

Critical Issues: Emerging and New Animal Pests and Diseases Program

FY 2011 Request for Applications

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 25, 2011



U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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

CRITICAL ISSUES: Emerging and New Animal Pests and Diseases Program

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.200 (Special Research Grants).

DATES: Applications must be received by close of business (COB) on **April 25, 2011** (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding. 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) is requesting comments regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and will be used 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)). This section requires the Secretary to solicit and consider input on a current RFA from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education and extension for use in formulating future RFAs for competitive programs. Written stakeholder comments on this RFA should be submitted in accordance with the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice.

Written stakeholder comments should be submitted by mail 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: RFP-OEP@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 Critical Issues: Emerging and New Animal Pests and Diseases RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Critical Issues: Emerging and New Animal Pests and Diseases (Critical Issues) Program for fiscal year (FY) 2011 to perform critical research related to high consequence, emerging, re-emerging or threatening animal pest and disease issues. It is anticipated that the amount available in FY 2011 for support of this Critical Issues solicitation will be approximately **\$300,000**. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an Appropriations Act for FY 2011. Enactment of additional Continuing Resolutions or an Appropriations Act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

See Part IIC. for a description of the type of projects that are being solicited. Typically, this program supports research and extension projects requiring immediate attention and that will lead to a critically needed or transformational work product, or that will initiate or reinvigorate essential work fostering development of promising new or innovative strategies and approaches

that will help investigators successfully secure longer-term support. NIFA may solicit proposals under this program several times during FY 2011 to address specific new or emerging issues relating to diseases and pests of animals.

For this particular solicitation, NIFA is requesting proposals that address specific aspects of the following issue:

Development of new knowledge leading to improved vaccine(s) and molecular diagnostic methods for control and detection of infection with *Brucella* species, especially in elk populations, in the Greater Yellowstone Area.

The issues included in this RFA have been identified through input from university and Federal scientists and policy analysts, producers and other constituents. Commensurate with the specific intent of, and the limited funding support available through, the Critical Issues program, the focused objectives described in this solicitation directly address one of several high priority need and concern areas applicable to this high consequence, endemic disease of both domestic and wild ungulates, and humans, in the United States (US).

Research support through this NIFA program is necessary in order to develop new, science-based capabilities and capacities that will 1) generate new diagnostic tools and efficacious vaccines that will be essential to the success of effective surveillance, control, and eradication programs, 2) help ensure earlier detection of individual outbreaks and thus more timely and effective response and containment, 3) reduce the risk of curtailed commerce within the US and with export partners, and 4) better protect animal and human health.

This notice identifies the objectives for Critical Issues project(s), the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to respond to this particular Critical Issues solicitation. NIFA additionally requests stakeholder input from any interested party for use in the development of the next RFA for this program.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The authority for this program is contained in Section 2(c)(1)(B) of the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act of August 4, 1965, Public Law No. 89-106, as amended (7 USC 450i (c)(1)(B)). This program supports critical research activities related to time-critical, emerging or re-emerging animal pest and disease issues.

Brucellosis is a devastating disease that affects humans and a variety of animals throughout the world, including much of Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and even the Arctic. The last remaining reservoir for *Brucella abortus* in the United States is in the wild bison and elk in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA).

Brucellosis eradication in cattle within the US has been a multi-billion dollar, multi-decade project that has yielded considerable success. However, in the last few years the disease has spilled over from affected wildlife to cattle populations in the states surrounding the GYA, thus threatening anew continued success of the US' national Brucellosis Eradication Program. Presently, the changes in the disease transmission dynamics, between and among domestic livestock and wild ungulate reservoirs of *Brucella* species (especially in elk and bison), underlying this increased incidence and prevalence of cases are poorly understood. Consequently, the expert community has joined together to call for both large- and small-scale initiatives aimed at supporting research and development in several specific areas determined to constitute critical scientific and technological gaps and needs.

Chief among the expert groups is the “The Consortium for the Advancement of Brucellosis Science (CABS)” whose broad and inclusive membership focuses on development of a “scientific synthesis and consensus to Inform Brucellosis Policy and Research.” The CABS mission and goals have been officially endorsed by resolution of the “United States Animal Health Association (USAHA)” and by the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The Consortium consists of a diverse science team, with members from around the United States (including California, Texas, Louisiana, Virginia, Maryland, Iowa, Wyoming, and Montana), and a stakeholder advisory team comprised of leaders from the Federal Government as well as from the 3 states in the GYA. The principal missions of CABS are to evaluate current research, identify research gaps, and conduct outreach for the advancement of brucellosis science for domestic and wild animals. The goal of the CABS is to work toward successful disease control and prevention. Based on its research priorities selection process, CABS is presently emphasizing promotion of vaccine and diagnostic test development for *Brucella* species that are known pathogens of reservoir wildlife species and agriculturally important host species, especially cattle.

Among the highest ranked research priorities identified by CABS is development of reliable and cost-effective diagnostic tests and vaccines validated for key domestic and wild ungulate reservoir species, with special focus on diagnostic tests and vaccines for use in elk. In addition, there is general support for the notion that the value of diagnostic tests would be greatly increased if the tests were portable and provided rapid results in the field. It is envisioned that

access to vaccine(s) and improved laboratory and field tests will enable collection of more, and higher quality, data essential to the design and conduct of critically important disease control-oriented epidemiologic studies. Results from these epidemiologic investigations are expected, in turn, to help guide policy makers, producers, and wild life managers toward the most efficient and effective points of intervention and disease control methods.

Based upon the general considerations discussed above, research priorities as developed from the 2005 CABS Laramie Agenda, subsequent meetings of the CABS, and input from APHIS leadership, researchable objectives for the current solicitation are focused principally on diagnostic test and vaccine development for elk. Other related objectives may include, but are not limited to:

1. Development of efficacious Brucella vaccines for elk;
2. Development of improved adjuvant and/or immune-modulators for Brucella vaccines administered to elk;
3. Development of Brucella vaccine delivery systems for elk;
4. Development of validated, rapid, portable diagnostic tests for use in elk, with additional multi-host functionality incorporated where practicable;
5. Development of improved diagnostic tests based on traditional test design approaches (e.g., immunological or direct bacterial culture);
6. Development of improved diagnostic tests based on innovative strategies, methods, markers, or chemistries;
7. Development of diagnostic tests that can distinguish exposure from infection; and
8. Exploitation of diagnostic technologies in ways that improve diagnostic test reliability and/or specificity and sensitivity.

A strong scientific and pragmatic case should be made for the approaches applicants propose to take in order to address one or more of the specific scientific and technical research and development goals described in this solicitation. Applications demonstrating assembly of collaborative teams documenting experience in making optimal use of existing local, regional, and national capabilities and capacities will be given priority consideration. Additionally, while NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria, applications for Critical Issues are encouraged to leverage, where possible, other sources of public and/or private funding to enhance prospects for project success.

Related Information Sources:

CABS (Internet Homepage). <http://www.uwyo.edu/enr/ruckelshaus-institute/projects-and-events/brucellosis-in-elk-and-bison-in-the-greater-yellowstone-area.html>. 2010.

Fact Sheet on the Consortium for the Advancement of Brucellosis Science (CABS): A Scientific Synthesis to Inform Policy and Research
<http://www.uwyo.edu/enr/files/docs/Ruckelshaus/Revised%20CABS%20External%20Fact%20Sheet%207-21-10.pdf>. 2010

Research Priorities – The Consortium for the Advancement of Brucellosis Science (CABS).

See extractable file named <CABS Research Priorities.pdf> under “[Information Kit](#)” at: <http://www.uwyo.edu/enr/ruckelshaus-institute/projects-and-events/brucellosis-in-elk-and-bison-in-the-greater-yellowstone-area.html>. 2009.

Probable Causes Of Increasing Brucellosis In Free-Ranging Elk Of The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. *Ecological Applications*, 20(1), 2010, pp. 278–288. <http://www.esajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1890/08-2062.1>. 2010.

United States Animal Health Association - Resolution Number: 32 Approved; Source: Committee On Brucellosis; Subject Matter: Consortium For The Advancement Of Brucellosis Science. <http://www.usaha.org/committees/resolutions/2009/resolution32-2009.pdf>. 2009

The United States Animal Health Association Special Committee on Brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area: A technical report: Enhancing Brucellosis Vaccines, Vaccine Delivery, and Surveillance Diagnostics for Elk and Bison in the Greater Yellowstone Area. http://www.usaha.org/committees/bru/2006Aug_TechnicalReport_GYA-Elk-Bison-Brucellosis.pdf. 2006

Brucellosis Confirmed in Park County. Wyoming Livestock Board - news release. <http://wlsb.state.wy.us/NewsReleases/23Nov10%20nd%20Brucellosis%20Confirmation.pdf>. 2010.

Brucellosis In The Greater Yellowstone Area. National Academy Press, National Research Council Report: <http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/bisonelk/>. 1998.

Extra Measures Needed to Protect Cattle Around Yellowstone Until Brucellosis Is Controlled in Bison and Elk. National Academies of Science press release: <http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=5957>. 1997.

B. Purpose and Priorities

NIFA requests applications for the Critical Issues program to perform critical research activities related to time-critical, emerging animal pest and disease issues. The program is designed to provide one-time seed funding to help initiate work requiring immediate attention until other longer-term resources can be secured to address the issue. *Priority will be given to proposals which are staffed by collaborative teams who document their experience in making optimal use of existing local, regional, and national capabilities and capacities; and demonstrate their experience in conducting time-critical research, however all eligible applicants are encouraged to apply.* NIFA anticipates soliciting proposals several times this fiscal year to address specific new or emerging issues. Applications are being solicited for the **Development of new knowledge leading to improved vaccine(s) and molecular diagnostic methods for control and detection of infection with Brucella species, especially in elk populations, in the Greater Yellowstone Area.**

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. It is anticipated that approximately **\$300,000** will be available to fund applications submitted in response to this RFA in FY **2011**. This RFA is being released prior to

the passage of an Appropriations Act for FY 2011. Enactment of additional Continuing Resolutions or an Appropriations Act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

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 2011, only new applications may be submitted to the Critical Issues: Emerging and New Animal Pests and Diseases Program.

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

C. Project Types

Development of new knowledge leading to improved vaccine(s) and molecular diagnostic methods for control and detection of infection with Brucella species, especially in elk populations, in the Greater Yellowstone Area

NIFA anticipates funding up to two (2) applications. Award amount will depend on the number of projects and objectives recommended and approved for implementation, the amounts requested by the Project Director(s), and feasibility of achieving project goals with available funds. Research only, as well as integrated research and extension, projects will be accepted.

D. Project Duration

The maximum project period is three years. Applicants should state in their proposal the amount of time anticipated to complete the project, and justify the proposed project duration with a graphical or narrative timeline. Please note that no-cost extension requests under the funding authority for this program will not be permitted past a three year performance limit. Thus, a project originally proposed for 1 year duration is eligible for up to two no-cost extension years, a project originally proposed for 2-year duration is eligible for only a single no-cost extension year, and a project originally proposed for 3-year duration is ineligible for a no-cost extension.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may be submitted State agricultural experiment stations, land-grant colleges and universities, research foundations established by land-grant colleges and universities, colleges and universities receiving funds under the Act of October 10, 1962 (16 USC 582a et seq.)

McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Act, and accredited schools or colleges of veterinary medicine for the purpose of facilitating or expanding ongoing State-Federal food and agricultural research programs that:

- (i) promote excellence in research on a regional and national level;
- (ii) promote the development of regional research centers;
- (iii) promote the research partnership between the Department of Agriculture, colleges and universities, research foundations, and State agricultural experiment stations for regional research efforts; and
- (iv) facilitate coordination and cooperation of research among States through regional research grants.

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

Pursuant to section 2(c)(3) of Public Law No. 89-106, NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. **Applicants are advised to submit early to the Grants.gov system.**

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, it is suggested that the PD/PI first contact an Authorized Representative (AR) (also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grant.gov. If the organization is not prepared (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 much as two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations the AR should go to **“Get Registered” on the Grants.gov left navigation bar (or go to http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov. A quick reference guide listing the steps is available as a 4-page PDF document at the following website: <http://www.grants.gov/section910/Grants.govRegistrationBrochure.pdf>.**

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

1. In order to access, complete and submit applications, applicants must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov. This software is essential to apply for NIFA Federal assistance awards. For basic system requirements and download instructions, please see http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp. To verify that you have a compatible version of Adobe Reader, Grants.gov established a test package that will assist you in making that determination. Grants.gov Adobe Versioning Test Package: <http://www.grants.gov/applicants/AdobeVersioningTestOnly.jsp>.
2. The application package must be obtained via Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov>, click on “Apply for Grants” in the left-hand column, click on “**Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Instructions,**” enter the funding opportunity number USDA-NIFA-OP-003416 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: A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” 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 assistance is needed to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms), **or submitting the application** then refer to resources available on the Grants.gov Web site first (<http://www.grants.gov/>). Grants.gov assistance is also available as follows:

Grants.gov customer support
Toll Free: 1-800-518-4726
Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [Federal Holidays](#).
Email: support@grants.gov

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

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Electronic 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 CONTAINING NON-PDF DOCUMENTS WILL BE AT

RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. With documented prior approval, resubmitted applications will be accepted until close of business on the closing date in the RFA.

If you do not own PDF-generating software, Grants.gov provides online tools to assist applicants. Users will find a link to “Convert Documents to PDF” on <http://grants.gov/assets/PDFConversion.pdf>.

For any questions related to the preparation of an application please review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable request for applications. 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, 7:00 am – 5:00 pm Eastern Time, 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 the Critical Issues program and describe the impact of proposed research activities related to the time-critical, emerging animal pest and disease issue as described in Part IIC of this announcement.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed fifteen (15) pages of written text including figures and tables regardless of whether it is single or double spaced. This maximum has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

1) Objectives. Clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged statement(s) of the specific aims of the proposed effort to the segment of the time critical research activities contained in the proposal must be included in all applications. Priority will be given to proposals which are staffed by collaborative teams who document their experience in making optimal use of existing local, regional, and national capabilities and capacities; and demonstrate their experience in conducting time-critical research, however all eligible applicants are encouraged to apply.

(2) Procedures. The procedures or methodology to be applied to the proposed effort should be explicitly stated. This section should include but not necessarily be limited to: (i) a description of the proposed investigations and/or experiments in the sequence in which it is planned to carry them out; (ii) techniques to be employed, including their feasibility; (iii) kinds of results expected; (iv) means by which data will be analyzed or interpreted; (v) pitfalls which might be encountered; and (vi) limitations to proposed procedures.

(3) Justification. This section should include in-depth information on the following, when applicable: (i) estimates of the magnitude of the problem and its relevance to ongoing State-Federal food and agricultural research programs; (ii) importance of starting the work during the current FY; and (iii) reasons for having the work performed by the proposing institution; (iv) demonstrated evidence of collaborative work, including that which involves working groups or approved Multi-state research committees, or similar activities, as appropriate; (v) demonstrated capacity to conduct research requiring flexibility and adaptation in order to find solutions in a time-critical manner.

(4) Literature Review. A summary of pertinent publications with emphasis on their relationship to the effort being proposed should be provided and should include all important and recent publications from other institutions, as well as those from your institution. The citations themselves should be accurate, complete, and written in an acceptable journal format.

(5) Current Work. Current unpublished institutional activities to date related to the priority as specified in Part I of this request for applications should be described.

(6) Project Timetable. The application should outline all important phases as a function of time for the entire project period.

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.

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.

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 Code. Enter the program code name “**Critical Issues: Emerging and New Animal Pests and Diseases**” and the program code “**NI**”

C. Submission Dates and Times

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

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on **April 25, 2011** (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

Applicants who have problems with the submission of an application to Grants.gov are encouraged to 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.

Correspondence regarding submitted applications will be sent using e-mail. 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, please contact the Program Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFA (for the Small Business Innovation Research program (SBIR) the Program Contacts are specified under subsection 1.5 of the SBIR Program Solicitation) and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in (for competitive programs) the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel or (for non-competitive programs) a delay in the issuance of an award. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

1. Indirect Costs

Pursuant to Section 1473 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended, 7 USC 3319, **indirect costs are not allowable costs under Section 2(c)(1)(B) Special Grant projects**, and no funds will be approved for this purpose. Further, costs that are a part of the institution's indirect cost pool, (e.g., administrative or clerical salaries), may not be reclassified as direct costs for the purpose of making them allowable.

2. Building Construction or Renovation

No funds will be awarded for the renovation or refurbishment of research spaces; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces; or for the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of a building or facility.

3. Tuition Remission

In accordance with Section 1473 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 USC 3319), as amended, tuition remission is not an allowable cost under Section 2(c)(1)(B) projects, and no funds will be approved for this purpose.

E. Other Submission Requirements

The applicant should follow the submission requirements noted in the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.”

Described below are the requirements for successful submission of an application, all of the following steps must be met for an application to be considered for peer review:

- 1) Meeting the deadline: To electronically send the application to Grants.gov the submit button is hit, which triggers a date and time stamp on the application. The date and time stamp is used to determine whether the application was received by Grants.gov before the deadline, which is prior to close of business (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on **April 25, 2011**. An application submitted or resubmitted after the deadline is late. Consideration of late applications is only given in extenuating circumstances (e.g., natural disasters, confirmed Grants.gov outage) with proper documentation and support of the Agency Contact (see Part VII). The occurrence of one of these situations does not automatically ensure that a late application will be accepted. If an applicant wants a late application considered under an extenuating circumstance, the applicant should contact the Agency Contact accordingly.
- 2) Successful Grants.gov validation: The Grants.gov system performs a limited check of the application, and applicants are notified by Grants.gov of the outcome of the initial review. Applications meeting Grants.gov requirements are made available to the funding agency for further processing. Applications that fail Grants.gov validation may be resubmitted to Grants.gov if the original agency deadline has not passed. (Note that the Grants.gov system may allow applications to be submitted after the deadline has passed, but the application is considered late by NIFA.)
- 3) Successful Agency validation: NIFA staff performs precursory review of the application. The agency validation process includes, for example, meeting eligibility requirements and following agency application guidelines (e.g., formatting, page limitations, and limits on budget requests). Applicants are notified by NIFA of the outcome of this review.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

Each application will be evaluated in a 2-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel.

Reviewers 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 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, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA:

The evaluation criteria below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. Overall scientific and technical quality of the application (15 points);
2. Scientific and technical quality of the procedures (10 points);
3. Feasibility of attaining time sensitive objectives (20 points);
4. Relevance and importance of the proposed research to achieving specific objectives in the targeted areas of this solicitation (as described in Part II, C.) (30 points);
5. Professional training and experience of key project personnel (including current and previous collaborative research related to the proposal) (10 points);
6. Adequacy of facilities and equipment (10 points); and
7. Appropriateness of budget request to attaining project objectives (5 points).

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining

conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 6400 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 648, Falls Church, Virginia 22042. Phone: (703) 532-2300. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be 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. 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, as 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. NIFA will provide 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 which 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 awarding official of NIFA 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 awarding official of NIFA 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. It should be noted that 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 shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR).

B. Award Notice

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

(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 PD's chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number assigned by the Department;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Director during the project period;
- (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:

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 and A-122 (2 CFR Parts 220 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 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement).

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—Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance).

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

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

7 CFR 3430—Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Grant Programs--General Grant 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 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.

For informational purposes, the "Federal Financial Report," Form SF-425, consolidates into a single report the former Financial Status Report (SF-269 and SF-269A) and the Federal Cash Transactions Report (SF-272 and SF-272A). The [NIFA Agency-specific Terms and Conditions](#) include the requirement that Form SF-425 is due on an **annual basis no later than 90 days**

following the end of the award anniversary date. A final “Federal Financial Report,” Form SF-425, is due 90 days after the expiration date of this award.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact [Dr. Gary B. Sherman](#), National Program Lead, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability; The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA); 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 2201, Washington, DC 20250-2201; telephone: (202) 401 - 4952; fax: (202) 401 - 6156; e-mail: gsherman@nifa.usda.gov

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent 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, the awardee 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. Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.

d. 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, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended by NIFA without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be 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. Any extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the awardee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of award.

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

For the purpose of this program, the following definitions are applicable: Please refer to 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Grant Programs--General Grant Administrative Provisions, for the applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.