



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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NRI Small Farms and Rural Agricultural Communities Initiative:

Request for Applications Issued

Funding is available again through the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program (NRI) called **Enhancing the Prosperity of Small Farms & Rural Agricultural Communities**. The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) is accepting applications for projects under this initiative until December 8, 2005. These grants are intended to examine the interactions between economic, social, environmental, and biological components important to the prosperity of small farms and rural agricultural communities.

The RFA can be downloaded in Acrobat PDF format at the [CSREES website](#). Proposed projects must combine at least two of three "integrated" components-- research, education, and extension. Projects must address small farms, rural agricultural communities, or both. Applicants should propose hypotheses that are testable and to use quantitative approaches. The NRI encourages the submission of what they call "high-risk" projects in addition to those with the potential for more immediate application. Only new applications not previously submitted to the NRI will be reviewed. Projects may include new research, synthesis of previous or ongoing research, building educational and research capacity, curricula development, transfer of information to producers and other end users, and other related activities.

Priority will be given to proposals that influence the prosperity of rural communities and the profitability of agricultural products in one of the following areas: 1) a comparison of approaches to environmental management; 2) an analysis of interactions that contribute to high returns in production, processing, and distribution; 3) an analysis of interactions that affect the adoption of new agricultural technology, management or foster rural agribusiness development; or 4) an identification of the growing opportunities and threats for small and medium sized farms and associated rural communities over the next 20 years. Projects that address topics of great importance and are of exceptional merit may be funded, but these four areas are given higher priority.

National Program Leaders Siva Sureshwaran (202-720-3310 or at ssureshwaran@csrees.usda.gov) and Diana Jerkins (202-401-6996 or by email at djerkins@csrees.usda.gov) are available for consultation about the suitability of proposal topics.

Approximately \$5 million is available in total for fiscal year 2005, with more funds and another round of applications in fiscal year 2006. Project awards are limited to \$500,000 for 2-4 years of support. No matching funds are required unless the proposed project is commodity-specific and not of national scope. State experiment stations, colleges and universities, federal research agencies, and private research organizations with demonstrated capacities to perform research or technology transfer are eligible to receive grants.

This national program is the result of an amendment, sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), to the FY04 agricultural appropriations bill. The amendment effectively required CSREES to issue a supplemental RFA to reflect two of the four goals for the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS) that had not received funding in recent years -- improving farm profitability and small and moderate-sized farm viability, and enhancing rural economic and community development. Via the annual agriculture appropriations bill, the IFAFS program has in recent years been merged into the NRI. Twenty percent of total funding for the NRI has been set-aside for IFAFS. Within the NRI, the IFAFS component is now referred to as "integrated projects," meaning they include research, education, and extension components rather than research only.

In coordination with this legislative effort on the appropriations bill, sustainable and organic agriculture interests and CSREES have also been in dialog on re-starting and re-envisioning the NRI program in agricultural systems, the topic of

recent stakeholder/agency workshops in the Midwest and Northwest organized by Walter Goldstein (Michael Fields Agricultural Institute) and Kim Leval (Center for Rural Affairs), respectively.

The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC) secured the original IFAFS language on farm profitability and small and moderate-sized farm viability in the 1998 legislation that first authorized IFAFS, working closely with the offices of Senators Feingold (WI) and Jeffords (VT) among others. In the 2002 farm bill, working closely with Senators Harkin (IA) and Lugar (IN), SAC pushed for the addition of rural economic and community development as an IFAFS purpose, and then in the FY04 appropriations bill pushed for the amendment to correct the agency's inattention to these two priorities. We now intend to challenge the USDA decision to split the currently available \$5 million between two fiscal years ('04 and '05). The expectation of congressional sponsors was that \$5 million and eventually considerably more in funding would be made available each year, not split between two fiscal years.