

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation and Foreign Agricultural Service

Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program

A. Program Description

Issued By: Commodity Credit Corporation and Foreign Agricultural Service

Assistance Listing Number: 10.604

Assistance Listing Title: Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program

Notice of Funding Opportunity Title: 2024 Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program

NOFO Number: USDA-FAS-TASC-2024

Authorizing Authority for Program: The Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops program (TASC) is authorized by Section 203(e) of the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978 (7 U.S.C. 5623(e)), as amended. The TASC regulations appear at 7 CFR 1487.

Appropriation Authority for Program: Funding for TASC is provided under 7 U.S.C. 5623(f).

Announcement Type: New

Program Overview, Objectives, and Priorities: 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. The TASC program is administered by personnel of the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

B. Federal Award Information

Award Amounts and Important Dates

Available Funding for this announcement: The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 provided \$9 million in funding for each of the fiscal years FY 2019 through FY 2023. Congress has not yet determined funding levels for FY 2024. This NOFO is being released prior to Congress appropriating funding for the TASC program for FY 2024. USDA makes no commitment to fund any application or to make a specific number of awards regardless of whether or at what level program funding for FY 2024 is provided.

Total Award Funding: Anticipated to be \$9,000,000

Estimated Number of Awards: It is anticipated that FAS will issue approximately 15 to 20 awards under the FY 2024 TASC program, subject to programmatic approval, review, and available funding.

Estimated Funding per Award: Funding per award under the TASC program is anticipated to range from \$5,000–\$500,000, subject to programmatic approval, review, and available funding. FAS may, at its discretion, not fund requests in full through the initial allocation of funding.

Anticipated Number of Awards: It is projected that FAS will issue approximately 15–20 awards under the FY 2024 TASC program, subject to programmatic approval and available funding.

Period of Performance: Awards will generally be granted for a project period not exceeding five years. However, FAS will entertain requests to continue activities and extend an agreement's activity completion date beyond five years. Any requests to extend an agreement's

activity completion date beyond five years must include a justification for why the extension is necessary and how the extension would effectively support the program's purpose.

Period of Performance Start Date(s): 10/01/2023

Period of Performance End Date(s): 10/30/2028

Type of Assistance Instrument: Grant.

C. Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants: To participate in the TASC program, an entity must be a U.S. organization, either government or private, 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 third parties in activities carried out by eligible organizations, but are not eligible for direct funding assistance through the program.

Eligibility Criteria

1. *Eligible Commodities:* 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 wheat, feed grains, oilseeds, cotton, rice, peanuts, sugar, and tobacco.

Applications may cover more than one U.S. specialty crop.

2. *Eligible Markets:* Applications may target any foreign market, including single countries or reasonable regional groupings of countries.

3. *Eligible Activities:* To be found eligible for consideration, TASC applications must address the following criteria:

- Applications must 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;
- Applications must demonstrate that the proposed activities will benefit an entire industry rather than a specific company or brand;
- Applications must include an explanation as to what specifically could not be accomplished without Federal funding assistance and why the eligible organization(s) would be unlikely to carry out the project without such assistance; and
- Applications must include performance measures for quantifying progress and demonstrating results. The proposed performance measures must meet the following criteria:
 - Aligned: the indicator must clearly measure the relevant result.
 - Clear: the indicator must be precise and unambiguous about what is being measured and how. There must be no doubt on how to measure or interpret the indicator.
 - Quantifiable: the indicator must sufficiently capture all the elements of a result.
 - Include an identified methodology: it must be clear that the data used to inform the indicator can be obtained in a timely and efficient manner and will

be of high quality. The full set of indicators selected to monitor project performance must be sufficient to inform project management and oversight.

4. *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. Certain types of expenses are not eligible for reimbursement by the TASC program, including the costs of market research, advertising, or other promotional expenses, and there are limits on other categories of expenses. FAS will also not reimburse unreasonable expenditures or expenditures made prior to approval of an application. For further information on ineligible expenditures, please refer to 2 C.F.R. parts 200 and 400 and the TASC program regulations, found at 7 CFR 1487.

5. *Limits on Applications:* Eligible organizations may submit multi-year applications, although 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. Government entities are not eligible for multi-year funding. 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 TASC participant can have underway at any given time is five.

6. *Funding Limits:* Applications that request more than \$500,000 in funding per year will not be considered. TASC funds awarded to government agencies must be expended or otherwise obligated by close of business September 30, 2024.

Cost Share or Match

There is no cost share requirement for the TASC program. FAS will, however, consider the applicant's willingness to contribute resources towards the project, including cash, goods, and services of the U.S. industry and foreign third parties, when determining which applications are approved for funding.

Other Submission Requirements and Information

Funded projects may take place in the United States or abroad. Examples of the types of project expenses that FAS may agree to reimburse under the TASC program include, but are not limited to: initial pre-clearance programs, export protocol and work plan support, seminars and workshops, study tours, field surveys, development of pest lists, pest, disease, and fumigant research, reasonable logistical and administrative support, and travel and per diem expenses. Applications that counter national strategies or duplicate activities planned or already underway by U.S. non-profit agricultural commodity or trade associations will not be considered.

Maintenance of Effort (MOE)

There is no MOE requirement for the TASC program.

D. Application and Submission Information

Key Dates and Times

Date Posted to Grants.gov: March 17, 2023

Application Submission Deadline: The date by which TASC applications must be submitted to be considered for funding in the first round of reviews is 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, Friday, May 19, 2023. Incomplete applications or applications that do not otherwise conform to this announcement by this deadline will not be considered for funding in the initial review period.

TASC applications will continue to be accepted and reviewed throughout the remainder of the fiscal year after the initial application deadline only if TASC funding remains available, as set forth in this notice. FAS will track the time and date of receipt of all applications. All applications received by the initial program deadline of 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, Friday, May 19, 2023, will be considered for funding in the initial allocation tranche. Applications that are denied funding during this initial review period will be reconsidered for funding if the applicant specifically requests such reconsideration in writing and only if funding remains available. Applications received after 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, Friday, May 19, 2023 will be considered for funding in the order received as long as funding remains available.

Anticipated Funding Selection Date: FAS anticipates that the initial funding selections will be made by the end of October 2023.

Anticipated Award Date: FAS anticipates that the initial awards will be announced by the end of December 2023.

Content and Form of Application Submission

To be considered for the TASC program, applicants are encouraged to apply through the web-based Unified Export Strategy (UES) system. The UES allows applicants to submit a

single consolidated and strategically coordinated application that incorporates requests for funding for all the FAS market development programs. The suggested UES format encourages applicants to examine the constraints or barriers to trade that they face, identify activities that would help overcome such impediments, consider the entire pool of complementary marketing tools and program resources, and establish realistic export goals. Applicants must contact FAS' Program Operations Division to obtain UES website access information. The UES may be found at the following URL address: <https://apps.fas.usda.gov/ues/webapp/>.

Organizations that do not have UES access may request access from FAS by following this 2–step process:

- 1) Users must first create an eAuthentication account and user ID at <https://www.eauth.usda.gov/eauth/b/usda/home>. FAS recommends creating a Level 2 eAuthentication account.
- 2) Users then must submit to FAS a completed UES Access Request form, which may be obtained by contacting the Program Operations Division, Global Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service *by e-mail*: uesadmin@usda.gov. Once the request is approved, FAS will create a UES account for the user. Applicants having trouble or otherwise needing further assistance should use this same contact information for assistance.

Although FAS highly recommends applying via the UES, applicants also have the option of submitting an electronic application to FAS via email to podadmin@usda.gov.

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

- (1) A TASC application that includes the information contained in this notice; and
- (2) Standard Form 424, “Application for Federal Assistance” (SF-424). The SF-424 is a standard form that FAS is requesting as part of the submission of applications under the TASC program. All applicable parts of the SF-424 must be completed, and the form must be signed by the applicant. FAS will ask that applicants complete incomplete or outdated SF-424 forms, which may cause delays in processing an application. A copy of the SF-424 may be obtained from Grants.gov. Please email the completed SF-424 to PODAdmin@usda.gov with the subject: “FY 2024 TASC SF-424.”

In addition to the required SF-424, each applicant must also complete and certify to the grants “Representations and Certifications” and “Grants Certifications” in SAM.gov by the application deadline. All applicants must also answer “Yes” to the question in the Grants Certification section of SAM.gov asking whether the applicant “Wishes to apply for a Federal financial assistance project or program, or is currently the recipient of funding under any Federal financial assistance project or program?” FAS will verify in SAM.gov that the proper certifications have been made. If they have not, the applicant will be contacted and directed to do so. Your award will not be issued until the proper certifications are completed within the SAM.gov. If required, the latest SF-LLL form, “Disclosure of Lobbying Activities,” must also be submitted.

TASC applications must contain complete information about the proposed projects, including, at a minimum, the following:

- (1) Organizational information, including:

- (i) Organization's name, address, Chief Executive Officer (or designee), Federal Tax Identification Number (TIN), and Unique Entity Identifier (UEI);
- (ii) Type of organization;
- (iii) Name, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address of the primary contact person;
- (iv) A description of the organization and its membership; and
- (v) A description of the organization's experience in technical assistance projects, including activities involved and project results.

(2) Project information, including:

- (i) A brief project title;
- (ii) The amount of funding requested and a justification for why federal funding is needed;
- (iii) Beginning and ending dates for the proposed project;
- (iv) A market assessment, including a brief description of the specific export barrier to be addressed by the project;
- (v) The goals of the project, and the expected benefits to the represented industry;
- (vi) A description of the activities planned to address the export barrier;
- (vii) An itemized list of all estimated costs associated with the project for which reimbursement will be sought. Detailed cost calculations and justifications for each budget line item must be provided in the application, 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; and

(viii) 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 may include the entity that submitted the application, private industry entities, host governments, foreign third parties, CCC, FAS, or other Federal agencies. Support may include cash, goods, and services. Although highly encouraged, financial support from the participant is not required.

(3) Export information, including:

- (i) Performance measures for each year the project is active beginning with the year that the project would begin, which will be used to measure the effectiveness of the project;
- (ii) A benchmark performance measure for the year prior to the year that the project would begin; and
- (iii) The viability of long-term sales to this market.

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

Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active SAM.gov registration. If you have never done business with the Federal Government, you will need to register your organization in SAM.gov. If you do not have a SAM.gov account, then you will create an account using login.gov¹ to complete your SAM.gov registration. SAM.gov

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

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

Foreign entities must obtain a NATO Commercial and Government Entity (NCAGE) Code prior to registering in SAM.gov. You can complete the registration once you enter the NCAGE. You can submit your request for an NCAGE Code by going to the NATO Support Activity (NSPA) NCAGE Request Tool at [CAGE/NCAGE Code Request](#), which contains detailed instructions.

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

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

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

Applicants are encouraged to register or update their SAM.gov registration early to avoid delays in processing their application. Applicants whose names are included on the excluded parties list on SAM.gov are not eligible to apply to the TASC program. Applicants should check their SAM.gov status prior to submitting their application.

Applicants must maintain an active SAM.gov registration at all times during which they have active Federal awards or an application under consideration by FAS. FAS will not make an award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM.gov requirements, and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time FAS is ready to make the award, FAS may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive an award and use that determination as a basis for making an award to another applicant. For questions about this requirement, please contact Curt Alt at (202) 690-4784, Senior Director, Program Operations Division, Global Programs or at curt.alt@usda.gov.

Intergovernmental Review

Applicant(s) must contact their State's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to comply with the State's process under Executive Order 12372 (see <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12372.html>). Names and addresses of the SPOCs are maintained at the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf>

Funding Restrictions

In general, TASC funds may not be used in any manner that is prohibited by 2 CFR Part 200 and 2 CFR Part 400, the program regulations at 7 CFR 1487, or this Notice of Funding Opportunity. Certain types of expenses are not eligible for TASC program reimbursement and there are limits on other categories of expenses that may be eligible for TASC program reimbursement. FAS will not reimburse unreasonable expenditures or expenditures for any activity made prior to approval of that activity.

FAS grant funds may only be used for the purpose set forth in the award and must be consistent with the statutory authority for the award. Grant funds and non-monetary support may not be used for matching contributions for other federal grants or cooperative agreements, lobbying, or intervention in federal regulatory or adjudicatory proceedings. Also, TASC program funds may not be used for expenses, fines, settlements, judgements, or payments to legal suits, challenges, or disputes filed against the U.S. Government or any other government entity.

E. Application Review Information

Prior to making an award, FAS will review all applications for eligibility and completeness. FAS will, subject to the availability of funds, approve those applications that it considers to best meet the requirements set forth in this announcement. FAS may, when appropriate to the subject matter of the application, request the assistance of other U.S. Government experts in evaluating the merits of an application. All reviewers scoring an application will be required to sign a conflict-of-interest form, and when conflicts of interests are found the reviewer will be recused from the objective review process.

Application Evaluation Criteria

FAS is required, as per 31 U.S.C. 3321 and 41 U.S.C. 2313, to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.gov, the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS), and the Federal Audit Clearinghouse (FAC). An applicant, at its choice, may review this information and comment on any information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system

accessible through SAM.gov and FAC. FAS will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 C.F.R. §200.206 "Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants."

Review and Selection Process

The purpose of the application review is to rate the qualifications, quality, and appropriateness of projects, determine the reasonableness of project budgets, make recommendations on appropriate funding levels for applications, and submit the applications and funding recommendations to the appropriate officials for decision making. FAS conducts the following process in reviewing applications and allocating available TASC program funds:

Sufficiency Review (Phase 1): In Phase 1, FAS conducts an initial review (sufficiency check) of all applications received to determine the completeness of the application and responsiveness to this announcement. If an applicant is determined to be ineligible per Section C, "Eligibility Information," of this announcement, FAS will not consider the application and will take no further action on it. If an application is determined to be incomplete, FAS will notify the applicant and request that the applicant send in the missing information within 30 days to complete its application. Applications that meet the requirements and are found to be responsive to this announcement will move on to the Phase 2 Agency review.

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:

- (1) 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 (12.5 points);
- (2) 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 (12.5 points);
- (3) 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 (15 points);
- (4) The ability of the organization to provide an experienced staff with the requisite technical and trade experience to execute the project (15 points);
- (5) The extent to which the project is targeted to a market in which the United States is generally competitive (17.5 points);
- (6) The degree to which time is essential to addressing specific export barriers (5 points);
- (7) The nature of the applicant organization, with a greater weight given to those organizations with the broadest base of producer representation (12.5 points); and
- (8) The effectiveness of the performance measures and potential of the performance measures to measure project results (10 points).

The TASC review committee may also solicit and consider feedback on the applications from appropriate overseas Posts in their review and in determining approval recommendations for each applicant. FAS may, when appropriate, request the assistance of other U.S. government subject area experts in evaluating applications.

Final Review and Allocation Decision Making (Phase 3): A summary of the applications and the recommended funding levels for each are provided to the Office of the Deputy Administrator, Global Programs for the purpose of finalizing the TASC program funding recommendations among the applicants. Once finalized, the recommendations are 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 and/or take recommendations out of order based on factors such as Agency priorities, priority markets, program impact, the record of performance of the organization in managing past TASC funds, and the organization's likelihood of success.

F. Federal Award Administration Information

Notice of Award

FAS will notify each applicant in writing of the final disposition of the submitted application. FAS will send an approval letter, agreement, signature card, and a civil rights self-certification form to each approved applicant. The approval letter and agreement will specify the terms and conditions applicable to the project, including the details of each project, responsibilities of the participant, levels of funding, timelines for implementation, and reporting requirements. Applicants not approved for funding will be notified via letter.

Before accepting the award, successful applicants should carefully read the agreement and approval letter for instructions on administering the grant and the terms and conditions associated with Federal Awards. Applicants 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.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements

All successful applicants for all grants are required to comply with the Standard Administrative Terms and Conditions, which are available online at: https://www.fas.usda.gov/grants/general_terms_and_conditions/default.asp. The applicable Standard Administrative Terms and Conditions will be those in effect for the program year in which the award was originally made unless explicitly stated otherwise in subsequent mutually agreed amendments to the award.

Program Performance and Financial Reporting Requirements

TASC participants must provide interim and final reports that cover the program performance and financial status for each approved project. Interim reports must be submitted within 90 days after the end of each program year, and a separate final report is due no later than 120 days after the activity is completed or the agreement is terminated. All reports must be submitted through the UES.

Each report, whether interim or final, must evaluate the progress of the TASC project using the performance measures presented in the approved application, as set forth in the written program agreement, and provide an accounting of all project expenditures by cost category and actual contributions made to the project by the applicant and all other participating entities.

Unusual deviations from activity budget amounts or lagging progress on performance measures should be noted and explained.

Monitoring

TASC projects and activities are subject to review and verification by FAS' Compliance and Security staff, and/or any designated FAS representatives. FAS reserves 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, FAS will review Participants' files related to the grant-funded program. As part of any monitoring and program evaluation activities, Participants must permit FAS, upon reasonable notice, to review grant-related records and to interview the organization's staff and clients regarding the program, and to respond in a timely and accurate manner to FAS requests for information relating to their grant program. Upon request, a TASC participant must provide to FAS documentation that supports the participant's reimbursement claims. FAS may deny a claim for reimbursement if the claim is not supported by adequate documentation.

Close Out Reporting Requirements

Within 120 days after the activity completion date, or after an amendment has been issued to close out a grant, whichever comes first, FAS will confirm that the Participant has provided all the required reports and will review the reports for completeness and content. Once the required reports are approved, FAS will prepare a closeout letter that advises the Participant of the award closeout procedures. The notice will indicate the period of performance as closed, note that any remaining funds will be de-obligated, and address any additional closeout requirements.

G. Awarding Agency Contact Information

Contact and Resource Information

For additional information and assistance regarding this announcement, please contact the following during regular working hours 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time:

1. *Program Operations Division Contact(s):* Curt Alt, Senior Director, Program Operations Division, Global Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture *by courier:* Room 6510, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250, or *by phone:* (202) 690-4784, or *by e-mail* at Curt Alt@usda.gov.

H. Additional Information

1. *Extensions:* Consistent with 7 CFR 1487.4(b), participants may request a no-cost extension to complete all project activities. Extension requests must be made at least 60 days in advance of the agreement expiration date and must include a justification as to why the extension of the award is necessary and how the extension would effectively support the program's purpose. Extension requests are subject to review and approval by FAS.

2. *Prior Approvals:* The Participant must not, without the prior written approval of the FAS Program Manager, request reimbursement, incur costs, or obligate funds for any purpose relating to the operation of their TASC program or activities prior to the approved budget period/performance period. The Participant must not conduct a new activity without the prior written approval of the FAS Program Manager.

3. *Budget Revisions:* Any changes to approved activities must be approved in writing by FAS before any reimbursable expenses associated with the change can be incurred.

4. *Program income*: Program income generated from an activity, the expenditures for which have been wholly or partially reimbursed with TASC funds, shall be used by the Participant in furtherance of its approved activities in the program period during which the TASC funds are available for obligation by the Participant, or must be returned to CCC.