

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY
Assisting Specialty Crop Exports Initiative FY 2027:
Low Oxygen Storage and Packaging Systems for U.S. Tree Nuts with Phytosanitary
Traceability

Table of Contents

1.	Basic Information.....	2
2.	Eligibility.....	3
3.	Program Description	5
4.	Application Contents and Format	8
5.	Submission Requirements and Deadlines	10
6.	Application Review Information.....	11
7.	Award Notices.....	14
8.	Post-Award Requirements and Administration.....	14
9.	Other Information.....	16

1. Basic Information

1.1 Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service announces this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) to support the Assisting Specialty Crop Exports (ASCE) Initiative by issuing a new award. The award is contingent on the availability of funding. This initiative aims to enhance U.S. specialty crop market access in key export markets and support producers with cost-effective approaches for post-harvest pest control and maintaining quality during storage and export. This opportunity is available to U.S. academic institutions, nonprofits with or without 501(c)(3) designation, U.S. trade associations, U.S. agricultural cooperatives, international organizations based in the United States, and any other United State-based entity including private sector businesses. The award is intended to assist U.S. tree nut and durable specialty crop producers and agribusinesses by developing the processes and technologies for phytosanitary validation and traceability of low-oxygen storage and packaging systems. Applicants must be registered in SAM.gov and apply through USDA's ezFedGrants online system, both of which require an identity-proofed login.gov account.

Benefits to the United States:

- This program makes America more prosperous by strengthening trade.
- This program makes America more prosperous by expanding and developing new markets in current and potential trading partners.

1.2 Federal Agency Name

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

1.3 Funding Opportunity Title

Assisting Specialty Crop Exports: Low Oxygen Storage and Packaging Systems for U.S. Tree Nuts with Phytosanitary Traceability

1.4 Announcement Type

New Announcement

1.5 Funding Opportunity Number

USDA-FAS-10621-0750-106-27-0001

1.6 Assistance Listing Number

10.621 Assisting Specialty Crop Exports

1.7 Funding Details

<u>Anticipated Total Available Federal Funding:</u>	\$2,000,000.00
<u>Anticipated Number of Awards:</u>	1
<u>Anticipated Project Duration:</u>	Up to 5 years

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

1.8 Key Dates

Application Submission Deadline: October 26, 2026 at 11:59pm Eastern Daylight Time

1.9 Agency Contact Information

For all inquiries, contact:

Name: Angel Gonzalez

Email Address: Angel.Gonzalez@usda.gov

Phone Number: 202-615-1742

Hours of Operation: 9:00am – 5:30pm Eastern Daylight Time

2. Eligibility

2.1 Eligible Applicants

This opportunity is available to U.S. academic institutions, state governments, nonprofits with or without 501(c)(3) designation, U.S. trade associations, U.S. agricultural cooperatives, international organizations, foreign entities, and any other entity including private sector businesses.

All applicants must have an active registration in the U.S. Government System for Award Management (www.sam.gov) before the date of award. Applicants with inactive, expired, pending, or excluded listings will be deemed ineligible. Exceptions, waivers, or extensions will not be considered. More information about SAM.gov registration can be found in this document in [Section 9, Other Information](#).

2.2 Substantial Compliance

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

Applications must substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in [Section 4, Application Contents and Format](#), of this solicitation or they will be deemed ineligible for funding consideration.

2.3 Evidence of Eligibility

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

2.4 Funding Restrictions

Generally, funds may not be used in any manner that is prohibited by applicable regulations, including [2 C.F.R. § 200](#) and [2 C.F.R. § 400](#). Awards issued pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity may only be used for the purpose set forth in the award, consistent with the statutory authority for the award. Capital expenses, such as the purchase of equipment, not entirely attributable to this award, must be pro-rated.

For example, agreement funds and other support may not be used for matching contributions for other federal grants or cooperative agreements, lobbying, or intervention in federal regulatory or adjudicatory proceedings. Federal employees are prohibited from acting as an agent of the applicant in any capacity (paid or unpaid) on any proposal submitted under this program. Also, federal funds may not be used to sue the Federal Government or any other government entity.

Compensation for personal services: Employees, consultants, or other personnel, including those of subrecipients, and regardless of the method of engagement, may not exceed the pro-rata equivalent of ES-III on the Executive Schedule (for 2026, \$209,600 per year, \$806.15 per day, or \$100.77 per hour). Non-monetizable fringe benefits, such as health insurance coverage, are not included in this ceiling.

In general, costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective but not readily assignable to specific awards, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved, are considered indirect costs. These may include facilities not specific to individual projects, enterprise-wide services such as IT, and enterprise management.

Indirect costs are eligible for reimbursement under this program. If indirect costs are included in the budget, attach a copy of the latest indirect cost rate agreement negotiated with a cognizant federal agency. Pursuant to USDA Departmental Regulation [DR2255-001](#), a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with a cognizant U.S. Government agency will be honored, except where prohibited by statute. If a negotiated indirect cost agreement does not exist, please attach a description of the basis for the indirect cost calculation. If electing to utilize the de minimis rate, consistent with [2 C.F.R. § 200.414\(f\)](#), please include a statement of election.

If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible tasks, activities, or cost items, that portion of the application will be deemed ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible for funding.

2.5 Multiple Applications

An individual applicant may not submit more than one application in response to this NOFO and may not be offered more than one award.

2.6 Cost Share/Match Requirement

Cost sharing is not required but encouraged.

3. Program Description

Background

The occurrence of insects as well as pesticide residuals can be significant barriers for U.S. horticultural exports. Each importing country can have unique phytosanitary and maximum residue limit (MRL) requirements, which creates operational and logistical challenges. To maximize return to growers, U.S. shippers need tools that can universally address all such requirements while maintaining product quality. Currently, tree nuts and many other durable specialty crops require fumigations or freezing, which are both expensive and create bottlenecks in marketing.

More and more tree nut handlers are using a modified atmosphere (MA) or controlled atmosphere (CA) technology in which low-oxygen conditions (<1% by volume) are maintained during storage and/or in packaging. Low-oxygen conditions are known to control insect pests, leave no chemical residuals, and result in high quality products since the lipid oxidation that causes rancidity is markedly suppressed. While this approach is being used as a condition of sale, there is currently no efficient way for shippers to validate the low-oxygen conditions for customers, let alone importers with phytosanitary requirements for insect control. Technically and economically viable, verifiable, and preferably traceable technologies are critically needed before low-oxygen storage and packaging approaches can be used for export to most countries.

Currently, the existing low-oxygen technologies do not incorporate digital mapping or official record-keeping during the packing or storage process, so there is no non-invasive manner to verify the oxygen content over time within the gas-impermeable liners and/or confirm seal integrity. This limits the ability to verify that a low-oxygen environment has been maintained at a specific oxygen level over a certain period of time, which would be necessary to ensure the conditions were met to act as a phytosanitary treatment. Countries such as India, Korea, and Japan require phytosanitary treatments, such as fumigation, for post-harvest pest management before many types of U.S. tree nuts can be imported into the countries. Additionally, buyers in other markets also request pest management treatments as a condition of sale in commercial transactions.

Objective

Recipients will develop technically and economically viable approaches to verify that low-oxygen conditions (less than 1% by volume) in packaging for U.S. tree nuts are maintained and certifiable by third parties. The resulting processes will meet conditions of sale requirements in markets and serve as a basis for establishment of a phytosanitary treatment where other pest-mitigation techniques are prohibited, impractical, or expensive, thus increasing market opportunities for U.S. tree nuts. Additional pest management tools and residue-free phytosanitary treatment options for U.S. commodities to access export markets will aid in the development of foreign markets for U.S. agricultural commodities.

Deliverable

The recipient will develop a report that includes the results of the project. The recipient will also provide a compilation of the proposed verification processes for each type of packaging or technology included in the project for which an oxygen verification process could be established. Solutions for each category for each specific technology and type of packing format (i.e. bulk packaging, retail packaging, use of sensors) must be addressed separately and the report must be differentiated by commodity type (including different tree nuts) if differences in verification processes exist. The report must include an estimate of the costs (per unit and capital costs) for using the different packaging systems and technologies, and how they can be incorporated into commercial contemporary tree nut processing and handling systems.

Program Details

The recipient of this funding will act as the managing entity of the ASCE-Low Oxygen Storage and Packaging Systems for U.S. Tree Nuts with Phytosanitary Traceability Program.

The recipient will work with leading commercial companies/providers of low-oxygen technologies, including sensor developers. The recipient will provide funding support from the project to each of the partners to develop and integrate approaches to non-invasively verify low-oxygen conditions (less than 1% by volume) preferably with digital record keeping.

Technologies or approaches for verifying low-oxygen conditions must document initial conditions and conditions after modification. Solutions should include digital mapping traced throughout the handling and logistics chain. Outputs must be verifiable by the handler and external entities such as third party or USDA inspectors. For example, this could include additional functionality of software, tweaks to hardware for testing/verification of oxygen levels upon filling, updates or new technologies or processes for adding oxygen levels into traceability systems, integration of sensors, ways of measuring seal integrity such as vacuum or pressure testing of enclosure integrity or sensors, among others. Each solution should include documentation of oxygen levels upon filling/sealing, and methods for confirming seal integrity. Verification technologies can also include sensors capable of measuring levels of at least 1% oxygen by volume. Sensor or verification approaches should be non-invasive (i.e., do not require opening up or piercing every package to verify oxygen content).

The low-oxygen technologies and/or approaches included in the project should be those which can be quickly adopted or are currently used in commercial tree nut processing, storage, transport, and packing. The proposed technologies must address bulk and retail packaging.

- For bulk, these include bulk bins and super sacks with an internal liner, used in storage and bulk material handling, as well as 20-pound and 40-pound boxes with liners. This can also include other bulk packaging formats if there is evidence of commercially relevant use in the tree nuts (or dried fruits or pulses) sectors.
- For retail packaging, this includes bags for retail and food service, as well as packaging with liners, membranes, or films impermeable to oxygen.

Verification processes and technologies that are incorporated into the project must be readily implementable and commercially available within a year, as well as be cost effective for U.S. tree nut processors/handlers to adopt and incorporate into existing packaging formats and processing. The recipient must be familiar with, and have access to, contemporary U.S. tree nut (and dried fruit or pulses, or other durable specialty crop) post-harvest processing and shipping technologies.

Recycling options must be available for some of the proposed liners and packaging materials to meet the requirements of the [European Union Packaging & Packaging Waste Regulation \(PPWR\)](#), as the European Union is a major export market for U.S. tree nuts.

For additional targeted technology solutions or research topics proposed during the project, additional subawards may be issued by the recipient which also achieve the objectives of the project. The recipient will present subaward proposals to USDA/FAS for final review and approval.

Project Coordination

After the award is issued, the recipient must create and coordinate with a technical group of U.S. tree nut industry associations, handlers, and USDA relevant experts. Input from this group will support and guide the project to ensure solutions are both commercially viable as well as sufficient to be used in official certification. The recipient will collaborate with USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to ensure that the data collected and processes for oxygen verification developed will be appropriate for consideration as a traceable phytosanitary treatment.

Project duration can be up to five years.

3.1 Authorizing Statutes and Regulations

Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act, [15 U.S.C. § 714c\(f\)](#)

3.2 Type of Assistance Instrument

USDA/FAS anticipates that a Cooperative Agreement will be funded pursuant to this funding opportunity.

This type of agreement provides for substantial involvement between USDA/FAS and/or other USDA agencies, and the selected applicant in the performance of the project. This may include:

- Close monitoring of the successful applicant's performance to verify the results proposed by the applicant;
- Collaboration during performance of the scope of work;
- In accordance with [2 C.F.R. § 200.317](#) and [2 C.F.R. § 200.318](#), review of proposed procurement;
- Approving qualifications of key personnel (USDA will not select the recipient's employees or contractors, but may disallow costs for specific individuals where required by statute or regulation); and

- Review and comment on reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient).

4. Application Contents and Format

4.1 Complete Application Package

A complete application package must include:

- [Standard Form SF-424](#), Application for Federal Assistance, showing the Unique Entity ID, and signed by the applicant.
- [Standard Form SF-424A](#), Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs, showing the budget categorization. Applicants are advised to consult [2 C.F.R. § 200 Subpart E](#) for guidance on proper categorization of cost items. An improper categorization will not itself be grounds for a determination of ineligibility but may delay approval and/or adversely impact the application's scoring.
- A detailed budget narrative, in which cost items are clearly identified, correspond to the appropriate cost category, and are quantified and described in sufficient detail to enable USDA/FAS to independently determine that the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable for the project and consistent with applicable regulations. The budget should cover the duration of the project (up to five years); the total amount of funding for the project duration may be allocated in the first year, to be invoiced on a reimbursable basis over the duration of the project.
 - If indirect costs are included in the budget, attach a copy of the latest indirect cost rate agreement negotiated with a cognizant federal agency. If a negotiated indirect cost agreement does not exist, please attach a description of the basis for the indirect cost calculation. If electing to utilize the de minimis rate, consistent with 2 CFR 200.414(f), please include a statement of election.
- A detailed project narrative or plan of operation no more than ten (10) pages in length, single spaced. Supplemental documents (CVs, letters of support from companies or associations, etc.) are not subject to page limits and should be submitted only if relevant. The project narrative should describe in plain language:
 - Activities to be undertaken, described in detail, indicating locations, timelines, personnel, and other factors that will demonstrate applicant's capacity to develop, select, and manage a portfolio of subawards for packing technology industry and academic researchers (if applicable) for meeting project objectives.
 - The details and justifications for which low-oxygen storage and packaging technologies companies/entities will be involved in and receive funding under the project, as well as the relevance of their technologies for tree nut processing/handling sector. If the packing technologies partners selection is not finalized, or there may be additional partners added, then include description of the process for identifying additional technologies/companies which would be included in the project and what criteria will be used to select them.
 - An explanation of how the proposed technologies included in the project would advance tree nut exports and which markets the applicant anticipates the project would facilitate exports for U.S. tree nut producers as a result of the new technologies.

- The applicant's experience and awareness of the processing, packing, and handling/exporting processes and logistics of the tree nuts sector, including science and industry practices for food safety, quality, phytosanitary issues and use of fumigation, and as well as the process for establishing new export protocols and phytosanitary treatments with USDA.
- Ability and experience to coordinate technical project input from tree nut sector leaders and experts and USDA or university scientists and officials, to guide the project activities and achieve objectives.
- Specialty crop producer support and involvement in the project activities is crucial to achieving project objectives. Applications should include letters of commitment from partners which will be involved in the project, as well as leading tree nut industry organizations. This includes:
 - Letter of support from at least one U.S. tree nut industry organization.
 - A letter of commitment from each packaging/technology company of their interest to work with the managing entity under this project and explore how they would incorporate oxygen-level verification and traceability data into their packaging systems.
 - If specific tree nut processors/handlers have already been identified to be involved in testing new technology or processes in collaboration with packing companies/technologies in their operations, include a description of those companies and letter of interest to participate in the project.

4.2 Specific Application Formats

Applicants should ensure they are using active, i.e. non-expired, versions of standard forms. The use of an expired standard form will not itself be grounds for a determination of ineligibility but may delay processing of an applicant selected for an award.

There is a 10-page limit on the narrative (excluding CVs, letter(s) of commitment). There are no formatting requirements (including, but not limited to, font and font size, margins, paper size, and color limitations) for applications.

4.3 Electronic Signatures

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

4.4 Proprietary Information

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

4.5 Other Application Information

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

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

5. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

5.1 Address to Request Application Package

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

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

Each applicant must:

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

5.3 Submission Instructions

Applications must be submitted through the ezFedGrants system at <https://grants.fms.usda.gov/>. USDA-managed computer systems require applicants to have an identity-proofed account through the [login.gov](#) platform, and in some cases may require at least two persons.

Identity-proofing and subsequent registration with any USDA-managed computer system may take several days, and applicants who do not already have system access should begin the registration process immediately, even if they are unsure if they will apply for this funding opportunity.

Applicants who require assistance with any USDA-managed computer system, such as the [ezFedGrants](#) system, must reach out to the agency contact listed in [Section 1, Agency Contact Information](#), prior to the application submission deadline date in [Section 5.4, Submission Dates and Times](#). USDA/FAS strongly encourages applicants reach out at least 5 business days in advance of the application submission deadline to ensure resolution prior to the application submission deadline date. Applicants should provide as much detail as possible to facilitate resolution of the issue. USDA/FAS will make a reasonable effort to resolve the issue and in rare cases may offer alternative avenues for application submission. If applicants do not contact USDA/FAS prior to the application submission deadline date and submit an application package through an alternative method, their application may be deemed ineligible.

5.4 Submission Dates and Times

Application Submission Deadline: October 26, 2026, at 11:59pm EDT (UTC -04:00)

Applications received after this time will NOT be accepted. Applicants are advised to make their submissions 1-2 days before this deadline in case of computer problems.

5.5 Intergovernmental Review

Not applicable.

6. Application Review Information

6.1 Eligibility Threshold Review

USDA/FAS will conduct an eligibility threshold review of all applications submitted to determine that:

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

An application that does not include all documentation required by this notice of funding opportunity at the time of application, including documentation required in [SAM.gov](#), will be deemed ineligible.

If an applicant is determined to be ineligible, USDA/FAS will notify the applicant prior to commencing with evaluation of applications, usually within 7 business days of the Application Submission Deadline. An applicant that feels such a determination was made in error may request reconsideration, highlighting evidence supporting their claim, by email to the program officer(s) listed in [Section 1, Agency Contact Information](#), within 3 business days of notification. If USDA/FAS determines an error occurred during the application submission and/or eligibility review process, the application will rejoin the group of eligible participants and continue to the merit review process.

Applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in application format, including selecting a legible font type and size for use in the application.

6.2 Review Criteria

Applicants will be evaluated by the extent and quality to which they demonstrate that they have the capabilities, staff, resources, and external companies/packing technologies/partners, to successfully perform the project as described in the following factors. Scoring will also be based on the applicant's ability to clearly articulate and detail its capacity to address the following factors in its proposal.

Technical and Commercial Issues Awareness (20 Pts)

- Does the applicant include an explanation of how the proposed technologies included in the project and deliverables would advance U.S. tree nut exports and aid in the development of foreign markets for U.S. producers as a result of the new technologies?
- To what extent does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of the context and interrelated issues for tree nuts food safety, quality, traceability, low-oxygen packing technologies and processes, and phytosanitary treatments, including for export?

- Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of and experience with contemporary tree nuts processing and handling operations and logistics, including packaging technologies used in this sector for multiple tree nut commodities?
- For the packaging companies/technologies and sensors proposed for inclusion in the project, are sufficient details about the specific type of technology, cost and ease of adopting and operating the technologies/processes for tree nut handlers (per unit cost and capital cost of adopting different technologies), as well as an explanation of their relevance and appropriateness to address the project objectives included?

Project Implementation Plan (30 Points)

- Does the applicant describe and demonstrate their experience and ability to implement the project described in a credible, effective, and time-bound manner?
- Does the applicant articulate their experience and ability to manage a portfolio of subawards for industry and academic researchers and companies? Do they note how they would facilitate collaboration between domestic and international researchers and companies (if appropriate)?
- Do they explain how they would manage commercial privacy and intellectual property privacy of different companies/technologies involved in the project (if needed or requested by the companies involved)?
- Have they developed an appropriate and organized plan for implementing the project which is expected to result in new data verification systems with phytosanitary traceability for oxygen content through handling and logistics of tree nuts and other durable crops?
- Does the applicant have at least two (2) letters of support from low-oxygen/modified atmosphere packing technology companies who will be involved in the project? The letters should express their interest in being involved in the project and their relevance/current level of adoption of the technology with tree nut processors/handlers in the United States.
- To the extent that the applicant will need to identify additional staff or partners, do they have a clear and reasonable plan for how this will occur?
- To the extent that the applicant plans to develop a process to solicit and grant subawards to researchers or companies which are not yet identified or included in the initial application, do they have a clear and reasonable plan for how this will occur and criteria for how they will evaluate additional projects/partners?

External Project Support and Collaboration (25 points)

- Does the applicant describe a credible plan for consulting with tree nut sector industry experts, researchers and advisors, and do they have experience in working with multiple organizations including USDA, specialty crop processors/handlers, and agricultural associations?
- Does the applicant describe a plan for consultation and coordination with USDA agencies: FAS, ARS, and APHIS throughout the project to ensure the verification processes are technically sound and supported by USDA?
- Does the applicant describe the specialty crop stakeholders, other than the applicant and companies/organizations involved, who support this project and why?
- Does applicant include letters of support from at least two (2) U.S. tree nut industry organizations?

- If specific tree nut producers/processors/handlers have been identified to be involved in testing new technology or processes in collaboration with packing companies/technologies, are details included about those companies? Is there a letter of interest/support for the project from each company?

Budget (up to 15 points)

- Are the amount and detail of the budget request reasonable, cost-effectiveness, appropriate, organized, in-scope and aligned with the project objectives?
- Does the Budget Narrative include justification for each budget category adequately explain the costs and why they are necessary to reach the outcomes and objectives of this project?

Professional Formatting, Spelling, and Grammar (10 Points)

- To what extent are the applicant's proposal documents detailed, organized, and clear?
- Has the applicant demonstrated professional organization and formatting throughout the project narrative and supporting documents with limited spelling and grammatical errors?

6.3 Review and Selection Process

The agency will convene a review panel to review the eligible applications against the evaluation criteria described above. USDA/FAS documents that reviewers, whatever their affiliation, are free from a conflict of interest that would affect their assessment of an applicant, whether positively or negatively.

The reviewers will ensure that the applicant can deliver the programs/activities as described in the announcement based on the applicant's project narrative and assign a score and provide summary comments based on the evaluation criteria identified above. The review panel will make a recommendation list to the selecting official, who is not a member of the panel.

The selecting official may select applications out of rank order in consideration of strategic program priorities. Selection determinations are final and cannot be appealed.

Prior to selection, the agency may contact the highest-ranking applicants to seek clarification and to discuss programmatic aspects of the application. If an application includes a subaward, USDA/FAS may request to speak with all parties included in the application to ensure sufficient planning and coordination has taken place prior to making an award.

6.4 Risk Review

Prior to making a Federal award, the Federal awarding agency is required by [2 C.F.R. § 200.206](#), [31 U.S.C. § 3321](#) and [41 U.S.C. § 2313](#) to review information available through any OMB-designated repositories of government-wide eligibility qualification or financial integrity information. Therefore, application evaluation criteria may include the following risk-based considerations of the applicant: (1) financial stability; (2) quality of management systems and ability to meet management standards; (3) history of performance in managing a Federal award; (4) reports and findings from audits; and (5) ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements.

Prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, currently \$350,000, the Federal agency must review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the responsibility/qualification records available in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) (41 U.S.C. § 2313).

- An applicant can review and comment on any information in the responsibility/qualification records available in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov).
- Before making decisions in the risk review required by [2 C.F.R. § 200.206](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-200/subpart-200.206), the Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant along with information available in the responsibility/qualification records in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov).

7. Award Notices

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

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

8. Post-Award Requirements and Administration

8.1 Administrative and National Policy Requirements

All successful applicants for all cooperative agreements are required to comply with the applicable General Terms and Conditions, which can be found at https://fas.usda.gov/grants/general_terms_and_conditions. The applicant is presumed to have read, understood, and accepted these terms when accepting a USDA/FAS award. USDA/FAS will specify in the terms and conditions of all final awards all termination provisions that apply, including terminations for all reasons specified in [2 C.F.R. § 200.340\(a\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-200/subpart-200.340(a)). Applicants with questions about the applicable terms should contact the program officer(s) listed in Section 1, Agency Contact Information.

Before accepting an award, the applicant should carefully read all award documents for instructions on administering the award and the terms and conditions associated with responsibilities of Federal Awards. Recipients must accept all conditions in this NOFO as well as any Special Terms and Conditions in the Notice of Award to receive an award under this program.

8.2 Reporting

Financial Reporting

Financial Reports, using form [SF-425](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-200/subpart-200.425), Federal Financial Report (FFR), must be submitted semi-annually, within 30 days of the end of the reporting period. A final financial report must be submitted within 120 days after the end date of the period of performance pursuant to [2 C.F.R. § 200.328\(d\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-200/subpart-200.328(d)).

Performance Reporting

Performance Progress Reports must be submitted semi-annually, within 30 days of the end of the reporting period. A final performance progress report must be submitted no later than 120 calendar days after the end date of the period of performance. The recipient may use any appropriate format for performance progress reports, provided the report includes:

- a) A comparison of actual accomplishments to the established goals for the period;
- b) The reasons why established goals were not met, if appropriate; and
- c) Additional pertinent information including, when appropriate, analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs.

Recipients are encouraged to include photographs and other supplemental material in the performance report.

Financial and Performance reports must be submitted through the ezFedGrants system at <https://grants.fms.usda.gov/>. USDA/FAS may authorize alternative means of submission for recipients who demonstrate a bona fide need.

Subaward and Executive Compensation Reporting

Applicants must ensure that they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the subaward and executive total compensation reporting requirements established at [2 CFR § 170](#), should they be selected for funding.

Closeout

No later than 120 calendar days after the end date of the period of performance or after an amendment has been issued to close out a USDA/FAS financial assistance agreement, whichever comes first, recipients must submit a final financial report and final progress report detailing all accomplishments and a qualitative summary of the impact of those accomplishments throughout the period of performance. After final reports have been reviewed and approved by the agency, and any residual amount due to the recipient or due to be returned to the agency is disbursed, the award is subject to closeout. Acceptance of final reports by USDA/FAS constitutes a closeout of the award with no further notice or obligation to either party. This acceptance will indicate the period of performance has expired, and any remaining funds will be deobligated. Records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the final reports are submitted.

8.3 Monitoring

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

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

8.4 Conflict of Interest

The applicant's Conflict of Interest (COI) Point of Contact as defined in USDA/FAS Conflict of Interest Policy must notify the USDA/FAS contact identified in [Section 1, Agency Contact Information](#), of this solicitation of any actual or potential conflict of interest that they are aware of that may provide the applicant with an unfair competitive advantage in competing for USDA/FAS financial assistance awards within 10 calendar days of becoming aware of the conflict of interest. Examples of an unfair competitive advantage include but are not limited to situations in which an USDA/FAS employee reviewed and commented on or drafted all or part of an applicant's application. Note that USDA/FAS does not generally consider receiving information from an USDA/FAS employee limited to whether the applicant or the applicant's proposed project is eligible to compete for funding to confer an unfair competitive advantage. In addition, assistance agreements made under this solicitation will include a term and condition notifying recipients of their COI disclosure obligations and responsibilities under the award including the need to have systems in place to address, resolve and disclose COIs to USDA/FAS.

8.5 Mandatory Disclosures

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

9. Other Information

9.1 Extensions

Extensions to this program are permitted, subject to approval.

9.2 No Awards

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

9.3 SAM.gov Registration Instructions

Organizations applying for this funding opportunity must have an active [SAM.gov](#) registration. If an applicant has never done business with the Federal Government, the applicant will need to register their organization in [SAM.gov](#). If the applicant does not have a [SAM.gov](#) account, then the applicant will create an account using [login.gov](#) to complete their [SAM.gov](#) registration. Login.gov is a secure sign in service used by the public to sign into Federal Agency systems including SAM.gov and Grants.gov. For help with login.gov accounts, visit <http://login.gov/help>.

[SAM.gov](#) registration is FREE. The process for entity registrations includes several steps and validations and is not complete until the registration is shown as Active. Please review the [Entity Registration Checklist](#) for details on this process.

If an applicant has done business with the Federal Government previously, the applicant can check their entity status using their government issued UEI to determine if their registration is active. [SAM.gov](#) requires account renewal every 365 days to keep it active.

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

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

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