reader installed on your computer and that it is compatible with https://www.grants.gov software. Grants.gov supports Adobe Reader version 9.0.0 and higher.
- Limit Application File Name Characters (50 or less).
- When uploading attachments, click the "Add Attachments" button (do NOT use the "paperclip" icon in Adobe Reader). Acceptable file types include .doc, .docx, .pdf, .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .gif, .xls, .xlsx, .txt, .ppt, and .pptx. If you would like to submit another file type, please contact the program office first for approval.
- Do not password-protect your documents and make sure all tracked-changes are "accepted."
- Avoid Special Characters in File Names ($, %, &, *, Spanish "ñ", etc.).
- Input the correct UEI number on the SF-424 cover page.
- Review the Grants.gov Applicant User and Registration Guides:
    - http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-faqs.html
    - https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html

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1.0 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

The Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking called on Federal agencies to use the best science and data available for decision-making, and to build more evidence when it does not exist to tackle complex, dynamic public policy challenges. (See Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking | The White House.) Efforts to restore trust in Government can succeed only if Government programs deliver results and do so effectively and equitably. The use of rigorous evidence on what works and investments that build evidence where it is lacking underpin the Federal Government's ability to design and implement programs that are equitable, effective, and accountable. To ensure that the Government delivers on its commitments to all Americans, the Federal Government has an obligation to bring evidence to bear on decision-making and to evaluate what is working, for whom, and under what circumstances.

The United States (U.S.) food and agricultural system is highly concentrated, both geographically and commercially. Most food consumed by Americans is grown on large farms and aggregated, processed, and distributed by a few multinational companies. While the U.S. food system is a highly efficient one, COVID-19 exposed the risks of a centralized system. The crippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food supply chains across the U.S. and the world exposed the risks a highly concentrated food system that has worked to the detriment of the small- and medium-sized farmers who serve local and regional food systems.

While USDA has long invested in local and regional food systems, the pandemic made clear that more needs to be done to withstand future pandemics, cyberattacks, and other threats that have hobbled portions of the food supply system in recent years. In 2022, USDA launched the Food Transformation Initiative (FTI) to create a more distributed and fair food system with fewer steps from farm to fork, provide options for small- and medium-sized producers to create value-added products to sell locally and regionally, and support new economic opportunities and job creation in rural communities.

This evaluation will provide USDA an evidence-based understanding of how and to what extent these programs have achieved their goal of a more resilient food supply chain and created market opportunities for small- and mid-size farmers and independent agricultural businesses up and down the food supply chain. The body of evidence and findings produced through this evaluation will guide the department as it takes these programs into the future.

1.2 STATUTORY AND REGULATORY AUTHORITY

The Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA) oversees USDA's budget, regulatory, and strategic planning processes and helps to ensure that USDA fulfills the requirements under Title 1 of the Evidence Act. Under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law No. 117-328), funds were identified for program evaluations and other evidence-building activities. This program, the Food Supply Chain Program Evaluation, is funded by OBPA in support of a key priority of the administration and to better understand how to create a more resilient and competitive food system in the U.S.

1.3 DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

The terms and conditions provided in this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) are applicable to and for the purposes of this NOFO only. Unless otherwise provided in the award documents, all financial terms not defined herein shall have the meanings as defined by Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).

Cooperative Agreement: Reflects a contractual relationship between USDA and the Cooperator that provides the terms and conditions of the award and the obligations of USDA and the Cooperator.

Formative evaluation: Typically conducted to assess whether a program, policy, or organizational approach—or some aspect of these—is feasible, appropriate, and acceptable before it is fully implemented. Can include process and outcome measures.

Impact evaluation: Estimates and compares outcomes with and without the program, policy, or organization, or aspect thereof, usually seeking to determine whether a causal relationship can be established between the activity and the observed outcomes.

Performance Measurement evaluation: Ongoing monitoring and reporting of program accomplishments, particularly progress toward pre-established goals.

Sector means stakeholders from areas such as business, health, education, and/or workforce; or from organization types such as public, Tribal communities, private, non-profit, and/or philanthropy.

Substantial involvement means when the Cooperator and USDA RD participate together in the management and/or performance of the activity/project during post-award. This collaboration is programmatic in nature and may provide benefits (e.g., technical expertise, knowledge, etc.) that would otherwise be unavailable to the Cooperator.

Commonly used Acronyms:

CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
FY	Fiscal Year
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NICRA	Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
OBPA	Office of Budget and Program Analysis
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
RD	Rural Development
RDCA	Rural Development Cooperative Agreement
SAM	System for Award Management
UEI	Unique Entity Identifier
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
SPOC	Single Point of Contact

1.4 APPLICATION OF AWARDS

The Agency will review, evaluate, and score applications received in response to this notice based on the provisions found in this NOFO. Awards under this NOFO will be made on a competitive basis using specific selection criteria contained in this NOFO. The Agency advises all interested parties that the

applicant bears the full burden in preparing and submitting an application in response to this notice regardless of whether or not the applicant receives funding pursuant to this NOFO program in FY 2023.

2.0 FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Type of Award: Cooperative Agreement

Fiscal Year Funds: FY 2023.

Available Funds: The amount available for this evaluation in FY 2023 is up to $750,000. RD reserves the right to withhold the awarding of any funds. Applications must receive a minimum score of at least 60 points to be considered. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any application that does not achieve the minimum score. This funding opportunity lists the information needed to apply for these funds and announces that RD is accepting FY 2023 applications to support this evaluation.

Award Amount: The Agency may select one or no Cooperator from this funding opportunity. Applicants may not submit more than one application.

Anticipated Award Date: No later than September 30, 2023.

Performance Period: The maximum Period of Performance is 3 years. Applicants should anticipate a Period of Performance as set forth in the Cooperative Agreement between RD and the Cooperator.

Renewal or Supplemental Awards: None.

Type of Assistance Instrument: Form RD 4280-2 -- Financial Assistance Agreement (Cooperative Agreement).

3.0 ELIGIBILTY INFORMATION

3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements stated here and in Section 5.1 by the application deadline. Applications that fail to meet any of these requirements by the application deadline will be deemed ineligible, will not be evaluated further, and will not receive a federal award. Applicants may not submit more than one application.

Organizations eligible to apply include public and private sector institutions with five or more years of experience conducting research on U.S. food systems or evaluations of federally funded programs in support of strengthening food supply chains. Individuals are not eligible to apply. Applicants must demonstrate they have the capacity and resources to carry out the evaluation and complete all tasks and deliverables within the Period of Performance. Applicants must specifically demonstrate past experience and current capacity to design and implement formative, performance, and impact evaluations.

See Section 5.0, Application Review Information, for additional information and an explanation of the scoring process.

Entities are not eligible if they have been debarred or suspended or otherwise excluded from, or ineligible for, participation in federal assistance programs under 2 CFR parts 180 and 417. In addition, an applicant will be considered ineligible for a cooperative agreement due to an outstanding judgment

obtained by the U.S. in a federal court (other than U.S. Tax Court) or if the applicant is delinquent on the payment of federal income taxes or federal debt.

3.2 COST SHARING OR MATCHING

There are no cost sharing or matching requirements associated with this award.

3.3 OTHER

Applications will first be reviewed to determine if applicants meet the eligibility requirements and compliance with the funding restrictions in this notice. If we determine that your application is ineligible, we will discontinue processing it, which means that we will not evaluate it further or score the application. Please see Section 5.1 for evaluation criteria.

4.0 APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

4.1 ADDRESS TO REQUEST APPLICATION PACKAGE

Application information is available at https://www.grants.gov.

4.2 CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

To be considered for funding, an application must contain all of the required elements outlined in this NOFO. Each application must address the applicable scoring criteria described in Section 5.1 of this NOFO.

For an application to be considered complete, the applicant must complete and submit the forms and supporting documentation contained in this section in addition to the written narrative proposal information in Section 5.0.

Each page must be on numbered, letter-sized (8 1⁄2″ × 11″) paper utilizing a white background that has 1″ margins, and the text of the application must be typed, single spaced, black, and in a font no smaller than 12 point.

(1) Applicants must complete and submit the following forms to apply for the Food Supply Chain Program Evaluation cooperative agreement:

(a) Standard Form 424, "Application for Federal Assistance."

(b) Standard Form 424A, "Budget Information—Non-Construction Programs."

(c) Standard Form 424B, "Assurances—Non-Construction Programs."

(d) Execute Form RD 400–1 "Equal Opportunity Agreement."

(2) All applications shall be accompanied by the following supporting documentation in concise written narrative form:

(a) All awards made under this notice are subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 7 CFR part 15, Subpart A (Nondiscrimination in Federally-Assisted Programs of the Department of Agriculture—Effectuation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975.

(b) Evidence of applicant's legal existence and authority in the form of organizational documents such as Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, or Charter.

(c) Evidence of tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service, if applicable.

(d) List of current principals and consultants, including first and last names.

(e) Applicants applying as a small private entity must provide a written self-certification which includes the entity's North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code or industry, number of employees or average annual revenue, and how the applicant meets the U.S. Small Business Administration small business size standards for their industry (https://www.sba.gov/size-standards).

(f) Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, if applicable.

(g) Written Proposal—The written proposal should be assembled into one or more pdf file(s) and should conform to the order in which the Evaluation Criteria are presented in Section 5.1. The completed .pdf file(s) should be uploaded into https://www.grants.gov as an attachment to the application. The maximum limit for the written narrative section is 20 pages. Written narrative submissions exceeding 20 pages may not be considered for evaluation by the scoring panel.

4.3 SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT AND UNIQUE ENTITY IDENTIFIER

(a) At the time of application, each applicant must have an active registration in SAM before submitting its application in accordance with 2 CFR part 25. In order to register in SAM, entities will be required to obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Instructions for obtaining the UEI are available at https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration.

(b) Each applicant must maintain an active SAM registration, with current, accurate and complete information, at all times while it has an active Federal award or an application under consideration by RD.

(c) Each applicant must complete the Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations in SAM.

(d) Each applicant must provide a valid UEI in its application, unless determined exempt under 2 CFR 25.110.

(e) The Agency will not make an award until the applicant has complied with all SAM requirements including providing the UEI. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the Agency is ready to make an award, the Agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

4.4 SUBMISSION DATES AND TIMES

Completed electronic applications must be submitted through https://www.grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on September 8, 2023. The Agency will not solicit or consider new scoring or eligibility information that is submitted after the application deadline. The Agency will not accept incomplete applications. RD also reserves the right to ask applicants for clarifying information and additional verification of assertions in the application.

4.5 INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW

Executive Order (EO) 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs," does not apply to this program.

4.6 FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

The selected Cooperator will be limited to using available funding for purposes authorized under this NOFO. Applicable regulations at 2 CFR part 200 and 400 list the types of expenditures of grant funds that are impermissible. Pre-award costs will not be funded by an award under this NOFO. Award funds cannot be used for construction.

5.0 APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

5.1 CRITERIA

A. General

Proposals should include a detailed narrative of the proposed evaluation plan(s) and methodologies, staffing and management plans, examples of past evaluation work, and cost estimates for each task. Applicants may propose additional evaluation questions and modify the ones listed above if accompanied by a clear justification. USDA welcomes innovative approaches to building evidence and assessing program performance.

The selected evaluation methods shall generate a mix of qualitative and quantitative data in support of the study's findings and recommendations. The methodologies should be clearly described in the Evaluation Plan and documented throughout the life of the evaluation. Proposed sampling methods should produce a statistically significant set of projects and be described clearly for review and approval by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service and OMB.

The Awardee will be the Cooperator and will work with USDA RD and OBPA staff. The proposal should describe cooperation through substantial and measurable involvement by all parties.

Applications will be reviewed for completeness. For an application to be considered complete, the applicant must complete and submit the written narrative proposal information and the required forms contained in Section 4.2 of this NOFO. If we determine that an application is incomplete, we will discontinue processing it, which means that we will not evaluate it further nor provide any scoring information.

B. Scoring Process

If your application is determined to be eligible and complete, we will further evaluate it based on the scoring criteria listed below and in Section 5.2. All applications will be competitively scored and ranked. The minimum score requirement for a cooperative agreement award under this funding opportunity is 60 points.

(1) Number of Awards: The Agency may or may not select a Cooperator from this funding opportunity. Applications must receive a minimum score of at least 60 points to be considered.

(2) Evaluation Criteria: Proposals will be evaluated based only on information provided in the application. Points will be given only for factors that are well documented in the application package and, in the opinion of RD and OBPA, meet the objectives outlines in each of the evaluation criteria. References to websites or publications will not be reviewed. Full documentation and support of application criteria is encouraged.

(3) The entire written narrative proposal includes the following sections in this order:

(a) *Evaluation Plan* – Soundness of Approach (0-40 points). The applicant can receive up to 40 points for the soundness of the evaluation plan, including goals and objectives, questions to be answered, and methods for collecting and analyzing process and performance data. The maximum 40 points for this criterion will be based on the following:

- Description of the evaluation framework and methods for carrying out formative, performance, and impact assessment of the programs.
- Applicants should demonstrate an understanding of the different types of evaluations, their purpose or function, and the deliverables that each type of evaluation offers.
- Description of the qualitative and quantitative methods that may be used for collecting, analyzing, and visualizing the data. Applicants should discuss methods for ensuring the validity and reliability of data collected as part of the evaluation.

(b) *Staffing Plan* – Capacity to Conduct the Evaluation (0-15 points). The applicant can receive up to 15 points for the knowledge, experience, and skill levels of the staff who will conduct the evaluation, analyze the data, and deliver a draft and final report with findings and recommendations. The maximum 15 points for this criterion will be based on the following:

- Demonstration of the ability to commit sufficient staff experienced in disciplines critical to the successful completion of the study objectives, including knowledge of social science methods related to performance measurement and evaluation, statistical analysis, and federal grant-funded programs.
- Description of how staff assignments will be made according to relevant experience and skill levels, demonstrating adequate management review and oversight to ensure timely and high-quality performance on all work.
- Demonstration of the capacity to deliver products that meet evaluation industry standards as established by the Office of Management and Budget (see "Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices" (M-20-12 (whitehouse.gov)) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Program Evaluation Standards - CDC).

(c) *Management Plan* (0 – 15 points) – *Capacity to Manage Evaluation to a Successful Completion.* The applicant may receive up to 15 points for a management plan based on the following elements.

- Description of project tasks and timeframes. Applicants will include a list of major tasks by key personnel, the time period of the tasks, describe substantial involvement with RD and OBPA staff, expected deliverables, and budget amounts associated with these tasks.
- Description of the relationship between staff assignments/expertise and needed skills.
- Description of the relationship of time commitments to anticipated level of effort.
- Description of the adequacy of task scheduling, coordination, and review to assure timely and high-quality performance on all work, and the adequacy of confidentiality protection and security protocols.

(d) *Alignment of budget to workplan* (0 - 10 points). Applicant can receive up to 10 points for successfully aligning budget costs with tasks outlined in the evaluation workplan.

- A detailed budget justification should align with the tasks detailed in the evaluation plan. Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities. Justify project costs including personnel, travel costs, and other direct costs. Statements of work for any subcontractors must be included as part of the applications. (Note: subcontractors must only be used on a limited basis where not more than 49% of the federal award amount requested can be contracted out to provide the proposed assistance).

(e) *Past Performance*. (0-20 points) Relevance to scope and requirements of this project.

- Applicant will provide relevant examples of program evaluations performed within the past seven years. Applicants may provide work samples (e.g., report executive summary, peer-reviewed journal articles, or similar written products) as part of their application. Submissions must represent work of the same or similar the requirements as specified in this NOFO.

5.1.1 TABLE 2. SUMMARY TABLE OF EVALUATION CRITERIA

Description	Maximum Total Points
Evaluation Plan/Soundness of Approach a. Evaluation Plan Framework (Objectives, Methods, and Deliverables). b. Understanding of the types of evaluations needed in this review. c. Methods for ensuring the validity and reliability of data collected.	0 - 40
Staffing Plan a. Ability to commit sufficient staff experienced in disciplines. critical to the successful completion of the evaluation objectives. b. Staff assignments relative to experience and skill levels. c. Key tasks with timeline	0 - 15
Management Plan a. Key tasks and timelines. b. Crosswalk of staff assignments, their expertise and skills, to specific tasks. c. Time commitments and anticipated level of effort. d. Adequacy of oversight to assure timely and high-quality work. e. Adequacy of confidentiality protection and security protocols.	0 - 15
Alignment of Budget to Workplan a. Budget justification in relation to tasks in Evaluation Plan.	0 - 10
Relevant Past Performance a. Relevant examples of program evaluations performed within the past seven years.	0 - 20

5.2 REVIEW SELECTION PROCESSES

A. Evaluation Description

RD is authorized to administer cooperative agreement awards in accordance with 7 U.S.C. 2204b(b)(4). The overall purpose of this evaluation is to provide an evidence-based assessment of the impact of RD's programs on local and regional food supply chains. This review will likely entail a combination of formative, performance, and impact evaluation methods depending on the availability of data and the age of the program. Evaluation work that requires the collection of information from the public will require approval from OMB in accordance with the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act.

Table A provides a list of programs that contribute, all or in part, to RD's food supply chain goals. Programs in Section A.1. are longstanding programs and programs listed in Section A.2 were created more recently as a part of the USDA Food Transformation Initiative (FTI). Programs that partially support food supply chain goals will be identified at the time of the award. RD will share relevant data and other resources, as appropriate, to facilitate the Cooperator's evaluation, including but not limited to research and data analysis conducted on Justice40 Initiative programs. A complete list of USDA's Justice40 Initiative programs can be found here.

Performance/Impact Evaluation. For programs listed in Table A.1 (see below), this review will build a body of evidence of performance, develop a methodology for a potential impact evaluation, and conduct the analysis. This segment of the review will help USDA answer the following questions for each stage of the food supply chain and the RD programs listed in Table 1 (see below).

1. How much has USDA/RD invested for the past five years and through which mechanisms (e.g., loans, grants, loan guarantees, and technical assistance), including investments made during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Using an evidence-based approach, to what extent have the programs met their goals and objectives? What have RD's programs contributed to each stage of the food supply chain?
3. What types and magnitude of outcomes and benefits did the programs generate for producers, processors, aggregators and distributors, and consumers? What types and magnitude of benefits were realized by socially disadvantaged farmers and female, Tribal, and Veteran farmers?
4. To what extent can observed changes in the relevant food supply chains be attributed to RD's investments?

*Formative Evaluation***.** For programs initiated under the FTI (see Table A.2.), this portion of the work will assess program implementation and performance, to the extent possible. Projects involving new construction may not produce benefits or outcomes for two to three years. The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (Public Law 118-5) rescinded all unobligated funds for these programs. Should USDA receive new funding, evidence of performance gathered in this work will inform those decisions.

In addition to the evaluation questions listed above in the Performance/Impact Evaluation section, the formative evaluation should also seek answers to the following questions:

1. Implementation --
    a. How are food supply chain program awardees using their funds and for what purposes?
    b. What challenges, if any, have food supply chain program awardees encountered in the process, both engaging USDA in the application and award processes and the implementation of the projects?
    c. Are there other points of intervention that USDA should consider for improving the food supply chain?

2. Potential and Actual Outcomes/Benefits --
    a. Are there any early indicators that the investments are having, or will have, an effect on the local or regional food supply chain systems?
    b. What indicators could be tracked over time to understand the extent to which an investment in processing capacity has on the food supply chain system?
    c. What factors or set of factors are most likely to contribute to or hinder achieving the goals and objectives of RD's programs?

B. Deliverables

- Evaluation plan and schedule for carrying out the evaluation.
- Draft and Final Reports with recommendations and findings.
- Regional or local food system maps that identify key food and agricultural actors in a food supply chain, their roles and business relationships, and opportunities and constraints that arise in building or expanding a food supply chain. Opportunities and constraints may pertain to regional growing conditions, socio-economic characteristics, and market structure and may change over time, including intentional changes such as through the creation of food value chains.[1]
- Regional or local food system needs assessments to inform future funding requests.
- A descriptive summary and visual representation of the programs in the scope of this evaluation, their goals and objectives, target audiences, key strategies, and intended outcomes.
- Set of descriptive statistics and visual representation for a representative sample of regional food systems, preferably using a geospatial mapping tool that can be used for additional analysis.
- Survey design and analysis.
- Initial draft of Federal Register Notice and Supporting Statements to acquire approval from the OMB to collect information from the public.
- All data collected or generated in the course of this review. Data will be provided to USDA in a format that is accessible to the public, in accordance with the Evidence Act.

Other deliverables specific to the formative evaluation may include:

- Outcome maps that lay out the relevance and viability of the program, its implementation strategies, and potential outcomes. These outcome maps will help illuminate the complexity of regional and local food supply chains to establish performance expectations for the program, anticipated and desired outcomes, and key performance evaluation questions.
- A program logic or theory of change model that takes into consideration the program's stated goals and objectives, the constraints and opportunities identified in the food system maps, and the anticipated and desired outcomes gleaned through the outcome mapping exercise.
- Recommendations as to the evidence needed to determine if and how investments in expanded processing capacity resulted in changes among farmers (producers) and consumers.

[1] See https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/food-value-chain.

Table A. RD Investments in Food Supply Chains			
A.1. Long-Standing Investments (Click on the links below for descriptions of these programs)			
Production	**Processing**	**Aggregation & Distribution**	**Technical Assistance**
Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans & Grants | Rural Development (usda.gov)	Agriculture Innovation Center Program | Rural Development (usda.gov)		Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program | Rural Development (usda.gov)
	Business & Industry Loan Guarantees | Rural Development (usda.gov)		Socially-Disadvantaged Groups Grant | Rural Development (usda.gov)
	Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program | Rural Development (usda.gov)		
	Rural Business Development Grants | Rural Development (usda.gov)		
	Value-Added Producer Grants | Rural Development (usda.gov)		
		Healthy Food Financing Initiative | Rural Development (usda.gov)	
Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program | Rural Development (usda.gov)			
A.2. Newer RD Investments (Click on the links below for descriptions of these programs)			
	Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program | Rural Development		

	(usda.gov)		
	Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program | Rural Development (usda.gov)		

5.3 SELECTION

(1) Incomplete or ineligible applications. Applications that are incomplete or ineligible will not be considered for funding (see Section 6.0 Federal Award Administration Information).

(2) The Reviewers. All eligible applications will be evaluated by an Application Review Panel using the criteria described in Section 5.0 of this notice. Panel members will be appointed by RD and will be qualified to evaluate the applications based on the type of work proposed by the applicant.

(3) Select up to one (1) applicant to serve as Cooperator. The Agency reserves the right not to select a Cooperator under this notice.

(4) Appeal Request. The applicant will be notified in writing regarding the reason(s) for any adverse decisions and will be provided a description of the options for review.

(5) Cooperative Agreement. Applicant selected for funding will be required to sign a Financial Assistance Agreement (Form RD 4280-2) (the Cooperative Agreement) in a form suitable to the Agency, which outlines the terms and conditions of the award. Pursuant to the Cooperative Agreement, funds will be released over the course of the period of performance in the form of a reimbursement for the performance of eligible, approved activities. The Cooperative Agreement also includes reporting requirements which, if not met, may result in a delay in reimbursement, disallowance of expenses, or a suspension of the Cooperative Agreement.

(6) Reimbursement.

(a) SF–270, ‘‘Request for Advance or Reimbursement,’’ will be completed by the Cooperator and submitted to RD along with supporting documentation.

(b) Upon receipt of a properly completed SF–270, payment will ordinarily be made within 30 days.

(c) Any change in the scope of the project, budget adjustments of more than 10 percent of the total budget, or any other significant change in the project must be reported to and approved by the approving official. Any change not approved may be cause for termination of the Cooperative Agreement.

6.0 FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

6.1 FEDERAL AWARD NOTICES

A. Federal Award Notices

(1) The successful applicant will be notified in writing by the Agency with a Letter of Conditions (LOC). The LOC is a notice of selection and does not indicate that an award has been approved, nor is it an authorization to begin performance on the award. While there may be special conditions that apply on a case-by-case basis, the conditions as stated in Section 6.2 (Administrative and National Policy Requirements) are standard for all successful applicants.

(2) Once the conditions described in the LOC have been met, the award will be approved through the execution of Form RD 4280–2 in conjunction with the Rural Development Cooperative Agreement (RDCA) Program Attachment. If an applicant is unable to meet the conditions of the award within 90 calendar days, the award will be withdrawn.

6.2 ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Applications should be prepared in conformance with departmental and other applicable regulations including 2 CFR parts 180, 182, 200, 400 and 421, and any successor regulations.

(1) The following requirements apply to the Cooperator selected for this program:

(a) Complete Form RD 1942–46, ‘‘Letter of Intent to Meet Conditions.’’

(b) Complete Form RD 1940–1, ‘‘Request for Obligations of Funds.’’

(c) Complete FMMI Vendor Code Request Form.

(d) Provide a copy of your organization’s Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, if applicable.

(f) Certify that you will comply with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 and report information about subawards and executive compensation.

(g) Certify that the U.S. has not obtained an outstanding judgement against your organization in a Federal Court (other than in the United States Tax Court).

(h) Execute Form SF–424B, ‘‘Assurances—Non-Construction Programs.’’

(i) Execute Form SF–LLL, ‘‘Disclosure of Lobbying Activities,’’ if applicable, or certify that your organization does not lobby.

(2) The applicant must provide evidence of compliance with other federal statutes, including, but not limited to, the following:

(a) Debarment and suspension information as required in accordance with 2 CFR part 417 (Non-procurement Debarment and Suspension) supplemented by 2 CFR part 180, if applicable. The information required under section heading: ‘‘What information must I provide before entering into a covered transaction with a Federal agency?’’ located at 2 CFR 180.335 is part of OMB’s Guidance for Grants and Agreements concerning Government-wide Debarment and Suspension.

(b) All of your organization’s known workplaces by including the actual addresses of buildings (or parts of buildings) or other sites where work under the award takes place. Workplace identification is required under the drug-free workplace requirements in Subpart B of 2 CFR part 421, which adopts the Governmentwide implementation (2 CFR part 182) of the Drug-Free Workplace Act.

(c) 2 CFR parts 200 and 400 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards).

(d) 2 CFR part 182 (Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)) and 2 CFR part 421 (Requirements for Drug Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)).

(e) Executive Order 13166, ‘‘Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency.’’ For information on limited English proficiency and agency-specific guidance, go to https://www.lep.gov.

(3) The following forms for acceptance of a federal award are now collected through your registration or annual recertification in https://sam.gov in the Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations section:

- Form RD 400–4, “Assurance Agreement.”
- Form AD–1047, “Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters-Primary Covered Transactions.”
- Form AD–1048, “Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion. Lower Tier Covered Transactions.”
- Form AD–1049, “Certification Regarding Drug-Free Workplace Requirements (Grants).”
- Form AD–3031, “Assurance Regarding Felony Conviction or Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants.”

6.3 REPORTING

The Cooperator shall constantly monitor performance to ensure that time schedules are being met, projected work by time periods are being accomplished, and other performance objectives are being achieved. Further, all Cooperators must submit an audit or financial information covering the defined period of performance as outlined in this Notice of Funding Opportunity and the Cooperative Agreement.

(1) SF–PPR “Performance Progress Report,” must be submitted quarterly based on the following time periods: January 1—March 31, April 1—June 30, July 1—September 30, and October 1— December 31. Quarterly reports are due within 30 calendar days of the end of the reporting period. A final report is due within 90 calendar days of the completion of the project or the end of the period of performance, whichever comes first. Both quarterly and final performance reports must be submitted electronically to RD.

(2) Financial Report: Form SF–425, “Federal Financial Report” must be submitted quarterly based on the following time periods: January 1— March 31, April 1—June 30, July 1— September 30, October 1— December 31. Quarterly reports are due within 30 calendar days of the end of the reporting period. A final report is due within 90 calendar days of the completion of the project or the end of the period of performance, whichever comes first. Both quarterly and final reports must be submitted electronically to RD.

(3) Report Suitable for Public Distribution: A report suitable for public distribution that describes the accomplishments of the project is due within 90 calendar days of the completion of the project. There is no format prescribed for this report, but it is expected that it will be 1–2 pages in length and describe the project in such a way that a member of the public not familiar with the project would gain an understanding of the impact of the project.

(4) Draft and Final Summary Report of Findings and Recommendations. A draft report will be submitted within 60 days of the completion of the evaluation and related analysis and a final report will be submitted within 90 days of the completion of the evaluation.

7.0 FEDERAL AWARD AGENCY CONTACTS

For further information or questions contact: Kasey Martin via email at: kasey.martin@usda.gov. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication should contact the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

8.0 OTHER INFORMATION

8.1 PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA), the information collection reporting and recordkeeping requirements as covered in this notice are exempt because the requirements are not imposed on 10 or more people, as defined at 44 U.S.C. 3502(3)(A)(i)).

RD has concluded that the reporting requirements contained in this NOFO will involve less than 10 persons and do not require approval under the provisions of the PRA.

8.2 NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

An awardee selected under this notice is subject to the requirements of 7 CFR part 1970. However, an award involving no land disturbance as contemplated by this notice is classified as a Categorical Exclusion pursuant to 7 CFR 1970.53 and usually does not require any additional documentation.

8.3 FEDERAL FUNDING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY ACT

All applicants, in accordance with 2 CFR part 25, must be registered in SAM and have a UEI number as stated in Section D.3 of this notice. The Cooperator will be required to report information about first-tier sub-awards and executive total compensation in accordance with 2 CFR part 170.

8.4 CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Any award made under this notice is subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as required by the USDA (7 CFR Part 15 Subpart A -- Nondiscrimination in Federally-Assisted Programs of the Department of Agriculture - Effectuation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, Title IX, Executive Order 13166 (Limited English Proficiency), Executive Order 11246, and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974.

8.5 OTHER INFORMATION

a. *Indirect Costs.* Organizations that have an active Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with the Federal Government must use the rate identified in the NICRA to determine the indirect costs to be charged to this funding. Current NICRAs must be uploaded under Other Attachments (listed as an Optional Form) in the https://www.grants.gov Opportunity Application Package. Entities without a NICRA may use a de minimis rate of up to 10 percent indirect costs rate. (Refer to 2 CFR 200.414 for additional information regarding indirect costs).

b. Evaluation Standards. All evaluation work shall be aligned with the standards described in https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/M-20-12.pdfOMB M-20-12 (whitehouse.gov)) and the CDC standards (Program Evaluation Standards - CDC) and reflect a shared commitment to conducting rigorous, relevant evaluations and to using evidence from evaluations to

inform policy and practice. In addition, the overall approach, engagement strategy, study design, and research methods should reflect the principles of culturally responsive evaluations.

c. *Open Data Act Compliance.* Members of the evaluation team will be required to obtain an Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) or similar persistent identifier. OBPA will work with the USDA National Agriculture Library to obtain a digital object identifier (DOI) to be associated with all data sets and documents. All data acquired through the course of this evaluation will be returned to OBPA in a format that facilitates public access.

8.6 NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

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

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language) should contact the responsible Mission Area, agency, staff office or the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation.

The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

(1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

(2) Fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

(3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov

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