Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions

__2014 Request for Applications__

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 4, 2014

U.S. Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ORGANIC TRANSITIONS

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.303.

DATES: Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time** on **April 4, 2014**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to 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)). Submit written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Organic Transitions RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the **Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions (ORG)** for fiscal year (FY) **2014** to solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research, education, and extension activities in program areas. In pursuant to H.R. 3547, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, the amount available to support this program in FY 2014 is approximately $4 million.

This notice identifies the objectives for **ORG** projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an ORG grant.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626), as reauthorized by Section 7306 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) (Pub. L. 110-246), authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a competitive grants program that provides funding for integrated, multifunctional agricultural research, extension, and education activities. Subject to the availability of appropriations to carry out this program, the Secretary may award grants to colleges and universities [as defined by section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3103)], as amended, on a competitive basis for projects that address priorities in United States agriculture and involve integrated research, education, and extension activities, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB). The RFA will be developed each fiscal year based on these established priorities and approaches to solving the critical agricultural issues. Section 7129 of the FCEA amended section 406(b) of AREERA (7 U.S.C. 7626(b)), adding Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (HSACU) as eligible entities for competitive funds awarded under this authority (see Part III, B. for more information).

The overall goal of the ORG Program is to support the development and implementation of research, extension and higher education programs to improve the competitiveness of organic livestock and crop producers, as well as those who are adopting organic practices. NIFA administers the ORG Program by determining priorities in U.S. agriculture through Agency stakeholder input processes in consultation with the NAREEEAB. In FY 2014, ORG will continue to prioritize environmental services provided by organic farming systems in the area of soil conservation, pollinator health, and climate change mitigation, including greenhouse gases (GHG), as well as the development of educational tools for Cooperative Extension personnel and other agricultural professionals who advise producers on organic practices, and the development of cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from the National Organic Program's National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. It is expected that all projects will integrate research, education and extension activities, as appropriate to project goals, although some projects may be weighted more heavily than others in one or more of these areas. However, all proposals should have activities and impact in at least two of these three areas: research, education and extension.

The ORG Program directly aligns with the Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan (http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA_REE_Action_Plan_02-2012_2.pdf) and specifically addresses: Goal 1 – Local and Global Food Supply and Security, Subgoals 1A, 1B, 1D (which focus on Crop Production, Health, Outreach and Markets); Goal 2 - Responding to Climate and Energy Needs, Subgoal 2A (which focuses on Climate Variability); Goal 3 – Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, Subgoal 3A (which focuses on Water); Goal 5 – Food Safety; Goal 6 – Education and Science Literacy; and Goal 7 – Rural Prosperity/Rural-Urban Interdependence by supporting systems-based research to enhance the sustainability of food production, including environmental, economic, and social factors.

B. Program Purpose

The goal of the ORG program is to support the development and implementation of research, extension, and higher education programs to improve the competitiveness of organic livestock and crop producers, as well as those who are adopting organic practices.

In FY 2014, ORG will fund standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 1 to 3 years. Budgets may not exceed $200,000 per year with the total amount awarded not to exceed $500,000. NIFA expects to make a total of seven to eight awards.

Practices and systems to be addressed include those associated with organic crops, organic animal production (including dairy), and organic systems that integrate plant and animal production. Applications are expected to contain descriptions of stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Applicants are strongly encouraged to assemble project teams that include those with expertise in Research, Education, Extension, and Evaluation and to utilize a systems approach. Projects should plan to deliver applied production information to producers, students, or their information providers, such as Extension agents/educators, agricultural consultants, or college teaching faculty.

Fieldwork to set up treatments or collect data on organic practices must be done on certified organic land. Refer to the USDA National Organic Program (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop) for organic production standards. However, as appropriate to project objectives, comparisons can include land in transition to organic certification and land not managed using organic practices. Similarly, the use of conventional production technologies, including the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO), for comparative purposes or proof of concept is permissible if cross-contamination with the organic and transitional treatments is prevented. In all cases, appropriate justification should be provided for activities that do not follow organic standards.

C. Program Priorities

Organic agricultural systems and practices provide many environmental services and environmental stewardship is a key principle in organic farming. For example, the use of cover crops, crop rotation, and erosion control; proper manure management; and livestock operation guidelines are cross-compliant with many Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) practice standards. How specific practices and combinations of practices interact in organic systems—including their contributions to conservation outcomes and climate change mitigation potential—is neither well documented nor understood, especially in the case of long-term organic soil management. The most meaningful metrics or models to quantify these services in organic systems are also not clear. A better understanding and documentation of these outcomes will allow for the adjustment of organic practices in order to optimize environmental services and to quantify and document those services in the areas of conservation practices, pollinator health, and climate change mitigation, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This information will help farmers better assess the financial benefits and costs of their practices and improve their ability to qualify for current and future incentives in the climate change and environmental markets. This process will also help justify consumer expectations that organically-grown and certified food is produced using the most environmentally-sound and sustainable production practices possible.

To be successful and sustainable, organic agriculture also needs essential ecosystem processes and components, such as biodiversity, to be intact. A better understanding and assessment of the contribution of organic agricultural systems to maintaining biodiversity is required.

However, for organic agriculture to provide these ecosystem benefits, producers need viable crop management tools. The National Organic Program (NOP) maintains a list of management tools, including fertilizers, cultural practices and pesticides, for certified organic growers. Recommendation for removal of specific tools from the NOP National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop) creates the need for research-based alternatives. NOP has specifically requested research directed to finding replacements for these materials, which are critical for many segments of the industry—from producers already certified for organic production to those in transition or considering transition.

Research findings will not have their intended impact on the organic agriculture industry unless they reach—and are adopted by—producers, requiring an aggressive Extension effort. Stakeholders have cited the need for Extension tools to help transitioning producers and their advisors, as few resources are available to guide growers during this critical period.

Priority Areas for FY 2014: Proposals within the Legislative Authority above will be accepted for consideration by panels. In FY 2014, priority will be given to proposals in the following areas (1-4 below):

Priority 1: <u>Documenting and understanding the effects</u> of organic practices such as crop rotation, organic manure, mulch and/or compost additions, cover crops, and reduced or conservation tillage on ecosystem services, greenhouse gas mitigation, and biodiversity. Project examples include:

1) optimizing tillage, cover crop and rotation practices to reduce erosion and increase carbon sequestration during the transition to organic agricultural systems and practices;
2) assessing the environmental, conservation, greenhouse gas emission reduction, and/or climate change mitigation potential of pasture-based organic dairy systems;
3) examining soil dynamics in fields under long-term organic soil management compared to that during the transition;
4) generating data sets on nitrous oxide emissions from organic systems using various sources of nitrogen, rotation practices, and tillage levels; and
5) evaluating the effect of transitioning to organic production on biodiversity, including pollinators.

Priority 2: <u>Improved technologies, methods, model development, and other metrics</u> to document, describe, and optimize the environmental services and climate change mitigation ability of organic farming systems. Project examples include:

1) developing tools that could be used to select an optimal suite of organic practices for a particular farming system;
2) developing better tools to assess the contributions of organic practices in future carbon markets; and

3) comparing estimates of conservation outcomes, environmental services, soil carbon sequestration potential, and/or greenhouse gas mitigation determined by current models during the transition to areas under long-term organic management.

Priority 3: <u>Develop cultural practices and other allowable alternatives</u> to substances recommended for removal from NOP's National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop). This may include effective substitutes or new technologies, cultural practices, cultivars, or breeds that render the substance in question less limiting to production under organic growing conditions. We encourage a systems approach, but will also consider proposals that are narrower in scope. For FY 2014, we are especially interested in the following substances that have been recommended for removal: a) antibiotics used to control diseases such as fire blight in organically grown crops; and b) methionine for use in poultry rations.

Priority 4: <u>Outreach to students and producers:</u> Projects may target students or their information providers (such as college teaching faculty) for information delivery on organic agriculture. This activity may include the development of college curriculum or other resources in the area of organic agriculture, with a focus on the transition period. Projects may also target producers directly or through the development and demonstration of educational tools for Cooperative Extension personnel and other agricultural professionals who advise producers on organic practices. Coordination of the development of online content with eXtension and the eOrganic Community of Practice is strongly encouraged as described below.

Funding may be requested to:

1) Establish an eXtension CoP or
2) Enhance an existing CoP, such as eOrganic, to ensure that information and technology transfer reaches potential adopters as quickly as possible.

Applicants establishing new CoPs (or enhancing existing ones) must follow the steps outlined by eXtension.org (http://create.extension.org/node/2057) and address the key criteria to establish a new COP. Proposals utilizing eXtension and the eOrganic CoP require letters of acknowledgement or support from appropriate eXtension and eOrganic contacts to indicate coordination has taken place and, where appropriate, adequate resources are budgeted. Please use the following links for detailed guidance on how to partner with eXtension or eOrganic:
- eXtension NIFA RFA information: http://create.extension.org/node/2057
- eOrganic information on partnering in a proposal: http://eorganic.info/proposal

Important Notes for All Priorities:

1) Fieldwork to set up treatments or collect data on organic practices must be done on certified organic land. Refer to the USDA National Organic Program (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop) for organic production standards. However, as appropriate to project objectives, comparisons can include land in transition to organic certification and land not managed using organic practices. Similarly, the use of conventional production technologies (including the use of GMOs) for comparative purposes or proof of concept is permissible if cross-contamination with the organic and transitional treatments is prevented.

2) Projects should use combinations of Research, Education, and Extension activities and describe expected outcomes and impacts. All projects must develop and implement an evaluation plan that captures project outcomes and demonstrates the impact of the project. Describe in the evaluation section how the project evaluator or evaluation team will determine if project goals have been met and what the impacts of those accomplishments are. Evaluation should be based on benchmarks, indicators, or expected outcomes related to project goals and activities, such that project goals are related to activities and to outputs, outcomes, and impacts (immediate, short-term, and intermediate-term expected changes). The budget must include adequate resources for project evaluation and evaluation procedures must be adequately described in the methods section.

3) Projects should include a plan to ensure continuation of the effort beyond the funding period.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

In pursuant to H.R. 3547, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, the amount available to support this program in FY 21014 is approximately $4 million. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html.

B. Types of Applications

In FY **2014**, applications may be submitted to the **ORG** Program as one of the following two types of requests:

(1) New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the ORG Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

(2) Resubmitted application. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the ORG Program but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV). Resubmitted applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in appropriate area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

C. Project Types

ORG will fund standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 1 to 3 years. Budgets may not exceed $200,000 per year with the total amount awarded not to exceed $500,000. NIFA expects to make a total of seven to eight awards.

An Integrated Project should include at least two of the three functions of the agricultural knowledge system (Research, Extension, and Education) focused around a problem or issue; however, single-function projects with sufficient justification will be considered. The functions addressed in the project should be interwoven throughout the life of the project and act to complement and reinforce one another. The functions should be interdependent and necessary for the success of the project. Integrated projects aim to resolve problems through the application of science-based knowledge and address needs identified by stakeholders. Integrated projects clearly identify anticipated outcomes and have a plan for evaluating and documenting the success of the project.

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

The responsible and ethical conduct of research (RCR) is critical for excellence, as well as public trust, in science and engineering. Consequently, we consider education in RCR essential to the preparation of future scientists. In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 7 CFR Part 3022, 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, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Per award terms and conditions, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and to support the conduct of the training.

Note that the training referred to herein shall be either on-campus or off-campus training. The general content of the ethics training will, at a minimum, emphasize three key areas of research ethics: authorship and plagiarism, data and research integration, and reporting misconduct. Each institution will be responsible for developing its own training system, as schools will need flexibility to develop training tailored to their specific student needs. Grantees should consider the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program for RCR (https://www.citiprogram.org/rcrpage.asp). Typically this RCR education addresses the topics of: Data Acquisition and Management - collection, accuracy, security, access; Authorship and Publication; Peer Review; Mentor/Trainee Responsibilities; Collaboration; Conflict of Interest; Research Misconduct; Human Subject Research; and Use of Animals in Research.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Colleges and universities (as defined in section 1404 of NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3103) are eligible to submit applications to the ORG program. Section 1404 of NARETPA was amended by section 7101 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246) to define Hispanic-serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs) (see Part III, B. and 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions for more information), and to include research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities.

For the purposes of this program, the terms "college" and "university" mean an educational institution in any state which (1) 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; (2) is legally authorized within such state to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) provides an educational program for which a bachelor's degree or any other higher degree is awarded; (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association. Applications also may be submitted by 1994 Land-Grant Institutions (defined in 7 CFR 3430), HSACUs, and research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities.

Award 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 time of application deadline will result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Hispanic-serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities

Section 7101 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-246) amended section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) (7 USC 3103) to create a definition for a new group of cooperating institutions: Hispanic-serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs). HSACUs are colleges and universities that qualify as Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs) and offer associate, bachelors, or other accredited degree programs in agriculture-related fields. HSACUs do not include 1862 land-grant institutions.

Pursuant to section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626) which authorized the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grant Program, all four year HSIs are eligible to apply for Integrated Projects as identified in the FY 2014 ORG RFA. Two year HSIs, however, may be eligible to apply only upon a determination by NIFA that the institution offers an associate or other accredited degree programs in agriculture-related fields. To seek an eligibility determination for grants under this RFA, two year HSIs may submit a one-page request to NIFA certifying that they are a Hispanic-serving institution, as defined in section 502 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1101a), and providing a justification that they do offer associate or other accredited degree programs in

agriculture-related fields. Eligibility determinations are valid for FY 2014 only and must be renewed every fiscal year.

Additional questions on HSACU eligibility can be addressed to Dr. Irma Lawrence, HSI National Program Leader, at ilawrence@nifa.usda.gov, (202) 720-2082, or via fax (202) 720-2030. HSIs that seek a determination of eligibility may submit a request before the application deadline date to Dr. Lawrence directly or as a portable document format (PDF) attachment to the SF-424 (R&R) application package submitted through Grants.gov. The request should document that the HSI: 1) qualifies as a Hispanic-serving institution; 2) offers accredited degree programs in agriculture-related fields; and 3) is not an 1862 Land-Grant institution.

C. Cost Sharing or Matching

If a grant provides a particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, the grant recipient is required to provide funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and/or in-kind contributions. See Part IV, B. 6. for further details.

NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if NIFA determines that:
(a) the results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or (b) the project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement. Projects involving organic agriculture may qualify for a waiver under "b" above.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Notice of Intent to Submit an Application

Prospective applicants are asked to email a Notice of Intent to Submit an Application by 5:00 p.m. on **Friday, February 28, 2014**. This notification is not required and does not enter into the review of a subsequent application. The information it contains will be used by program staff to plan the review process. It will not be used for screening for project appropriateness or applicant eligibility, nor will feedback be offered.

This email should include the following information:

1. Descriptive (draft) title of proposed research
2. Name of the Project Director and Applicant Institution name
3. Names of other potential co-Project Directors and their affiliations, if applicable
4. Priority area(s) addressed (see Part I (B) for specific details)
5. Likely type of proposal (resubmission or new)
6. Subject line of email should read: ORG – Intent to Submit
7. E-mail should be sent to organicprograms@nifa.usda.gov

B. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. Applicants are advised to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the PD/PI first contact an Authorized Representative (AR, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grant.gov. If not (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed **PRIOR** to submitting an application. It can take as long as 2 weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **"Register" in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to** http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html**) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Item 2. below mentions the "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide." Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains additional explanatory language regarding the registration process.

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:
1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, seehttp://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-

support/software/adobe-reader-compatibility.html. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determination whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.

2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to http://www.grants.gov, click on "Applicants" in the navigation bar at the top of the page and then click on the "Apply for Grant Opportunities" link under the "Apply for Grant" heading. Under Step 1 click on "Download a Grant Application Package," and enter the funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-ICGP-004448** in the appropriate box and click "Download Package." From the search results, click "Download" to access the application package.

   Contained within the application package is the "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide." This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

   If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application,** refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website (http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-resources.html). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:
   > Grants.gov customer support
   > 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035
   > Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on federal holidays.
   > Email: support@grants.gov
   > Grants.gov iPortal: Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 am - 9 p.m. ET). Get help now!

   > Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:
   > - Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
   > - Name of agency you are applying to
   > - Specific area of concern

See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html for additional resources for applying electronically.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the guide. <u>ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW.</u> Partial applications

will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).

Grants.gov provides online tools to assist if you do not own PDF-generating software. You will find PDF conversion software at http://test.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/pdf-conversion-software.html.

For any questions related to the preparation of an application, review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable RFA. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:
- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 4. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of **ORG**. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed **20** pages of written text, figures, and tables regardless of whether it is single- or double-spaced. This maximum (**20** pages) has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

(a) Response to the previous panel review: An application with substantive similarities to a prior, unsuccessful project should be presented as a resubmission. Resubmitted applications must provide a detailed response to the previous panel review. The response should be as concise as possible, but there is no limit to the number of pages that may be submitted. The response to the previous review is not counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative. A NIFA-issued proposal number must be included in the response to the previous review.

(b) Introduction: Include a clear statement of the long-term goals and supporting objectives of the proposed activities. Summarize the body of knowledge or past activities substantiating the need for the proposed project. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the

proposed activity, including the work of key project personnel. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, include in-depth information on the following, when applicable:

(1) Estimates of the magnitude of the issues and their relevance to stakeholders and to ongoing state-federal food and agricultural Research, Education, and Extension programs;

(2) Description of the role stakeholders, including end users, play in problem identification, planning, and implementation and evaluation as appropriate; and

(3) Reasons for performing the work at the proposing institution.

(c) Objectives: Include clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged statements of specific aims of the proposed effort, including the suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale. Projects must include specific objectives for Research, Education, and Extension functions (as appropriate); include evidence of necessary involvement from interdisciplinary teams; and demonstrate the extent to which partnerships with other institutions (federal, state, other) are developed.

(d) Methods: Explicitly state the procedures or methods to be applied to the proposed effort. Include, but do not necessarily limit to:

(1) Description of how the project will solicit and use stakeholder involvement;

(2) Description of the proposed project activities and the sequence in which they are to be carried out;

(3) Techniques and methodology to be employed in the project, including their feasibility and rationale;

(4) Results expected within a reasonable time frame;

(5) How you will monitor and evaluate (as appropriate) Research, Extension, and Education activities;

(6) How you will analyze and interpret data;

(7) Details of plans to communicate results to stakeholders and the public;
(8) Pitfalls that might be encountered;

(9) Limitations to proposed procedures; and

(10) Suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale.

(11) Plan to sustain activities beyond this funding period

(e) Project Timetable: Outline all important phases as a function of time, year-by-year, for the entire project, including periods beyond the grant funding period. Include specific, measurable goals or projected accomplishments for each year of ORG funding and expected impacts or outcomes of the work.

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the Guide includes information about the people who require a Senior/Key Person Profile, and details about the Biographical Sketch and the Current and Pending Support, including a link to a suggested template for the Current and Pending Support.

5. R&R Personal Data – As noted in Part V, 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

6. R&R Budget
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Matching
If an applicant concludes that matching funds are not required as specified under Part III, C., a justification should be included in the Budget Narrative. NIFA will consider this justification when ascertaining final matching requirements or determining if required matching can be waived. NIFA retains the right to make final determinations regarding matching requirements.

For those grants where matching funds are required as specified under Part III, C., applications should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Written verification means:

For any **third party cash contributions**, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, signed by the Authorized Representative of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor;   (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation; and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.

For any **third party in-kind contributions**, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution, signed by the Authorized Representative of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

The sources and the amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution should be summarized on a separate page and placed in the application immediately following the Budget Narrative. All pledge agreements must be placed in the application immediately following the summary of matching support.

The value of applicant contributions to the project shall be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circular A-21, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions, for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

Additional Budget Information
During the term of their project ORG Project Directors must attend at least two Project Directors' Workshops. Sufficient funds should be budgeted in the proposal and reserved in the course of the project for the PD to attend the workshops in the Washington, DC area, each lasting 2 days. **The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the Budget Justification** (Field K. of the R&R Budget).

Publication costs may include the additional cost of open-source publication if that is an option for the journal. Open source availability will increase the visibility and citation rate for NIFA-funded research publications and should be chosen if it is an option and appropriate.

7. <u>Supplemental Information Form</u>
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter "**Organic Transitions**") and the program code (i.e., enter "**112.E)**

b. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List**. See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time** on **April 4, 2014**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications (see Part IV. C.). Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFA 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, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.

D. Funding Restrictions

Funds awarded under this authority may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of Research, Education, or Extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

Section 718 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (Division A of Pub. L. 113-6) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Therefore, when preparing budgets, applicants should limit their requests for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. If no rate has been established the applicant may indicate "None—will negotiate" and a reasonable dollar amount for indirect costs may be requested, which will be subject to approval by USDA. In the latter case, if a proposal is recommended for funding, an indirect cost rate proposal must be submitted prior to award to support the amount of indirect costs requested. NIFA will request an indirect cost rate proposal and provide instructions, as necessary. An applicant may elect not to charge indirect costs and, instead, use all grant funds for direct costs. If indirect costs are not charged, the phrase "None requested" should be written in this space.

E. Other Submission Requirements

You should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, section 1.9 in the document entitled "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide."

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III., section 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

We evaluate each application in a 2-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, a review panel will technically evaluate applications that meet these requirements.

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) 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; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

Practices and systems to be addressed include those associated with organic crops, organic animal production (including dairy), and organic systems integrating plant and animal production. Applications should describe stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. We will give priority to applications that describe multi-state, multi-institutional, multidisciplinary, multifunctional activities, and combinations thereof; however, a narrower focus, such as a single university that demonstrates significant collaboration with various agencies or organizations within the host state, as appropriate to project goals, may also be competitive. We strongly encourage project teams to have expertise in research, education, extension, and evaluation. Projects should plan to deliver applied production information to producers and students. We also encourage description of how results at the field and farm scale can be extrapolated beyond the parameters of the proposed project.

We will use the following evaluation criteria when reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. Technical merit of all aspects of the application, including research, education, and Extension components, as appropriate (50 points).
   a. Degree of integration of Research, Education, and Extension (10 pts);
   b. Extent to which proposed work addresses identified organic stakeholder needs in the priority areas described above (10 pts);
   c. Suitability and feasibility of methodology for successfully completing work in the allotted time (10 pts);
   d. Quality of monitoring and evaluation plans (10 pts); and

e. Qualifications of key project personnel and institutions, including institutional experience and competence in the proposed area of work, and adequacy of available support personnel, equipment, and facilities (10 pts);

2. **Relevance of proposed project to ORG purpose (see Part I, B.) (50 points).**
   a. Justification for concern (10 pts);
   b. Evidence of appropriate involvement with interdisciplinary teams and institutional partners (federal, state, other) (10 pts);
   c. Extent to which stakeholders, including end users, were or will be involved in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation (10 pts);
   d. Probability that the project will be successful, have documentable impact, and produce transferable results (10 pts); and
   e. Likelihood that the project will fill knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of organic practices and programs in the priority areas listed previously (10 pts).

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, we determine the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 1801 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 340, Reston, VA, 20191. Phone: (888) 349-7715. Web site: http://www.hepinc.com.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, are kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process, to the extent permitted by law, therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the preaward process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant shall 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 RFA 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 (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR), and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum:

(1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;

(2) Title of project;

(3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;

(4) Identifying award number assigned by NIFA;

(5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;

(6) Total amount of financial assistance approved for the award;

(7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;

(8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;

(9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html to view NIFA award terms and conditions);

(10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to:

2 CFR Part 220—Cost Principles for Educational Institutions (OMB Circular A-21).

2 CFR Part 225—Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87).

2 CFR Part 230—Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122).

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

7 CFR Part 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., OMB Circular Nos. A-21, A-87, and A-122, now codified at 2 CFR Parts 220, 225 and 230), and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308 (formerly the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, Pub. L. No. 95-224), as well as general policy requirements applicable to recipients of departmental financial assistance.

7 CFR Part 3016—USDA Implementation of Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3019—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-110, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Nonprofit Organizations (2 CFR Part 215).

7 CFR Part 3021—USDA Implementation of Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

7 CFR Part 3022—Research Institutions Conducting USDA-Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct.

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations.

7 CFR Part 3407—USDA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR 3430—Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs-- General Award Administrative Provisions.

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in federally-assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in federally-assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Grantees are to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system that facilitates both grantee submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. Details of annual and final technical reporting requirements also are included in the award terms and conditions.

PDs are required to attend at least two PD workshops at a location and time to be designated at a later date. Budget amount should be sufficient to attend the 2-day workshops in the Washington, DC area. In the early years of a multiyear project, participation may be in the form of a poster presentation and submission of an abstract. In the final year of the project, an oral presentation should be made and a written report submitted.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Program Contacts:

Dr. Mathieu Ngouajio
National Program Leader
Institute of Food Production and Sustainability
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240;
Telephone: (202) 401-4895
Fax: (202) 401-6488
E-mail: mngouajio@nifa.usda.gov

Dr. Steve Smith
National Program Leader
Institute of Food Production and Sustainability
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240;
Telephone: (202) 401-6134
Fax: (202) 401-1782
E-mail: sismith@nifa.usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contacts:

Duane Alphs
Awards Management Division
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240;
Telephone: 202-401-4362
Email: dalphs@nifa.usda.gov

Rochelle McCrea
Awards Management Division
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240
Telephone: 202-401-2880
Email: rmcrea@nifa.usda.gov

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

We will send copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. <u>Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility</u>

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.

2. <u>Changes in Project Plans</u>

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

b. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved goals or objectives prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests be approved for changes that are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel, prior to effecting such changes.

d. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not federal funds are involved, prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. The terms and conditions of award include information about no-cost extensions of the award and when ADO's prior approval is necessary.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of

amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the 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.

E. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.