

**NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY**  
**Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program**

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## **1. Basic Information**

### **1.1 Executive Summary**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, announces this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to support the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) program by issuing new awards. This opportunity is available to U.S. entities to provide funding for projects that seek to remove, resolve, or mitigate existing or potential sanitary, phytosanitary, or technical barriers that prohibit or threaten the export of U.S. specialty crops.

### **1.2 Federal Agency Name**

United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA/FAS)

### **1.3 Funding Opportunity Title**

2027 Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops

### **1.4 Announcement Type**

New Announcement

### **1.5 Funding Opportunity Number**

USDA-FAS-TASC-2027

### **1.6 Assistance Listing Number**

10.604 Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops

### **1.7 Funding Details**

Total Available Federal Funding: Anticipated to be \$9 million. The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, as extended, provided \$9 million in funding for each of the fiscal years through FY 2026. Congress has not yet determined funding levels for FY 2027.

Anticipated Number of Awards: 20 awards.

USDA/FAS reserves the right to make additional awards under this opportunity if additional funding becomes available after the original selections are made, consistent with agency policy and guidance.

### **1.8 Key Dates**

Deadline for Question Submission: July 31, 2026

Application Submission Deadline: FAS will track the time and date of receipt of all applications. The initial application submission deadline is 5 p.m. Eastern Time, Friday, August 14, 2026. All applications received by the initial application submission deadline will be considered for funding in the initial allocation tranche. Applications will continue to be accepted after the initial application submission deadline and will be considered for funding in the order received on the following dates as long as funding remains available: Tranche II deadline - December 31, 2026; Tranche III deadline - March 31, 2027; Tranche IV deadline - June 30, 2027. No applications will be accepted after June 30, 2027.

## 1.9 Agency Contact Information

For all inquiries, contact:

Name: Curt Alt

Email Address: [curt.alt@usda.gov](mailto:curt.alt@usda.gov)

Phone Number: (202) 690-4784

Hours of Operation: M-F, 7:30 am - 4:00 pm Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)

## 2. Eligibility

### 2.1 Eligible Applicants

Any United States private or government entity with a demonstrated role or interest in exporting U.S. agricultural specialty crops. Government organizations consist of Federal, State, and local agencies. Private organizations may include non-profit trade associations, universities, agricultural cooperatives, state regional trade groups, and private companies. Foreign organizations, whether government or private, may participate as subrecipients or in-kind partners for activities carried out by eligible organizations, but are not eligible as recipients under the program.

All applicants must have an active registration in the U.S. Government System for Award Management ([www.sam.gov](http://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. More information about SAM.gov registration can be found in [Section 9, Other Information](#).

### 2.2 Eligibility Threshold Criteria

*Eligible Commodities:* The TASC program is only open to U.S. specialty crops. For the purposes of the TASC program, specialty crops are defined as most cultivated plants, or the products thereof, produced in the U.S. except for wheat, feed grains, oilseeds, cotton, rice, peanuts, sugar, and tobacco. Applications may cover more than one U.S. specialty crop.

*Eligible Markets:* Applications may target any foreign market (unless off limits for funding due to U.S. sanctions or other restrictions), including single countries or reasonable regional groupings of countries.

*Eligible Activities:* To be eligible for consideration, TASC applications must:

1. Identify and address an existing or potential sanitary, phytosanitary, or technical barrier that prohibits or threatens the export of commercially available U.S. specialty crops; and
2. Demonstrate how the proposed activities will remove, resolve, or mitigate the identified existing or potential sanitary, phytosanitary, or technical barrier and will benefit an entire industry rather than a specific company or brand.

*Ineligible Activities:* TASC funding can only be used for generic activities. For-profit entities cannot use program funds to conduct private business, promote private self-interests, supplement the costs of normal sales activities, or promote their own products or services beyond specific uses approved by FAS. TASC funds cannot be used to support normal operating costs of

individual organizations, including government organizations, nor as a source to recover pre-award costs or prior expenses from previous or ongoing projects. Costs related to market research, advertising, or other promotional activities are not eligible for reimbursement. FAS will also not reimburse unreasonable expenditures or expenditures made prior to approval of an application.

*Limits on Applications:* TASC funds awarded to Federal government agencies must be expended or otherwise obligated by close of business September 30, 2027. All other eligible entities may request funding for up to five years in a single application. Multi-year funding may, at FAS' discretion, be provided one year at a time with commitments beyond the first year subject to interim evaluations and funding availability.

*Funding Limits:* Funding per award under TASC is limited to a maximum of \$500,000. Applications that request more than \$500,000 in total funding will not be considered.

### **2.3 Substantial Compliance**

All applications will be reviewed for eligibility and must meet the eligibility requirements described above. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified within 15 calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

To be deemed eligible, applications must substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in [Section 4, Application Contents and Format](#), of this solicitation.

### **2.4 Evidence of Eligibility**

Applicants are responsible for including documentation, if necessary, establishing that they meet the stated eligibility requirements, when it is not immediately obvious. Applicants should not presume that USDA/FAS is sufficiently familiar with their organization, and USDA/FAS will not make assumptions as to the nature of an applicant's organization.

### **2.5 Funding Restrictions**

Generally, funds may not be used in any manner that is prohibited by applicable regulations, including [7 CFR Part 1487](#), [2 CFR Part 200](#), and [2 CFR Part 400](#). 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.

For example, agreement funds and other 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 acting as an agent of the applicant in any capacity (paid or unpaid) on any proposal submitted under this program. Also, federal funds may not be used to sue the Federal Government or any other government entity.

Indirect costs are eligible for reimbursement under this program. In general, costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective but not readily assignable to specific awards, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved, are considered indirect

costs. These may include facilities not specific to individual projects, enterprise-wide services such as IT, and enterprise management. Pursuant to USDA Departmental Regulation DR2255-001, a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with a cognizant U.S. Government agency will be honored, except where prohibited by statute.

## **2.6 Multiple Applications**

Applicants may submit more than one application, and applicants with previously approved TASC awards may apply for additional awards. However, the maximum number of active awards that a single TASC recipient can have underway at any given time is five.

## **2.7 Cost Share/Match Requirement**

Cost share is required for all applicants except for Federal, state, or local government agencies. Apart from Federal, state, or local government agencies, all other applications must include a recipient cost share element equal to at least 10 percent of the requested funds. Cost share may be actual cash invested or in-kind contributions to the project. Applications that do not meet this requirement will not be considered.

## **3. Program Description**

The TASC program is designed to assist U.S. organizations by providing funding for projects that seek to remove, resolve, or mitigate existing or potential sanitary, phytosanitary, or technical barriers that prohibit or threaten the export of U.S. specialty crops.

### **3.1 Authorizing Statutes and Regulations**

Section 203(e) of the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978 ([7 USC 5623\(e\)](#)), as amended.

### **3.2 Type of Assistance Instrument**

USDA/FAS anticipates that Grant Agreements 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 progress under the project.

## **4. Application Contents and Format**

### **4.1 Complete Application Package**

TASC applications must be submitted through the Unified Export Strategy (UES) system and must contain the following information:

- (1) Organizational information, including:
  - (i) Organization's name, address, contact person, and Unique Entity Identifier (UEI);
  - (ii) A description of the organization and its membership;
  - (iii) A discussion of any collaborating organizations; and
  - (iv) A description of the organization's experience in technical assistance projects, including activities involved and project results.

- (2) The project's targeted market and promoted commodity.
- (3) Constraints and Performance Measures:
  - (i) A clear description of the existing or potential sanitary, phytosanitary, or technical trade barrier that is being addressed in the proposal; and
  - (ii) Applicants must describe the performance measures that will be used to measure the success of the project and identify results. Each indicator must include a baseline value and projected targets, and applicants should provide a brief description for how the indicator data will be collected, who on the project team will collect the data, and when the data will be collected.
- (4) Proposal details, including:
  - (i) Project title;
  - (ii) Funding request by year;
  - (iii) Cost share information indicating all financial and in-kind support to the proposed project, and the resources to be contributed by each entity that will contribute to the project's implementation. This must include the minimum 10 percent pledge from the entity that submitted the application but may additionally include cost share from private industry entities, host governments, foreign third parties, or Federal agencies. Support may include cash, goods, and services.
  - (iv) Discussion of the project goals, including the beginning and ending dates for the proposed project, a description of the activities planned to address the export barrier (including a detailed work plan for each with sequencing and timeframes, outputs and results, and milestones), how those activities will remove, resolve, or mitigate the identified barrier, and the expected benefits to the represented industry;
  - (v) Market assessment and background for the targeted market(s), including a discussion of the competitiveness of the U.S. product in the market and a U.S. export trade analysis that demonstrates a link between the need for the TASC intervention and the potential to maintain or increase trade;
  - (vi) Discussion of how the proposal fits into the applicant organization's short and long term strategy;
  - (vii) Trade impact from the activity (including the impact on market retention, market access, and market expansion) and the viability of long-term commercial sales to the targeted market;
  - (viii) Explanation as to what specifically could not be accomplished without federal funding assistance and why participating organization(s) are unlikely to undertake activities without such assistance; and
  - (ix) Information on similar projects that are/or have been conducted in the market.
- (5) For each proposed activity, a detailed budget request and description, including the applicant's required cost share, must be provided. Detailed cost calculations and justifications for each budget line item must be provided, and all line items should be described in sufficient detail to enable FAS to determine that the costs are reasonable and allowable for the project.
  - (i) If indirect costs are included in the budget, attach a copy of the latest indirect cost rate agreement negotiated with a cognizant federal agency. If a negotiated indirect cost agreement does not exist, please attach a description

of the basis for the indirect cost calculation. If electing to utilize the de minimis rate, consistent with [2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#), please include a statement of election.

#### **4.2 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.

#### **4.3 Proprietary Information**

Applicants should generally refrain from including the details of proprietary information in applications. In cases where, in the applicant's judgement, the inclusion of proprietary information is essential to application review and scoring, the applicant should clearly indicate information it wishes to designate as proprietary.

#### **4.4 Other Application Information**

Successful applicants must submit the following information after USDA/FAS notification of our intent to make a Federal award, but prior to a Federal award, if the applicant request for funding or the intended award amount is over \$100,000:

- [Grants.gov Lobbying Form](#)
- [Standard Form SF-LLL](#), Disclosure of Lobbying Activities, if applicable to the applicant

### **5. Submission Requirements and Deadlines**

#### **5.1 Address to Request Application Package**

This NOFO contains all information required to submit a complete application package.

#### **5.2 Unique Entity ID and System for Award Management (SAM)**

Each applicant must:

- (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application;
- (ii) Provide a valid unique entity ID in its application; and
- (iii) Continue to maintain an active registration in SAM with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal agency.

#### **5.3 Submission Instructions**

TASC applications must be submitted to USDA/FAS through the web-based UES system. The UES system is accessible at <https://apps.fas.usda.gov/ues2>. All required information and any supplemental documents must be included in the UES application. FAS will not review documents, attachments, exhibits, etc. provided outside of the UES, and applications submitted outside of the UES will not be considered. Applicants needing help or access to the UES should email the UES team at [uesadmin@usda.gov](mailto:uesadmin@usda.gov) for assistance.

USDA-managed computer systems require applicants to have an identity-proofed account through the [login.gov](#) platform, and in some cases may require at least two persons. Identity-proofing and subsequent registration with any USDA-managed computer system may take

several days, and applicants who do not already have system access should begin the registration process immediately, even if they are unsure they will apply to this funding opportunity.

#### **5.4 Submission Dates and Times**

Application Submission Deadline: FAS will track the time and date of receipt of all applications. The initial application submission deadline is 5 p.m. Eastern Time, Friday, August 14, 2026. All applications received by the initial application submission deadline will be considered for funding in the initial allocation tranche. Applications will continue to be accepted after the initial application submission deadline and will be considered for funding in the order received on the following dates as long as funding remains available: Tranche II deadline - December 31, 2026; Tranche III deadline - March 31, 2027; Tranche IV deadline - June 30, 2027. No applications will be accepted after June 30, 2027.

#### **5.5 Intergovernmental Review**

Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, may be applicable to awards resulting from this announcement. 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 [click here](#).

### **6. Application Review Information**

USDA/FAS will, subject to the availability of funds, approve those applications that it considers to best meet the objectives outlined in this announcement.

#### **6.1 Eligibility Threshold Review**

*Eligibility Threshold Review (Phase 1):* In Phase 1 of the review, USDA/FAS will conduct an eligibility threshold review of all applications submitted to determine that:

- The applicant is eligible, as defined in [Section 2, Eligibility](#); and
- The application was submitted by the application submission deadline as specified in [Section 5, Submission Requirements](#); and
- The applicant submitted a complete application, including all required forms and documents, as defined in [Section 4.1, Complete Application Package](#).

Applications determined to be ineligible will receive no further consideration and will not be considered for funding. If an application is determined to be ineligible, USDA/FAS will notify the applicant, usually within 15 business days of the application submission deadline. An applicant that feels such a determination was made in error may request reconsideration, highlighting evidence supporting their claim, by email to the program officer(s) listed in [Section 1.9, Agency Contact Information](#), within 3 business days of notification.

Applications that are deemed eligible and complete will move on to the Phase 2 Agency review.

#### **6.2 Review Criteria**

*Agency Review (Phase 2):* A TASC review committee comprised of representatives from FAS Program Areas will review each eligible application and will score and recommend approval for each application using the following criteria, with the numbers in parenthesis indicating the weights attached to each criterion:

- The nature of the specific export barrier or potential export barrier and the extent to which the project is likely to successfully remove, resolve, or mitigate that barrier (20 points);
- The potential trade impact of the proposed project on market retention, market access, and market expansion, including the potential for expanding commercial sales in the targeted market (15 points);
- The completeness and viability of the application. Among other things, this will include the cost of the project and the amount of other resources dedicated to the project, including cash, goods, and services of the U.S. industry and foreign third parties (20 points);
- The ability of the organization to provide experienced staff with the requisite technical and trade experience to execute the project (10 points);
- The extent to which the project is targeted to a market in which the United States is generally competitive (10 points);
- The degree to which time is essential to addressing specific export barriers (5 points);
- The nature of the applicant organization, with a greater weight given to those organizations with the broadest base of producer representation (10 points); and
- The effectiveness of the performance measures and potential of the performance measures to measure project results (10 points).

### **6.3 Review and Selection Process**

*Development of Funding Recommendations (Phase 3):* In this phase of the review, a combined average score for each of the applications will be calculated from the individual scores provided by the TASC review committee members. The applications will be ranked highest to lowest by combined score, and the available funding will be allocated to the applications in such order until all applications are funded or until the available funding is exhausted. Applications that receive an average score of less than 70 points will not be considered for funding. In addition to the scores, FAS may also solicit and consider feedback on the applications from appropriate overseas Posts and other U.S. government subject area experts when determining funding recommendations.

*Final Review and Allocation Decision Making (Phase 4):* 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 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.

### **6.4 Risk Review**

Prior to making a Federal award, the Federal awarding agency is required by [2 CFR 200.206](#), [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 award; (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 \$350,000, the Federal agency must review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the responsibility/qualification records available in SAM.gov ([41 USC 2313](#)).

- An applicant can review and comment on any information in the responsibility/qualification records available in SAM.gov.
- Before making decisions in the risk review required by [2 CFR 200.206](#), the Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant along with information available in the responsibility/qualification records in SAM.gov.

## **7. Award Notices**

Applicants will be notified of the status of their application/award by email. Notification to successful applicants is not authorization to proceed, and such notification should be construed as provisional until an award document has been signed by authorized officials of USDA/FAS and the recipient.

Award documents will be transmitted by email to the individuals or offices who submitted them, or to those persons or offices that USDA/FAS believes, to the best of its information, are proper. The applicant is recommended to ensure that the agency is provided with the correct point(s) of contact.

## **8. Post-Award Requirements and Administration**

### **8.1 Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

All successful applicants are required to comply with the applicable General Terms and Conditions, which can be found at [https://fas.usda.gov/grants/general\\_terms\\_and\\_conditions](https://fas.usda.gov/grants/general_terms_and_conditions). 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 1.9, Agency Contact Information](#).

Before accepting an award, the applicant should carefully read all award documents 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.

### **8.2 Reporting**

TASC recipients must provide interim and final performance and financial reports as specified by the terms and conditions of their award. Each report, whether interim or final, must evaluate the progress of the TASC project using the performance measures approved in the written agreement and provide an accounting of all project expenditures by cost category and actual contributions made to the project by the recipient and all other participating entities. Unusual deviations from activity budget amounts or lagging progress on performance measures should be noted and explained. All reports must be submitted in the UES.

#### 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](#), should they be selected for funding.

#### Closeout

Within 90 days after the agreement completion date, or after an amendment has been issued to close out a grant, whichever comes first, FAS will confirm that the recipient has provided all of 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 recipient of the award closeout procedures. The notice will indicate that the period of performance has closed, note that any remaining funds will be de-obligated, and address any additional closeout requirements. Records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the final reports are submitted.

### **8.3 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 required. During site visits, USDA/FAS will review recipients' files related to the program.

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

### **8.4 Conflict of Interest**

The applicant's Conflict of Interest (COI) Point of Contact as defined in USDA/FAS Conflict of Interest Policy must notify the USDA/FAS contact identified in [Section 1.9, Agency Contact Information](#), 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 a USDA/FAS employee reviewed and commented on or drafted all or part of an applicant's application. 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.

### **8.5 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.

## **9. Other Information**

### **9.1 Extensions**

Extensions to this program are allowed. Recipients may request a no-cost extension to complete all project activities. The request must be submitted at least 60 days prior to the expiration of the performance period and must include a justification for why the extension is necessary and how the extension would effectively support the program's purpose. Requests for extensions are subject to review and approval by FAS.

### **9.2 No Awards**

USDA/FAS reserves the right to make no awards under this competition.

### **9.3 SAM.gov Registration Instructions**

Organizations applying for 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](#)<sup>1</sup> to complete your SAM.gov registration. SAM.gov registration is FREE. The process for entity registrations includes several steps and validations and is not complete until the registration is shown as Active. Please review the [Entity Registration Checklist](#) 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.

Organizations should ensure that their SAM.gov registration includes a current e-Business (EBiz) point of contact name and email address. The EBiz point of contact is critical for Grants.gov Registration and system functionality.

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<sup>1</sup> 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, visit <http://login.gov/help>.

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

#### **9.4 Faith-Based Organizations**

(i) Faith-based organizations may apply for an award on the same basis as any other organization, as set forth at, and subject to the protections and requirements of, [7 CFR part 16](#) and any applicable constitutional and statutory requirements, including [42 U.S.C. 2000bb](#) et seq. USDA/FAS will not, in the selection of recipients, discriminate for or against an organization on the basis of the organization's religious character, motives, or affiliation, or lack thereof, or on the basis of conduct that would not be considered grounds to favor or disfavor a similarly situated secular organization.

(ii) A faith-based organization that participates in this program will retain its independence from the Government and may continue to carry out its mission consistent with religious freedom and conscience protections in Federal law. Religious accommodations may also be sought under many of these religious freedom and conscience protection laws.

(iii) A faith-based organization may not use direct Federal financial assistance from USDA/FAS to support or engage in any explicitly religious activities except when consistent with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and any other applicable requirements. An organization receiving Federal financial assistance also may not, in providing services funded by USDA/FAS, or in their outreach activities related to such services, discriminate against a program beneficiary or prospective program beneficiary on the basis of religion, a religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or participate in a religious practice.