Specialty Crop Research Initiative

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FY 2014 Request for Applications

LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: April 11, 2014

STAKEHOLDER RELEVANCE STATEMENT DEADLINE: April 11, 2014

INVITED FULL APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 20, 2014

U.S. Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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

SPECIALTY CROP RESEARCH INITIATIVE

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.309**.

DATES:

1. Letters of Intent for Research and Extension Planning Grant applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern time on April 11, 2014**. See Section IV, A. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a letter of intent and submitting instructions. **LETTERS OF INTENT ARE MANDATORY FOR RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PLANNING GRANT APPLICATIONS.**

2. Complete, error-free Stakeholder Relevance Statements for all other grant types must be received in Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 11, 2014.** See Section IV, C. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a stakeholder relevance statement. **STAKEHOLDER RELEVANCE STATEMENTS ARE MANDATORY FOR ALL SPECIALTY CROP RESEARCH INITIATIVE GRANT APPLICATIONS EXCEPT FOR RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PLANNING GRANTS.**

3. **Invited full applications** must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on June 20, 2014**. See Section IV, D. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a full application.

The agency strongly encourages applicants to submit applications well before the deadline to allow time for correction of technical errors identified by Grants.gov. Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six 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 your comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, and 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 SCRI RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) for fiscal year (FY) 2014 to solve critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities that use systems-based, trans-disciplinary approaches. The intent of the SCRI program is to solve the needs of the various specialty crop industries through the promotion of collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information, and the development of resources that accelerate application of scientific discovery and technology. NIFA anticipates the total amount available for support of the SCRI program in FY 2014 will be approximately $76.8 million. Of this, approximately $24 million will be reserved for the Emergency Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program component of SCRI, in accordance with Section 7306 of P.L, 113-79, the Agricultural Act of 2014. The SCRI program will give priority to projects that are multistate, multi-institutional or trans-disciplinary (see Definitions, Part VIII (E)), and include clearly defined mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public.

Please Note: Beginning in FY 2014, the SCRI program will be competed in two stages. Applicants intending to submit Standard Research and Extension projects, Coordinated Agricultural Projects eXtension projects or Regional Partnerships for Innovation projects will be required to submit Stakeholder Relevance Statements (SRS). The content of the SRS is described in Section IV, C. of this RFA. Applicants whose SRS is scored highly enough **will be invited to submit full applications**. Invited full applications will undergo a scientific peer review. Review criteria for the SRS and invited full application review can be found in Section V, A. of this RFA. Both the relevance score and the results of the scientific peer review will be considered when recommending applications for award.

The SCRI program offers the following five project types in FY 2014. These project types are described in more detail in Part II, C. Applicants should decide which project type is best suited to the objectives of their research and extension project and develop a budget that fits the objectives. Applicants are discouraged from developing a project (and selecting a project type) based on a budget request target.

1. **Standard Research and Extension Projects** (SREPs)
    a. Project Period – Up to five years.
    b. Budget – Federal funds not less than $250,000 per project.
    c. Purpose – To support targeted problem-solving efforts that would not otherwise qualify in scope for support as a CAP project.

2. **Coordinated Agricultural Projects** (CAPs)
    a. Project Period – Three to five years.
    b. Funding range – Normally, federal funds will not exceed a total of $10,000,000.
    c. Purpose – To address specific multiple components of a primary system or multiple components of areas where primary systems overlap (see diagram on page 6).

3. **Regional Partnerships for Innovation** (RPIs)
    a. Project Period – Two to three years.
    b. Budget – Normally, federal funds will not exceed $2,000,000 per project.

c. Purpose – To form partnerships that provide the local or regional infrastructure needed to fully exploit future technology commercialization and adoption.

4. **eXtension Projects**
   a. Project Period – Three to five years.
   b. Budget – Normally, federal funds will not exceed $450,000 per project.
   c. Purpose – To develop Communities of Practice (COPs) for the eXtension system and to support existing COPs.

5. **Research and Extension Planning Projects**
   a. Project Period – One year.
   b. Budget – Federal funds up to $50,000 per project.
   c. Purpose – To provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP, RPI, or CAP proposals (grant planning). Funds may also be requested to provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning). The expectation is that developed plans could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications.

This notice identifies the objectives for SCRI projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a SCRI award.

We encourage you to go to the SCRI More Information page, www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/scri/scri.html, to view archived presentations from workshops on "Planning and Managing Systems Based Trans-disciplinary Projects for USDA/NIFA" to help you develop your application.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is reauthorized by Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 which amends Section 412 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act (AREERA) of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7632). Section 412 of the AREERA of 1998 established a specialty crop research and extension initiative to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by developing and disseminating science-based tools to address needs of specific crops and their regions. Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 added a requirement that, in addition to the scientific peer review NIFA regularly conducts, a panel of specialty crop industry representatives review and rank applications to SCRI for merit, relevance, and impact. In addition, Section 7306 requires increased consultation between NIFA and the Specialty Crops Committee of the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board. The initial consultation occurred on 2/13/2014 and comments provided by the Committee were considered prior to finalizing this request for applications.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the SCRI program is to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry (as defined in Part VIII, E) by awarding grants to support research and extension that address key challenges of national, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of food and agriculture, including conventional and organic food production systems. **Except for eXtension Project applications and Research and Extension Planning Project applications, the SCRI program only accepts applications that integrate research *and* extension activities.**

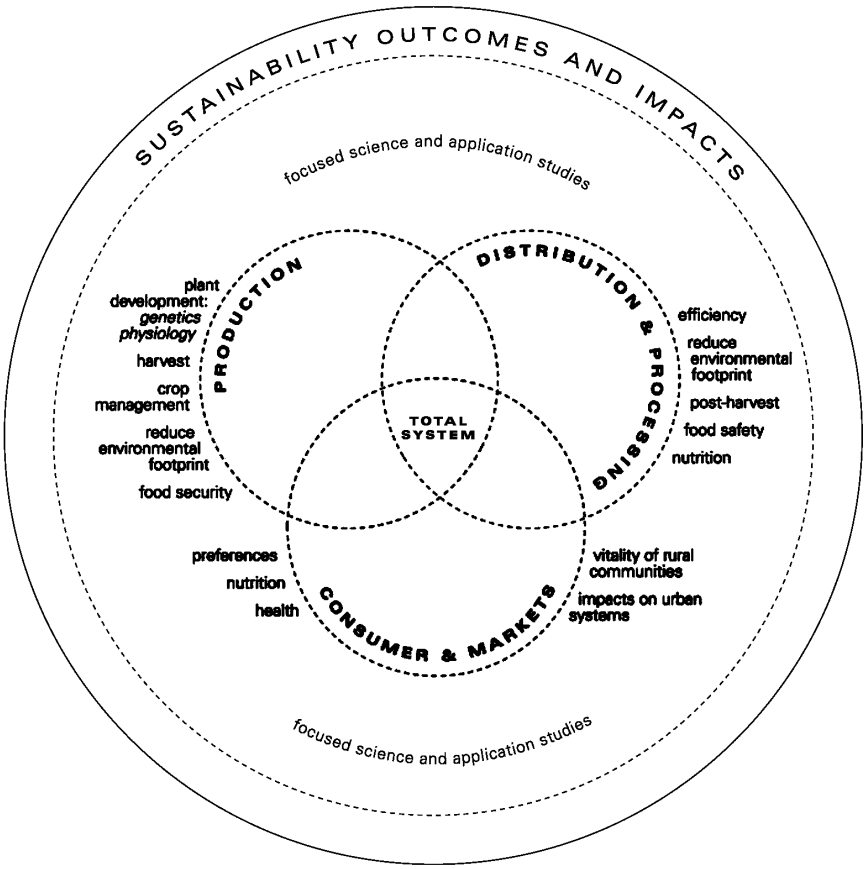
Applicants are strongly encouraged to propose a unique approach to solving problems facing the specialty crop industry using a systems approach:

> A systems approach is any process of estimating or inferring how local policies, actions, or changes influence the state of the neighboring universe. It is a framework that is based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation. The only way to fully understand why a problem or element occurs and persists is to understand the part in relation to the whole.

The philosophy of the SCRI program is that truly effective, long-term solutions to specialty crop industry challenges can best be achieved by understanding and treating those problems as complex systems of many interacting components. This perspective requires projects that are larger in scope and complexity, and that demand more resources than have traditionally been allocated to individual research and extension projects.

In doing so, applications should focus on entire primary systems, or on areas where two or more primary systems overlap. For the purpose of this announcement, a primary system is one of the

three main sectors of the specialty crop industry depicted in the graphic below: the production system; the processing and distribution system; and the consumer and marketing system. Meeting the challenges faced by these industries can best be handled by considering the full breadth of system components (see example components listed for each primary system), rather than treating each component in isolation and ignoring important interactions and conflicts among components that may reduce the viability of component-specific solutions in the long term.



Specialty crops are defined in law as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. USDA has developed a more detailed description of specialty crops that is now in use by all USDA agencies. Please see the More Information link, www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/scri/scri.html, for guidance on crops designated as "specialty crop" by USDA. Collectively, these crops face many challenges. The SCRI program seeks to address these challenges by funding systems-based, trans-disciplinary approaches. **PLEASE NOTE: For purposes of the SCRI program, the term trans-disciplinary, is defined as a multi-disciplinary approach that brings biological and physical scientists together with economists and social scientists to address challenges in a holistic manner.** It is anticipated that successful applications will:

1. Engage stakeholders in collaborative ways to identify those priorities of greatest need;
2. Bring together multi-state, multi-institutional teams of biological, physical, and social scientists to develop strategies and actions emphasizing **systems-based**, **trans-disciplinary** approaches for meeting the identified priorities;
3. Address priorities through research and extension;
4. Present plans for documenting the impacts of funded applications that include stakeholder involvement; and
5. Include explicit mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public.

SCRI Logic Model: NIFA developed a logic model for the SCRI program as part of the self-study document produced for the external review of the SCRI program in 2011. That logic model is found below. This logic model will guide the development of future SCRI RFAs and program funding priorities. It is also a tool that will be used to document the impact of future investments in the SCRI program. Applicants are now required to develop a logic model as part of each application (except Planning Grant applications) and to document how the project-specific logic model supports the programmatic logic model (see Application and Submission Information).

Program: Specialty Crop Research Initiative Logic Model
Situation: Specialty crops represent 50% of the farm gate value of crop plant agriculture in the U.S. To remain competitive in a global economy, all segments of U.S. specialty crop enterprises need scientific discovery, development and implementation.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		
	Activities	*Participation*	*Short*	*Medium*	*Long*
Farm bill funding	Consult with Specialty Crop Committee and Citrus Disease Subcommittee of NAREEEAB	Specialty crop stakeholders	Generate new knowledge for specialty crop systems	New professionals engaged in specialty crop systems	Profitable systems for specialty crop production/processing
USDA coordination	Publish Rules (Federal Register)	Land-grant partners	Adapt existing knowledge to specialty crop systems	New processes and products for specialty crop producers	Increased competitiveness of U.S. specialty crop producers and processors
NIFA intra-agency coordination	Publish RFA	Federal agencies	Engage broadest possible scientific community in challenges faced by specialty crop industries	Producers and processors adopt newly developed technologies and innovations	Abundant supply of safe, affordable, and high-quality specialty crops for consumers
Program Directors	Conduct PD workshops	State agencies	Engage specialty crop industries in strategic planning	Demonstrate efficacy of a trans-disciplinary, system science approach to problem solving in agriculture	Energetically efficient systems for specialty crop production and processing
Support Staff	Conduct grantsmanship workshops	University scientists	Web based and other digital information that allows communication among the scientific community and between the scientific community and stakeholders	Create a new generation of research and extension scientists capable of, and adept at, working in large, trans-disciplinary teams	Beneficial impacts on specialty crop agro-ecosystems
Panel Managers	Recruit panel managers, industry relevance reviewers and peer review panelists	NGOs		Networks that improve the flow of information among all components of specialty crop systems	Improved working conditions all along specialty crop value chain
Review Panel members	Conduct industry relevance and peer review panel meetings	Consumers			
Stakeholder matching contributions	Award funds to meritorious applications				
	Basic and applied research				
	Outreach to producers, processors, and consumers				
	Team building through planning-grant workshops				

Assumptions
Sustainability is the foundation of SCRI
Trans-disciplinary teams will achieve impacts more thoroughly and rapidly than single or multi-disciplinary teams
A systems approach will achieve impacts more rapidly than a reductionist approach

External Factors
Congressional funding
Stakeholder input
Specialty Crop Committee and Citrus Disease Subcommittee of NAREEEAB
Stakeholder matching contributions

Project Director (PD) Workshop: It is the intent of the SCRI program to require successful applicants, or a designee, to attend AT LEAST TWO PD WORKSHOPS during the term of their project. These workshops may be held in conjunction with another conference or may be held separate from any other meeting. **For the purpose of budget development, you are required to request funds necessary to attend at least two such workshops.** The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the budget narrative section of the application. Please note that this workshop requirement is waived for recipients of planning grants.

Support of Long-term, Systems-focused Research and Extension: The SCRI program is able to support long-term, systems-focused research and extension projects in limited cases where current, five-year project periods do not allow for the completion of project objectives. Breeding of woody plants and some ecological studies are examples of these types of projects. In order to be considered as a long-term project, you **MUST** request five years of funding and state in the **Project Summary** that you want your application to be considered as a long-term project. Only Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs) and Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs) may be considered as long-term projects. In the final year of the initial project period, you will be able to apply for additional funding (up to a 5-year increment of funds) as a ***NEW*** application, subject to congressional authorization and the availability of funds. The application for an additional five years of funding as a new award must document both progress during the initial five years and the ability to leverage gains in a second five years.

The SCRI program will give priority to projects that are multistate, multi-institutional, or trans-disciplinary, and include clearly defined mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public. Project applications must budget sufficient resources to carry out the proposed set of extension and research activities, must address at least one of the five legislatively mandated focus areas described below, and should describe the practical applications being sought. The intent of the SCRI program is to promote collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information, and the development of resources that accelerate application of scientific discovery and technology to solve the needs of various specialty crop industries. The SCRI program aims to reduce duplication of efforts and integrate activities among individuals, institutions, states, and regions. Therefore, applications should clearly articulate how an SCRI award will complement and/or link with existing programs or projects. The SCRI program will award funding to successful applicants under the five project types described in detail in Part II, C.

The SCRI program has five legislatively mandated focus areas, each of which will receive at least 10 percent of the available funds. Later this fiscal year, NIFA intends to issue a separate RFA soliciting applications for the approximately $25 million Emergency Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program. The legislatively mandated focus areas are:

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, genomics, and other methods to improve crop characteristics, such as:
    a. product, taste, quality, and appearance;
    b. environmental responses and tolerances;
    c. nutrient management, including plant nutrient uptake efficiency;

    d. pest and disease management, including resistance to pests and diseases resulting in reduced application management strategies; and
    e. enhanced phytonutrient content.
2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including threats to specialty crop pollinators;
3. Efforts to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, and profitability over the long term (including specialty crop policy and marketing);
4. New innovations and technology, including improved mechanization and technologies that delay or inhibit ripening; and
5. Methods to prevent, detect, monitor, control, and respond to potential food safety hazards in the production efficiency, handling and processing of specialty crops, including fresh produce.

NIFA will address all focus areas by funding projects that emphasize **systems-based**, **trans-disciplinary** approaches. In addition, for the purposes of this program, NIFA interprets new innovations and technology to include, among other things, automation, robotics, sensor technology, and precision agriculture for specialty crops. NIFA also recognizes the importance of specialty crops in enhancing human nutrition and health.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative strongly encourages applicants to develop partnerships that include collaboration with: (1) small- or mid-sized, accredited colleges and universities, and/or (2) 1890 land-grant institutions, 1994 land-grant institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions, and/or other institutions that serve high-risk, under-served, or hard-to-reach audiences, and/or (3) international partnerships, linkages, and exchanges that can positively impact critical specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems in the United States.

Please note: This program does not fund start-up businesses. Applications must address only scientific research and extension activities. A small business must not propose technical assistance, demonstration projects, classified research, or financial assistance to start or create a company or patent applications.

C. Program Area Description

Legislative Focus Area Priorities

Stakeholder organizations have invested considerable effort crafting strategic plans and technology roadmaps over the past several years. Stakeholders have also provided direct input to the SCRI program. While stakeholder communities have expressed broad interest in research and extension projects that cover many different topics within the five mandated focus areas, they have also indicated some very significant high-priority needs. Consequently, based on those stated industry needs, the SCRI program has identified a number of priorities within each focus area for FY 2014, and particularly encourages applications that address these priorities. Identification of these priorities is not intended to be exclusionary and should not deter

submission of applications that address other priorities appropriate to each focus area. The priorities for the legislative focus areas developed through stakeholder input are listed below:

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, genomics, and other methods to improve crop characteristics. **Projects that seek to create improved cultivars through the use of biotechnology must demonstrate an understanding of the regulatory requirements involved in their release and must also present a plan for addressing the regulatory issues.**
    - Develop innovative plant breeding systems that improve flexibility and speed for delivering unique new specialty crop cultivars adapted to meet future challenges.
    - Describe and develop systems to remove non-technical barriers to adoption of new cultivars— such as economic or marketing barriers—that inhibit full exploitation of the genetic potential of specialty crops.
    - Facilitate and improve connections between genomic projects and specialty crop breeding programs, including phenotypic characterization, marker development, transgenic research and risk assessment, and cloning of key genes of economic importance for vegetable crops.
    - Advance understanding of the genomics of the Cucurbitaceae family and their application to practical breeding programs.
    - Develop new cultivars that are co-designed with newly engineered systems for production operations (e.g., spraying, pruning, scouting, and harvesting), to help assure that future crop architectures are amenable to increased mechanization.
    - Utilize genetic approaches to enhance the nutritional value of specialty crops.

2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including threats to specialty crop pollinators.
    - Control of Brown Marmorated Stink Bug.
    - Mitigation of bird damage through economic, biological and consumer information. Create new scientific developments, technologies, and tools that will help reduce the incidence and impact of industry-critical insect and disease problems including, but not limited to: monitoring, control and management strategies; field based diagnostic tools; integrated management systems; and comprehensive strategies and mechanisms for eradication of newly introduced pests where eradication is a plausible strategy.
    - Create new knowledge and improved tools to understand, protect, and manage native pollinators, including: determining the role and extent of parasites and pathogens on native pollinators; modifying specialty crop production systems to improve habitat for pollinators; and establishing and evaluating ecosystem services performed by native pollinators in specialty crop systems.
    - Develop new integrated pest management tools, such as have been demonstrated with the integrated pest management - Pest Information Platform for Extension and Education (ipmPIPE) and other wide-area, integrated systems, that possess the potential for broad impact. Proposed projects should respond to stakeholder identified critical threats.

3. Efforts to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, and profitability over the long term (including specialty crop policy and marketing).
    - Development of wine grape cultivars suitable for production in the northern tier of the United States.
    - Resource efficient, ecologically sustainable fruit production systems for cherry and apple. Develop new or improved mechanisms (e.g., criteria and indicators) for assessing sustainability that will allow specialty crop producers and processors, or entire industries or regions, to evaluate the sustainability of current practices and to monitor their movement toward more sustainable practices over time.
    - Improve the understanding and application of knowledge about the nutritional and health properties of bioactive compounds in specialty crops.
    - Improve the understanding and application of nutritional, economic, social science, and marketing factors influencing the consumption of specialty crops: increase knowledge about health promoting properties of bioactive components found in specialty crops; develop and evaluate the impact of strategies to improve knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to consumption; test or develop new methods to measure the outcomes of strategies to increase consumption of specialty crops; and establish the economic benefits, both individual and societal, for increased consumption.
    - Improve the understanding of the environmental, economic, and social implications of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, distribution, and marketing—including the production and transportation of all inputs (including energy) and the disposition of all wastes and byproducts—through the application of Life Cycle Assessment or other methods of systems-based analysis.

4. New innovations and technology, including improved mechanization and technologies that delay or inhibit ripening.
    - Development and testing of technology for the grafting of vegetable transplants. Improve post-harvest handling, transportation, and distribution systems and technologies: develop post-harvest systems and distribution channels that help to better maintain the “cold chain”, preserve nutritional value, and increase the shelf life of specialty crops (e.g., including, but not limited to: logistics, sorting, inspection, waste stream management, traceability, and packaging).
    - Remove key barriers to achieving labor savings and product quality enhancement in production and processing through research, development, application, and adoption of technologies that: foster automation; sense plant health (including detecting viruses in whole plants or parts of plants) and product quality; provide high resolution spatial and temporal information for decision making; and are both robust and economical.
    - Develop new science, tools, and technology focused on the use and impacts of alternative sources of water (e.g., recycled, brackish groundwater) on: plant productivity and crop yield; product taste, quality, and marketability; plant environmental responses and tolerances (e.g., salinity); and food safety and toxicity issues.

5. Methods to prevent, detect, monitor, control, and respond to potential food safety hazards in the production efficiency, handling and processing of specialty crops, including fresh produce.
    - Field test models developed for scientifically-based consensus food safety metrics for leafy greens and tomatoes.
    - How do the intrinsic characteristics of cropping systems in which food-borne illnesses do **NOT** occur differ from the characteristics of cropping systems in which food-borne illnesses do occur?
    - Develop and/or evaluate a multi-barrier approach (a combination of best management practices, interventions, control strategies, etc., throughout the food chain) to reduce food borne threats (microbial, chemical, or toxins) from the pre-harvest environment through the final product. As part of this work, studies should identify the source(s), persistence, growth and the mechanism(s) of transfer of food-borne threats throughout the food chain.
    - Develop and adapt methods to identify and quantify viable and/or infectious food-borne pathogens, chemical residues (e.g., fumigants), and tree nut allergens, with particular reference to sample preparation methods to aid in recovery of pathogenic microorganisms in complex matrices and rapid, robust, and field testable methods, test kits, and/or devices.
    - Create a collaborative effort among academe, Government, and Industry to develop and standardize: rapid detection methods (including sample preparation time), metrics for risk management, monitoring and interventions; third party certification and audits, procedures for training managers; and/or providing assistance to risk managers.
    - Develop, test, and implement an interactive national database, networking, and data sharing system for effective risk management decisions and commodity-specific information to facilitate tracing the origin of contamination.
    - Develop procedures and mechanisms, and provide assistance in implementing, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) programs for small producers, processors, distributors, and retail service operators of fresh and fresh-cut produce.
    - Identify and validate one or a set of food-borne threat surrogates (indicators) that can be used to predict the contamination of products, irrigation water, and/or the harvesting and production environments with pathogens, chemicals and/or toxins. Effective surrogate(s) would be present when food-borne threats are present and, where possible, useful across geographic regions, products, and the environment (i.e., suitable for water, soil, and air). Methods for the detection of food-borne threat surrogates should be simple, robust, rapid, and inexpensive.

The SCRI program encourages projects that develop content and programs suitable for delivery through the Cooperative Extension System's eXtension Initiative. Funds may be used to contribute to existing Communities of Practice (CoP) or to create new ones. Projects must align with the eXtension vision, mission, and values. A letter of acknowledgement from eXtension is required, and a letter of support may be required from one or more of the Communities of Practice. For detailed guidance on how to partner with eXtension, go to http://create.extension.org/node/2057.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. NIFA anticipates that approximately $76.8 million will be available to fund SCRI applications in FY 2014. Please refer to Part II, C. for further details regarding funding ranges and project periods.

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 www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2014, applications may be submitted to the SCRI program as one of the following three types of requests:

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

(2) Renewal application. Renewal applications request additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award. Applications for renewed funding must contain the same information as required for new applications, and additionally must contain a Progress Report (see Part IV, D. 3(ii)) which demonstrates measurable progress. Renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in the appropriate area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications. In FY 2014, the cumulative duration of any renewal application combined with the length of the initial project award cannot exceed five years. So, for example, if an initial project award was for four years, then a renewal application cannot exceed one year. Renewal applications can be submitted at any time during the original award period or after completion of the original award; however, to minimize potential lapses in project funding and to maximize reporting of accomplishments, renewal applications are typically submitted within the last year of an original award.

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

C. Project Types

Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs): Beginning in FY 2014, applicants submitting SREPs will be required to submit a SRS. See Section IV, C. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a SRS. SREP awards will support targeted problem-solving efforts that contribute to the overall sustainability of a primary system or one of its components, and that would not otherwise qualify in scope and effort for support as a Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP). Beginning with stakeholder-identified concerns, projects should seek solutions that lead to measurable benefit to producers and consumers. Applications should bring together both research and extension components of the agricultural knowledge system around a problem area or activity. Partnerships with end-user groups (*e.g.*, industry, processors, manufacturers, growers, technology providers) are strongly encouraged, as is the use of students in key research and extension roles (e.g., internships and other opportunities for students to engage with stakeholders and their needs or student exchange opportunities across collaborating institutions). For each SREP award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will be formed to inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and extension objectives. Applications should detail the creation and functions of this panel. As part of industry communication, the project should publish a web site by the end of the first year that can inform a broad audience regarding ongoing progress and outcomes. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems. Further, the project must bring together biological, physical, and social scientists, as appropriate to project goals and address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability. SREPs represent the "focused science and application studies" portion of the systems diagram on page four. SREPs will have a project period ranging up to five years.

Applications must include, as an appendix, a timeline that clearly identifies which key personnel are involved in which objectives during each time segment of the project. This appendix should also identify short-, medium- and long-term metrics that will be used in project evaluation, the expectations for each team member, a mechanism whereby progress metrics can be evaluated, and how the project will complement and/or link to existing programs or projects.

Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs): Beginning in FY 2014, applicants submitting CAPs will be required to submit a SRS. See Section IV, C. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a SRS. CAPs will be awarded to consortia or groups of qualified applicants to address multiple components of a primary system, an entire primary system or problems that cut across primary systems, with the expectation that the project will make significant contributions to the sustainability of the system or system component. These projects should apply trans-disciplinary, multi-functional, and, where appropriate, multi-institutional approaches to provide viable solutions to the highest priority stakeholder needs. An aim of a CAP award is to encourage maximum flexibility in applied research and extension. Applications will be evaluated based on how well their goals and objectives respond to current stakeholder needs. It is recognized, however, that as a project's comprehensive approach unfolds, unexpected advances and promising leads, or unforeseen new national needs related to project goals and objectives, may be identified. CAPs will have a project period ranging from three to five years.

CAP applications are expected to demonstrate coherent and complementary integrated activities with the ultimate goal of developing a strategy or solution that could be implemented for specialty crops. Applications are expected to take advantage of recent advances in biological, physical, and social and economic sciences and to translate basic discoveries and knowledge to practical applications. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems. The application's methodology and analytical approach must be appropriate to project objectives and effectively combine research and extension activities. The continuity plan must describe how the partnership effort will continue beyond the period of NIFA funding and address future long-term plans for proposed activities. Applications are expected to demonstrate the potential to develop a national strategy or solution as an ultimate goal. This would include the intent to promote collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information and development of resources that accelerate the application of scientific discovery and technology to solving the needs of various specialty crop industries. Such a national CAP should aim to reduce duplication of efforts and integrate activities among individuals, institutions, states, and regions. Therefore, applications should clearly articulate how the national-scope CAP they are proposing would complement and/or link with existing programs or projects.

A CAP must seek to bring together a multi-state, multi-institutional, and/or trans-disciplinary team to integrate scientific discoveries and technology with practical application; and provide complementary extension efforts to bring science-based information to relevant audiences that will allow them to make informed decisions. For each CAP award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and/or extension objectives. Applications must detail the creation and functions of this panel. As part of industry communication, the project should publish a web site by the end of the first year that can inform a broad audience on progress and outcomes.

CAP teams should be comprised of members working in discovery, learning, and engagement to conduct research and extension utilizing systems science and trans-disciplinary approaches on an emerging or priority area important to specialty crops. This integrated team should contain expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science and engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences, extension, and program evaluation, as appropriate, as well as expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Partnerships with end-user groups (*e.g.*, industry, processors, manufacturers, growers, technology providers) are strongly encouraged, along with the use of undergraduate students in key research and extension roles (e.g., internships and other opportunities for students to engage with stakeholders and their needs or student exchange opportunities across collaborating institutions). The application should outline the potential of the CAP team, its structure, coordination and plan of implementation.

As a result, there is an expectation that objectives may be redirected and/or new objectives may be developed with associated budget adjustments. To encourage flexibility, the program does not expect that all investigators associated with the proposed project will be supported throughout its duration.

Applications must include, as an appendix, a budgeted project management plan and timeline to ensure efficient functioning of the CAP team. A timeline chart that clearly identifies which key personnel are involved in which objectives during each time segment of the project is particularly helpful. This plan should include an organizational chart, administrative timeline, a description of how the project will be governed, intellectual property management, and identification of short-, medium- and long-term metrics that will be used in project evaluation, the expectations for each team member, a mechanism whereby progress metrics can be evaluated, and how the project will complement and/or link to existing programs or projects to include multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional, multi-state and trans-disciplinary collaborations. Given the size and scope of CAP projects, applicants are strongly encouraged to budget for a half-time or full-time (as appropriate) project management position to deal with day-to-day project operations and coordination. The management plan must include a strategy to become self-supporting by the end of the project period. See Part IV, D (3) (c) – Field 11 for attachment instructions.

Applications must include, as an appendix, a budgeted plan and timeline for an advisory group of principal stakeholders and scientists relevant to the proposed research and extension projects (*e.g.*, include letters of commitment and rationale for their role) to assess and evaluate the quality, potential outcomes, and impacts, and how they could function effectively to support the goals and objectives of the CAP). See Part IV, D (3) (c) – Field 11 for attachment instructions.

Regional Partnerships for Innovation (RPIs): Beginning in FY 2014, applicants submitting RPIs will be required to submit a SRS. See Section IV, C. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a SRS. New technologies and innovations associated with SCRI and other research and extension programs will drive continued development of product lines, businesses, and business alliances within specialty crop industries. As more robust infrastructure is put in place to support innovation, additional business opportunities will open along the production-to-consumption value chains across all manner of specialty crop systems. New technologies not only need to be identified or developed, but there must be an active path to commercialization and implementation. In creating new products and new businesses, there are clear benefits to producers who can utilize the new technologies, and there are benefits to the area where these new technologies are developed in the form of new businesses, jobs, and a stronger economy. Such activities can occur in a single commodity in a limited area, but in order to gain the greatest buy-in and impact, there must be a general awareness and support for these activities across many business sectors and technologies. This entire process works best when agricultural and non-agricultural businesses, institutions, and agencies join together to create *regional partnerships for innovation*. Such partnerships fill a gap in networking resources ("support networks") that encourage and help sustain regional economic development.

This project type seeks innovative projects that will establish collaborative environments whereby businesses form mutually supportive alliances and partnerships and integrate their operations. In effect, these interdependent businesses constitute a "business ecosystem" whereby the sustainability of the whole is assured through the coordinated participation of many. Examples of these relationships include instances where the waste products from one business become raw materials for another business; where the services provided by one business open markets needed by another, or where multiple producers increase market share by creating

regional identity (e.g., terroir). Strategies to strengthen specialty crop business ecosystems include: (1) building vibrant business-to-business and business-to-consumer networks to engage businesses and customers in the flow of product and process innovation; (2) designing and implementing system architectures and related applications, processes, and tools that expedite networking and collaboration; (3) creating alliances that satisfy local markets and export surplus to national or global markets; or (4) developing investment approaches that maintain greater wealth within enterprises and communities associated with specialty crop production.

The Federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) programs help individual small businesses develop and prototype pre-commercial products and services. Therefore, RPIs **will not** support proposals focused on the development of individual technologies, services, or businesses. RPIs are intended to result in model systems for support and infrastructure to promote local, regional, and integrated systems of businesses associated with specialty crops. More information about the SBIR program can be found at www.sbir.gov.

Additional partnership efforts are needed to commercialize new technologies, bring them to market, and ensure that the necessary long term financial, human and intellectual capital is present. Broad-based partnerships can provide the local or regional organizational infrastructure needed to fully exploit future technology commercialization and adoption and business ecosystems for specialty crops. Research and extension efforts within an RPI project might, for example, be used to: seed innovative approaches and technology leading to new product development; explore new networking capabilities and/or integrated product lines and service offerings; conduct market research for recently developed, or anticipated, new technology areas or products; better understand and develop mitigation strategies for technology adoption roadblocks and associated business growth and development concerns; and investigate and test new finance and business models particularly tailored to the unique needs of interdependent specialty crop industries.

These networks would be comprised of partnerships among universities, community colleges, local governments, financial stakeholders, end-user industries, manufacturers, community organizations, and customers. RPI awards will support the initial development of regional partnerships with the expectation that they would be self-supporting by the end of the project period. RPI applications will have a project period of two to three years.

RPIs should serve specialty crop associated industries, both seeking their participation and incorporating their input. It is expected that each funded partnership will operate within a clear geographic focus and include participants appropriate to that geography and stated stakeholder communities. However, such partnerships may eventually grow over time; particularly if they provide good models for other geographic areas. Participant roles and responsibilities will focus on particular partnership objectives and the anticipated outputs and outcomes for the project. Applicants must demonstrate how their RPI efforts will contribute to the commercialization of a portfolio of integrated products and services, foster new business innovation clusters, and/or enhance the growth and development of local and regional economies. For each RPI award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and/or extension objectives. Applications must detail

the creation and functions of this panel. As part of industry communication, by the end of the first year the project should publish a web site, informing a broad audience about ongoing progress and outcomes.

The application must demonstrate understanding and application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the partnership to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems. The application must demonstrate that the project brings together biological, physical, and social scientists, as appropriate, to address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.

RPIs developed under this initiative should articulate how their approach can serve as a model for innovation by other industries and other locales. A continuity plan should also be included that describes how the partnership effort will continue beyond the period of NIFA funding.

eXtension Projects. Beginning in FY 2014, applicant submitting eXtension project applications will be required to submit a SRS. See Section IV, C. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a SRS. NIFA encourages the development of information and educational content to advance the widespread adoption of research-based practices and technologies by producers and other end users. Groups of qualified individuals will receive grants to develop new eXtension Communities of Practice (CoPs) and/or support the enhancement of existing CoPs to ensure that information and technology transfer reach potential adopters as quickly as possible. Strong justification for creation of a new CoP, instead of enhancing or expanding an existing one, should be included in the proposal language. Proposals to either establish a new CoP or to enhance an existing CoP should include a letter of acknowledgement from eXtension (http://create.extension.org/node/2057). If proposing establishment of a new CoP, an application must clearly demonstrate that it has surveyed existing CoPs and articulate how the proposed CoP will complement and coordinate with the existing base of related CoPs to avoid duplication of effort and to combine resources. If the proposed work will expand an existing CoP, the applicant should contact the leader of the appropriate CoP to explore options for collaboration early in the proposal development process. This will allow sufficient time for collaborative development of the plan of work and budget, as well as obtaining letters of collaboration from both eXtension and the target CoP. All key personnel for an application should be registered with eXtension.org and have user accounts.

eXtension applications typically will include funds to support core CoP functions (e.g., community development, editorial management, Ask-an-Expert, outreach, evaluation, etc.) and development of project-specific content for publication to eXtension. Budgets should include supporting funds for both core and project-specific functions.

The application must demonstrate an understanding and application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing and marketing systems. The project must bring together biological, physical, and social scientists, as

appropriate, to project goals to address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.

Applicants establishing new CoPs (or enhancing existing ones) must first follow the corresponding steps outlined by eXtension.org (http://create.extension.org/node/2057). In addition to addressing the relevance criteria established for the SCRI, eXtension applications should also address in their narrative the Key Criteria listed on the above eXtension web site. eXtension applications will have a project period of three to five years.

Please see the following links for more information:

eXtension
http://about.extension.org/

eXtension Implementation Plan
http://about.extension.org/wiki/Planning

Communities of Practice
http://about.extension.org/wiki/Glossary_of_eXtension_Terms#Community_of_Practice_.28CoP.29

Including eXtension in your NIFA proposal and contact information:
http://create.extension.org/node/2057

Research and Extension Planning Projects. In FY 2014, applicants submitting will be required to submit a LOI. See Section IV, A. for a description of the requirements for the contents of a LOI and submitting instructions. Research and Extension Planning Projects are intended to support two types of activities, either to: (1) provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP, RPI, or CAP proposals (grant planning) or (2) provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning). The expectation is that developed "plans" could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications. Priority will be given to applicants who can: (1) demonstrate limited resources for either submitting large grant applications or for supporting strategic planning activities on their own, (2) articulate benefits to be accrued from formal planning activities, and (3) provide evidence of a high likelihood that quality future applications would be submitted for SCRI projects (desired for grant planning) or would result in a publicly available strategic plan, which could be used to support development of one or more future SCRI grant applications (desired for strategic planning). Research and Extension Planning Project grants do not support preliminary research. However, support for stakeholder survey activities may be requested, where appropriate and necessary.

Grant planning applications are encouraged to bring together biological, physical, and socio-economic scientists and others, as appropriate, including end-users and technology providers, to identify research and/or extension needs, update information, and advance understanding of specialty crop issues and problems. This information should be used to build teams that can

develop SCRI applications to address the identified challenges using a systems-based, trans-disciplinary approach. The application must develop a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems. Project goals must address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability. These activities can take the form of workshops or symposia and may constitute an initial step in preparing an SCRI application in subsequent years. Applicants should be careful to ensure that participants represent a broad range of expertise by detailing the types of participants who will be invited. Note: The intent of these planning projects is to foster collaboration and networking opportunities to enhance the preparation of future high-quality grant applications. To convey to the review panel that grant planning can successfully lead to a quality grant application, the application should also incorporate the necessary activities and resources for grant development and writing.

Strategic planning applications are encouraged to bring together stakeholders representing various sizes of operations, scientific expertise, specialty crop associations, technology and service providers, and representation from entities along the product value chain, as appropriate, to develop a strategic plan that addresses short-, medium-, and long-term specialty crop interests. The key expected outcome from this planning effort will be a publicly available strategic planning document that could be used subsequently by eligible entities to develop SCRI applications that address the plan's stated goals and priorities. Applications should include the anticipated meeting schedule in detail, participants identified by organizational affiliation, proposed meetings and other activities, and how the plan will be produced and distributed. Strategic planning projects are sought particularly to address the needs of limited-acreage crops and under-served or under-represented populations of producers, processors, distributors, retailers, etc.

Research and Extension Planning Proposal awards of Federal funds will not exceed $50,000, and are not renewable. It is expected that planning activities supported by this program will occur within 12 months of awards being issued. The 100 percent matching requirement also applies to these awards. Proposals should demonstrate measurable, cost effective benefits from any planning activities requested.

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) 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

For the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), applications may be submitted by Federal agencies, national laboratories, colleges and universities, research institutions and organizations, private organizations or corporations, State Agricultural Experiment Stations, Cooperative Extension Services, individuals, or groups consisting of two or more of these entities.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

The recipient of an award from the SCRI program must provide funds or in-kind support from other sources in an amount that is *at least equal to* the amount provided by SCRI. There is no provision for waiver of this requirement in fiscal year 2014 (please see Part IV, D (6) for more information).

Applicants may use both the unrecovered indirect costs associated with the Federal Budget and the unrecovered indirect costs associated with the Non-Federal Budget to meet their matching requirements. **However, indirect costs may not be recovered on third-party matching contributions.**

The example below may assist applicants in preparing their Federal and Non-Federal Budgets when considering the use of unrecovered indirect costs as a matching contribution. In this example, an applicant is submitting an application with a total budget of $100,000 and their negotiated indirect cost rate is 55 percent.

	Federal Budget	Non-Federal Budget
Direct costs	$78,000	$51,032
Indirect cost (allowable as part of the Federal Budget*)	$22,000	
Unrecovered indirect costs attributed to the Federal Budget		$20,900**
Indirect costs attributed to the Non-Federal funds provided by grantee		$28,068***
Total Budget	$100,000	$100,000

This example assumes no capital equipment expenditures as part of the Federal Budget or third-party matching contributions as part of the Non-Federal Budget.

*limited to 22 percent of the Federal funds requested

**($78,000 x 0.55) – 22,000

***$51,032 x 0.55

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Content of the Letter of Intent (LOI) for Research and Extension Planning Grant Applications

- **a.** Name, professional title, affiliation and email address of the principal investigator
- **b.** Name, professional title and affiliation of all known collaborators, including industry stakeholders
- **c.** The legislative focus area to be addressed as a result of the planning process
- **d.** Descriptive title
- **e.** The specialty crop sector that will benefit from the planning activity
- **f.** Significance of the problem being addressed
- **g.** Potential impact

PLEASE NOTE: The LOI cannot exceed 2 pages in length. The LOI must be formatted with margins no less than 1 inch on all sides. Text must be 12 point or larger and must be left-justified. The LOI must be submitted in the portable document format (PDF). An LOI not submitted in the PDF format runs the risk of not being accepted. Completed LOIs must be submitted by email to scri@nifa.usda.gov by 5:00 Eastern Time on April 11, 2014.

B. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see 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 Grants.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** 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, see 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/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html. Under Step 1 click on "Download a Grant Application Package," and enter the funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-SCRI-004509** 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 (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 www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html for additional resources for applying electronically.

C. Content and Form of Stakeholder Relevance Statement Submission

Electronic Stakeholder Relevance Statements (SRS) must be submitted for all SCRI grant types except Research and Extension Planning Grants. The SRS should be prepared following Parts IV and V of the document entitled "A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov." This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following **additional information** is needed in order 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., portable document format) in Part III section 3. of the Guide. ANY STAKEHOLDER RELEVANCE STATEMENTS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (i.e., content format, pdf file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Partial stakeholder relevance statements will be excluded from NIFA review. With documented prior approval, duplicate submissions of a stakeholder relevance statement will be accepted until the closing time and date in the RFA.

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.

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. The following are additional instructions:

a. **Field 1. Type of Submission.** Click the "Pre-application" box.
b. **Field 15. Enter Estimated Project Funding.** Enter a zero in each field.
c. **Field 20. Pre-application.** Click on "Add Attachment" to attach the Stakeholder Relevance Statement. Requirements are listed below.

PLEASE NOTE: **Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application guide.** A total of 6 pages is allowed. Relevance statements that exceed this limit will not be included in the review process. No budgetary information is required for the submission of the SRS. The SRS should include the following elements:

a. Statement of the problem being addressed, its importance, a list of hypotheses to be tested and a list of project objectives;
b. Statement of the how the proposed research approach will address each objective;
c. Statement of the process to obtain stakeholder input to identify proposed project objectives:
d. Statement of the process to be used for continued stakeholder engagement to achieve project objectives, including a description of how stakeholders will be involved in project evaluation:
e. Statement of how the project will translate results into useable information that will be delivered to the entire stakeholder community in a timely fashion:
f. Brief documentation of the relevance of the Project Director's scientific background to project objectives: and
g. Project logic model chart that illustrates scientific outputs and outcomes.

2. Supplemental Information Form

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 "Specialty Crop Research Initiative") and the program code (i.e., enter "SCRI").

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.

D. Content and Form of Invited Full Application Submission

Applicants whose SRS is scored highly enough **will be notified and invited to submit full applications**. Applicants submitting Research and Extension Planning projects are not required to submit an SRS. Electronic invited full applications should be prepared following Parts V and VI of the document entitled "A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov." This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed in order 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., portable document format) in Part III section 3. of the Guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (i.e., content format, pdf file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until 5:00 PM Eastern Time on June 20, 2014.

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 Project Summary may not exceed **250 words** on one page, and should clearly indicate the appropriate project type (as described in Part I (C)). The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of the SCRI. The importance of a concise, informative Project Summary cannot be overemphasized. This word and page limitation applies regardless of whether figures or tables are included. These limits have been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. Research and Extension Planning Projects must ***also*** state the objectives of any workshop or symposia as well as the proposed location and probable date(s) of the activity.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

PLEASE NOTE: the Project Narrative section may not exceed a total of 25 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables. The Introduction may not exceed 5 pages, and the rest of the Project Narrative may not exceed 20 pages. **Research and Extension Planning narratives may not exceed 15 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables.** These SCRI page limitations apply regardless of whether figures or tables are included. All pages, including those with figures and tables, should be numbered sequentially. Applications exceeding the applicable page limitation will be at risk of being excluded from review. These maximums have been established to ensure fair and equitable competition.

The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

(i) In addition to the other components of the Project Narrative, resubmitted applications must provide a detailed response to the previous review. The response should be as concise as possible, but there is no limit to the number of pages that may be submitted. If available, please include the Grants.gov number or NIFA proposal number of the previous submission. The response to the previous review **is not** counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative.

(ii) In addition to the other components of the Project Narrative, renewal applications must provide a progress report detailing, for each objective of the original project award: (1) project activities, both completed and continuing; (2) results and outputs from those activities; and (3) significant outcomes and impacts. The report should be as concise as possible, and is **limited to five pages**. If available, please include the NIFA proposal number or award number from the original project. The progress report **is not** counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative.

(iii) As the first page (or more as needed) of the project narrative of new applications or immediately following the response to the previous review of resubmitted applications or the progress report for renewal applications, all applications must include the following information in a combined executive summary and table of contents (table format preferred). The executive

summary and table of contents **does not** count toward the narrative's page limitation. Applications without an executive summary will **NOT** be considered for funding.

1. Project title
2. Project type (see Part II, C)
3. List the legislatively mandated focus area(s) being addressed (see Part I, B), and provide an estimate of the percentage of effort/funds dedicated to each (sum of percentages should equal 100 percent).
4. Program Staff – include name, title, affiliation, address, and e-mail for PD(s), Co-PD(s) and Key Personnel (please see the definitions section for the role and responsibilities of PD, Co-PD, etc.).
5. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) describing the critical stakeholder need addressed by the project and the project's long-term goals (provide cross-references to full descriptions in the narrative).
6. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) of the outreach plan proposed by the project (provide a cross-reference to the full description in the narrative).
7. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) describing potential economic, social, and environmental benefits (Who benefits and how?).
8. Logic Model Requirement: Except for planning grant applications, projects must include the elements of a logic model detailing the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the proposed project. This information must be formatted into a logic model chart. More information and resources related to the logic model planning process are provided at www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/integrated/integrated_logic_model.html.

(iv) Introduction. List the following:

1. Provide a clear statement of the long-term goal(s), the critical need(s) of specialty crop industries being addressed, and supporting outreach objectives or research questions.
2. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities that substantiate the need for the proposed project.
3. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project including the work of key project personnel. Applications should also demonstrate how duplication of effort with similar activities by others will be avoided.
4. Preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed work should be included in this section. All works cited should be referenced and attached at Field 9 on the Form, Bibliography & Reference Cited. Refer to Part V, 4.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

(v) Rationale and Significance. Concisely present the rationale behind the proposed research and/or extension activities. The specific relationship of the project's objectives to one or more of the SCRI focus areas should be clearly shown. These purposes and focus areas are described under Part I, B, Purpose and Priorities. Any novel ideas or contributions that the proposed project offers should also be discussed in this section.

(vi) Approach – **For CAPs, SREPs, RPIs, and eXtension Projects** *(for Research and extension Planning Projects see (vii) below.)* The activities proposed or problems being addressed must be

clearly stated and the approaches being applied clearly described. Specifically, this section must include:

1. A description of the activities proposed, key personnel or institution roles in those activities, and the sequence in which the activities are to be performed (a Gantt chart or other task X time representation of project activities is desirable);
2. Methods to be used in carrying out the proposed project, including the feasibility of the methods. Clearly describe the systems thinking used in the project methodology and the contribution of trans-disciplinary approaches;
3. Expected outcomes, including how the project contributes to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crops;
4. Means by which results will be analyzed, assessed, or interpreted;
5. How results or products will be used;
6. Outreach plan: including, how and where appropriate, science-based tools will be disseminated, participants involved in delivery, and how impacts will be measured;
7. Pitfalls that may be encountered;
8. Limitations to proposed procedures; and
9. A full explanation of any materials, procedures, situations, or activities related to the project that may be hazardous to personnel, along with an outline or precautions to be exercised to avoid or mitigate the effects of such hazards.

(vii) Approach – **For Research and Extension Planning Projects**:

1. A justification for the meeting (see Part II, C);
2. Recent meetings on the same subject with dates and locations;
3. Names and organizational affiliations of the chair and other members of the organizing committee;
4. A proposed program (or agenda) for the activity, including a listing of scheduled participants and their institutional affiliations (see Part II, C);
5. Expected outcomes, including how the planning project expects to contribute to the development of a successful application for a SCRI CAP, SREP, or RPI; and
6. The method of announcement or invitation that will be used.

c. Field 11 - Other Attachments – PDF

Depending on the type of application, other attachments are required. Please see the description of each project type in Part II, C for both specific and general information that may be attached here.

Appendices to Project Description – PDF Attachment. Appendices to the Project Description are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. **The addition of appendices should not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.**

4. <u>R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)</u>

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: Applications shall include written verification of commitments of matching support from all sources (including both cash and fair market value of in-kind contributions from third parties). **The matching amount must be at least equal to the amount awarded through SCRI.** All matching must be secured to be considered. The applicant must provide evidence of the required amount of matching prior to award and the information should be included in the proposal. Written verification means:

For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, submitted on the donor organization's letterhead signed by the authorized representative of the donor organization and the applicant organization and to include the title of the person signing as the AR, 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 and specifying the recipient may use the cash donation as they deem necessary or a statement on how the cash is be used on the project. For cash matching to be used as deemed necessary, the applicant must provide details of how cash matching will be used e.g. salary details, time and/or effort, materials, supplies etc.

For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR 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. For in-kind donations of time, the donor's normal rate of pay should be used to value the contribution if the service provided is in the donor's normal line of work.

For in-kind donations involving the use of land or facilities, an explanation and documentation of how the value was determined should be provided. ~~Inherent in the idea of matching support (or in-kind contributions) is that the third party (provider of the match) incurs some additional costs (or losses of productivity) above and beyond their normal business practices due to project activities. That is, the third-party must incur a monetary penalty for participation that is absorbed in lieu of cash contributions to the project. If there are no increased costs or losses, from the research/extension activities of the project, there is no in-kind contribution because there is no cash equivalent. So, for example, in a crop production scenario, any costs for additional insect scouting or spraying (chemicals, fuel, and labor) and any losses to yield from non-standard~~

~~horticultural practices could be used as in-kind contributions. Unless the research/extension project takes the land completely out of production for that growing season, a percentage reduction in production losses should be provided. Partial production budgets and historical yields should be included in any supporting documentation.~~

The sources and the amount of all matching support from the applicant organization and outside the applicant organization shall be summarized on a separate page and placed in the application as a part of the Budget Justification attachment (see Field K on the Form SF 424 (R&R) Budget Fed & Non-Fed). Include the matching amount, the budget category for the match, and detail how the matching support, *from each source*, will be used (e.g., salary and position supported). Hourly rates for in-kind contributions of time should be based on the person's actual salary rate if the duties performed for the project are the same as his/her normal duties. If different, the hourly rate for the in-kind labor should be based on the going rate in the area for similar duties. Additionally, all pledge agreements must be included as a PDF attachment in Field K as well.

The value of applicant contributions to the project shall be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars 2 CFR 220, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions; 2 CFR 225, Cost Principles for State, Local, and Tribal Governments; 2 CFR 230, Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations; 2 CFR Part 215, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations; and the cost principles in the Federal Acquisition Regulation at 48 CFR 31.2 for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

Additional Budget Information
For Research and Extension Planning Projects: The budget for the planning activity may include an appropriate amount for transportation and subsistence costs for participants and for other related costs. Planning awards of federal funds will not exceed $50,000 and are not renewable. Include an itemized breakdown of all support requested in the Budget Justification (Field K. of the R&R Budget).

Project Director Workshop: It is the intent of the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to require successful applicants or a designee to attend at least two project director workshops during the term of their project. For the purposes of budget development, applicants are required to request funds for attending at least two such workshops. The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the budget narrative section of the application. Please note: this workshop requirement is waived for recipients of planning grant awards.

Applicants who wish to use unrecovered indirect costs to meet the matching requirements should indicate, if applicable, what amount is attributed to the Federal budget and what amount is attributed to the non-Federal budget.

7. Supplemental Information Form
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 Specialty Crop Research Initiative) and the program code (i.e., enter SCRI).

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.

E. Submission Dates and Times

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

1. Mandatory LOIs for Research and Extension Planning grants must be submitted by email to scri@nifa.usda.gov by **5:00 PM Eastern time on April 11, 2014.**
2. Complete, error-free stakeholder relevance statements must be received in Grants.gov by **5:00 PM Eastern time on April 11, 2014**
3. Complete, error free **INVITED** full applications must be received in Grants.gov by **5:00 PM Eastern time on June 20, 2014.**

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. B. for Grants.gov contact information.

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. 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 pre/or full application within 7 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 by the panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

F. Funding Restrictions

1. Indirect Costs

Section 7132 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, amended the National Agriculture Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3310(a)), limiting indirect costs to 22 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 22 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.

PLEASE NOTE: In accordance with section 709 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (H.R. 3547), for the purposes of a grant made under section 412 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998, which established SCRI, in-kind support from non-Federal sources in the form of unrecovered indirect costs for both the Federal Budget and Non-Federal Budget *may* be used to meet the matching requirements under 412(e)(3). These indirect costs are those that are not otherwise charged against the grant and must be consistent with the approved indirect cost rate of the organization.

Special Notices:

1. NIFA will withhold all funds for a SCRI award to an applicant requesting indirect costs if the applicant has not negotiated an indirect cost rate with its cognizant federal agency.

2. If a grantee is in the process of negotiating an indirect cost rate with its federal agency, NIFA will withhold all funds from that grantee until the indirect cost rate has been established.

3. If an institution's indirect cost rate has expired or will expire in the near future, a clear statement on renegotiation efforts must be included in the application. (See Part IV, D.6. SF 424 (R&R) Budget Fed & Non-Fed).

4. It is incumbent on all applicants to have a current indirect cost rate or begin negotiations to establish an indirect cost rate prior to the SCRI submission deadline. Because it may take several months to obtain an indirect cost rate, applicants needing an indirect cost rate are encouraged to start work on establishing these rates well in advance of submitting a SCRI application.

5. In lieu of requesting indirect costs (if the applicant does not have a negotiated rate), an applicant may prepare a budget in which all charges in the budget are included as direct costs.

2. Construction and Renovation

Funds made available under SCRI shall not be used for the construction of a new building or facility or the acquisition, expansion, remodeling, or alteration of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architect fees).

G. 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

SCRI has instituted a two phase review process. The first phase of the review process is the Relevance Review. Each Stakeholder Relevance Statement (SRS) will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each SRS will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Administrative requirements include: meeting the application deadline; meeting eligibility requirements; satisfying program intent; inclusion of all required sections of the SRS package; and adherence to guidelines. Based on the crop proposed, an SRS that meets these requirements will be evaluated for relevance by reviewers in one of seven general areas:

1. Deciduous fruit trees
2. Sub-tropical fruit
3. Vegetables, including mushrooms and herbs
4. Nursery, including Christmas trees, and turf
5. Floriculture, greenhouse and ornamental crops
6. Small fruit
7. Limited-acreage crops, including horticultural crops that don't fit into other categories

For the purposes of the Relevance Review, reviewers will be selected from a) persons directly involved in the growing, handling and processing of specialty crops; or b) persons representing those defined in (a) above through trade organizations or other professional associations.

Reviewers will review each application and give it a score based on the criteria in Section V, B. The results of the Relevance Review, including scores and ranking, will be provided to peer reviewers during the second phase of the review process and will be considered during the ranking that occurs in this phase of the SCRI review process.

The second phase of the SCRI review will be a scientific peer review of invited full applications. Each full application will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Administrative requirements include: meeting the application deadline; evidence that the application was invited for submission; meeting eligibility requirements; satisfying program intent; providing evidence of 100 percent non-federal matching funds; and including all required sections of the application package. Applications that meet these requirements will be evaluated for technical merit by a scientific peer review panel.

Section 7301 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, amended section 103(a) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7613(a)) states that Peer and Merit review procedures *shall not* take the offer or availability of matching funds into consideration. Therefore, while matching is required under SCRI, it will only be considered as part of the administrative review of applications and will not be included in the Peer and Merit Review (see Part III, B for more information).

Scientific peer review panelists will be selected based upon 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 experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (d) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and gender representation and an age distribution; and (e) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

We will use the evaluation criteria below to review SRS and invited full applications submitted in response to this RFA and the specific Project Types described in Part II, C:

Criteria for Stakeholder Relevance Review

1. The issues/challenges being addressed are significant on a state, regional or national scale. (20 points maximum)
    a. Full point value will be given if significance is at regional or national level.
    b. If significance is at state level, full point value may be given if documentation is provided that new knowledge generated by the project will be of value to producers in other states, including plans for dissemination of information.
    c. If significance is at state level, less than 20 but more than 10 points may be awarded if the new knowledge generated will benefit producers in a single state but that state produces the majority of the crop being studied.
    d. No points will be awarded if the issues/challenges being addressed are not significance at any level.

2. Stakeholders were involved in identifying and developing project goals and objectives. (20 points maximum)
    a. Full point value will be given if project team was recruited by a stakeholder group to address a scientific challenge identified by the stakeholders.
    b. Full point value will be given if the project team was actively engaged with stakeholders in an iterative manner to develop a strategic assessment of the scientific needs of the industry represented.
    c. Full point value **may** be given if the project team conducted surveys of a specific industry to determine scientific challenges and a stakeholder advisory committee was actively engaged in survey evaluation and subsequent project planning.
    d. Partial point value, but no more than 15 points, may be given if project team decided on project objectives based on published strategic assessments of scientific challenges with little or no actual engagement with the stakeholder community.

e. Partial point value, but no more than 10 points, may be given if project team decided on project objectives based solely on their understanding of industry needs.

3. Plans are in place for stakeholders to remain actively engaged in project activities. (20 points maximum)
    a. Full point value will be given if a stakeholder advisory committee is already identified and a process is in place for obtaining, evaluating and incorporating input from the committee.
    b. Full point value may be given if a process for identifying members of a stakeholder advisory committee is presented and there is a process described for obtaining, evaluating and incorporating input from the committee.
    c. Partial point value, but no more than 15 points, may be given if stakeholder advisory committee already exists and plans are in place for obtaining, evaluating and incorporating input from the committee but, in the judgment of the reviewer, the committee does not appear to adequately represent the target audience.
    d. Partial point value, but no more than 10 points, may be given if a stakeholder advisory committee is identified but a process for obtaining, evaluating and incorporating stakeholder input is not adequately described.
    e. No points will be awarded if it does not appear that stakeholders will remain actively engaged in project activities.

4. Information developed by the project team will be delivered to stakeholders in ways that allow them to implement new and/or improved practices. (15 points maximum)
    a. Full point value will be given if Extension/outreach objectives are included within project objectives, personnel for completing these objectives are clearly an integral part of project planning and the appropriate methods for information delivery are described.
    b. Partial point value, but no more than 15 points, may be given if Extension/outreach objectives are included within project objectives and personnel for completing these objectives are clearly an integral part of project planning, but methods for information delivery are not adequately described.
    c. Partial point value, but no more than 10 points, may be given if Extension/outreach objectives are included within project objectives but personnel for completing these objectives are **not** clearly an integral part of project planning.

5. Stakeholders will be involved in program evaluation. (10 points maximum)
    a. Full point value will be given if criteria for determining whether the project achieves predicted outcomes are described and a panel of stakeholders is identified that will apply the evaluation criteria to project outcomes.
    b. Full point value may be given if criteria for determining whether the project achieves predicted outcomes are described and a process is described for recruiting a panel of stakeholders that will apply the evaluation criteria to project outcomes.

c. Partial point value, but no more than 5 points, may be given if a panel of stakeholders is identified that will be involved in project evaluation but criteria for determining whether the project achieves predicted outcomes are not described.

6. Project team has at least some members who have worked with the target stakeholders in the past and have experience with the described research and extension approach. (5 points maximum)
    a. Full point value will be given if the PD documents the relevance of his/her scientific background to the project objectives.
    b. Partial point value, but no more than 2 points, will be given if the PD does not document relevant scientific background but other team members clearly have relevant scientific background.
    c. No points will be awarded if there is no documentation that any team member possesses the relevant scientific background.

7. The described research and extension approach will result in impacts/outcomes that are important to the target stakeholders. (15 points maximum)
    a. Full point value will be given if it is clear how the proposed research and extension will address the problem and the hypotheses for each objective.
    b. Partial point value, but no more than 10points, will be given if the research approach is described in general, but it is not clear how the proposed research and extension will address the problem and the hypotheses for each objective.
    c. No point value will be given if it is not clear that the proposed research and extension approach will result in positive impacts/outcomes.

Criteria for Scientific Peer Review

Criteria for Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs)

1. Conceptual adequacy (20 points). Application clearly states objectives that are potentially attainable within project time, scope and budget.
2. Design (40 points). The application's methodology and analytical approach are appropriate to project objectives, and effectively combines research and extension activities. The application demonstrates understanding of a whole system(s) approach and discusses how the project will contribute to an integrated systems solution to the identified problem. Even if a single component is the focus of the project, the proposal must provide a thorough analysis of the broader systems context and why that component is critical and why the solution offered will lead to an improved system in economic, ecological, and social terms. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems.
3. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise and use of trans-disciplinary approach (10 points). Application documents that the project brings together expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science and engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences, extension, and program evaluation, as appropriate, as well as expertise from

principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop.

4. Outreach plan (15points). Application includes a detailed outreach plan based on the project logic model that includes project benefits and a description of how impacts will be measured, including the likelihood that the project will provide solutions that lead to measurable benefits to producers and consumers.
5. Feasibility, probability of success, including the likelihood that the project will contribute to the overall sustainability of a component or primary system (10 points).
6. Appropriateness of budget (5 points).

Criteria for Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs)

1. Conceptual adequacy (20 points). Application clearly states objectives that are potentially attainable within project time, scope, and budget.
2. Design (40 points). The application's methodology and analytical approach are appropriate to project objectives, a continuity plan addresses future long-term plans for the proposed activities, and the project effectively combines research and extension activities. The application demonstrates an understanding of a whole system(s) approach and ***applies*** that approach to overcoming the identified problem. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems.
3. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise and use of trans-disciplinary approach (10 points). Application documents that the project brings together expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science, engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences. The application should include appropriate extension activity, and program evaluation and the application documents should include expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address economic, environmental, **and** social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.
4. Outreach plan (15 points). Application includes a detailed outreach plan based on the project logic model that includes project benefits and a description of how impacts will be measured.
5. Feasibility, probability of success (10 points).
6. Appropriateness of budget (5 points).

Criteria for Regional Partnerships for Innovation (RPIs)

1. Conceptual adequacy (20 points). Application clearly states objectives which are potentially attainable within project time, scope and budget.
2. Design (40 points). The application's methodology and analytical approach are appropriate to project objectives, including the likelihood that the proposed project approach will serve as a model for innovation by other industries and other locales. The application demonstrates an understanding and application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the partnership to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems.

3. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise and use of trans-disciplinary approach (10 points). Application documents that the project brings together expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science, engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences, include extension activity, and program evaluation, as appropriate. In addition, the application documents should include the expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address economic, environmental, **and** social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.
4. Outreach plan (15 points). Application includes a detailed outreach plan based on the project logic model that includes project benefits and a description of how impacts will be measured.
5. Feasibility, probability that proposed project will successfully create the initial development of regional partnerships that encourage regional economic development (10 points).
6. Appropriateness of budget (5 points).

Criteria for eXtension Projects

1. Documented need (15 points). Application includes documentation substantiating that project is essential in helping producers, processors and/or consumers to overcome current or likely future problems/challenges in specialty crop agriculture.
2. Stakeholder involvement (15 points). Application includes information on how stakeholders were selected and how their input and participation were solicited and will continue to be incorporated throughout multiple aspects of the proposed project.
3. Systems-based approach (10 points). Application demonstrates an understanding and application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems.
4. Trans-disciplinary approach (10 points). Application documents that the project brings together biological, physical, and social scientists as appropriate to project goals to address economic, environmental, **and** social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.
5. Community of Practice (CoP) (10 points). Application describes the CoP, including a plan to increase the CoP membership, and a CoP leadership and management plan.
6. Community of Interest (CoI) (15 points). Application describes the CoI to be served and methods the CoP will use to engage the CoI with educational products and programs on a continuing basis.
7. Plan of Work (25 points). Application includes a logic model description that adequately demonstrates procedures for the development of the following:
    - a functioning and sustainable CoP including inputs, outputs, and outcomes;
    - a detailed plan of content aggregation, evaluation and development/repackaging for year one and maintenance, sustainability, and evolution over time;
    - a scope of work for the proposed CoP over the first 12 months; a brief description of milestones for years two and three;
    - an anticipated date of CoP inclusion in the eXtension public site (public release); and
    - documented resources currently available to this proposed CoP and plans for CoP sustainability.

Criteria for Research and Extension Planning Projects

1. Documented need (10 points). Application includes documentation substantiating that project is directed to current or likely future problems/challenges in specialty crop agriculture. Demonstrate specific need for planning activity, e.g., limited resources for submitting large grant applications (or for developing a strategic plan) and potential benefits accrued from formal planning activities.
2. Stakeholder involvement (30 points). Application includes information on how stakeholders will participate in the activity, including a listing of key participants who will be invited and their affiliations.
3. Conceptual adequacy and design (25 points). Application clearly states objectives and includes a preliminary agenda that addresses those objectives; Application demonstrates an understanding of and proposes to develop the application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems.
4. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise in planning activity committees, speakers, and attendees (15 points); Application documents that the project brings together biological, physical, and social scientists as appropriate to project goals to address economic, environmental, **and** social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.
5. Appropriateness of budget (5 points).
6. Feasibility (5 points). Likelihood that the effort will result in a future grant application to the SCRI and/or address the strategic plan goals.

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 pre-award 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 which 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 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.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Questions

Tom Bewick; National Program Leader; Division of Plant Systems Production; 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) 401-3356; fax: (202) 401-4888; e-mail: tbewick@nifa.usda.gov.

OR

Daniel Schmoldt; National Program Leader; Division of Plant Systems Production; 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) 720-4807; fax: (202) 401-5179; e-mail: dschmoldt@nifa.usda.gov.

Administrative/Business Questions

Susan Bowman, Awards Management Division, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2271; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 202005-2271; telephone: (202) 401-4324; e-mail: sbowman@nifa.usda.gov.

OR

Adrienne Woodin, Awards Management Division, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2271; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 202005-2271; telephone: (202) 401-4320; e-mail: awoodin@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. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

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

2. Changes in Project Plans

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 instituting 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 Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions, for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

For the purpose of this program, the following additional definitions are applicable:

Director means the Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and any other officer or employee of NIFA to whom the authority involved is delegated.

Multifunctional research and extension activities are those in which research results are communicated via extension activities to stakeholders and the public in a coordinated manner during the life of a single project.

Project Director or PD means the single individual designated by the grantee in the grant application, who is responsible for the direction and management of the project and who is approved by the Authorized Departmental Officer. By extension of this definition, then, all project personnel listed as Co-PDs on an application are assumed to be approved by the grantee institution as ready and able to fulfill the role of PD in the event that the PD can no longer serve

in that capacity. All other project personnel should be identified as co-principal investigators or key personnel.

Specialty crop means fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture).

Trans-disciplinary means a multi-discipline approach that brings biological and physical scientists together with economists and social scientists to address challenges in a holistic manner.