

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

2015 Request for Applications

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 16, 2015



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

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

ORGANIC TRANSITIONS

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

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

DATES: Notification of Intent to Submit (NOI) emails are due by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on March 26, 2015**. Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 16, 2015**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Organic Transitions RFA.

As part of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) strategy to successfully implement the 2014 Farm Bill, NIFA is soliciting stakeholder input on NIFA's centers of excellence strategy. Between January and March 2015 NIFA will hold webinars to collect stakeholder input about the centers of excellence strategy in fiscal year (FY) 2015. Upcoming dates for the informational outreach webinars are February 26, 2015 and March 5, 2015, they will also be announced on the [NIFA website](#). The full transcript of the webinars will also be available on the [NIFA website](#). NIFA will also request to receive input through an advertised call-in number, fax and email. All comments and suggestions for the FY 2015 centers of excellence should be received by March 30, 2015.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the **Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions (ORG)** for fiscal year (FY) **2015** to solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research, education, and extension activities in program areas. According to the 2015 Appropriations Bill, H.R. 83, the amount anticipated to be available to support this program in FY 2015 is approximately \$4 million.

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

*******Please Read*******

Important Information Regarding Organic Transitions Policies and Procedures

*******Please Read*******

- Proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope cannot be submitted to both ORG and OREI (Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative) programs.
- Use the Project Summary template provided by grants.gov. Failure to use the correct format or exceeding the word limit may result in the rejection of the proposal.
- Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co-PDs vs sub-contractors.
- Proposals must include a data management plan that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626), as reauthorized by Section 7302 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (H.R. 2642; Pub.L.113–79), authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a competitive grants program that provides funding for integrated, multifunctional agricultural research, extension, and education activities. Subject to the availability of appropriations to carry out this program, the Secretary may award grants to colleges and universities [as defined by section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3103)], as amended, on a competitive basis for projects that address priorities in United States agriculture and involve integrated research, education, and extension activities, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB). The RFA will be developed each fiscal year based on these established priorities and approaches to solving the critical agricultural issues. Section 7206 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 amended section 406(b) of AREERA to add the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions as eligible to apply for grants under this authority. Section 7129 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) (Pub. L. 110-246) amended section 406(b) of AREERA (7 U.S.C. 7626(b)), adding Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (HSACU) as eligible entities for competitive funds awarded under this authority ([see Part III, A.](#) for more information).

The overall goal of the ORG program is to support the development and implementation of research, extension and higher education programs to improve the competitiveness of organic livestock and crop producers, as well as those who are adopting organic practices. NIFA administers the ORG program by determining priorities in U.S. agriculture through Agency stakeholder input processes in consultation with the NAREEEAB. In FY 2015, ORG will continue to prioritize environmental services provided by organic farming systems in the area of soil conservation, pollinator health, and climate change mitigation, including greenhouse gases (GHG), as well as the development of educational tools for Cooperative Extension personnel and other agricultural professionals who advise producers on organic practices, and the development of cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from the National Organic Program’s National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. It is expected that all projects will integrate research, education and extension activities, as appropriate to project goals, although some projects may be weighted more heavily than others in one or more of these areas. However, all proposals should have activities and impact in at least two of these three areas: research, education and extension.

The ORG program directly aligns with USDA Strategic Plan (<http://www.usda.gov/documents/usda-strategic-plan-fy-2014-2018.pdf>) and specifically addresses Strategic Goal 1 – Assist rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, re-populating, and economically thriving, Objective 1.2 – Increase agricultural opportunities by ensuring a robust safety net, creating new markets, and supporting a competitive agricultural system. ORG is aligned with the Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan

(http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA_REE_Action_Plan_03-2014.pdf) and specifically addresses: Goal 1 – Sustainable Intensification of Agricultural Production, Subgoals 1A, 1B, 1D (which focus on Crop and Animal Production, Health, Outreach and Markets); Goal 2 - Responding to Climate and Energy Needs, Subgoal 2A (which focuses on Climate Variability); Goal 3 – Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, Subgoal 3A (which focuses on Water); Goal 5 – Food Safety; Goal 6 – Education and Science Literacy; and Goal 7 – Rural Prosperity/Rural-Urban Interdependence by supporting systems-based research to enhance the sustainability of food production, including environmental, economic, and social factors. ORG is aligned with the NIFA Strategic plan (http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat_plan_2014.pdf), and specifically addresses Strategic Goal 1 (Science), by advancing our Nation’s ability to achieve global food security and fight hunger (Subgoal 1.1).

B. Program Purpose

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

In FY 2015, ORG anticipates funding standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 1 to 3 years. Budgets may not exceed \$200,000 per year with the total amount awarded not to exceed \$500,000. NIFA expects to make a total of seven to eight awards.

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

C. Program Priorities

Organic agricultural systems and practices provide many environmental services and environmental stewardship is a key principle in organic farming. For example, the use of cover crops, crop rotation, and erosion control; proper manure management; and livestock operation guidelines are cross-compliant with many Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) practice standards. How specific practices and combinations of practices interact in organic systems—including their contributions to conservation outcomes and climate change mitigation potential—is neither well documented nor understood, especially in the case of long-term organic soil management. The most meaningful metrics or models to quantify these services in organic systems are also not clear. A better understanding and documentation of these outcomes will allow for the adjustment of organic practices in order to optimize environmental services and to quantify and document those services in the areas of conservation practices, pollinator health,

and climate change mitigation, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This information will help farmers better assess the financial benefits and costs of their practices and improve their ability to qualify for current and future incentives in the climate change and environmental markets. This process will also help justify consumer expectations that organically-grown and certified food is produced using the most environmentally-sound and sustainable production practices possible.

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

However, for organic agriculture to provide these ecosystem benefits, producers need viable crop management tools. The National Organic Program (NOP) maintains a list of management tools, including fertilizers, cultural practices and pesticides, for certified organic growers.

Recommendation for removal of specific tools from the NOP National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop) creates the need for research-based alternatives. NOP has specifically requested research directed to finding replacements for these materials, which are critical for many segments of the industry—from producers already certified for organic production to those in transition or considering transition. The NOP National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) maintains a list of research priorities that is updated annually. 2013 priorities: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5104964>; 2014 Priorities:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5108951> Research findings will not have their intended impact on the organic agriculture industry unless they reach—and are adopted by—producers, requiring an aggressive Extension effort. Stakeholders have cited the need for Extension tools to help transitioning producers and their advisors, as few resources are available to guide growers during this critical period.

Priority Areas for FY 2015: Proposals within the Legislative Authority above will be accepted for consideration by panels. In FY 2015, priority will be given to proposals in the following areas (1-4 below):

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

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

- 5) evaluating the effect of transitioning to organic production on biodiversity, including pollinators.

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

- 1) developing tools that could be used to select an optimal suite of organic practices for a particular farming system;
- 2) developing better tools to assess the contributions of organic practices in future carbon markets; and
- 3) comparing estimates of conservation outcomes, environmental services, soil carbon sequestration potential, and/or greenhouse gas mitigation determined by current models during the transition to areas under long-term organic management.

Priority 3: Develop cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from NOP's National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop). This may include effective substitutes or new technologies, cultural practices, cultivars, or breeds that render the substance in question less limiting to production under organic growing conditions. We encourage a systems approach, but will also consider proposals that are narrower in scope.

Priority 4: Barriers to organic transition: Projects under this priority should address major barriers that limit the transition to organic agriculture in a given region or specific crop or animal production systems. The constraint must be identified by growers and other stakeholders. Project examples include:

- 1) Innovative crop management strategies, including those that limit unintended contamination from genetically engineered material (GMO).
- 2) Development and validation of new tools (machine, equipment, product) or adaptation of existing technology to address unique issues in organic production.

Important Notes for All Priorities:

- 1) Fieldwork to set up treatments or collect data on organic practices must be done on certified organic land. Refer to the USDA National Organic Program (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop) for organic production standards. However, as appropriate to project objectives, comparisons can include land in transition to organic certification and land not managed using organic practices. Similarly, the use of conventional production technologies (including the use of GMOs) for comparative purposes or proof of concept is permissible if cross-contamination with the organic and transitional treatments is prevented.
- 2) Projects should use combinations of Research, Education, and Extension activities and describe expected outcomes and impacts. All projects must develop and implement an

evaluation plan that captures project outcomes and demonstrates the impact of the project. The evaluation section should describe how the project evaluator or evaluation team will determine whether project goals have been met and if so, their impacts. Evaluation should be based on benchmarks, indicators, or expected outcomes related to project goals and activities, such that project goals are related to activities and to outputs, outcomes, and impacts (immediate, short-term, and intermediate-term expected changes). The budget must include adequate resources for project evaluation and evaluation procedures must be adequately described in the methods section.

- 3) If appropriate, projects should include a plan to ensure continuation of the effort beyond the funding period.
- 4) Proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope cannot be submitted to both ORG and OREI (Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative) programs. Additional information on the scope of OREI and ORG may be found at the following link: http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/plants/pdfs/orei_org_synop_9_2014.pdf

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

Pursuant to H.R. 83, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 the anticipated amount available to support this program in FY 2015 is approximately \$4 million. The funds will be awarded through a grant. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

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

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2015, applications may be submitted to the **ORG** Program as one of the following two types of requests:

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

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

C. Project Types

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

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

Starting in FY 2015 Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects must include a data management plan that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public.

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 2 CFR Part 422, institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Per award terms and conditions, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training.

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

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Colleges and universities (as defined in section 1404 of NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3103) are eligible to submit applications to the ORG program. Section 1404 of NARETPA was amended by section 7101 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246) to define Hispanic-serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs) (defined in 7 CFR 3430, and referred to in Part VIII, E.), and to include research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities.

For the purposes of this program, the terms “college” and “university” mean an educational institution in any state which (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate; (2) is legally authorized within such state to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) provides an educational program for which a bachelor’s degree or any other higher degree is awarded; (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association. Applications also may be submitted by 1994 Land-Grant Institutions (defined in 7 CFR 3430), HSACUs, and research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities. The 2014 Farm Bill required NIFA to establish an ongoing process allowing public colleges and universities that offer 4-year or advanced degrees in the food and agricultural sciences to apply for designation as NLGCA institutions. Hispanic Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs) are given the opportunity to opt out of their status to be considered for designation as a NLGCA; however, this decision will be binding on them until September 30, 2018.

Pursuant to section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626) which authorized the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grant Program, all four year Hispanic Serving Institutes (HSIs) are eligible to apply for Integrated Projects as identified in the FY 2015 ORG RFA. Two year HSIs may be eligible to apply only if the institution has been certified as a HSACU for the fiscal year in which funding is being provided. Approximately by January 2015, list of the institutions certified and therefore eligible to apply as HSACUs for grants under FY 2015 RFAs, including this RFA, will be made available at www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/education/in_focus/hispanic_if_hispanic_HSACU.html. Institutions appearing on this list are granted HSACU certification by the Secretary for the period starting October 1, 2014, and ending September 30, 2015. Certifications are valid for FY 2015 only. Additional questions on HSACU eligibility can be addressed to Lisa DePaolo, Policy Specialist, by email at LDePaolo@nifa.usda.gov or phone at (202) 401-5061.

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

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

In accordance with section 1492 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3371), as added by section 7128 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), for grants awarded after October 1, 2014, the recipient of an award from the Organic Transitions program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA. The matching funds requirement does not apply to grants awarded:

1. To a research agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); or
2. To an entity eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program (as defined in section 251(f)(1)(C) of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, 7 U.S.C. 6971(f)(1)(C)), including a partner (see Part VIII, E. Definitions for definition of partnership) of such an entity.

Entities eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program and exempt from the matching funds requirement include:

- a. 1862 Land-grant Institutions, including State Agricultural Experiment Stations receiving funding under the Hatch Act of 1887
- b. 1890 Land-grant Institutions
- c. 1994 Land-grant Institutions
- d. Recipients of Continuing Animal Health and Disease, Food Security, and Stewardship Research, Education, and Extension Program Funds — Capacity and Infrastructure Program (CIP)
- e. Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACU)
- f. Insular Area Schools Eligible to Receive Funds from the Distance Education/Resident Instruction Grant Programs
- g. Recipients of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program Funds
- h. Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) - (for exemption from the new matching requirement, these applications must include NLGCA certification. Instructions for requesting certification are available at: <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html> , and for attaching the certification in **Part IV, C.** of this RFA)
- i. Recipients of funds under a program established under section 1417(b) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)), including: (1) 1890 Institution Teaching, Research, and Extension Capacity Building Grants Program; (2) Higher Education Challenge Grants Program; (3) Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program; and (4) Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program
- j. Individual public or private, nonprofit Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions of higher education (see 20 U.S.C. 1059d).

A proposal submitted in response to this RFA may indicate that the work will be completed by multiple entities as a collaborative partnership. All partners must have a substantial involvement

in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership among multiple entities is proposed, the proposal must clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;
- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and
- 3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or third party in-kind contribution (see section 2 of 7 CFR 3430 or section 96 of 2 CFR part 200) to the total project budget costs.

If a proposal indicates that the work on the project will be completed by multiple entities as partners, and at least one entity is exempt from the matching requirement under #2 above, the entire project will be exempt from the matching requirement regardless of whether all entities involved are otherwise exempt. Any partner entity can serve as the lead entity on the project. All partners must be significantly involved in the project.

After proposals have been recommended for award, NIFA will determine if the submitted proposal and proposed division of work reflects substantial involvement of all entities involved. If a proposal is recommended for award to a lead entity not otherwise exempt from the matching requirement and the proposal does not reflect substantial involvement of at least one partner that is exempt under #2 above, then the matching requirement will apply. Exemption from the matching requirement for an entity not otherwise exempt is limited to the project for which it is a partner.

Waiver of Match - NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a recipient for one year with respect to a competitive grant that involves research or extension activities that are consistent with the priorities established by the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) for the year involved. To determine whether proposed activities are consistent with the priorities of the NAREEEAB, please refer to the [2014 Research, Education and Economics Action Plan. Instructions for requesting a waiver are included in Part IV, C. of this RFA.](#)

C. Multiple Submissions

Duplicate, essentially duplicate or predominantly overlapping applications submitted to both ORG and OREI in any one fiscal year will not be reviewed. In addition, applicants may not submit to ORG an application that is considered duplicate, essentially duplicate, or predominantly overlapping with an application submitted to another NIFA program in the same fiscal year.

D. Centers of Excellence

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), beginning in Fiscal Year 2015, for applicable competitive research and extension programs, NIFA will be recognizing and providing priority in the receipt of funding to applications from "centers of

excellence” that have been established for purposes of carrying out research, extension, and education activities relating to the food and agricultural sciences. In July of 2014, NIFA held listening sessions and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA’s implementation of the centers of excellence provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input gathered are available on NIFA’s website at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/offices/legis/cntr_ex_webinar_documents.html.

A center of excellence is composed of 1 or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the center of excellence. Therefore, an eligible applicant who wishes to be considered as a center of excellence must be one of the following entities that provides financial or in-kind support to the Center being proposed, as described in the grant application.

- (A) State agricultural experiment stations;
- (B) colleges and universities;
- (C) university research foundations;
- (D) other research institutions and organizations;
- (E) Federal agencies;
- (F) national laboratories;
- (G) private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
- (H) individuals; or
- (I) any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

Only CAP grants and standard grant applicants may be considered for COE designation. See Part IV, C. of this RFA for additional requirements that eligible applicants must meet to be considered a center of excellence.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Notice of Intent to Submit an Application

Prospective applicants are asked to email a Notice of Intent to Submit an Application by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on **March 26, 2015**. This notification is not required and does not enter into the review of a subsequent application, but will inform the review process. It will not be used for screening for project appropriateness or applicant eligibility, nor will feedback be offered.

This email should include the following information IN THE BODY OF THE EMAIL:

1. Descriptive tentative title of proposed research
2. Name of the Project Director and Applicant Institution name
3. Names of other potential co-Project Directors and their affiliations, if applicable.
Please note all people listed as co-PD or co-PI should be eligible and able to fulfill the role of PD/PI for the project if the need arises.
4. Priority area(s) addressed (see [Part I. C.](#) for specific details)
5. Likely type of proposal (resubmission or new)
6. Subject line of email should read: ORG – Intent to Submit
7. E-mail should be sent to organicprograms@nifa.usda.gov

B. Electronic Application Package and Content and Form of Applications Submission

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 <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html>.

Only materials submitted through grants.gov will be included in the review. Materials such as letter of support, missing components sent by fax, email, or other means will not be included in the review packet.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (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 <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2 below to locate the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide”.

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 <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/adobe-reader-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.

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

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-ICGP-004958

in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

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

If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application**, refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website (<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-resources.html>). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

Grants.gov customer support
800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035
Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [federal holidays](#).
Email: support@grants.gov

Grants.gov iPortal (see <https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants>):
Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 a.m. - 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

C. Content and Form of Application Submission

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

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).

For any questions related to the preparation of an application, review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable RFA. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:

- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

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

3. R&R Other Project Information Form

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

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of ORG. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template. The program recommends using the Project Summary template provided by grants.gov. Failure to use the correct format or exceeding the word limit may result in the rejection of the proposal.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed **20** pages of written text, figures, and tables regardless of whether it is single- or double-spaced. This maximum (**20** pages) has been

established to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

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

(b) Introduction: Include a clear statement of the long-term goals and supporting objectives of the proposed activities. Summarize the body of knowledge or past activities substantiating the need for the proposed project. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed activity, including the work of key project personnel. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, include in-depth information on the following, when applicable:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co-PDs vs sub-contractors.

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

- (5) Results expected within a reasonable time frame;
- (6) How you will monitor and evaluate (as appropriate) Research, Extension, and Education activities;
- (7) How you will analyze and interpret data;
- (8) Limitations to proposed procedures;
- (9) Pitfalls that might be encountered;
- (10) Suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale;
- (11) Details of plans to communicate results to stakeholders and the public; and
- (12) Plan to sustain activities beyond this funding period

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

Center of Excellence Justification

Applicants who wish to be considered as centers of excellence must provide a brief justification statement, as part of their Project Narratives and within the page limits provided, describing how they meet the standards of a center of excellence, based on the following criteria:

- (A) the ability of the center of excellence to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts regarding research, teaching, and extension in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application;
- (B) in addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the center of excellence to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the Federal Government in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application. Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award;
- (C) the planned scope and capability of the center of excellence to implement teaching initiatives to increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application; and

(D) the ability or capacity of the center of excellence to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues in support of and as a result of the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application.

Additionally, where practicable (not required), center of excellence applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) (list of certified NLGCA is available at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/pdfs/nlgca_colleges.pdf), and schools of veterinary medicine).

c. Field 12. Other Attachments.

Non-Land Grant College of Agriculture (NLGCA) Certification. PDF Attachment. Applicants claiming exemption from the new matching requirement as NLGCA, must attach the NLGCA certification letter they requested and received from NIFA. Title the attachment 'NLGCA Certification' and save file as 'NLGCACertification'. To request certification as an NLGCA, complete the form at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>. Note that certification can take up to 30 days from submission of request form.

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

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

- (a) All people listed as co-PD or co-PI should be eligible and able to fulfill the role of PD/PI for the project if the need arises.
- (b) Exceeding the page limit for the Biographical Sketch may negatively impact consideration of the proposal.
- (c) Current and Pending forms **MUST INCLUDE THE CURRENT PROPOSAL WITH A PERCENTAGE OF TIME**, even if there will be no financial compensation.

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.

Please be as specific as possible in the budget narrative and include actual amounts, not percentages. Note the PD or Co-PD for each budget item within the cumulative Budget Narrative for the project.

Matching

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

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

- (a) For any **third party cash contributions**, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, signed by the authorized representative (AR) of the donor organization (and the applicant organization only if provided after submission of the application), 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 (the budget narrative must describe how the cash donation will be used); and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.
- (b) For any **third party in-kind contributions**, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution, signed by the authorized representative of the donor organization (and the applicant organization only if provided after submission of the application), which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

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

The value of applicant contributions to the project shall be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles described in OMB Circular A-21 (2 CFR Part 220), Cost Principles for Educational Institutions. **All contributions, including cash and third party in-kind, must meet the criteria included in section 23 of 7 CFR 3019, “Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations.”**

Additional Budget Information

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

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

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 “**Organic Transitions**”) and the program code (i.e., enter “**112.E**)
- b. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.
- c. Data Management Plan - PDF Attachment.** Required for all ORG proposals. Two-Page Limit. Title the attachment as ‘Data Management Plan’ and save file as ‘Management Plan’. Projects must budget sufficient resources to develop and implement the proposed data management plan.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Prior to electronic submission of the application via Grants.gov, it is strongly recommended that an administrative review be conducted to ensure that an application complies with all application preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review.

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

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 16, 2015**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

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

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

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

E. Funding Restrictions

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

Section 715 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (Pub. L. 113-235) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. When preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

F. Other Submission Requirements

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

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

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

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

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

When each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of Organic Transitions will recommend that the project: (a) be approved for support from currently available funds or (b) be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

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

B. Evaluation Criteria

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

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

1. Technical merit of all aspects of the application, including research, education, and Extension components, as appropriate (50 points).

- a. Degree of integration of Research, Education, and Extension (10 pts);
- b. Extent to which proposed work addresses identified organic stakeholder needs in the priority areas described above (10 pts);
- c. Suitability and feasibility of methodology for successfully completing work in the allotted time (10 pts);
- d. Quality of monitoring, data management and evaluation plans (10 pts); and
- e. Qualifications of key project personnel and institutions, including institutional experience and competence in the proposed area of work, and adequacy of available support personnel, equipment, and facilities (10 pts);

2. Relevance of proposed project to ORG purpose (see Part I, B.) (50 points).

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

Centers of Excellence Status

All eligible applicants will be competitively peer reviewed (as described in Part V, A. and B. of this RFA), and ranked in accordance with the evaluation criteria. Those that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a center of excellence will be further evaluated by the peer panel to determine whether they have met the standards to be centers of excellence (listed A. through D. above). In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-center of excellence, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the center of excellence criteria. Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a center of excellence or who are not deemed to have met the centers of excellence standards may still receive funding.

In addition, the applicant's Notice of Award will reflect that, for the particular program, the applicant meets all of the requirements of a center of excellence. Entities recognized as centers of excellence will maintain that distinction for the specific area of science or subject matter associated with the center of excellence for the duration of their period of performance or as

identified in the terms and conditions of that award when applying for funding in covered research and extension programs.

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 555, 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).

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application; however, withdrawn applications normally will not be returned. One copy of each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by Organic Transitions for a period of three years.

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, and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

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

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number and the Federal Agency Identification Number assigned by NIFA;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of financial assistance approved for the award;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA award terms and conditions);
- (10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

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

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

2 CFR Part 200 – Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

2 CFR Part 400 —USDA implementation of 2 CFR Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

2 CFR Part 415 – USDA General Program Administrative Regulations.

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.

2 CFR Part 180 and Part 417--OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Government-Wide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) and USDA Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension.

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

2 CFR Part 416—USDA General Program Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

2 CFR Part 418—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.

2 CFR Part 421—USDA Implementation of Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

2 CFR Part 422—Research Institutions Conducting USDA-Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct.

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).

44 U.S.C. 3541 et seq. (Pub. L. 107-347) - Federal Information System Security Management Act of 2002 (FISMA), to improve computer and network security within the Federal Government. Applies to awardees if it will collect, store, process, transmit, or use information on behalf of NIFA.

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Grantees are to use REEport, NIFA's electronic, web-based inventory system to submit an initial project initiation which documents expected products and outcomes of the project. Additionally, annual progress report documenting realized project outcomes must be submitted to the electronic system. The web-based system facilitates an electronic workflow between grantees and NIFA for project accomplishments to be easily searchable and allows for public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements, including those specific to the annual and final technical reports, are included in the award terms and conditions.

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

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Program Contacts:

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

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

Administrative/Business Contacts:

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

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

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

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

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. 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 2 CFR part 415, subpart C, this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Definitions

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

Partnership requires that all partners have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership between multiple entities is proposed, the proposal should clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;
- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and
- 3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or in-kind contribution to the total project budget costs.