

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Strengthening Agricultural Systems

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY)
FY 2025 and FY 2026

APPLICATION DEADLINES: March 26, 2026
April 23, 2026

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING: \$140,000,000

AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL AWARD RANGE: \$1,000,000 – 10,000,000

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-AFRI-011677

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.310

LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: February 26, 2026

ANNOUNCEMENT
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Agriculture and Food and Research Initiative (AFRI) Strengthening Agricultural Systems (SAS) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.310.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Letter of Intent:	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, February 26, 2026
Application Deadlines:	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, March 26, 2026 5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, April 23, 2026
Applicant Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice <i>(NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)</i>

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

- Solving the most pressing challenges they face.
- Protecting America’s food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security.
- Supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers.
- Expanding and developing domestic markets.
- Training the next generation of agriculturalists.; and
- Fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

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

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

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

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer

service. NIFA considers comments to the extent possible when developing NOFOs and uses comments to help meet the requirements of Section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 ([7 U.S.C. 7613\(c\)\(2\)](#)). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@usda.gov. Please use the following subject line: Response to the AFRI SAS NOFO.

Centers of Excellence. Applicants are encouraged to visit the NIFA's [Centers of Excellence \(COE\)](#) webpage for information on the COE designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs offering COE opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

AFRI is America's flagship competitive grants program that provides funding for fundamental and applied research, education, and extension projects in the food and agricultural sciences. Within AFRI, the long-term purpose of the SAS Program is to help transform the U.S. food and agricultural system to increase agricultural production while enhancing farmer prosperity. Achieving this goal will require transdisciplinary approaches to address current and future food and agricultural challenges within the context of the economic viability of farm operations, quality of life for farmers and society as a whole, and the most efficient use of resources.

The amount available for programs included in the FY 2026 AFRI SAS NOFO is approximately \$140 million for awards ranging from a minimum request of \$1 million to a maximum of \$10 million each.

In FY 2026, this NOFO solicits proposals for Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP) and Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) Strengthening Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP) Grants. See [Part I § C](#) for grant and project types solicited and [Part II § C](#) for a detailed description of each individual grant type and project type.

Applications from and collaborations with institutions eligible for Strengthening Grants are welcome. More information is available on the [AFRI FASE and Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research \(EPSCoR\) page](#).

New Information

1. Prospective applicants are requested to email a **Letter of Intent** to submit an application by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on **Thursday, February 26, 2026**, to “AFRI-SAS@usda.gov.” This notification is **optional** and will be used to plan for the expertise required for the review process. The information provided will not be used to screen for project appropriateness, applicant eligibility, or in review of a subsequent application. NIFA will not provide feedback on the letter. (See [Part IV](#) for additional details).
2. Previous AFRI award outcomes are required if the Project Director (PD) on the current application has previously received an AFRI award from NIFA (e.g., AFRI Challenge Area Grant, National Artificial Intelligence Research Institutes Grant, AFRI SAS Grant, etc. excluding Conference and Equipment Grants) and is listed as the PD on the prior award(s) with start date(s) within five years prior to the submission deadline for this program. Provide the following in the Project Narrative: 1) award number(s) and 2) significant outcome(s) from each award addressing stakeholder needs beyond the life of the project (maximum of 300 words per award).
3. Mentoring plan instructions have been revised and important details can be found at “FY 2026 Strengthening Agricultural Systems NOFO Additional Information for Part IV, C” on the [AFRI Resources](#) webpage.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Section 2(b) of the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act (hereafter referred to as the Act) ([7 U.S.C. 3157](#)), as amended, authorizes the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), a competitive grant program to provide funding for fundamental and applied research, education, and extension to address food and agricultural sciences in the following six priority areas:

1. Plant health and production and plant products;
2. Animal health and production and animal products;
3. Food safety, nutrition, and health;
4. Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment;
5. Agriculture systems and technology; and
6. Agriculture economics and rural communities.

To the maximum extent practicable, NIFA, in coordination with the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE), will make grants for high priority research, education, and extension, taking into consideration, when available, the determinations made by the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) pursuant to the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act ([7 U.S.C. 3157](#)). The Secretary delegates the authority to the Under Secretary in [7 CFR 2.21](#), and the Under Secretary delegates that authority to NIFA.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of AFRI is to invest in research, education, and extension projects that will help farmers, ranchers, foresters, and other agricultural producers address key problems of local, regional, and national importance in sustaining food and agricultural systems. These include farm and ranch production efficiency, profitability, and sustainability; domestic biofuels and bio-based products; forestry; aquaculture; rural communities and entrepreneurship; human nutrition; mitigating impacts of biotic and abiotic constraints on food production; food safety; physical and social sciences; prevention of agricultural pests and diseases; and genetic improvement of plants and animals. In addition, the economic sustainability of food systems is an overarching priority for the projects funded in response to this NOFO; therefore, projects focusing on plant or animal species or commodities that are important to small- or medium-sized farms or ranches are also welcome. Through this support, AFRI advances knowledge in both fundamental and applied sciences important to agriculture. Additionally, AFRI supports work in education and extension activities that deliver science-based knowledge to end users, allowing them to make informed, practical decisions. The AFRI SAS NOFO provides funding for fully integrated extension, education, and research projects through a CAP grant type. CAP grants support large-scale projects and coordinate activities among academic, government, state, regional, nongovernmental, and private sector institutions. The long-term goal of the SAS program is to transform the U.S. food and agricultural systems by increasing agricultural production and optimizing its financial and human capital gains. Achieving this goal requires systems and transdisciplinary approaches to address current and future challenges in food and agriculture.

Background

AFRI is NIFA's flagship competitive grants portfolio for food and agricultural sciences, and funding is offered through the Foundational and Applied Science, Strengthening Agricultural Systems, and Education and Workforce Development NOFOs for addressing critical societal issues.

For a program informational webinar please visit the [NIFA calendar](#) for dates, event registration, and link. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in any of the informational webinars listed, please contact the event host listed no later than 10 days prior to the event.

C. Program Area Description

NIFA is soliciting applications under two Program Area Priorities:

1. Program Code: A9201 - Strengthening Agricultural Systems
2. Program Code: A9231 - Artificial Intelligence for K-12 Food and Agricultural Sciences

Applicants **must** explicitly identify and specify the **Program Code** and the **SAS Program Area Priority** they intend to address within the summary/abstract and project narrative. All projects must demonstrate direct and/or indirect benefit to farmers, ranchers, producers, and forest landowners.

1. Strengthening Agricultural Systems (Program Code A9201)

The SAS program is seeking projects that support at least one of the following sub-priorities:

- New Uses and Expanding Markets for Agriculture and Forestry Products
- Solutions to Pests and Diseases of Plants or Animals
- Combating Food and Diet-Related Chronic Diseases

Applicants to this program area priority must address one or more sub-priorities aligned with USDA priorities in putting American farmers, ranchers, producers, and foresters first.

Projects responding to these areas, as well as developing and implementing advanced solutions in Artificial Intelligence (AI), mechanization, or automation for use in food and agriculture systems are encouraged.

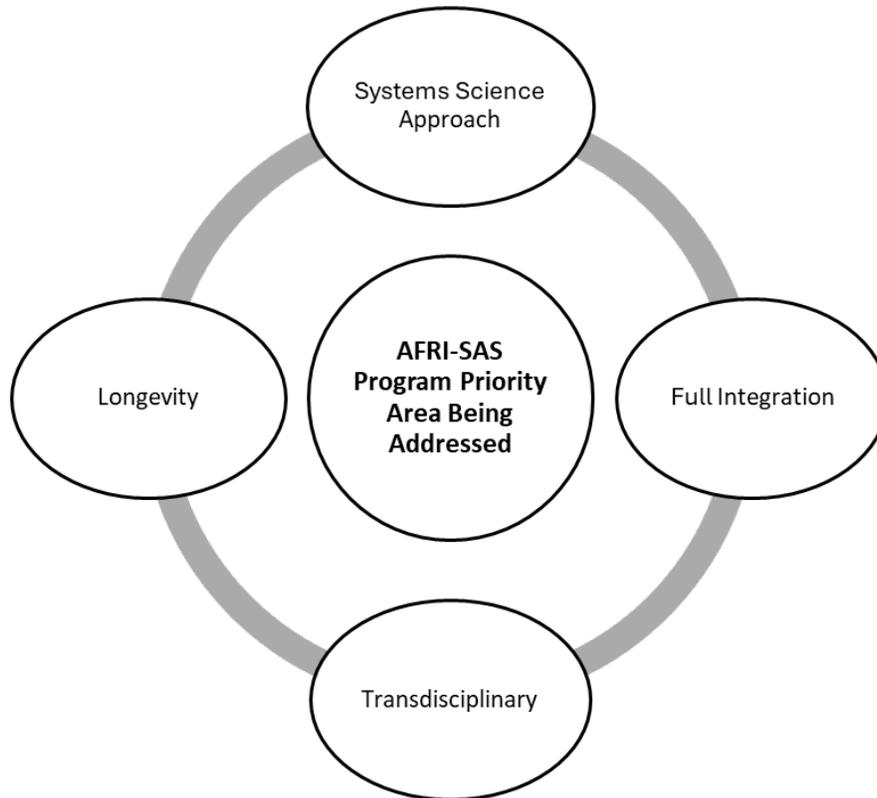


Figure 1: A visual illustration of how applications must identify a priority topic and utilize four pillars to enable project success. These four pillars are planning for longevity, full integration (extension, education, and research functions of agriculture), systems science approach, and transdisciplinary approach.

Planning for Longevity: The long-term benefit, enhancement, or achievement of a solution to a food and agricultural systems issue must be addressed. Applicants must design projects with producers, end-users, and consumers in mind. This includes use of project outcomes to stabilize plant and animal production capability, guarantee or improve yield and quality, and implement tailored site-specific strategies that ensure an abundant, healthy, and safe food supply. Longevity also encompasses the use of tools, products, and capabilities to train the next generation of agriculturalists and enhance the quality of life for farmers, ranchers, foresters, and society.

Systems Approach: This requires tackling an issue and examining and understanding its complex and interacting parts rather than just a specific part in isolation. Applicants must design projects that use systems thinking that apply and study the interaction of rapidly advancing science and technologies to leverage the economic benefits. Agricultural systems are inclusive of local and regional supply chains; food production to consumption; human and community health; and from traditional open-field farms, ranches, and managed forests to controlled production in built environments.

Full Integration: This program solicits creative visionary projects that seamlessly combine the three components of the agricultural knowledge system -- research, education, and extension -- to function as a unified whole to solve challenges to current and future food and agricultural

systems. Applicants must include all three components. Applicants must carefully review the general characteristics of all grant types and project types. Applicants must also review the NIFA definitions of extension, education, and research found in the documents labeled “AFRI Grant Types” and “AFRI Project Types” in the "Related Documents" list on [AFRI Notice of Funding Opportunities Resources page](#).

Transdisciplinary Approach: Intentional teamwork, coordination, and interaction between multiple scientific disciplines, stakeholders, and end-users is essential to addressing complex challenges.

Applicants must clearly describe how transdisciplinary approaches will be deployed to achieve the goals of the project. Applicants must demonstrate the transdisciplinary linkages necessary to address the complex challenge or issue. A high degree of engagement must occur between the applicants and farmers, ranchers, producers, landowners, and communities who will be impacted by project outcomes for critical leadership and co-production of knowledge, behavior, or condition. All relevant stakeholders must be engaged from inception through implementation of the project.

Metrics: Projects must plan to employ meaningful performance metrics that measure progress during the grant period. These metrics must be aligned with key indicators of scientific, agricultural, and economic impact. Metrics can include how the proposed system and its components contribute to productivity and profitability, reliable natural resources, food safety, food quality, processing quality, food and nutrition science, human health and well-being, a skilled workforce, educational opportunities and curricula, regional or national market share, students and professionals trained, more sustainable jobs in the food and agricultural sector, consumer adoption and participation, or discernable benefits to consumers, families, or communities. Metrics must capture how outcomes will address stakeholder needs beyond the life of the project.

Table 2: Strengthening Agricultural Systems Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Codes:	A9201
Program Code Name:	Strengthening Agricultural Systems
ALN:	10.310
Project Type:	Integrated Research, Education, and Extension <u>Only</u>
Grant Type:	CAP and Strengthening CAP Grants Only
Letter of Intent Deadline	February 26, 2026
Application Deadline	March 26, 2026
Grant Duration:	Up to 60 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	10-12
Minimum Award Amount:	\$2,500,000
Maximum Award Amount:	\$10,000,000

New Uses and Expanding Markets for Agriculture and Forestry Products Sub-priority:

Proposals should focus on the most pressing challenges faced by agricultural producers, farmers, ranchers, and foresters with a focus on creating new and expanding existing markets for agriculture and forestry products to ensure a strong U.S. economy and protect the fuel and fiber supply. Proposals responding to this sub-priority must address items a) and b). Proposals may also address item c) below:

- a) Work with established U.S. commodity crops, specialty crops, or forest products that develop new uses for crop residues for meal, feed, or oils will be considered. Pursuit of this goal depends on the development of new innovative solutions and initiatives that bring more jobs, economic opportunities, and expand existing markets to new regions particularly to rural communities. The focus should be on equipping and empowering current and next generations of American farmers, ranchers, producers, and foresters; and
- b) Address the long-term efforts necessary for growth of agriculture and/or forestry products markets while preserving our nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands.
- c) May also address: Develop or enhance systems to produce reliable sources of biofuels, biomaterials, or biobased chemical intermediates, including emphasis on high-value or value-added products from agricultural and/or forestry products to foster rural prosperity and enhance national security.

Solutions to Pests and Diseases of Plants or Animals Sub-priority:

Proposals responding to this sub-priority must address at least two (2) of the following:

- a) Protect the food, fuel, and/or fiber supply as well as enhance national security by developing innovative solutions to combat pests, diseases, or weeds (invasive/established species) negatively affecting plant and/or animal agricultural systems.
- b) Address important crop, livestock, or forest losses due to pest and/or pathogen damage.
- c) Develop effective disease or pest solutions, including weed management solutions in grasslands/rangelands, as they occupy a substantial portion of the United States and impact both plant and animal production and are critical to the nation's economy.
- d) Drive innovation, promote proven agricultural or forest production practices, reduce input costs, and increase outputs that result in maximizing productivity of American farmers, ranchers, and foresters.

Combating Food and Diet-Related Chronic Diseases Sub-priority:

Proposals responding to this sub-priority must address item a) or item b). Proposals must also address at least two (2) of the following items: c), d), and/or e):

- a) Address factors linked to achieving healthy diets from sustainable food production systems with the goal of increasing nutrient content and bioavailability of nutrients from plant and/or animal food products to improve human health.

- b) Identify and implement innovative solutions that result in healthy dietary patterns, support the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and lead to long-term large population-level reductions of diet-related chronic diseases.
- c) Upscale or maximize impacts of existing scientifically proven interventions/solutions.
- d) Incorporate stakeholders’ perspectives, particularly American farmers’ or ranchers’ voices as they play a critical role in ensuring an abundant, healthy and safe food supply.
- e) Explore value-add solutions that benefit agricultural producers, farmers, ranchers, or foresters.

Note: Applications focused on solutions to combat childhood chronic diseases are encouraged. Proposed dietary solutions must utilize agricultural foods, preferably healthy whole foods. This sub-priority does not support the development of pharmaceutical therapies or products.

2. Artificial Intelligence for K-12 Food and Agricultural Sciences (Program Code A9231)

Table 3: Artificial Intelligence for K-12 Food and Agricultural Sciences Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	A9231
Program Code Name:	Artificial Intelligence for K-12 Food and Agricultural Sciences
ALN:	10.310
Project Type:	Integrated Extension, Education and Research <u>Only</u>
Grant Type:	CAP and Strengthening CAP Grants <u>Only</u>
Letter of Intent Deadline	February 26, 2026
Application Deadline	April 23, 2026
Grant Duration:	Up to 60 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	6
Minimum Award Amount:	\$1,000,000
Maximum Award Amount:	\$2,000,000

Applicants to this program area priority **must** explicitly specify the **A9231** Program Code and the **Artificial Intelligence (AI) for K12 Food and Agricultural Sciences** within the summary/abstract and project narrative.

AI continues to be an important component of Strengthening Agriculture Systems. AI-powered technologies, including but not limited to automation and mechanization, in food, agricultural, and forest production are already in use, boosting productivity and efficiency in a variety of ways. These technologies address labor shortages, pest management, animal diseases, crop and

forest quality, soil health, weather pattern prediction, irrigation system precision, food safety, and personalized nutritional strategies, among other applications.

NIFA's vision is to support proposals in all [six AFRI priority areas](#) (see [Part I.A.](#)). Therefore, applicants to this program area priority must identify and state a primary AFRI priority area in the abstract. While one AFRI priority area will be the primary or focus, projects are welcome to develop activities and materials supportive of as many priority areas as desired and justified with the team's expertise. NIFA will make funding decisions based on project merit and alignment to create a portfolio with broad representation of these priority areas.

This priority is for kindergarten through 12th grade education, but resources developed are to be made available for post-secondary and lifelong learners to develop new skills for a changing workforce.

Proposals responding to this priority must address at least four (4) of the following:

- a) Develop and/or strengthen the pipeline of AI-literate and skilled next-generation agriculturalists, with special emphasis in K-12 youth, to support the advancements in food, agricultural, and forest sciences.
- b) Adapt or develop AI-based tools and modalities that can be effectively integrated into classrooms, non-formal educational experiences, and/or curriculums to support the understanding and training of the next generation of agriculturalists and foresters.
- c) Build and expand comprehensive teacher and non-formal educator training in AI in food, agricultural, and/or forest sciences to equip them with knowledge to train students about AI and to utilize AI in their classrooms to improve educational outcomes.
- d) Support AI resource sharing mechanisms that make curriculum, training materials and courses, and resources accessible for the nation's K-12 teachers and Cooperative Extension educators in food and agricultural sciences.
- e) Equip learners to become future innovators of agricultural AI.
- f) Advance the scientific, economic, environmental, social, and/or workforce training innovations in food, agriculture, and/or forestry to keep U.S. farmers, ranchers, producers, and foresters at the forefront of productivity by leveraging AI.
- g) Use AI to help strengthen youth's understanding of the importance of America's food, fuel, and fiber supply and its role in national security.

Important Note: AI for K-12 Food and Agricultural Sciences projects must be led by the education and/or extension component in the project. Research for this goal must be limited to one or more of the following components: (i) exploring pedagogical and student development impacts of AI delivery methods; (ii) economic analysis of identified solutions; (iii) impacts of identified solutions on youth and agricultural communities; and/or (iv) evaluation of long-term impacts of identified solutions on the development or strengthening of the next generation of agriculturalists.

Projects supporting research in AI innovation and data systems for agricultural systems are not appropriate for A9231 and should be submitted to Program Area Priority A1541 of the AFRI Foundational and Applied Sciences Program. Projects developing degree and training programs for undergraduate and graduate students are not appropriate for A9231 and should be submitted to the appropriate Program Area Priority in the AFRI Education and Workforce Development Program.

Program Area Additional Information

1. Requests exceeding budgetary guidelines will not be reviewed.
2. Unless otherwise stated, grants are issued for a period of up to five years and are not renewable after completion of the performance period.
3. Review additional application requirements from the document titled FY 2026 AFRI Strengthening Agricultural Systems NOFO Additional Information for Part IV, C on the [AFRI Resources](#) page.
4. Projects must provide evidence that the project is aligned with a program area priority in this NOFO and with the AFRI priority areas, as listed in [Part I § A](#) of this NOFO.
8. NIFA welcomes applicants that leverage public-private partnerships.
9. A Data Management Plan is required and must include making data publicly available with persistent identifiers or compatible with other open databases and sources. A reasonable budget allocation for data management is allowed as a direct cost.
10. Proposals addressing A9201 Combating Food and Diet-Related Chronic Diseases sub-priority may consider evidence-based approaches such as policy, systems, and/or built environment (PSE) change interventions, nutrition education, precision/personalized nutrition, etc.
11. Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider the youth voice in stimulating and championing solutions and actions at household, local, and national levels as evidenced through 4-H, National Future Farmers of America Organization, and other youth organizations.
12. Projects selected under the sub-priority area “New Uses and Expanding Markets for Agriculture and Forestry Products” may have the opportunity to partner with U.S. Department of Energy’s Regional Biomass Hubs Initiative (RBRH). Applicants interested in learning more may email: rbrh@inl.gov for more information.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for the AFRI SAS NOFO is approximately \$140,000,000. USDA is not committed to funding any application or to making a specific number of awards.

The [Automated Standard Application for Payments](#), operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this NOFO.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO. Application for FY 2026 is limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).
2. *Resubmitted application*: Resubmitted applications must include a response to the previous review and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the Federal Field (Field 4) on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).

C. Project and Grant Types

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

1. **Project Types**. Applicants must propose Integrated Projects only (must include Research, Education, and Extension components within project) as described in [PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION](#) of this NOFO. A detailed description of the project types available across AFRI is located on the [AFRI Resources page](#) (“AFRI Project Types” in the attachments list).
2. **Grant Types**. Applicants must select the appropriate AFRI grant type. For this NOFO, the grant types are **Coordinated Agricultural Project and FASE (Strengthening Coordinated Agricultural Project) Grants only**. This is specified within the relevant Program Area Descriptions in [Part I § C](#) of this NOFO. A detailed description of the grant types (Standard Grants, Coordinated Agricultural Projects, Workshop Grants, and FASE Grants) available across AFRI is located on the [AFRI Resources](#) page (“AFRI Grant Types” in the “Related Documents” list).

D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

In accordance with sections [2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422](#), institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award, that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients must, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training. See NIFA’s guidelines on [Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#) for further information.

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

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

1. Integrated Projects

Eligible applicants for Integrated Projects include:

- a) Colleges and universities;
- b) 1994 Land-grant Institutions; and
- c) Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (see [NIFA's Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities page](#)).

For item a) under Integrated Projects, the terms "college" and "university" means an educational institution in any state which

- i) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate;
- ii) is legally authorized to provide a program of education beyond secondary education;
- iii) provides an educational program for which a bachelor's degree or any other higher degree is awarded;
- iv) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and
- v) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.

A research foundation maintained by a college or university is eligible to receive an award under this program.

2. Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement Grants

[Part II § C.2](#) of this NOFO contains the eligibility details for FASE Grants. Note that under FASE program, Strengthening Coordinated Agricultural Project Grants are solicited in this NOFO.

Applicants must respond to the program area priorities and deadlines found in [Part I § C](#). Grant recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award (see [Part III § B](#)).

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – submission of duplicate or predominantly overlapping applications is not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits multiple applications that are duplicative or substantially overlapping to NIFA programs within the same fiscal year. For those new to federal financial assistance, NIFA's [About Grants](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand

the federal awards process.

B. Request for Determination of Status

1. Strengthening Grant Eligibility

If an institution is applying for a Strengthening Grant under the FASE program (see [Part II § C. 2](#)) refer to the [AFRI Resources page](#).

2. Multi-Campus Institution

All institutions grouped under one main campus as listed in “Table 1 Most Successful Institutions” in the “Related Documents” list on the [AFRI Resources page](#), unless located in an Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) state (See “AFRI Grant Types” in the “Related Documents” list on the [AFRI Resources page](#), are excluded from eligibility for all strengthening funds. However, if any campus within a multi-campus listing can provide information demonstrating that it is administratively independent or has an independent accreditation, then the institution may petition for an exemption to this rule and request eligibility for strengthening funds. The application must include a letter indicating how the institution is independent of the main campus, either through accreditation or administration, how the institution is eligible for a Strengthening Grant, and total federal funds received for science and engineering research and development. The letter must be signed by the Authorized Representative (AR).

C. Cost Sharing or Matching

Applicants MUST provide matching contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis for all federal funds awarded under AFRI for applied research grants unless a waiver applies. Matching funds requirements for AFRI programs included in this NOFO may be found at [7 U.S.C. 3157 \(b\)\(9\) \(C\)](#). For Applied Research Components:

1. **Match is required** – If an applied research (see [Appendix III](#)) or Integrated Project with an applied research component is commodity-specific and not of national scope, the grant recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-federal sources with cash and/or in-kind contributions .
2. **Match is not required** - If the applied research or integrated project with an applied research component is not commodity-specific or is national in scope, then no match is required.

D. Centers of Excellence

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 ([7 U.S.C. 5926](#)), NIFA will recognize and prioritize COE applicants that carry out research, extension, and education activities that relate to the food and agricultural sciences. A COE is composed of one or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the COE:

1. State agricultural experiment stations
2. Colleges and universities
3. University research foundations
4. Other research institutions and organizations
5. Federal agencies
6. National laboratories
7. Private organizations, foundations, or corporations

8. Individuals; or
9. Any group consisting of two or more of the entities described in (1) through (8).

COE recognition and priority is available only for the **Standard Grant and the Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP) Grant** applications submitted to the program area priorities in the Education and Workforce Development, Foundational and Applied Science, and Strengthening Agricultural Systems NOFOs or RFAs. If applicable, [Part IV C](#), of the NOFO contains additional requirements for COE consideration.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Letter of Intent to Submit an Application

Prospective applicants are requested to email a **Letter of Intent** to submit an application by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on **February 26, 2026**, to “AFRI-SAS@usda.gov”. This notification is **optional** and will be used to plan for the expertise required for the review process. The information provided will not be used to screen for project appropriateness, applicant eligibility or used in review of a subsequent application. NIFA will not provide feedback for the notification of intent.

Letter of Intent email should include the following information:

1. Descriptive (draft) title
2. Name of the Project Director and Applicant Institution name
3. Names of other potential Co-Project Directors/Investigators and their affiliations, if applicable
4. Sub-priority/ies or Farm Bill Priority Area(s) addressed
5. Subject line of email should read: AFRI-SAS – Intent to Submit
6. E-mail should be sent to AFRI-SAS@usda.gov.

Notification of intent should be succinct. **Please do not include abstract, bios, or information other than what is requested.**

B. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this NOFO electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this NOFO and additional resources are available on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [Grants 101](#). **Table 3** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application and **Table 4** provides links to related support services. *Part III* of the NIFA Grants Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) registration process. The NIFA Grants Application Guide is contained in the specific funding opportunity package or a sample of the guide can be found [here](#). When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package.

Table 4: Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
Step One: Register	<i>New Users</i> to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements).
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity number USDA-NIFA-AFRI-011677 search for application here: Opportunity Package .
Step Four: Assess Readiness	Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization’s readiness to submit an electronic application.

Table 5: Help and Resources

Grants.gov Support	NIFA Support
Grants.gov Online Support Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035 Email support: support@grants.gov Self-service customer-based support: Grants.gov iPortal Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays .	Email: grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, except federal holidays .

C. Content and Form of the Application

The [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is part of the corresponding application package for this NOFO. The NOFO overrides the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. Applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA’s review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that meet the requirements of this NOFO. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 6** outlines key instructions for applicants.

Table 6: Key Application Instructions

Instruction	References (All references are to the NIFA Grants Application Guide)
Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format.	Part IV
Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format.	Part IV
Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission.	Part IV
Follow the submission instructions.	Part IV
Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R.	Part V
Contact the Grants.gov helpdesk for technical support and keep a record of the correspondence.	N/A
Contact NIFA if applicant does not received correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 30 days of the application deadline.	N/A

AFRI Specific Application Instructions. Application and submission information including page limits and narrative font sizes for AFRI SAS applications are available in the “2026

Strengthening Agricultural Systems NOFO Additional Information for *Part IV § C* PDF in the attachment labelled “FY 2026 AFRI Strengthening Agricultural Systems NOFO Additional Information for Part IV, C” list on the [AFRI Resources page](#).

We recommend that you conduct an administrative review of the application prior to submitting the package via Grants.gov to ensure that it complies with all preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in [Part VII](#) of the NIFA Grants.gov [Application Guide](#) to assist with this review.

You should check the application for completeness. The application must include:

1. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the AFRI-SAS Sub-priority/ies or AFRI Priority Area(s). See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for instructions and suggested templates.
2. Project Narrative.
3. Bibliography & References Cited.
4. Logic Model. A logic model must include elements detailing the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the proposed project. The logic model planning process is a tool that should be used to develop a project before writing the application. This information may be provided as a narrative or formatted into a logic model chart. For more information and resources, see [Logic Model Planning Process](#) located on the NIFA website.
5. Management Plan. A Management Plan is required and must include project governance, a stakeholder advisory board, involvement of an evaluator, and progress reporting. The plan must clearly articulate, with an organizational chart, how the project will be governed. A clear strategy must be put in place to enhance coordination, collaboration, communication, data sharing and reporting among members of the project team and stakeholder groups. The management plan must include an advisory group of principal stakeholders, partners, evaluators and professionals to assess and evaluate the quality, expected measurable outcomes, and potential impacts for the proposed research, education and Extension.
6. Data Management Plan (DMP). A DMP is required. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see [Part V, B](#) of this NOFO). A Data Management Plan must include making data publicly available with persistent identifiers or compatible with other open databases and sources. Machine readable data management plans produced using tools such as the [DMP Tool](#) are strongly recommended. A reasonable budget allocation for data management is allowed as a direct cost.
7. Mentoring plan. A three-page limit mentoring plan is required for CAP Grants that involve any type of education, training or mentoring of students or other individuals including high school students, undergraduate students, graduate students, professional degree students, postdoctoral scholars, other professionals or any other individual receiving any type of formal, or nonformal or vocational training on the project. Upload plan as a separate attachment into to **Field 12** of the grant application. Include all student and/or other individual types in the same mentoring plan and describe: a) past or proposed training of individuals who will serve as mentors including equipping,

mentoring, or monitoring activities they have received or will receive to help them effectively mentor students and trainees during the project; b) the groups of students or individual trainees to be mentored on the project, including students grades 9-12, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, professionals and any other individuals to be trained or mentored on the project; c) detailed mentoring activities to be delivered throughout the project to each distinct category or group of students and/or trainee participants, including those activities provided through research, education, Extension or outreach efforts; and d) expected outcomes derived from the mentoring activities and prospective impact(s) on the food and agricultural sciences. For additional important details, see the "FY 2026 AFRI Strengthening Agricultural Systems NOFO Additional Information for Part IV, C" in the "Related Documents" list on the [AFRI resources page](#).

8. Facilities & Other Resources. Provide adequate evidence that each institution in the application has a significant role and contributes to the project.
9. Curriculum Vitae
10. Conflict of Interest Lists
11. Current and pending support
12. Budget
13. Budget Justification

This is not an exhaustive list of required items; it only serves to highlight items that may be overlooked. The three documents considered as critical and required at the application deadline are the 1) Project Summary/Abstract, 2) Project Narrative, and 3) Bibliography & References Cited sections. Failure to include any of these as PDF attachments will result in the application not being reviewed or considered for funding by NIFA.

We send email correspondence to the PD and AR regarding the status of submitted applications. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the PD and AR have not received correspondence from NIFA regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in [Appendix I](#) of the NOFO and request the proposal number assigned to the application. Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, you should cite this number on all future correspondence.

D. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Cost (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) of the recipient. Section 1462(a) and (c) of the ([7 U.S.C. 3310\(a\) and \(c\)](#)) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum IDC rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

1. the sum of an institution's negotiated IDC rate and the IDC rate charged by sub-awardees, if any; or
2. 30 percent of TFFA.

The maximum allowable IDC rate under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the two rates above.

If the result of number one above is the lesser of the two rates, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated IDC rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee's negotiated IDC rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated IDC rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the IDC rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If number two above is the lesser of the two rates, then the maximum IDC rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the IDC of the prime awardee plus the sum of the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

In the event of an award, the prime awardee is responsible for ensuring the maximum IDC allowed for the award is not exceeded when combining IDC for the Federal portion (i.e., prime and sub-awardee(s)) and any applicable cost-sharing. Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections [408](#) and [410](#) of [2 CFR 200](#).

If the applicant does not have a negotiated rate and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant may request an IDC rate. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process and need only to calculate a rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete IDC proposal package to obtain a negotiated rate.

Organizations that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate, may elect the De Minimis rate ([2 CFR 200.414](#)). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de Minimis rate of 15 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described above and in [2 CFR 200.403](#), costs must be charged consistently as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If elected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which it may do at any time.

Successful applicants must not use grant funds awarded under the authority of this NOFO to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such space; or plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities.

See [NIFA Indirect Costs](#) for information including [additional resources](#) and [NIFA Indirect Cost Guidance Chart](#).

E. Domestic Travel

PD meetings are required during the period of performance as a condition of the award. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss projects, opportunities for collaborative efforts, and enhance dissemination of exemplary end products/results. PD meetings may alternate between in-person and virtual meetings. In either case, attendance is required. PDs are to budget for in-person travel for all years that federal funding is requested, and the award remains active. If

funds are not used in any year due to NIFA hosting a virtual PD meeting, NIFA may allow rebudgeting of travel funds to a different budgetary category.

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, NIFA screens each application to ensure that it meets the NOFO administrative requirements. All administrative requirements must be met for the application to proceed to the next level of review. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that have met the administrative requirements using a review panel (**see NIFA Peer Review Process**).

Scientific Peer Review Process:

NIFA selects reviewers for the review panel based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, considering the following factors:

1. The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities.
2. The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields.
3. The need to include other experts (e.g., agricultural producers, range or forest managers/operators, researchers, educators, evaluators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to intended audiences and to program needs.
4. The need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private profit and nonprofit organizations) and geographic locations.
5. The need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to the reviewer's area of expertise, geographic area, and entity type, as appropriate.
6. The need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

A reviewer's written evaluation entails two levels of assessment. First, the reviewer summarizes how well the application addressed each evaluation criterion. After the application has been assessed for strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, the reviewer evaluates the overall likelihood that the project will have significant outcome and impact. Written reviews are used to begin panel discussions with other reviewers serving on the peer review panel. Through these discussions, peer review panelists come to consensus on the final ranking of the applications. A complete description of NIFA's peer review process can be found at the [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications page](#).

After each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible NIFA program staff will recommend that a project is either approved for support from currently available funds or declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, *not* including the identity of reviewers, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

Conflicts of interest. NIFA takes extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may influence the review or evaluation (see [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#)).

B. SAS Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will use the most up-to-date version of these criteria for the review of all **Integrated Project Applications** found on this webpage [AFRI Resources](#) in the file named **FY 2026 AFRI Review Criteria**. **The Integrated Project Applications review criteria begin in section 4 of the file.**

Center of Excellence (COE) Status

All eligible applicants will be competitively peer reviewed (as described in Part V, A. and B. of this NOFO) and ranked in accordance with the evaluation criteria. Those that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a COE will be further evaluated by the peer panel to determine whether they have met the standards to be COE ([Part III D.](#) and [Part IV C.](#)). In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-center of excellence, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the COE criteria. NIFA will effectively use the COE prioritization as a “tie breaker.” Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a COE or who are not deemed to have met the COE standards may still receive funding.

In addition, the applicant’s Notice of Award will reflect that, for the grant project, the applicant meets all the requirements of a COE. Entities recognized as COE will maintain that distinction for the duration of their award period of performance or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

C. Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information prior to the award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only need to provide an update if there was a change in previously provided information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and non-financial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

D. Application Disposition

Applicants may withdraw at any time before NIFA makes a final funding decision. NIFA will retain all applications, including withdrawn applications and unfunded applications.

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this NOFO. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant must be no later than September 30 of the federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this NOFO may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and [NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions, 7 CFR Part 3430, subparts A through E](#).

Award Notice. The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information as described in [2 CFR 200.211](#) (see [NIFA's Terms and Conditions](#)).

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this NOFO (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute or award-specific requirements, [NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide](#) applies to all NIFA awards.

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Output and reporting requirements are included in the [award terms and conditions](#). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the Award Notice.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

Delegation of fiscal responsibility. Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

Changes in Budget or Project Plans. In accordance with [2 CFR 200.308](#), awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons (the awardee is subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award):

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision required);
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the Federal award;
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project;
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with [2 CFR 200 Subpart E \(Cost Principles\)](#), or [2 CFR Part 300 Appendix IX, \(Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals\)](#), or [48 CFR](#), unless waived by the Federal awarding agency, [48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
5. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs](#));
6. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a Federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see [2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards](#)), unless described in the application and funded in the approved Federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services;
7. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-Federal entity;
8. The need for additional Federal funds to complete the project;
9. Salary rates of pay exceeding an Executive Level IV salary range (see “Rates of Pay for the Executive Schedule” under the “Executive & Senior Level Employee Pay Tables” header at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) require prior NIFA approval. This rate does not include any fringe benefits, general and administrative (G&A), overhead, or other expenses. Requests for approval must include the salary rate of pay and a justification for the rate and be sent to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) to awards@usda.gov;
10. No more than 50 percent of the total dollars of this award may be subcontracted to another party(ies) without prior written approval of the ADO, except subcontracts to Federal agencies;
11. Transferring funds between the construction and non-construction work under a Federal award; and
12. A no-cost extension (meaning, an extension of time that does not require the obligation of additional Federal funds) of the period of performance, other than any one-time extension authorized by the Federal agency in accordance with paragraph 2 CFR 200.308(g)(2). All requests for no-cost extensions should be submitted at least 10 calendar days before the conclusion of the period of performance. The Federal agency may approve multiple no-cost extensions under a Federal award if not prohibited by Federal statute or regulation.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of NIFA transaction records, which are available to the public. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, applicants should clearly mark any information within the application they wish to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary. NIFA will retain a copy of an application that does not result in an award for three years. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An applicant may withdraw at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C. Regulatory Information

This program is not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 ([44 U.S.C. Chapter 35](#)), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under [OMB Document No. 0524-0039](#).

D. Language Access Services

NIFA offers language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, free of charge. If you need interpretation or translation services, please visit [NIFA Language Access Services](#).

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

AFRI Program Office:

E-mail: AFRI@usda.gov

Specific questions pertaining to technical matters may be directed to the Program Area Priority Contact(s):

E-mail: AFRI-SAS@usda.gov

For administrative questions related to

1. Grants.gov, see [Part IV](#) of this NOFO.
2. Other RFA, other NOFO or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov.
3. Awards under this NOFO, please email awards@usda.gov.

U.S. Postal Mailing Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative – AFRI
Assistance Listing Number – ALN
Authorized Representative – AR
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 – AREERA
Coordinated Agricultural Project – CAP
Centers of Excellence – COE
Co-Project Director – Co-PD
Data Management Plan – DMP
Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research – EPSCoR
Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement – FASE
Indirect Costs – IDC
National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board – NAREEEAB
National Agricultural Research, Extension, Teaching and Policy Act of 1977 – NARETPA
National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA
Notice of Funding Opportunity – NOFO
Project Director – PD
Research, Education, and Economics – REE
Strengthening Agricultural Systems – SAS
Total Federal Funds Awarded – TFFA
United States Department of Agriculture – USDA

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

Refer to [7 CFR 3430 Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for additional definitions.

Definitions

Applied Research:

Research that includes expansion of the findings of fundamental research to uncover practical ways in which new knowledge can be advanced to benefit individuals and society.

Bioeconomy:

The bioeconomy presents an opportunity to expand and enable new agriculture and forest markets while also improving the longevity of the broader modern economy. New biobased technologies and products promise to create new possibilities for product supply chains, jobs, and economic opportunities.

Co-Project Director (Co-PD):

A Co-PD must be someone who could assume the PD's responsibilities if the PD steps out of that role prior to the completion of the project term. Co-PDs on an application are presumed to be approved by the lead institution. Note that NIFA awards institutions, not individuals. Co-PDs may be at the same institution or a different institution as the PD. Team members responsible for achieving specific objectives should be listed as Co-Investigators. International partners are ineligible to serve as PD or Co-PD and should be listed as Co-Investigator.

Co-Investigator (CI):

CIs are senior or key personnel, including collaborators or cooperators, who are responsible for achieving specific project objectives. They have the same status as a Co-PD in terms of contribution to the project, but they cannot assume the responsibilities of the PD.

Education Component:

The proposed Education (teaching and teaching-related) component of an Integrated Project should develop human capital relevant to U.S. agriculture. An education or teaching activity is formal classroom instruction, laboratory instruction, and practicum experience in the food and agricultural sciences and other related matters such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies.

More information is available in the "AFRI Project Types" PDF in the attachments list on the [AFRI Resources page](#).

More information is available under "AFRI Project Types" in the attachments list in the [AFRI Notice of Funding Opportunities Resources page](#).

FASE Grants:

Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) Grants mean funding awarded to eligible applicants to strengthen science capabilities of Project Directors, to help institutions develop competitive scientific programs, and to attract new scientists into careers in high-priority areas of national need in agriculture and food sciences. FASE

awards may apply to any of the three agricultural knowledge components (i.e., research, education, and extension). FASE awards include Pre- and Postdoctoral Fellowships, New Investigator grants, and Strengthening grants.

Fundamental Research:

Research that (i) increases knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and has the potential for broad application; and (ii) has an effect on agriculture, food, or nutrition.

Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Projects:

An Integrated Project includes at least two of the three functions of the agricultural knowledge system (i.e., research, education, and Extension) within a project. Note: AFRI SAS requires that Integrated Project applications include all three components of the agricultural knowledge system. More information is available under “FY 2026 AFRI Project Types” in the "Related Documents" list on the [AFRI Notice of Funding Opportunities Resources page](#).

Limited Institutional Success:

Limited institutional success means institutions that are not among the most successful universities and colleges for receiving federal funds for science and engineering research. A list of successful institutions is provided in the “Least Successful Institutions FY 26” PDF in the "Related Documents" list on the [AFRI Notice of Funding Opportunities Resources page](#).

Local:

According to the USDA Economic Research Service, there is no consensus on a definition of “local” or “local food systems” in terms of the geographic distance between production and consumption. Nevertheless, local and regional foods are increasingly being recognized as an important component to efforts to create more resilient, healthier food systems. Applicants should define their “local/regional” food system in the application.

Matching:

The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-federal sources.

New Application:

An application not previously submitted to a program.

Project Director (PD):

They are the principal from a NIFA-funded organization responsible for managing a grant project. The PD is legally responsible for management, progress, and completion of the project and for ensuring that project funds are used to accomplish project objectives. The PD submits reports to NIFA periodically and communicates with the National Program Leader. Project Director has also been historically known as Principal Investigator.

Research Component:

The proposed Research component of an integrated project should address knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of practices and programs to address the stated problem.

Resubmitted Application:

A project application that was previously submitted to a program, but the application was not funded.

Small and Mid-Sized Institutions:

Small and mid-sized institutions are academic institutions with a current total enrollment of 17,500 or less including graduate and undergraduate and full- and part-time students. An institution, in this instance, is an organization that possesses a significant degree of autonomy. A significant degree of autonomy is defined by being independently accredited as determined by reference to the current version of the Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 7245 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 319, Falls Church, Virginia 22042 (888) 349-7715).

Stakeholder:

Anyone (individual, group, etc.) who has an interest in or potential influence on the success of a project. In the context of NIFA integrated projects, stakeholders can be viewed as those impacted by the work that is being proposed.

Strengthening Grants:

Funds awarded to institutions eligible for FASE Grants to enhance institutional capacity, with the goal of leading to future funding in the project area, as well as strengthening the competitiveness of the investigator's research, education, and/or Extension activities. Strengthening grants consist of Standard, Coordinated Agricultural Project and Conference Grant types as well as Seed Grants, Equipment Grants, and Sabbatical Grants.

Transdisciplinary Approach:

Transdisciplinary approaches intentionally integrate knowledge from different scientific disciplines with relevant stakeholders and community members to address societal challenges. The development of transdisciplinary approaches engages a team composed of investigators from multiple disciplines that cross boundaries using holistic approaches to address complex challenges that cannot be solved using single-disciplinary approaches.

USDA EPSCoR States:

USDA Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research EPSCoR States mean States which have been less successful in receiving funding from AFRI, having a funding level no higher than the 38th percentile of all states based on a three-year average of AFRI funding levels, excluding FASE Strengthening funds. The most recent list of USDA EPSCoR States is provided under "FY 2026 AFRI Grant Types" PDF in the "Related Documents" list on the [AFRI Notice of Funding Opportunities Resources page](#).

APPENDIX IV: OTHER AFRI RESOURCES

AFRI program information is available on the [NIFA AFRI website](#). The following are among the materials available:

1. [Notices of Funding Opportunities](#)
2. [AFRI Annual Review](#)
3. [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
4. [Interagency Programs](#)
5. [AFRI Resources](#)
 - a. ***Most Successful Universities and Colleges.*** Any institution listed on this list, Most Successful Universities and Colleges Receiving Federal Funds, is not eligible for Strengthening Grants from the FASE program unless they are in an EPSCoR state. See “Most Successful Institutions FY 26” in the "Related Documents” list on the [AFRI Resources page](#).
 - b. ***Lowest One Third of Universities and Colleges Receiving Federal Funds.*** The lowest one third of universities and colleges receiving federal funds is used to determine eligibility for possible waiver of matching funds requirement for Equipment Grants (see “Least Successful Institutions FY 26” in the "Related Documents” list) on the [AFRI Resources page](#).
 - c. ***Flow Chart for Strengthening Grant Eligibility.*** The Flow Chart for Strengthening Grant Eligibility will help to determine your eligibility to apply for strengthening grants (see “Strengthening Grant Eligibility Decision Tree” in the "Related Documents” list) on the [AFRI Resources page](#).
6. [AFRI Deadlines](#)