



United States
Department
of
Agriculture

Program Solicitation

Small Business Innovation
Research Program – Phase I
Fiscal Year 2015

National Institute of
Food and Agriculture

Competitive

Programs SBIR-15-1

Phase I Application Deadline: October 2, 2014

Telephone: 202-401-4002

Email: sbir@nifa.usda.gov

Internet: www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/sbir

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (CFDA)
10.212 Small Business Innovation Research

NIFA Funding Opportunity Number
USDA-NIFA-SBIR-004553

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acronym List | 4 |
| 1.0 GENERAL PROGRAM DESCRIPTION | 5 |
| 1.1 Introduction..... | 5 |
| 1.2 Three-phase Program | 5 |
| 1.3 Potential Commercial Outcome | 6 |
| 1.4 Eligibility | 6 |
| 1.5 USDA SBIR Program Priority Areas..... | 7 |
| 1.6 NIFA Societal Challenge Areas | 8 |
| 1.7 Agency Contacts | 8 |
| 1.8 Stakeholder Input | 10 |
| 2.0 APPLICATION PREPARATION INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS | 11 |
| 2.1 Application Requirements..... | 11 |
| 2.2 USDA SBIR Application Submission Overview..... | 11 |
| 2.2.1 Resources | 12 |
| 2.2.2 Registration Procedures for Companies | 13 |
| 2.2.3 Special Considerations | 13 |
| 2.3 Application Guidelines | 14 |
| 2.3.1 SF-424 R&R Cover Sheet..... | 14 |
| 2.3.2 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s) | 15 |
| 2.3.3 R&R Other Project Information..... | 15 |
| 2.3.4 R&R Senior/Key Person Profile – (PDF Format is Required)..... | 18 |
| 2.3.5 R&R Personal Data..... | 18 |
| 2.3.6 R&R Budget..... | 18 |
| 2.3.7 R&R Subaward Budget Attachment - (PDF Format is Required) | 20 |
| 2.3.8 NIFA Supplemental Information | 21 |
| 2.3.9 SBIR/Small Business Technology Transfer Program (STTR) Information..... | 21 |
| 3.0 SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS | 32 |
| 3.1 When to Submit | 32 |
| 3.2 What to Submit | 32 |
| 3.3 Where to Submit | 32 |
| 3.4 Questions Pertaining to the USDA SBIR Program or to this Solicitation..... | 32 |
| 3.5 Information on Application Status..... | 33 |
| 4.0 METHOD OF SELECTION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA..... | 34 |
| 4.1 Introduction..... | 34 |
| 4.2 Initial Screening Criteria..... | 34 |
| 4.3 Phase I Evaluation Criteria | 35 |
| 4.4 Phase I Review Process | 36 |
| 4.5 Notice to Applicants | 36 |
| 5.0 CONSIDERATIONS | 37 |
| 5.1 Awards | 37 |
| 5.2 Reports | 37 |
| 5.2.1 REEport..... | 37 |
| 5.2.2 Technical Reports..... | 38 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 5.2.3 Financial Reports | 38 |
| 5.3 Proprietary Information | 38 |
| 5.4 Rights in Technical Data..... | 39 |
| 5.5 Copyrights..... | 39 |
| 5.6 Patents and Inventions | 39 |
| 5.8 Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research..... | 41 |
| 5.9 Grantee Commitments | 41 |
| 5.10 Additional Information..... | 41 |
| | |
| 6.0 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION SOURCES | 43 |
| | |
| 7.0 RESEARCH TOPIC DESCRIPTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS..... | 46 |
| 7.1 Forests and Related Resources..... | 46 |
| 7.2 Plant Production and Protection - Biology..... | 48 |
| 7.3 Animal Production and Protection | 50 |
| 7.4 Air, Water and Soils..... | 52 |
| 7.5 Food Science and Nutrition..... | 54 |
| 7.6 Rural and Community Development | 56 |
| 7.7 Aquaculture..... | 58 |
| 7.8 Biofuels and Biobased Products..... | 60 |
| 7.9 through 7.11 Reserved. | 61 |
| 7.12 Small and Mid-Size Farms..... | 62 |
| 7.13 Plant Production and Protection - Engineering | 64 |
| | |
| 8.0 SAMPLE APPLICATIONS FROM USDA SBIR SOLICITATION | 66 |
| | |
| 9.0 DEFINITIONS..... | 67 |

ACRONYM LIST

ADO – Authorized Departmental Officer
APHIS – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
AOR – Authorized Organizational Representative
AR – Authorized Representative
ASAP – Automated Standard Applications for Payment System

CFDA – Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
CFR – Code of Federal Regulations
COI – Conflict of Interest
CRADA – Cooperative Research and Development Agreement

DHHS – Department of Health and Human Services
DUNS – Data Universal Number System

E-Business POC - E-Business Point of Contact

F&A – Facilities and Administration
FR – Federal Register
FY – Fiscal Year

HUBZONE – Historically Underutilized Business Zone

M-PIN – Marketing Partner Identification Number

NIFA – National Institute of Food and Agriculture
NPL – National Program Leader

PD – Project Director
PDF – Portable Document Format
PI – Principle Investigator
POC – Point of Contact
PRS – Peer Review System

REEPort – Research, Education, and Extension project online reporting tool
R/R&D – Research or Research and Development
R&D – Research and Development
R&R – Research and Related

SBA – Small Business Administration
SBC – Small Business Concern
SBIR – Small Business Innovation Research Program
STTR – Small Business Technology Transfer Program

U.S. – United States
USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

USDA PROGRAM SOLICITATION

SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATION RESEARCH PHASE I

FISCAL YEAR 2015

1.0 GENERAL PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1.1 Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) invites science-based small business firms to submit research applications under this program solicitation entitled “Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR) - Phase I, Fiscal Year 2015.” Firms with strong scientific research capabilities in any of the topic areas described in section 8.0 are encouraged to participate. USDA will support high-quality research or research and development (R/R&D) applications containing advanced concepts related to important scientific problems and opportunities that could lead to significant public benefit.

Objectives of the SBIR program include stimulating technological innovation in the private sector, strengthening the role of small businesses in meeting Federal research and development needs, increasing private sector commercialization of innovations derived from USDA-supported research and development efforts, and fostering and encouraging participation by women-owned and socially and economically disadvantaged small business firms in technological innovation.

In December 2000, Congress passed the Small Business Research and Development Enhancement Act (P.L. 102-564), reauthorizing the SBIR program until September 30, 2000. The program was reauthorized until September 30, 2008 by the Small Business Reauthorization Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-554). Subsequently, The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, enacted on December 31, 2011, reauthorized the SBIR and STTR programs through September 30, 2017. This program is administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) of the USDA.

In accordance with the changes in the 2011 reauthorization of the National Defense Authorization Act, section 2.0 of this program solicitation has been modified to be consistent with the Act (i.e., commercialization, covered small business concern, and small business concern).

This program is subject to the provisions found at 7 CFR Part 3403. These provisions set forth procedures to be followed when submitting grant applications, rules governing the evaluation of applications and the awarding of grants and regulations relating to the post-award administration of grant projects. Beginning in FY 2015, NIFA will begin the process to modify 7 CFR Part 3403 to, at a minimum, be consistent with the applicable definitions included in the Reauthorization Act of 2011.

This program solicitation is being released prior to the passage of an Appropriations Act for FY 2015. Enactment of additional Continuing Resolutions or an Appropriations Act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

1.2 Three-phase Program

The USDA SBIR program is carried out in three separate phases. Phase I is to determine the scientific or technical feasibility of ideas submitted by applicants on research topic areas described in section 8.0 of this solicitation. **This program solicitation is only for the preparation and submission of Phase I applications.** Phase I awards may not exceed \$100,000 for a period normally not to exceed eight (8)

months. However, longer grant periods, of up to 20 months, may be considered if the proposed research project will require more than 8 months to complete (see 3.3.3, Field 12. (4)). The Phase I application should concentrate on research that will significantly contribute to **proving the scientific or technical feasibility** of the approach or concept and will be a prerequisite to further USDA support in Phase II.

Phase II applications promote principal R/R&D and will require a more comprehensive application, outlining the proposed effort in detail. Only prior Phase I grant recipients are eligible to submit a Phase II application at the conclusion of the Phase I grant period. At the appropriate time, the SBIR program will provide Phase I awardees with instructions for preparing these applications and a deadline (normally late February of each year) for submitting applications. USDA recognizes that Phase II awards may not be sufficient in either dollars or time for the firm to complete the total R/R&D required to bring the project results to commercialization in the marketplace. Therefore, completion of the research under these circumstances may have to be carried into Phase III.

The purpose of Phase III is to stimulate technological innovation and the national return on investment from research through the pursuit of commercialization objectives resulting from the USDA-supported work carried out in Phases I and II. No Federal SBIR funds may be used to support Phase III projects as firms are strongly encouraged to secure Phase III funding from their own resources or other public and private sources.

FY 2015 Phase I applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on October 2, 2014.

1.3 Potential Commercial Outcome

In addition to supporting scientific research and development, another program goal is to provide incentives and opportunities for small business firms to convert USDA-sponsored research into technological innovation in the private sector. All proposed research should have some potential commercial outcome. Phase I applications should contain a brief description of any potential commercial application(s) and whether or not the small business concern will attempt to secure follow-on, non-SBIR funding to pursue the commercial development of the expected products from the proposed research (See Section 3.3.3 R&R Other Project Information, Field 8., (9) – Potential Post Application).

1.4 Eligibility

Each applicant submitting an application must qualify as a small business concern for R/R&D purposes at the time of award (see definitions in section 2.0). A potential grantee that is a subsidiary must show that the parent company is also a small business entity and the parent company must provide documentation supporting their small business status (the documentation should be included in Field 12, Other Attachments, of the Research and Related (R&R) Other Project Information form). If the parent company is not a small business entity, then the subsidiary is not eligible to submit an SBIR application. In addition, the primary employment of the Project Director (PD) must be with the small business concern at the time of award and during the conduct of the proposed research, unless otherwise approved in writing by NIFA. Eligible primary employment means that more than one-half of the PD's time is spent in the employ of the small business. Primary employment with the small business precludes the applicant as a full-time employee with another organization. This requirement applies to Phase I awards and any deviations from this requirement must be approved in writing by the USDA Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) after consultation with the appropriate National Program Leader (NPL). While the PD must work more than one-half of his/her time for the small business

during the entire grant period, there is no time requirement for the PD's work on the proposed research.

(A) Size

An SBIR awardee, combined with its affiliates, must not have more than 500 employees. The small business concern must be the primary performer of the proposed research effort. In Phase I, a minimum of **two-thirds** of the research or analytical work, as determined by budget expenditures, must be performed by the proposing organization. Occasionally, deviations from this requirement may occur, and must be approved in writing by the ADO after consultation with the USDA SBIR NPL.

(B) Work in the U.S.

For Phase I, the **R/R&D work must be performed in the United States**. On rare and unique circumstances, for example, a supply, material or project requirement may not be available in the United States, agencies may allow that particular portion of the R/R&D work to be performed or obtained outside of the United States. Approval, in writing, is necessary by both a USDA SBIR NPL and the ADO for such specific conditions.

(C) Benchmark

All Phase I applicants must meet a minimum benchmark rate for converting Phase I awards into Phase II awards to be eligible to submit a Phase I application. Any company that has received at least 20 Phase I awards, regardless of the awarding agency, during the five-year period (Fiscal Year 2008 through 2012) must have received a minimum of five Phase II awards (25% conversion rate), regardless of the awarding agency, over the same five-year period to be eligible to submit a Phase I application in response to this solicitation.

1.5 USDA SBIR Program Priority Areas

The USDA recognizes Agriculturally-related Manufacturing Technology and Energy Efficiency and Alternative and Renewable Energy as two cross-cutting priorities with relevance to all topic areas listed in Section 8.0 of this program solicitation. USDA encourages applicants to address these priorities, as appropriate, within their applications for submission to one of the topic areas. Special consideration will be given to applications that address one of these priorities under the Project Narrative, item 2. under subsection 3.3.3.-Field 8, Responsiveness to USDA SBIR Program Priorities and Societal Challenge Areas.

Agriculturally-related Manufacturing Technology

On February 26, 2004, the President issued Executive Order 13329 (69 FR 9181) entitled "Encouraging Innovation in Manufacturing." In response to this Executive Order, USDA encourages the submission of applications that deal with some aspect of agriculturally-related manufacturing technology (Section 2.21). Since manufacturing impacts all aspects of agriculture and rural development, applications dealing with manufacturing could be submitted to any of the topic areas

Energy Efficiency and Alternative and Renewable Energy

In an effort to find alternatives to fossil fuels and to reduce overall energy usage, the USDA established research on energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy as a high priority. Such research includes development of new energy crops, improved methods for producing biofuels, such as ethanol,

butanol and biodiesel, producing hydrogen and other fuel gases from agricultural waste, and more efficient use of energy in agricultural production and in rural communities. Energy issues impact all aspects of agriculture and rural development and thus applications dealing with energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy could be submitted to any of the topic areas.

1.6 NIFA Societal Challenge Areas

NIFA has identified five primary societal challenge areas which departmental research and development programs are structured. Special consideration will be given to applications that address one of these priorities under the Project Narrative, item 2. under subsection 3.3.3. Field 8, Responsiveness to USDA SBIR Program Priorities and Societal Challenge Areas.

1) Global Food Security and Hunger

New technologies are needed to boost food production by developing improved sustainable production systems, developing better ways to protect agricultural production systems from diseases and pests, and developing innovative ways to enhance food accessibility to vulnerable populations.

2) Climate Change

New technologies are needed to enable agricultural producers and natural resource managers to develop better mitigation strategies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration, and to develop better approaches for adapting to climate change by reducing carbon, nitrogen and water footprints and developing new plant cultivars and animal breeds adapted to changing environmental conditions.

3) Sustainable Bioenergy

New technologies are needed to convert biomass to biofuels, design optimum biomass for sustainable bioenergy production systems, and to produce value-added biobased industrial products derived from agricultural and forest materials in order to reduce the U.S. dependence on foreign oil and achieve energy independence.

4) Childhood Obesity

New technologies are needed to ensure that nutritious foods are affordable and available and that individuals and families are able to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing in order to reduce the prevalence of obesity among children and adolescents.

5) Food Safety

New technologies are needed to reduce the incidence of food-borne illnesses and death through a safe food supply, improve our ability to detect food-borne pathogens, and develop improved food processing technologies.

1.7 Agency Contacts

The NPL for each topic area is listed below. If applicants have questions or need more information about a topic area, they should to contact the NPL at any time.

Dr. Kitty Cardwell (kcardwell@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401-1790

Fax: (202) 401-6070

[8.13 Plant Production and Protection – Engineering](#)

Dr. Charles Cleland (ccleland@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401- 6852

Fax: (202) 401- 6070

[8.1 Forests and Related Resources](#)

[8.7 Aquaculture](#)

Dr. Denis Ebodaghe (debodaghe@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401-4385

Fax: (202) 401-6070

[8.12 Small and Mid-Size Farms](#)

Mr. Brent Elrod (belrod@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 690-3468

Fax: (202) 401-6070

[8.6 Rural Development](#)

Dr. William Goldner (wgoldner@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401- 1719

Fax: (202) 401- 6070

[8.8 Biofuels and Biobased Products](#)

Dr. Shing Kwok (skwok@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401 - 6060

Fax: (202) 401- 6070

[8.2 Plant Production and Protection- Biology](#)

Ms. Mary Ann Rozum (mrozum@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401 - 4533

Fax: (202) 401- 6070

[8.4 Air, Water, and Soil](#)

Dr. Robert Smith (rsmith@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401 - 4892

Fax: (202) 401 - 6070

[8.3 Animal Production and Protection](#)

Dr. Jodi Williams (jwilliams@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 720-6145

Fax: (202) 401-6070

[8.5 Food Science and Nutrition](#)

Questions of a general nature about this SBIR solicitation should be sent to sbir@nifa.usda.gov or can be directed to:

Mr. Elden Hawkes

(sbir@nifa.usda.gov)

Telephone: (202) 401-4002
Fax: (202) 401-6070
SBIR Program Specialist

1.8 Stakeholder Input

NIFA seeks your comments about this Program Solicitation. We will consider the comments when we develop the next Program Solicitation 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 this Program Solicitation to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this Program Solicitation and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Small Business Innovation Research Phase I program solicitation.

2.0 APPLICATION PREPARATION INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Application Requirements

Applications must address only scientific research activities. **A small business must not propose technical assistance, demonstration projects, classified research, or financial assistance to start or create a company or patent applications.** Many of the research projects supported by the SBIR program lead to the development of new products based upon the research results obtained during the project. However, projects that seek funding solely for product development where no research is involved (i.e., the funds are needed to permit the development of a product based on previously completed research) will not be accepted. Research may be carried out through the construction and evaluation of a laboratory prototype, where necessary.

Literature surveys should be completed prior to the Phase I application and should not be proposed as part of the R&D effort. Applications that deal principally with developing proven concepts for commercial markets or scaling up previously developed prototypes for commercial production should not be submitted. Such efforts are considered the responsibility of the private sector and therefore are not supported by USDA. An application must be limited to only one research problem.

Applicants may respond to any of the topic areas listed under section 8.0. **The same application, however, may not be submitted under more than one topic area.** Organizations may submit separate applications under different topic areas or different applications under the same topic area outlined in this solicitation. Where similar research is discussed under more than one topic area, the applicant should choose the topic area description that is most relevant to the applicant's research concept. **Duplicate applications will not be reviewed.**

The purpose of a research application is to provide a written statement that contains sufficient information to persuade members of the research community who review the application and then advise the USDA SBIR professional staff that the proposed research is a sound approach to an important scientific question and is worthy of support under the stated USDA evaluation criteria (see section 4.0). The application should be self-contained and written with the care and thoroughness accorded papers for publication. Each application should be reviewed carefully by the applicant prior to submission and by others knowledgeable on the subject to ensure inclusion of data essential for comprehensive evaluation.

2.2 USDA SBIR Application Submission Overview

For all FY 2015 applications, the USDA SBIR program will require electronic application submission through Grants.gov (www.grants.gov). Submission through Grants.gov requires the use of forms located at the Grants.gov Website. Applications not submitted electronically are not eligible to be considered for a Phase I SBIR award and will not be reviewed.

Please note that NIFA has developed both this Program Solicitation and a document titled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov,” also known as the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide,” to assist in completing the application forms. Both documents are needed to complete the application process. Information about how to access the forms and the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide are included below (see Steps to Obtain

Application Package Materials).

Section 3.0 of this program solicitation provides additional information that is specific to the USDA SBIR program. Applicants are advised to refer to this program solicitation to determine if specific information is required during the submission of the forms on Grants.gov.

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.
2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>. Under Step 1 click on “Download a Grant Application Package,” and enter the funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-SBIR-004553** 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.

2.2.1 Resources

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

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

Grants.gov iPortal: Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 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

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

Any program-specific questions concerning the USDA SBIR program, such as the appropriateness of your proposed research or work plan, should be directed to the NPL responsible for the topic area where you wish to submit your application (see section 8.0). For general questions you can also contact the USDA SBIR office at sbir@nifa.usda.gov or 202-401-4002.

2.2.2 Registration Procedures for Companies

Information related to the steps necessary to submit an application through Grants.gov can be found at http://www.grants.gov/applicants/organization_registration.jsp.

The registration procedure for companies or individual proprietorships intending to submit a grant application through Grants.gov requires several steps and must be finished prior to submitting an application. **The registration process can take up to one month to complete so it is critical that companies begin this process as soon as possible. Companies that have previously registered with Grants.gov must contact Grants.gov to ensure that the company's registration is updated and complete prior to submission. Grants.gov requires all companies to update their registration on an annual basis.**

All companies that are submitting an application to any SBIR solicitation are required to register with the SBIR company registry. Information related to the steps necessary to register with the SBIR company registry through SBA.gov can be found at <http://www.sbir.gov/registration>.

2.2.3 Special Considerations

Throughout the program solicitation, the following is specified, “Attachment Format – (PDF Format is Required).” You should refer to Part III, 3.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for attachment requirements. It is your responsibility to correctly submit the attachments in the correct format. Grants.gov will not check the application for adherence to this requirement at the time of submission.

USDA SBIR electronic application submissions consist of Adobe forms and PDF attachments.

THE USDA SBIR PROGRAM WILL ONLY ACCEPT ATTACHMENTS IN PDF.

If you do not own PDF-generating software, Grants.gov provides online tools to assist applicants. To download the necessary software, go to http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp. PDF documents submitted as a part of the application must also adhere to the following guidelines:

- margins not less than 1 inch; 2.5 cm on all sides;
- type no smaller than 12 point font size regardless of whether it is single or double spaced;
- font type should be Times New Roman, Geneva, Helvetica, Arial;
- tables and graphics may be included; text for captions, headings and graphic explanations must not be smaller than 9 point and must be the same font type as the rest of the application; and
- all documents must be submitted without file protection.

PROPOSALS CONTAINING NON-PDF DOCUMENTS WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Incomplete applications will also be excluded from NIFA review.

Page Limitations

Applications submitted electronically via Grants.gov consist of forms and PDF attachments. **Page limitations for certain attachments must be followed, see section 3.3.3. APPLICATIONS THAT DO NOT FOLLOW THE PAGE LIMITS OUTLINED IN SECTION 3.3.3 ARE NOT ELIGIBLE TO BE CONSIDERED FOR A PHASE I SBIR AWARD AND WILL BE EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW.**

Changes, Additions or Corrections

Modifications to the application will not be accepted after the closing date of this program solicitation. Under some circumstances, changes, additions, or corrections may be necessary to an application submitted to the USDA SBIR program via Grants.gov **before the specified program solicitation closing date.** Modifications to applications will require a resubmission of the entire application package and the applicant must notify the program at sbir@nifa.usda.gov of the resubmission. **Submitting changes to Grants.gov without contacting the program could significantly delay your application submission and may result in the application not being reviewed.**

2.3 Application Guidelines

Those who wish to submit an application to the USDA SBIR program should submit the following components and associated attachments via Grants.gov.

If there is a discrepancy between the program solicitation and the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the information contained in this program solicitation is overriding.

Below are instructions for completing each field within each of the forms required in the application package. Page limitations indicated in bold are applicable to the specific section/attachment.

2.3.1 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 unless otherwise noted below.

Field 5. Please note: the USDA SBIR program's official correspondence will be with either the PD or AOR.

Field 12. Proposed Project Start Date and End Date – The proposed duration of Phase I projects should normally not exceed eight months, except in special, justified circumstances. In most circumstances, the following dates should be used for these fields:

| | Start | End |
|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Phase I | 6/1/2015 | 1/31/2015 |

Field 17. Complete Certification – Please refer to the NIFA Grants.gov Application guide for information on the Certifications that are being agreed to by checking this box.

NOTE: An applicant who is delinquent on Federal debts must attach explanatory information detailing all relevant particulars concerning the Federal debt in PDF format in Field 12 of the

R&R Other Project Information form (Other Attachments).

Field 20. Pre-application – This is not applicable to the USDA SBIR program. No attachments should be added.

2.3.2 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.

2.3.3 R&R Other Project Information

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

Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract – (PDF Format is Required)

1 PAGE is the Page Limit for the Summary/Abstract.

In the technical abstract, include a brief description of the problem or opportunity, project objectives, and a description of the effort. Provide another paragraph discussing the anticipated results and potential commercial applications of the proposed research. **The project summary/abstract of successful applications will be published by USDA and, therefore, should not contain proprietary information. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE APPLICANT TO REVIEW THE ABSTRACT ATTACHMENT FOR PAGE LIMIT AND PDF COMPLIANCE BEFORE SUBMISSION.**

Field 8. Project Narrative – (PDF Format is Required)

16 PAGES is the Page Limit for the Project Narrative (The only exception to this page limit requirement will be found in the directions as noted below under (1) Response to Previous Review.) NOTE: The USDA SBIR Program encourages applicants to only include information pertaining to the items listed below. Applicants must **not** include additional information such as cover sheets, table of contents, reference listings, budgets, and appendices **unless the applicant intends for these to be considered in the page count.** **Applicants that do not address the items listed below risk being excluded from NIFA review.**

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE APPLICANT TO REVIEW THE PROJECT NARRATIVE ATTACHMENT FOR PAGE LIMIT AND PDF COMPLIANCE BEFORE SUBMISSION.

1. Response to Previous Review –For applicants who are submitting an application in which the project described was previously submitted to the SBIR program, but not funded, the page limit for the Project Narrative is increased to 17 pages to permit a one page response to the previous reviews. Applicants should provide a clear statement acknowledging comments from the previous review, indicating revisions, rebuttals, etc. This response is a critical part of the screening criteria as noted in subsection 4.2(H). Furthermore, the revised application should clearly indicate the changes that have been made in the project. If more than one page is required, additional pages should be taken from the 16 page limit of the Project Narrative so that the Project Narrative does not exceed a total of 17 pages when including the Response to Preview Review.

2. Responsiveness to USDA SBIR Program Priorities and Societal Challenge Areas. – Please indicate if the application has a connection to agriculturally-related manufacturing technology, energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy (see Section 1.5) or one or more of the NIFA Societal Challenge Areas (see Section 1.6). Provide a brief explanation of how the application is related to the area indicated.

3. Identification and Significance of the Problem or Opportunity – Clearly state the specific technical problem or opportunity addressed and its importance.

4. Background and Rationale – Indicate the overall background and technical approach to the problem or opportunity and the part that the proposed research plays in providing needed results. As a part of this section, it is critical that applications adequately cite relevant scientific literature. Moreover, all citations provided must be properly referenced in the Bibliography & References Cited as a separate attachment (see 3.3.3 – Field 9).

5. Relationship with Research or Research and Development – Discuss the significance of the Phase I effort in providing a foundation for the follow-on Phase II R&D effort. State the anticipated results of the approach if the project is successful. This should address: (a) the technical, economic, social, and other benefits to the Nation and to users of the results, such as the commercial sector, the Federal Government or other researchers; (b) the estimated total cost of the approach relative to benefits; and (c) any specific policy issues or decisions that might be affected by the results.

6. Technical Objectives – State the specific objectives of the research or research and development effort. Include the technical questions needed to establish the technical feasibility of the proposed approach.

7. Work Plan – The work plan must provide an explicit, detailed description of the research or research and development approach. The plan should list the tasks to be performed, provide details of the methodology that would be used to research each task, including statistical analysis, if applicable, and indicate how and where the work will be carried out. The effort should attempt to determine the technical feasibility of the proposed concept. The work plan should be linked with the technical objectives of the research and the questions the effort is designed to answer. This section should constitute a substantial portion of the project narrative.

8. Related Research or Research and Development – Describe significant research or Research and Development (R&D) activities that are directly related to the proposed effort, including any conducted by the Project Director or by the proposing small business concern, how the proposed effort expands on the related work, and any planned coordination with outside sources. The applicant must persuade reviewers that he or she is aware of related research in the selected subject. It is critical that the applicant make a convincing case that the proposed research builds upon previous research and, if successful, will lead to the development of a new product, process, service, or technology or to substantial improvement of an existing product, process, service, or technology.

9. Potential Post Application – Briefly describe the commercialization potential of the proposed research after Phase I funding. In addition, indicate whether there appears to be a potential use of the proposed research by the Federal Government. Include a brief description of the proposing company (e.g., date founded, number of employees, and its field of interest). What are the major competitive products in this field, and what advantages will the proposed research have over existing technology in application, performance, technique, efficiency, or cost?

10. Satisfying the Public Interest - Specify how the proposed research will satisfy one or more of the

following USDA strategic goals: (more information can be found at <http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/usdasp/usdasp.htm>)

- a. Strategic Goal 1: Assist Rural Communities To Create Prosperity So They Are Self-Sustaining, Repopulating, And Economically Thriving
- b. Strategic Goal 2: Ensure Our National Forests And Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, And Made More Resilient To Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources
- c. Strategic Goal 3: Help America Promote Agricultural Production And Biotechnology Exports As America Works To Increase Food Security
- d. Strategic Goal 4: Ensure That All Of America's Children Have Access To Safe, Nutritious, And Balanced Meals

Field 9. Bibliography & Cited References – (PDF Format is Required)

Provide a complete list of all references cited in the application. **For each reference, provide the complete name for each author, the year of the publication, full title of the article, name of the journal or book published, volume, and the page numbers.** The references should be listed in alphabetical order using the last name of the first author.

Field 10. Facilities & Other Resources – (PDF Format is Required) Describe the types, location, and availability of instrumentation and physical facilities necessary to carry out the work proposed. This letter should be included as a part of Other Attachments, see Field 12 below.

Field 11. Equipment Documentation – (PDF Format is Required) Describe the types, location, and availability of equipment necessary to carry out the work proposed. Items of equipment to be purchased must be fully justified under this section. When purchasing equipment or a product under the SBIR funding agreement, the small business should purchase only American-made items whenever possible and should normally not exceed 10 percent of the budget request.

Field 12. Other Attachments – (PDF Format is Required) See Part V, 4.12 for instructions for documentation to be included in this field. The following are additional instructions for documentation that may be required for your application.

- (1) **Use of Facilities or Equipment** – If university facilities, private facilities, or government laboratories are being used, there must be a letter in the application from the authorized organizational representative of the university, private facility, or government laboratory describing the arrangement and testifying that the facilities will be subject to the exclusive use and control of the applicant.
- (2) **Outside Services** – Involvement of university, government, or other outside personnel in the planning and research stages of the project as consultants or through subcontracting arrangements is permitted and may be particularly helpful to small businesses that have not previously received Federal research awards. Establishment of a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) with a USDA laboratory or other Federal laboratory may also be beneficial to proposing firms. If the application involves outside consultants, subcontracts, or involvement with a CRADA partner, these arrangements should be described in detail. **Applications must include letters from proposed consultants, subcontractors or CRADA or license cooperators indicating their willingness to serve in order for such participation to be considered during the application review and evaluation process (see subsection 4.3 as appropriate).**
- (3) **Letters of Support** –General letters of support from potential end-users of the technology or

from individuals/organizations that want to express support for the application.

- (4) **Duration Exceeds Normal Project Period** – The proposed duration of Phase I projects should normally not exceed eight months, except in special, justified circumstances. Where a proposed research project requires more than eight months to complete Phase I, a longer project period, not to exceed twenty months, may be requested. An applicant of a Phase I project with an anticipated duration beyond eight months should specify and justify the length of duration in the application at the time of its submission to USDA.
- (5) **Applicant is a Subsidiary** – A potential grantee that is a subsidiary must show that the parent company is also a small business entity and the parent company must provide documentation supporting their small business status. The subsidiary must provide documentation to support its independent viable financial status.
- (6) **Statement as to Delinquency on Federal Debts by Applicants for Federal Assistance** – An applicant that is delinquent on Federal debts must attach, in PDF format, explanatory information detailing all relevant particulars concerning the Federal debt.
- (7) **Non-Domestic Performance Explanation** – Requests for foreign travel or work are discouraged, but may be approved based on the justification provided in the application (see Field K. under 3.3.6 below).

2.3.4 R&R Senior/Key Person Profile – (PDF Format is Required)

Applicants must fill out a profile for the PD and anyone that will be supported by the budget. For instructions on completing the profile part of this form, applicants must reference Part V.5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for directions.

2.3.5 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.

2.3.6 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 unless otherwise noted below. Applicants who plan to have a sub award (subcontract) will need to reference section 3.3.7 for directions.

A Research & Related Budget form must be completed for each year (or partial year) for which work is proposed under this program solicitation. **Applicants must include a budget request that is appropriate for this solicitation. All USDA SBIR Phase I grants have a cap of \$100,000. Applications with a budget request that exceeds this cap will be excluded from review.**

Fields C1-C11. Equipment Description - Performing organizations are expected to have appropriate facilities, suitably furnished and equipped. However, funding for items of equipment may be requested provided that they are specifically identified with the dollar amount and adequately justified, see Field K (2) Budget Justification of the R&R Budget for specific requirements.

Field D2. Foreign Travel Costs Funds Requested - Requests for foreign travel are discouraged, but may be approved based on the justification provided in the application. See Field K (4) Budget Justification of the R&R Budget for specific requirements.

Field J. Fee - Applicants must reference the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for directions. If an applicant requests a fee, the combined total of “Section I - Total Direct and Indirect Costs” and “Section J – Fee” on the Research & Related (R&R) Budget form must not exceed the funding ceiling of this program solicitation.

Field K. Budget Justification – (PDF Format is Required) - A budget justification with supporting detail for each budget category as noted in items (1) through (5) of this subsection must be attached. **A budget justification is required for each entity for which a Research & Related Budget Form is submitted.**

- (1) **Salaries and Wages** – Indicate the number and kind of personnel for whom salary support is sought, including job tasks. Provide the base salary for senior personnel. For key personnel, also indicate the number of work months of involvement to be supported with USDA funds, and explain how the level of compensation was established (e.g., the hourly rate of pay, the monthly rate of pay, or the yearly rate of pay).
- (2) **Equipment** – Performing organizations are expected to have appropriate facilities, be suitably furnished and equipped. However, funding for items of equipment may be requested, provided that they are specifically identified with the dollar amount and adequately justified. **Such requests should normally not exceed 10 percent of the budget.** Equipment is defined as an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5000 or more per unit. Awardees are usually allowed to retain title to equipment purchased with funding provided under a SBIR funding agreement. However, in some instances, USDA may direct the awardee to vest title to a third party. **Awardees should plan to lease expensive equipment.** The inclusion of equipment will be carefully reviewed with respect to need and appropriateness for the research proposed.
- (3) **Materials and Supplies** – The types of expendable materials and supplies required should be indicated in general terms with estimated costs.
- (4) **Travel** – The type and extent of travel and its relationship to the project should be specified. Funds may be requested for field work or for travel to professional meetings. Requests for foreign travel are discouraged, but may be approved based on the justification provided in the application. In the budget justification, provide the purpose, the destination, method of travel, number of persons traveling, number of days, and estimated cost for each trip. If details of each trip are not known at the time of application submission, provide the basis for determining the amount requested.
- (5) **All Other Direct Costs** – Other anticipated direct costs not included above should be itemized. Examples include, but are not limited to, subcontracts and consultants. See Field 12 “Other Attachments” of the R&R Other Project Information form for required documentation associated with subcontracts and consultants. A budget and budget justification stating sub-contractual and consulting costs and the rationale for the amount of the costs are required. Consultants’ rate of pay normally cannot exceed \$598/day for an eight hour day. However, with proper documentation and justification, NIFA will consider approval of higher rates. Applicants should reference Section 1.4(B) Size, to determine the total amount of funds a Phase I SBIR project can provide to subcontracts and consultants.

- (6) **Fee** - A reasonable fee, not to exceed seven percent of total Federal funds awarded (.07527 of Field I, Total Direct and Indirect Costs) is permitted under this program solicitation, but applicants are encouraged to minimize fee requests due to the small amount of funds available. **All fees are subject to negotiation with USDA.** If a fee is requested, the amount should be indicated in Field J “Fee” on the R&R Budget form. **Applicants who are not familiar with the definition of a fee, should reference section 2.0 of this Program Solicitation.**

(7) **Indirect Costs**

If the organization has a negotiated rate with a cognizant Federal agency, indirect costs may not exceed the negotiated rate; the percentage and base should be indicated in the space allotted in item H of the budget sheet. Documentation supporting the negotiated rate must be included as part of the budget justification.

For Phase I applicants (only):

If no rate has been negotiated, a reasonable dollar amount (i.e., amounts equal to or less than 30% of total direct costs) in lieu of indirect costs may be requested with supporting documentation. If the amount exceeds the reasonable dollar threshold and such applications are recommended for funding, NIFA will provide instructions for the submission of an indirect cost rate application* (the indirect cost rate application should not be submitted as part of application for award) to support the amount of indirect costs requested; the indirect cost rate application is subject to NIFA’s review/negotiation.

An applicant may elect not to charge indirect costs and, instead, use all grant funds for direct costs. If indirect costs are not charged, the phrase “None requested” should be written in this space.

* How to prepare an indirect cost rate application.

- [PowerPoint Presentation \(One Rate Method\)](#)
- [PowerPoint Presentation \(Two Rate Method\)](#)
- A Complete Commercial, For-Profit Indirect Cost Proposal includes the following documents:
 - [Cover Page](#)
 - [Certificate of Indirect Costs](#)
 - [Indirect Cost Submission Checklist – For-Profit Organizations](#)
 - [Indirect Cost Rate Calculation – For-profit One Rate Calculation, or For-profit Two Rate Calculation](#) or other acceptable calculation.
 - [Breakdown of Labor Charges - For-profit Organizations](#)
 - [Accounting System Questionnaire – For-profit Organizations](#)
 - [Chart of Accounts – see sample For-Profit Company Chart of Accounts](#)

Sample Timesheets ([Biweekly](#) and [Monthly](#))

2.3.7 R&R Subaward Budget Attachment - (PDF Format is Required)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 8. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

You should note that the check application feature in the Grants.gov application package will not check the Subaward budget forms. However, once the application is submitted to Grants.gov, Grants.gov will validate the subaward budget forms for compliance. If the subaward budget forms fail the Grants.gov validation, the application will be rejected and an email will be sent to the applicant notifying them of this problem. USDA NIFA will not accept

late applications due to a non-compliant subaward budget form. You must plan ahead and submit early in order to correct any problems you may have with your submission to Grants.gov.

2.3.8 NIFA Supplemental Information

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide unless otherwise noted below.

Field 2. Program to Which You Are Applying and Program Code – This refers to the topic area (see section 8.0) to which you are submitting your USDA SBIR application. For example:

Program Code Name: *Forest and Related Resources*

Program Code: *8.1*

If you have a question about which topic area is appropriate for your application, please contact the NPL in the area(s) in question. An application can only be submitted to one topic area. It is extremely important the Program Code Name and Program Code are spelled correctly and match exactly one of the topic areas indicated in section 8.0 of this program solicitation. Failure to complete these fields correctly could significantly delay the acceptance of your application into the program and the application may not be reviewed.

Field 8. Conflict of Interest List – PDF Attachment. No Page Limit. Title the attachment as ‘Conflict of Interest’ in the document header and save file as ‘ConflictofInterest’. See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

2.3.9 SBIR/Small Business Technology Transfer Program (STTR) Information

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide unless otherwise noted below.

Field 1b. Anticipated Number of Personnel to be employed at your organization at the time of award? – Enter a number.

Field 7. Commercialization Plan – Leave this section blank.

Field 8. Documentation of Prior SBIR Phase II Awards – A small business firm that submits a Phase I application and has received more than 15 Phase II SBIR awards during the preceding five fiscal years must document the extent to which it was able to secure Phase III funding to develop concepts resulting from previous Phase II SBIR awards. In addition, the documentation must include the name of the awarding agency, date of award, funding agreement number, amount, topic or subtopic title, follow-on agreement amount, source and date of commitment, and current commercialization status for each Phase II award. USDA shall collect and retain the information at least until the General Accounting Office submits the report required under section 105 of the Small Business Research and Development Enhancement Act of 1992.

If the applicant falls under the threshold indicated above, the applicant must provide an attachment stating that less than 15 Phase II awards have been granted to this organization/company during the preceding five fiscal years.

3.0 SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

3.1 When to Submit

All Phase I applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on October 2, 2014**. Applications received after this deadline normally will not be considered for funding.

For the convenience of all potential applicants, the following schedule is provided for informational purposes:

Phase I

Deadline date for applications: October 2, 2014

Standard period of performance: June 1, 2015 through January 31, 2016

3.2 What to Submit

USDA SBIR electronic application submissions consist of forms (viewed, completed, and submitted through the Grants.gov Web site) and attachments. All of the necessary forms and instructions will be found on the Grants.gov Web site (see section 3.0 of this program solicitation). One way applicants can access the appropriate page on Grants.gov is by visiting the USDA SBIR funding opportunity page at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/sbir>. Clicking on the Funding Opportunity Number listed near the bottom of the page will link the applicant directly to the information and forms and instructions necessary to submit through Grants.gov.

All attachments submitted with the application must follow the requirements listed under Part III, 3.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application 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. Applications with critical documents which are write protected or password protected will not be reviewed.

Please note: Applicants must have successfully completed the entire registration process, see subsection 3.2.2, prior to being able to submit an application through Grants.gov.

3.3 Where to Submit

All FY 2015 applications submitted to USDA SBIR must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov.

3.4 Questions Pertaining to the USDA SBIR Program or to this Solicitation

Written or verbal questions of a general nature about the USDA SBIR program, as well as general questions pertaining to this solicitation, but not pertaining to requests for additional copies of the solicitation, should be sent to sbir@nifa.usda.gov or can be directed to one of the USDA SBIR NPLs, see section 1.7.

3.5 Information on Application Status

It is anticipated that the evaluation of Phase I applications will require approximately five months from October 2, 2014. No information on application status will be available until final selections have been made.

Successful applicants will be notified of the intent to fund their applications within approximately six months after submission with a final award on or around June 1, 2015.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of a final decision approximately six months after submission.

4.0 METHOD OF SELECTION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

4.1 Introduction

All Phase I applications will be evaluated on a competitive basis. Applications will be initially screened to determine responsiveness to the program solicitation. Applications passing this initial screening will be evaluated by technical reviewers to select those with the highest scientific and technical merit. **Applications received after the specified closing date or not following application guidelines of this program solicitation will not be considered for a Phase I SBIR award and will not be reviewed.**

External peer reviewers will be used during the technical evaluation stage of this process. Selections will be made from among recognized specialists who are uniquely qualified by training and experience in their respective fields to render expert advice on the merit of applications received. It is anticipated that these experts normally will be drawn from universities, Government, and non-profit research organizations.

Final decisions will be made by USDA based upon the ratings assigned by reviewers and consideration of other factors, **including the potential commercial application**, possible duplication of other research, any critical USDA requirements, program balance, and budget limitations. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application, to support any specific number of applications in a given research topic area, or to make a specific number of awards. USDA also may elect to fund several or none of the proposed approaches to the same topic. Care will be taken to avoid actual and potential conflicts of interest among reviewers. Evaluations will be confidential to USDA staff members, peer reviewers, and the proposed Project Director to the extent permitted by law.

4.2 Initial Screening Criteria

To avoid any misunderstandings, applicants should be aware that applications that do not satisfy all of the screening criteria are at risk of being excluded from NIFA review. Returned applications may not be resubmitted (with or without revision) under this solicitation. The initial screening criteria are the following:

- (A) The proposing firm must qualify as a small business concern as defined in section 2.0.
- (B) The application must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on October 2, 2014.**
- (C) The application must meet the Application Content and Format requirements as described in section 3.0.
- (D) Applications must be limited to one research problem as described in section 3.0.
- (E) The proposed budget must be within the dollar limit identified in subsections 1.2 and 3.3.6.
- (F) The proposed Phase I research must fall within a solicited topic area in section 8.0.
- (G) An application must contain adequate scientific/technical information clearly stating the research plan and objectives. USDA reserves the right not to submit for review any application that it finds to have insufficient scientific/technical information (See Section 3.3.3, Field 8, numbers (1) through (10)).

- (H) A resubmitted application must address concerns of the previous review panel. USDA reserves the right not to submit for review any application found not to be responsive to the previous reviews.

4.3 Phase I Evaluation Criteria

USDA plans to select for award those applications offering the best value to the nation. The primary evaluation criteria used by reviewers are listed below. Approximately equal consideration will be given to each criterion **except for item (A), which will receive twice the value of any of the other items.**

(A) Scientific and Technical Feasibility:

- The application should contain a thorough background section with an up-to-date literature review.
- The application should clearly state the objectives logically and indicate how they will lead toward proving the technical feasibility of the approach or concept.
- The research plan should offer an original and innovative approach to the problem and sufficient detail to indicate how each research objective will be investigated.
- The research plan should be completed in the requested grant period.

(B) Importance of the Problem:

- The application should provide sufficient justification for the importance of the problem and clearly indicate the anticipated commercial potential of the proposed research.
- The proposed project should be in the public interest and satisfy one or more of the USDA strategic goals and objectives listed in subsection 3.3.3 (item 10. of Field 8).

(C) Investigator and Resource Qualifications:

- The bibliographic information should be provided to document that the Project Director, other key staff and any consultants have the appropriate training and experience to carry out the proposed research plan.
- If consultants, subcontractors or CRADA cooperators are involved in the project, letters from these individuals should be included in the application verifying their willingness to participate in the research study, their rates of pay and any other budgetary information.
- Adequate research facilities that are available should be owned or controlled by the small business for the duration of the grant.
- Instrumentation available should be adequate to complete the proposed research plan.

(D) Budget:

- The budget should be appropriate for the proposed research plan.
- Budget detail should include subcontract, consultant, and CRADA and license agreement data to indicate clearly how the funds would be utilized.

(E) Duplication:

- Duplication of any ongoing or previous research by the small business firm or by other researchers will not be considered.
- The application should clearly indicate how the proposed technology would differ significantly from existing technology.
- If the small business firm or a consultant has received or applied for patent(s) pertaining to the proposed technology, the proposed research should constitute a legitimate feasibility study.

Additional factors that will be considered in the review process include whether an application involves a CRADA with a USDA laboratory, a licensing agreement, or is a resubmission. In the event that two or more applications are of approximately equal merit, the existence of a CRADA with a USDA laboratory will be an important consideration. If one application is a resubmission, this will also be an important consideration.

4.4 Phase I Review Process

We evaluate applications using a confidential peer review system. Separate review panels are held that correspond to each of the topic areas listed in Section 8.0. Reviewers are normally drawn from universities, government and non-profit research organizations. For each topic area, a NPL is appointed as a topic manager. The NPL for each topic area recruits a Panel Manager, and in consultation with our leadership, we appoint a review panel. The Panel Manager ensures that the review panel evaluates applications fairly. Applications are reviewed both by members of the review panel and by ad hoc reviewers with specific expertise appropriate for each application. The panel discusses each application carefully and then ranks the applications. The panel rankings are used in determining which applications are funded.

Considerable effort is made to ensure that the review process is confidential. Reviewers are instructed to handle all applications in complete confidence and each reviewer is provided written guidelines to follow. All reviewers are obligated to certify that they will maintain confidentiality at the time they prepare a review and submit it through the Agency's electronic Peer Review System (PRS).

Every effort is made to avoid even the appearance of a conflict-of-interest (COI). The USDA has rules on COI that are followed during the review process. If a panel member has a COI on an application, he/she will not review the application and will be excused from the panel meeting when the particular application is being discussed. USDA/NIFA is committed to ensuring a fair and confidential review process.

4.5 Notice to Applicants

Technical reviewers will base their conclusions and recommendations on information contained in the application. It cannot be assumed that reviewers are acquainted with any experiments referred to within an application, with key individuals, or with the small business firm itself.

After final decisions have been announced, a panel summary that briefly states the main strengths and weaknesses of the application and the written reviews of the application will be sent to the PD. The reviews will include neither the scores nor the identities of the reviewers. Due to funding limitations and USDA's desire to support as many worthwhile projects as possible, it may be necessary for USDA/NIFA to reduce the amount of an award below the amount requested by a small business or to fund only certain objectives outlined in the application. Any significant changes will be discussed with the proposing small business, which may then be asked to submit a revised budget reflecting the reduced amount. In the event that this occurs, specific instructions will be provided to the applicant.

5.0 CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Awards

Depending upon the availability of funds, USDA expects to make approximately 75 Phase I awards, not to exceed \$100,000 each, to small businesses in FY 2015. Awards are anticipated to be made on or about June 1, 2015. USDA will announce the names of those concerns receiving awards and successful applicants will then typically have eight months after awards are made to carry out their proposed Phase I effort.

Additional factors that will be considered in the review process include whether an application involves a CRADA with a USDA laboratory, or a license to a USDA technology, or is a resubmission. In the event that two or more applications are of approximately equal merit, the existence of a CRADA with a USDA laboratory or a license to a USDA technology will be an important consideration. If one application is a resubmission, this will also be an important consideration.

A list of available technologies for licensing and CRADAs that may be considered as projects under the SBIR program can be found at the USDA Office of Technology Transfer (OTT) website <http://dbnrrc.ars.usda.gov/business/docs.htm?docid=763&page=6>. Each of these technologies would be appropriate for one of the topic areas in section 8.0 of this program solicitation. If an applicant is interested in proposing a research project that addresses one of these technologies, the applicant should contact the OTT office at 301-504-6905 or <http://www.ars.usda.gov/business/Docs.htm?docid=763> to discuss the possibility of signing a licensing agreement and possibly also a CRADA agreement prior to submitting the proposal to the SBIR program.

All Phase I awards will be issued as research grants in accordance with the guidelines contained in 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308, the authority contained in Section 630 of the Act making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies' programs for fiscal year ending September 30, 1987 and for other purposes, as made applicable by Section 101(a) of Public Law Number 99-591, 100 Stat. 3341.

A reasonable fee may be requested as part of the budget. See 3.3.6, Field J.

5.2 Reports

Grantees are to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system, REEport, that facilitates both grantee submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. Details of annual and final technical reporting requirements also are included in the award terms and conditions. More information about REEport can be found at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/reepport_imp.html.

5.2.1 REEport

Reports submitted to REEport are entered into the CRIS database. CRIS is a public database of all projects funded by USDA. Because the CRIS database is open to the public, reports submitted to

REReport must not contain any proprietary information.

5.2.2 Technical Reports

For successful Phase I applications, the grantee is required to submit interim and final technical reports to program officials in accordance with the terms and conditions of the award, in addition to the Web-based reports referenced above.

SBIR Technical Reports should be submitted electronically as an attachment (MS Word or PDF) to the following email address: sbir@nifa.usda.gov. **Reporting instructions will be found in the Terms and Conditions which will be provided at the time of award.** Additional guidance for these reports can be found on the “Grantee Resources” webpage located at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/sbir/sbir.html>.

Please note: All technical reports are held confidential for a period covering four years after the termination of the project. **As such, proprietary information should be included in all technical reports only when necessary to provide the USDA SBIR Staff adequate information to evaluate the outcome of the project.**

5.2.3 Financial Reports

For Phase I applications, a final “**Financial Status Report**” (SF-425) is due within 90 days after the expiration date of the grant (http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/sbir/sbir_sf425.html) and should be submitted in accordance with instructions contained in the award terms and conditions.

5.3 Proprietary Information

Information contained in unsuccessful applications will remain the property of the applicant. The Government may, however, retain copies of all applications. Public release of information in any application submitted will be subject to existing statutory and regulatory requirements. If proprietary information is provided by an applicant in an application, which constitutes a trade secret, proprietary commercial or financial information, confidential personal information or data affecting the national security, it will be treated in confidence, to the extent permitted by law. This information must be clearly marked by the applicant with the term “confidential proprietary information,” and the following legend must appear on each PDF attachment submitted as a part of the application: “These data shall not be disclosed outside the Government and shall not be duplicated, used or disclosed in whole or in part for any purpose other than evaluation of this application. If a funding agreement is awarded to this applicant as a result of or in connection with the submission of these data, the Government shall have the right to duplicate, use or disclose the data to the extent provided in the funding agreement and pursuant to applicable law. This restriction does not limit the Government’s right to use information contained in the data if it is obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction are contained on pages ___ of this application.”

Any other legend may be unacceptable to the Government and may constitute grounds for removing the application from further consideration without assuming any liability for inadvertent disclosure. The Government will limit dissemination of such information to within official channels.

USDA, by law, is required to make the final decision as to whether the information is required to be

kept in confidence. Information contained in unsuccessful applications will remain the property of the applicant. Public release of information for any application submitted will be subject to existing statutory and regulatory requirements. The legislation reauthorizing the SBIR program strengthened the protection of awardee firms relative to maintaining confidentiality of proprietary information for a period of four years after the end of the grant period. However, any application which is funded will be considered an integral part of the award and normally will be made available to the public upon request through the Freedom of Information Act, except for designated proprietary information.

The inclusion of proprietary information is discouraged unless it is necessary for the proper evaluation of the application. If proprietary information is to be included, it should be limited, set apart from other text on a separate page, and keyed to the text by numbers. It should be confined to a few critical technical items which, if disclosed, could jeopardize the obtaining of foreign or domestic patents. Trade secrets, salaries, or other information that could jeopardize commercial competitiveness should be similarly keyed and presented on a separate page. Applications or reports that attempt to restrict dissemination of large amounts of information may be found unacceptable by USDA.

5.4 Rights in Technical Data

Rights in technical data, including software developed under the terms of any funding agreement resulting from an application submitted in response to this solicitation, shall remain with the grantee. However, the Government shall have the limited right to use such data for Governmental purposes and shall not release such data outside the Government without permission of the grantee for a period of four years from completion of the project under which the data were generated. Effective at the conclusion of the four- year period, the Government shall retain a royalty-free license for Governmental use of any technical data delivered under the agreement, whether patented or not.

5.5 Copyrights

With prior written permission of the ADO, the grantee normally may copyright and publish (consistent with appropriate national security considerations, if any) material developed with USDA SBIR support. USDA receives a royalty-free license for the Federal Government and requires that each publication contain the following acknowledgment and disclaimer statement:

“The project was supported by the Small Business Innovation Research program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, grant number #. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.”

The last sentence may be omitted from articles published in scientific journals.

5.6 Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to inventions shall be in accordance with 35 U.S.C. 202-206 and the Department of Commerce implementing regulations entitled “Rights to Inventions Made by Nonprofit Organizations and Small Business Firms under Government Grants, Contracts and Cooperative Agreements” at 37 CFR Part 401. These regulations provide that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain

circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically. To the extent authorized by 35 U.S.C. 205, USDA will not make public any information disclosing a USDA-supported invention for a four-year period to allow the grantee a reasonable time to file an initial patent application. Additional information may be obtained by contacting:

Bart Hewitt, Director of Planning, Accountability, and Reporting
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA STOP 2213
1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, DC 20250-2213
Telephone: (202) 720-5623
Facsimile: (202) 720-7714 bayhdole@nifa.usda.gov

SBIR awardees must report inventions to the awarding agency within two months of the inventor's report to the awardee. The reporting of inventions must be made through submission to Interagency Edison (www.iedison.gov). Specific instructions for invention reporting are contained in the agency's terms and conditions, a copy of which can be provided upon request.

5.7 Research Involving Special Considerations

A number of situations frequently encountered in the conduct of scientific research require the submission of special information for a particular project. Since some types of research targeted for SBIR support have high probability of involving human subjects at risk or vertebrate animals, special instructions follow:

If the proposed research will involve human subjects at risk or vertebrate animals, the application must so indicate by checking "Yes" on the R&R Other Project Information form. Further, in the event that the project is funded, the applicant may be required to have the research plan reviewed and approved by the appropriate review board or committee. It is suggested that applicants contact local universities, colleges, or nonprofit research organizations that have established such reviewing mechanisms to have this service performed.

Guidelines to be applied and observed when conducting such research are outlined below.

- (A) **Human Subjects at Risk** - Regulations issued by the Department of Agriculture to be used in safeguarding the rights and welfare of human subjects used in research supported with USDA grant funds are contained in 45 CFR Part 46 and USDA regulations set forth in 7 CFR Part 1c. All nonexempt research projects involving human subjects must be approved by an Institutional Review Board prior to commencing actual substantive work.
- (B) **Animal Care** - The performing organization must comply with the Animal Welfare Act (7 U.S.C., 2131-2156); Public Law 89-544, 1996 and the regulations issued by the Department of Agriculture in 9 CFR parts 1, 2, 3 and 4. In the case of domesticated farm animals housed under farm conditions, the grantee must adhere to the principles stated in the Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Agricultural Research and Teaching, and Federation of Animal Sciences Societies, 1999. In the event a project involving the use of living vertebrate animals results in a grant award, funds will be released only after a qualified Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has approved the project.

5.8 Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

The responsible and ethical conduct of research (RCR) is critical for excellence, as well as public trust, in science and engineering. Consequently, we consider education in RCR essential to the preparation of future scientists. In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 7 CFR Part 3022, institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Per award terms and conditions, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and 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.

5.9 Grantee Commitments

Upon issuance of a research grant by USDA, the awardee will be required to make certain legal commitments through acceptance of the award document and the terms and conditions attached thereto, as well as any project-specific terms or conditions outlined.

5.10 Additional Information

- (A) This program solicitation is intended for informational purposes and reflects current planning. If there is any inconsistency between the information contained herein and the terms of any resulting SBIR funding agreement, the terms of the funding agreement are controlling.
- (B) Before the award of an SBIR funding agreement, USDA requires the submission of certain organizational management, personnel, and financial information to assure responsibility of the applicant, including certification that the proposing organization is in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These forms will be provided to the small business concern by the Office of Grants and Financial Management, NIFA, prior to the forwarding of the funding agreement for acceptance. The information contained in both forms must normally be submitted on a one-time basis only. (If sufficient changes occur within the organization to warrant submission of new or additional information, additional forms should be requested by calling (202) 401-4986. It is anticipated that all Phase I awardees will be required to submit the above information. **Please note that NIFA will not issue an award until all requested organizational management and financial information has been received. Delaying or failing to submit this information could result in the application not being funded.**
- (C) If an applicant or a grantee is contemplating any type of transaction involving the entity (i.e., merger, spin-off or sale), it is advised that the applicant or the grantee contact one of the

SBIR NPLs (see subsection 1.7) for knowledge of how the transaction may affect a potential grant or existing grant, as applicable.

- (D) USDA is not responsible for any monies expended by the applicant prior to the award of any funding agreement.
- (E) This program solicitation is not an offer by USDA and does not obligate USDA to make any specific number of awards. Also, awards under this program are contingent upon the availability of funds.
- (F) Unsolicited applications will not be accepted under the SBIR program.
- (G) The applicant must provide the total number of employees for the organization and its subsidiaries and/or parent company, if applicable.

6.0 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Listed below are some of the sources that can provide technology search and document services which may be useful in preparing SBIR applications. They can be contacted directly for service and cost information.

National Agricultural Library
Service Desk
U.S. Department of Agriculture
10301 Baltimore Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705-2351
(301) 504-5755
www.nal.usda.gov

National Technology Transfer Center
Wheeling Jesuit University
316 Washington Avenue
Wheeling, WV 26003
(304) 243-2455 or (800) 678-6882
www.nttc.edu

National Technical Information Service
5285 Port Royal Road
Springfield, VA 22161
(800) 553-6847
www.ntis.gov

REReport
PARS/NIFA/USDA
Stop 2213
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250
http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/reepport_imp.html

Regional Technology Transfer Centers

Far West
Western Research Application Center (WESRAC)
3716 South Hope Street, Suite 200
Los Angeles, CA 90007
(213) 743-2732
<http://wesrac.usc.edu/>

Mid-Continent Technology Transfer Center
Texas Engineering Extension Service
The Texas A&M University System

301 Tarrow
College Station, TX 77843-8000
(979) 845-8762
Fax (979) 845-3559
www.teex.com

Mid-Atlantic
TECC - the Technology Commercialization Center
144 Research Drive
Hampton, VA 23666
(757) 766-9200
Fax (757) 766-2402
www.teccenter.org

Northeast
Center for Technology Commercialization
1400 Computer Drive
Westborough, MA 01581-5043
(508) 870-0042
www.ctc.org

Southeast
Georgia Institute of Technology
151 6th Street
216 O'Keefe Building
Atlanta, GA 30332
(404) 894-6786
www.edi.gatech.edu/nasa

Agricultural Technology Innovation Partnership (ATIP) Program

Ben Franklin Technology Development Authority, Pennsylvania (BFTDA)
Commonwealth Keystone Building
400 North Street, 4th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225
1 (866) 466-3972
www.newpa.com/business/business-assistance/ben-franklin-technology-development-authority

California Association for Local Economic Development
550 Bercut Drive, Suite G
Sacramento, CA 95811
916-448-8252
www.caled.org

Center for Innovation at Arlington, TX (CFI)
202 E Border St.
Arlington, TX 76010
817-543-4298
www.thecenterforinnovation.org

Center for Innovative Food Technology, Toledo, OH (CIFT)
5555 Airport Hwy., Ste. 100
Toledo, OH 43615-7320
www.ciftinnovation.org

Georgia Research Alliance (GRA)
50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 1220
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-332-9770
www.gra.org

Innovate Mississippi
134 Marketridge Drive
Ridgeland, Mississippi 39157
601-960-3610
www.innovate.ms

Kansas Bioscience Authority (KBA)
10900 S. Clay Blair Blvd
Olathe, Kansas 66061
913-397-8300
www.kansasbioauthority.org

Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO)
5565 Sterrett Place
Suite 214
Columbia, MD 21044
1-800-305-5556
www.tedco.md

Wisconsin Security Research Consortium (WSRC)
455 Science Drive #240
Madison, WI 53711
920-527-1950
www.wisecurity.org

7.0 RESEARCH TOPIC DESCRIPTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants are encouraged to submit applications that address the research priorities stated for each topic area described in this Program Solicitation (see topic areas 8.1 through 8.13 below). They are further encouraged to submit applications related to agriculturally-related manufacturing technology, energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy or one or more of the NIFA Societal Challenge Areas; see section 1.6. Applicants should pay attention to specific instructions located within each of the topic area descriptions when developing their proposal. Each topic area description provides background information, FY 2015 research priorities and other key information. Although applicants should apply to the topic area they deem most appropriate, USDA reserves the right to shift applications between topic areas when necessary to achieve the most effective review. Questions regarding the suitability of research for a specific topic area should be directed to the appropriate NPL.

7.1 Forests and Related Resources

Contact Dr. Charles Cleland, NPL for SBIR Forests and Related Resources at ccleland@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 401-6852 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The Forests and Related Resources topic area aims to address the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations through the development of environmentally sound approaches to increase productivity of forest lands, improve sustainability of forest resources, and develop value-added materials derived from woody resources. New technologies are needed to enhance the protection of the Nation's forested lands and forest resources and help to ensure the continued existence of healthy and productive forest ecosystems. Proposals focused on sustainable bioenergy and development of value-added biofuels from woody biomass, and on the influence of climate change on forest health and productivity are strongly encouraged. Proposals that utilize nanotechnology in their approach to developing new wood-based products or that utilize wood-based nano-materials are also encouraged.

To meet the identified needs in forestry and wood utilization, the program's long-term goals (10 years) are to achieve increased utilization of woody resources for value-added products from wood; healthy and sustainable forest ecosystems that are more resilient to wildfires and the impact of pathogens and insects; improved environmental and economic methods of sustainable harvesting; and improved growth and yield of forest species that will lead to more efficient use of forested lands.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to the following:**

1. **Growth and Yield** – Improving growing stock, tissue culture, genetic manipulation or vegetative reproduction of forest trees, and other means of increasing the regenerative abilities of forests; developing systems to increase the survival of newly planted trees through mechanical, physical or chemical means that are environmentally safe and through improved nutrient/water utilization; reducing the adverse impact of pathogens and insects by developing better methods to monitor infestations and improved control strategies for combating insects and pathogens that attack important woody species.

2. **Increasing the Utility of Forest-Grown Material** – Research to improve the yield of lumber, pulp fiber and specialty chemicals from trees; utilizing a greater percentage of the tree through improved techniques of production, for the creation of new or improved reconstituted products; developing better methods for manufacturing wood-based products and testing products for performance and durability; and developing improved methods for the production of paper.
3. **Reducing Ecological Damage by Forest Operations** – Research to reduce soil erosion, compaction, water degradation or other alterations caused by harvesting and/or other forest operations, provisions for the economic recovery of resources from forests while raising potential productivity and reducing impacts to the ecological structure of the area of operation.
4. **Urban forestry** – Research to promote the growth of forested land in urban areas, such as greenways, parks, and strategically planted urban trees, to address problems of forest fragmentation, the introduction of invasive species, and the impact of urban forested land on air and water quality and quality of life improvements.
5. **Climate Change** – Research to address the issue of ecosystem adaptation to climate change, ways to enhance carbon sequestration and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, development of decision support tools for forest managers and markets for forest ecosystem services.
6. **Developing Technology that Facilitates the Management of Wildfires on Forest Lands** – Research that provides systems for detecting and managing wildfires; systems for reducing fuel loads in forests; tools and equipment for improving the efficacy and safety of fire fighters on the ground and in the air; and communication and navigation systems for improving the coordination of fire management activities.
7. **Sustainable Bioenergy and Development of Value-Added Products From Forest Resources** – Research for development of improved methods for the conversion of forest biomass into cellulosic biofuels (e.g. ethanol, biobutanol, jet aviation) and biobased products, including intermediate chemicals; development of new wood-based composite materials; development of local scale energy conversion projects that generate electricity and/or useful heat; and development of technologies that will mitigate carbon release from combustion.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- The applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the NPL regarding the suitability of research topics.
- Applications that deal with the development of biofuels derived from non-woody agricultural crops should be submitted under topic area 8.8 Biofuels and Biobased Products.

7.2 Plant Production and Protection - Biology

Contact Dr. Shing Kwok, NPL for SBIR Plant Production and Protection - Biology at skwok@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 401-6060 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The objective of this topic area is to examine means of enhancing crop production by applying biological approaches to reduce the impact of harmful agents, develop new methods for plant improvement, and apply traditional plant breeding methods and new technologies to develop new food and non-food crop plants, as well as new genotypes of existing crop plants with characteristics that allow their use in new commercial applications. This topic area supports the following NIFA Societal Challenge Areas: Global Food Security and Hunger; Climate Change; Sustainable bioenergy; and Food Safety.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to the following:**

1. **Plant improvement** – Improved crop production using traditional plant breeding and biotechnology, including but not limited to, molecular biology, and mutagenesis, genomics, tissue culture, and/or embryogenesis to produce crops with new or improved quality, yield, agronomic, horticultural, value- added, and/or economic traits. Topics may include, but not limited to:
 - a. **Improvement of commercial floriculture production** - Biological and/or technological approaches to improve the competitiveness of U.S. production of flowering potted plants, bedding plants, seasonal crops, annuals, perennials, and cut flowers.
 - b. **Development of new crops** – Development of new crop plants as sources of food, non-food industrial or ornamental products.
2. **Pollinators and crop production** - Projects that address the health and success of domesticated and natural pollinators of economically important crops.
3. **Pollinators and crop production** - Projects that address the health and success of domesticated and natural pollinators of economically important crops.
4. **Plant protection against abiotic and/or biotic stresses** – Reduced the impact of plant pathogens, insect pests, and abiotic stress on crop plants; and increasing plant resistance to plant pathogens, insect pests, and abiotic stress. Topics may include, but not limited to:
 - a. Improved plant disease diagnostics (accurate, rapid, and cost-effective identification of causal agents in specialty crop plants at the earliest possible time relative to manifestation of disease).
 - b. Bio-Based approaches to protect organically-grown crops from insect and nematode pests and diseases, including the development of decision aid systems that are information extensive and time sensitive.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- Phase I applications involving the development of transgenic crops would benefit by the inclusion of a brief description of the proposed path to commercialization, including an understanding of what will be needed to clear regulatory consideration. Phase II applications involving the development of transgenic crops should have an expanded section on how regulatory considerations will be met and market entry attained.
- Applications that deal with non-biological engineering technologies should be sent to topic area 8.13 Plant Production and Protection-Engineering.
- Applications that deal with the genetic improvement and production of woody biomass feedstock crops should be submitted to the 8.1 Forest and Related Resources topic area.
- Applications that deal with the genetic improvement and production of algae should be submitted to the 8.7 Aquaculture topic area.

7.3 Animal Production and Protection

Contact Dr. Robert Smith, NPL for SBIR Animal Production and Protection at rsmith@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 401-4892 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations predicts that feeding the world's growing population will require a doubling of global food production by 2050. Fulfilling this need will require new technologies to improve both productivity and efficiency of food animals. The Animal Production and Protection topic area aims to develop innovative, marketable technologies that will provide significant benefit to the production and protection of agricultural animals. New technologies for rapid detection, treatment and prevention of disease are needed to improve productivity and enhance the biosecurity of our herds and flocks. Better technologies are also needed to trace animals as they move through the food supply chain and to ensure that food products derived from animals do not contribute to food-borne illnesses. To meet increasing consumer demand for value-added animal products, innovative technologies are needed to address the challenges presented by non-conventional management systems and strategies. And there is an urgent need for technologies that decrease the impact of animal agriculture on the environment and optimize use of our natural resources. Technological advances in animal production and protection will not only enhance the safety of the Nation's food supply and contribute to environmental stewardship, they will also allow American producers to remain competitive in the global marketplace and contribute to global food security.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Development of marketable technologies designed for use in agriculturally important animals that will:

1. Improve production efficiency. Areas of interest include improved fertility; increased feed efficiency; and translation of genomic information into practical use and benefit.
2. Improve the safety and/or quality of end products derived from animals. These technologies must be applicable in the pre-harvest environment.
3. Improve animal health and well-being. Examples of these technologies include new diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines and other immunization methods, biosecurity management tools, traceability methods, and animal handling methods.
4. Improve the productivity of animals in modified conventional or alternative animal production systems. Examples include non-confinement housing, pasture-based feeding systems, and organic systems.
5. Mitigate the impacts of animal agriculture on the natural environment. Areas of interest include technologies that decrease greenhouse gas emissions or reduce the excretion of phosphorus and nitrogen.

Other Key Information

- Applications that deal with post-harvest technologies for products derived from animals will not be accepted for review under this program area. Applications that deal with post-harvest technologies

for foods derived from animals may be submitted under topic area 8.5 Food Science and Nutrition.

- Applications should explain how the proposed work will contribute to the USDA Societal Challenge Areas (Global Food Security and Hunger, Climate Change, Food Safety).
- All Phase I applications should give the reviewers a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- Applications dealing with aquacultured species should be submitted under topic area 8.7 Aquaculture.

7.4 Air, Water and Soils

Contact Mary Ann Rozum, NPL for SBIR Air, Water and Soils at mrozum@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 401-4533 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The Air, Water and Soils topic area aims to develop technologies for conserving and protecting air, water and soil resources while sustaining optimal farm and forest productivity. Climate variability and food security are major focal points of this topic area. Efforts are needed to reduce the production of greenhouse gases that result from agricultural activities and to increase carbon sequestration in soils. Climate change is likely to alter temperature and precipitation patterns and new technologies are needed that will better enable plant and animal production systems to adapt to changing climatic conditions. As population continues to increase food security will be critical as efforts for food production to keep pace will increasingly become a challenge. Soil and water are critical resources that impact food production. New technologies are needed that will improve water quality and conservation and use water more efficiently. We also need new technologies that will improve soil quality and fertility and reduce soil erosion.

To meet these identified needs of agriculture, the program's long-term goals (10 years) are to achieve improved air quality and improved utilization of water resources that are better able to sustain production agriculture; better use of limited water resources for agriculture through improved irrigation technologies; a more sustained soil resource through reduced soil erosion and thereby lead to more productive agriculture; and improved soil quality that will permit a more sustainable and productive agriculture.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to, the following:**

1. **Water Quality and Conservation** – Develop new and improved technologies to optimize water management conservation at both the farm level and at a watershed scale, monitor the quality of surface water and groundwater resources for biotic and abiotic pollutants, including animal manure and pharmaceuticals, develop improved methods for the reuse of waste water, including the remediation and restoration of water resources that impact agriculture and forestry operations, and promote watershed restoration.
2. **Irrigation** – Develop improved irrigation technologies for both farming and landscaping applications that will provide more efficient and cost-effective delivery of water and chemicals. Develop new irrigation methods that allow for more efficient use of water including accurate delivery of water to where it is needed.
3. **Soil Erosion** – Develop better methods for preventing soil erosion by wind and surface water runoff and for monitoring wind erosion and sediment transport.
4. **Soil Quality** – Develop new technologies for measuring soil properties, soil nutrient content, and the physical and chemical nature of soil. Research new technologies that enhance soil properties

while restricting adverse environmental impact and develop improved methods to remediate degraded soils.

5. **Air Resources** – Develop new and improved technologies to monitor air quality and reduce air pollution stemming from agricultural enterprises, including manures from livestock and poultry production systems.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- The applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the NPL regarding the suitability of research topics.

7.5 Food Science and Nutrition

Contact Dr. Jodi Williams, NPL for SBIR Food Science and Nutrition at jwilliams@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 720-6145 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The Food Science and Nutrition topic area aims to fund projects that support research focusing on developing new and improved processes, technologies, or services that address emerging food safety, food processing and nutrition issues.. The program will fund projects: 1) Increase the understanding of the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of food; 2) Improve methods for the processing and packaging of food products to improve the quality and nutritional value of foods; and 3) Develop programs or products that increase the consumption of healthy foods and reduce childhood obesity. The outcome of a successful project is a proof of concept for a marketable item or patented process.

The long term goals (10 years) of the program are to commercialize the production of useful new food products, processes, materials, and systems that reduce food-borne illness, obesity and enhance the nutritional quality and value of foods.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to, the following:**

1. **Food Safety:** Developing technologies for the rapid detection of food borne hazards (microorganisms, chemicals, toxins) during pre- and post-harvest processing and distribution.
2. **Food- Quality-Engineering:** Developing innovative food processing and packaging technologies and materials that reduce post-harvest losses in produce while maintaining safety and quality.
3. **Food Quality- Science:** Understanding the physical, biological, and chemical interactions and functionality of food in order to develop affordable food ingredients and/or food formulations that contribute to the development of high quality foods.
4. **Nutrition – Education:** Developing and implementing interactive programs for nutrition educators and teachers to increase nutrition awareness and improve health to address obesity among children.
5. **Nutrition- Science:** Improve functionality and efficacy of foods, nutrients and/or dietary bioactive components in promoting health.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).

- The applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the NPL regarding the suitability of research topics.
- Improvements of current commercial methods should address high false positive and high false negative rates associated with PCR based methods for detection of food borne bacteria in produce and high false negative rates associated with immunoassays for detection of Salmonella.
- New rapid detect tests should be designed to detect at least 1 cfu/25g of food using approaches that reduce or eliminate enrichment and should be designed to allow for sampling of large volumes of food.
- Projects that promote value-added products and processes are encouraged.
- Projects that address functional foods to promote health are encouraged.
- Projects on novel screening methods for threat agents need strong letters of support from the appropriate Federal agency that will be the end user of the technology.
- Projects that focus on technologies for improving cost benefit and model-based analyses, including distribution, warehousing, and retailing systems as they relate to the economy are acceptable.
- Applicants who have received previous SBIR funding should address outcomes for those projects.

Projects should include appropriate collaborations with experts in the field of investigation i.e. a Food Scientist or Nutritionist as a part of the development team for the project.

7.6 Rural and Community Development

Mr. Brent Elrod, National Program Leader for SBIR Rural Development may be contacted at belrod@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 690-3468 6145 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

During the last 30 years, dramatic social, economic and technological changes have occurred in many rural areas in the United States. Although farming continues to be an important source of income, most of rural America is moving from an agrarian to a post-agrarian economy. The results of this transformation have been uneven across the rural landscape. Some communities are facing economic decline and rural exodus, while in other communities, especially those in areas near large urban centers or rich in natural amenities, economic and population growth have accelerated. Even in rural communities where economic growth and population have grown, some have become more vulnerable to disasters caused by human action and/or climate changes. Many other communities are plagued by limited access to good schools, food, and health services. As a result, despite decades of intervention and billions of dollars in public investment, many rural residents are unable to utilize important government services and new scientific information that can help improve their quality of life; have higher food insecurity and childhood obesity rates; lack the required entrepreneurship and workforce skills to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities (e.g., climate change mitigation, safe food processing and marketing, etc); and are hampered by insufficient modern infrastructure to rapidly benefit from growing public and private sector investment.

Applications may be submitted for the development of new technology, or for the utilization of existing technology, that address important economic and social development issues or problems in rural America. The applications need not be centered on agriculture, but may be focused on any area that has the potential to provide significant benefits to rural Americans. All applications should explicitly discuss the specific rural problem or opportunity that will be examined and how this technology will successfully address the problem or opportunity. Applications submitted must include an objective to assess the impacts of the proposed project on the environment or the socio-economic development of rural areas.

To meet these identified problems and opportunities of rural development, the long-term (10 year) goal for this program is to develop and commercialize new technology, products, processes and services that will: (i) enhance the efficiency and equity of public and private investment in rural communities; (ii) build a diversified workforce to meet the needs of the present and for the future; (iii) enhance resilience to both natural and human disasters; and (iv) enhance economic vitality of rural communities and, in turn, reduce rural poverty.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to, the following:**

1. **Development of services and information and managerial systems that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Local Governments and Public and Private Institutions.**
Topics may include educational programs that address the specific needs of people in rural areas (e.g., development of entrepreneurship and workforce skills); new housing designs; improved health care delivery; appropriate transportation and communication technologies and services;

and marketing of new information and technologies.

2. **Development of technologies and services that protect or enhance the environment while promoting economic development.** Topics may include technologies and services that protect the ecosystem, conserve energy, develop alternative energy sources such as wind and solar energy (excluding biofuels), etc.
3. **Reducing the vulnerabilities of rural communities from hazards (excluding intentional acts such as terrorism).** Procedures are needed to make rural communities more sustainable to natural or unintentional hazards such as food-borne illnesses, food contamination, droughts, hurricanes, etc., through better preparation, forecast and warning, response and rebuilding phases of hazard mitigation, including communication.
4. **Development of technologies and services that specifically address the needs of youth and, the elderly the low-income sector of the rural population.** Efforts are needed that will enhance human capital development, build earnings capacity, promote food security, including issues of access to adequate amounts and quality of foods, increase labor force participation and/or promote job creation to the most vulnerable populations in rural communities.
5. **Increasing opportunities for employment and income generation in rural communities.** Topics may include rural tourism, agri-tourism, off-farm value-added agricultural development, etc.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- The applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the NPL regarding the suitability of research topics.
- If funded, projects are expected to enhance the environmental and economic vitality of rural communities. Therefore, applications must contain an objective to assess the impacts of the proposed project on the environment or the socio-economic development of rural areas.
- Applications dealing with on-farm production agriculture research should be submitted to topic area 8.12 Small and Medium Sized Farms.
- Applications dealing with the development of biofuels and biobased products should be submitted to topic area 8.8 Biofuels and Biobased Products.

7.7 Aquaculture

Investigators with questions regarding questions about the topic area may contact Dr. Charles Cleland, NPL for SBIR Aquaculture at ccleland@nifa.usda.gov, (202) 401-6852.

Background

The Aquaculture topic area aims to develop new technologies that will enhance the knowledge and technology base necessary for the expansion of the domestic aquaculture industry as a form of production agriculture. Seafood production from the wild is under increased pressure due to overfishing and pollution and therefore aquaculture is increasingly an important source of farmed seafood and an important contributor to improve food security. In this context new technologies are needed to protect aquaculture species against disease and to improve production efficiency. Emphasis is placed on research leading to improved production efficiency and increased competitiveness of private sector aquaculture in the United States. Studies on commercially important, or potentially important, species of fish, shellfish and plants from both freshwater and marine environments are included. Food Safety is another important priority in Aquaculture. Technologies are needed to ensure the safety of aquaculture species from heavy metals and other hazardous materials and from human pathogens.

To meet these identified needs in aquaculture, the program's long-term goals (10 years) are to achieve improved aquaculture production resulting from improved reproductive efficiency in fish and shellfish; improved aquaculture production resulting from genetic improvement in fish and shellfish; improved aquaculture production resulting from improved animal health; improved aquaculture production with reduced water usage and improved production efficiencies; and cost-effective production of microalgae for use as aquaculture feed and as a source of valuable human food supplements.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to, the following:**

1. **Reproductive Efficiency** – Novel or innovative approaches to improve reproductive efficiency in aquaculture species including: greater control of maturation, ovulation and fertilization; improved gamete and embryo storage; improved larval rearing techniques; enhanced reproductive performance of broodstock; improved methods for cryopreservation of sperm and embryos; and methods to control sex determination.
2. **Genetic Improvement** – Novel or innovative approaches to improve production efficiency through genetic improvement of aquacultural stocks including: genetic mechanisms of sex determination; genetic basis for inheritance of commercially important traits, such as growth, cold tolerance, and pathogen susceptibility; identification of major genes affecting performance; application of molecular biology and genomics and the integration of this technology into breeding programs; and performance evaluation of aquacultural stocks and utilization of crossbreeding and hybridization.
3. **Integrated Aquatic Animal Health Management** – Novel or innovative approaches to reducing acute and chronic losses related to aquatic animal health in aquaculture production systems through an integrated holistic approach including: physiological stress related to the quality of the

aquatic production system; genetic, environmental, and nutritional components of aquatic health management; control of predation in aquaculture production systems; development of new vaccines or immunization procedures to enhance resistance to infectious diseases and parasites; development of diagnostic tests for specific diseases that pose a health hazard; and development of improved treatment methods for acute or chronic health problems caused by specific infectious or non-infectious agents, parasites, injuries and chemical and toxic agents.

4. **Improved Production Systems and Management Strategies** – Novel or innovative approaches to improve existing or alternative production system design and management strategies including: development of biological, engineering and economic design criteria and models; enhancement of water quality in existing production systems through aeration, flow patterns, etc.; characterization, handling and treatment of effluent from aquacultural production systems; improved harvesting methods and strategies; and improved operating efficiencies for recirculation systems.
5. **Plant Production Systems** – Novel or innovative approaches to improve the efficiency of algal production systems including: identification of new species with improved nutritional profile for use in feeding to other aquacultural species or as a source of valuable human food supplements; development of improved bioreactor technology; and development of better methods for harvesting algal biomass.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- The applicants are strongly encouraged to contact either NPL regarding the suitability of research topics.
- Applications that deal with the development of new food products derived from aquaculture species should be submitted under topic area 8.5 Food Science and Nutrition.

7.8 Biofuels and Biobased Products

Contact Dr. William Goldner, NPL for SBIR Biofuels and Biobased Products at wgoldner@nifa.usda.gov or (202)-401-1719 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The objective of this topic area is to promote the use of biofuels and non-food biobased products by developing new or improved technologies that will lead to increased production of industrial products from agricultural materials. This research will lead to new opportunities to diversify agriculture and enhance agriculture's role as a reliable supplier of raw materials to industry. This topic area supports the NIFA Sustainable Bioenergy Societal Challenge Area and the Climate Change Societal Challenge Area. Historically, appropriate research areas have included: development of procedures for enhanced recovery of critical raw materials from agricultural commodities; development of improved technology for converting agriculturally derived raw materials into useful industrial products; development of new products from new industrial crops; and development of industrial products derived from agricultural materials to make them more effective and/or more cost competitive with non-agriculturally derived industrial products. In order to enhance the impact of the program, acceptance of applications will be limited to select Research Priority Areas.

FY2015 Priority Research Areas

Acceptance of applications for the FY2015 solicitation will be **strictly limited** to:

1. **Advanced “Drop-in” Biofuels** – New and improved technology for the **economically and environmentally sustainable** production and conversion of agricultural biomass material **energy crops and residues** into non-ethanol biofuels (e. g. biobutanol, green gasoline, green diesel, aviation fuel), fuel additives, and other products to be used as fuel; development of improved biocatalysts and thermochemical processes for advanced biofuel production, and byproducts from the advanced biofuel production stream that will optimize the economic feasibility of the production of biofuels. This solicitation seeks to support innovative technologies that will minimize adverse environmental impacts during conversion (for example: reduction of energy use and water use during conversion; reduction of harmful byproducts from conversion) and have carbon reduction benefits. Applications developing technology for ethanol production (grain or cellulosic) or co-products from ethanol production will not be accepted in this topic area, but may be submitted to other topic areas if appropriate (see Other Key Information below). Applications not addressing economic and environmental sustainability may be returned to the applicant without review.
2. Advanced biofuels and biobased products from **animal manure** or carcass waste.
3. **New Non-food Biobased Products from New Industrial Crops** – Identification of markets and development of new biobased products and processes for making products from **new industrial crops (including algae)**. These products should be economically competitive and have carbon reduction benefits.
4. New processes for the manufacture of **biobased plastics**.

5. New products or processes that develop **biobased materials** with properties **that enhance energy efficiency** in their applications.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- Applications that deal with developing value-added biofuels (including ethanol) and biobased products from forest biomass should be sent to the 8.1 Forest and Related Resources topic area.
- Applications that deal with developing biofuels (including ethanol) and bioenergy that will improve the sustainability of small and mid-size farms should be sent to the 8.12 Small and Mid-Size Farms topic area.
- Applications that deal with the genetic improvement or production of biomass feedstock crops except for woody biomass and algae should be submitted to the 8.2 Plant Production and Protection– Biology topic area.
- Applications that deal with the genetic improvement, production, or feedstock logistics of woody biomass feedstock crops should be submitted to the 8.1 Forest and Related Resources topic area.
- Applications that deal with the genetic improvement, production, or feedstock logistics of algae for biofuel production should be submitted to the 8.7 Aquaculture topic area.
- Applications that deal with the engineering aspects of the planting, production or post-harvest handling of biomass feedstock crops should be submitted to the 8.13 Plant Production and Protection – Engineering topic area.
- Applications submitted to this topic area that do not specifically address the FY2015 Priority Research Areas will not be reviewed.

7.9 through 7.11 Reserved.

7.12 Small and Mid-Size Farms

Dr. Denis Ebodaghe, National Program Leader for SBIR Small and Mid-Size Farms may be contacted at debodaghe@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 401-438 regarding questions about the topic area or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The Small and Mid-Size Farms topic area aims to promote and improve the sustainability and profitability of small and mid-size farms and ranches (where annual sales of agricultural products are less than \$250,000 for small farms and \$500,000 for mid-size farms - hereafter referred to as small farms). The vast majority of farms in this country are small and they play an important role in the agricultural sector. The viability and sustainability of small farms is important to the Nation's economy and to the stewardship of our biological and natural resources. While some small farms are located in urban areas, most small farms are located in rural areas, and these farms are critical to sustaining and strengthening the leadership and social fabric of rural communities. Applicants are strongly encouraged to emphasize how their project would contribute to the well-being of rural communities and institutions. In particular, applicants should emphasize how the results of their project would be disseminated to other small farmers and provide benefit to the small farm community.

Food safety, climate change, food security and sustainable bioenergy diversification of agricultural production systems and increased efficiency of farm operations and economies of scale are all important program priorities in this topic area. Proposals are encouraged that focus on one or more of these priorities and are appropriately scaled so as to apply to the needs and capabilities of small farmers.

To meet these identified needs in the small and mid-size farm sector, the program's long-term goals (10 years) are to achieve improvements in sustainability and profitability of small farms with increased production of specialty crops and specialty animals; improved farm management skills in small farmers that leads to more sustainable and profitable small farms; better stewardship of natural resources through adoption of more sustainable farming practices; enhanced utilization of renewable energy sources and more focus on energy efficiency and energy conservation; and better educated small farmers who are better able to operate their farms on a sustainable and profitable basis.

FY 2015 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to, the following:**

1. **New Agricultural Enterprises** – Efforts are needed to develop new agricultural enterprises that are small scale and focused on specialty farm products, both plant and animal, and on innovative ways to market these farm products through direct marketing, such as farmer's markets or cooperatives where the financial return to the farmer is optimized or through specialty market outlets that offer a higher financial return. Emphasis is encouraged for organic and natural foods, specialty animal products, such as free-range poultry or natural beef, non-food specialty crops, such as medicinal herbs and value-added food, and non-food products.

2. **Development of New Marketing Strategies** – Efforts are needed to develop appropriate new strategies for marketing agricultural, forestry and aquacultural commodities and value-added products produced by small farms in local, regional, national and international markets, including the assessment of consumer demand; identification of desired product characteristics, including packaging and processing methods; development of new and innovative utilization of existing production and processing technologies; and the promotion of efficient assembling, packing, processing, advertising and shipping methods.
3. **Farm Management** – Efforts are needed to develop tools and skills that are appropriate for small farms that will enhance the efficiency and profitability of small farms. New tools are also needed that will enhance farm safety. Development of new risk management tools to facilitate better planning is needed. Development of improved farm level life-cycle assessment tools that help small to mid-sized farms 1) improve operations through resource efficiency and 2) quantify ecosystem services provided is needed. Innovative ways to promote agro-tourism as a way to enhance farm profitability is encouraged.
4. **Natural Resources and Renewable Energy** – Efforts are needed to develop farming methods scaled appropriately for small farms that are directed at more efficient use of natural resources. Particular emphasis is needed to develop better ways to utilize renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, and geothermal energy, and to promote improved energy efficiency and conservation in farming operations.
5. **Educational Outreach** – Efforts are needed to develop new tools to ensure that the next generation of small farmers has access to the information and resources they need to operate their small farms on a sustainable and profitable basis.
6. **Urban Farming** – In recent years there has been increasing interest in the establishment of small farms in urban areas on roof tops, in abandoned building and in vacant lots. Efforts are needed to explore ways to make urban farming more energy efficient, environmentally sustainable and profitable. The most appropriate crops for urban farms needs to be determined. Procedures that would increase the establishment of new urban farms need to be developed.

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- The applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the NPL regarding the suitability of research topic.

7.13 Plant Production and Protection - Engineering

Investigators are encouraged to contact Dr. Kitty Cardwell, National Program Leader for SBIR Plant Production and Protection Engineering may be contacted at kcardwell@nifa.usda.gov or 202-401-1790 regarding questions about the suitability of research topics or to arrange a telephone consultation.

Background

The objective of this topic area is to enhance crop production by creating and commercializing technologies that enhance system efficiency and profitability and that protect crops from pests and pathogens in economically and environmentally sound ways. Projects that promote energy conservation or efficiency are strongly encouraged. Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, **but are not limited to, the following:**

1. **Improved crop production methods or strategies** – Enhance the efficiency of crop production by utilizing innovative methods and equipment for planting, growing and harvesting crop plants, including optimization of inputs and reduction of environmental impacts by implementing the use of precision farming technology, robotics, sensors, information technology, and remote sensing, etc..
2. **Plant protection** – Reduce the impact of plant pathogens, insect pests and competing vegetation on crop plants by developing efficient and environmentally safe pesticide and herbicide application equipment, and by developing needed technologies to monitor and manage plant disease, insect pests, or abiotic stress at the earliest stages of their manifestations.
3. **Energy conservation** – Develop crop management systems, farm and greenhouse structures, and waste utilization strategies that promote energy conservation and efficiency, including the development of technology for the economic use of alternative/renewable energy resources.

Special Priority Research Areas for FY 2015: SBIR is strongly encouraging the submission of applications focusing on the following problem areas. Additional consideration will be given to applications addressing the development of products, processes, and services for US production of specialty crops (fruits, nuts, vegetables, nursery, and greenhouse crops):

1. **Improved chemical application technology** that increases product efficacy, worker safety, and reduces off-target drift of applied chemicals.
2. **High resolution spatial and temporal monitoring** of specialty crops using sensors and sensor networks (for example, temperature, humidity, drought stress, pest damage, and disease).
3. **Post-harvest handling (including transportation and storage) of specialty crops**, including handling to maintain quality and reduce food safety issues, reducing waste streams from post- harvest handling, selection for quality and consumer preference.
4. **Reduction of manual labor in specialty crop production, harvesting, and post-harvest handling** through technology to improve the competitiveness of US specialty crop

production.

5. **Technologies that enhance commercial horticulture production** to improve the competitiveness of U.S. flowering potted plant, bedding plant, and cut flower production, seasonal crops, annuals, and perennials.
6. **Planting, production, harvesting, and post-harvest handling technology** targeting the sustainable production of the following **biomass feedstock crop groups: perennial grasses, energycane, sorghum, and oil seed crops** (not including algae, see Other Key Information below).
7. **Technology to enhance the competitiveness of U.S. Organic agriculture and horticulture.**

Other Key Information

- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- Applications that deal with irrigation and related technology should be sent to the 8.4 Soil and Water Resources topic area.
- Applications that deal with the feedstock logistics of woody biomass (including short rotation crops like willow and poplar) should be submitted to the 8.1 Forest and Related Resources topic area.
- Applications that deal with the production of algae for biofuel production should be submitted to the 8.7 Aquaculture topic area.

8.0 SAMPLE APPLICATIONS FROM USDA SBIR SOLICITATION

These applications, which resulted in Phase I awards, were submitted under previous USDA SBIR Program Solicitation guidelines. As such, these applications do not accurately reflect the current format nor the forms and attachments that are required for submission through Grants.gov. These applications are provided solely as samples for general guidance. In the original application, the cover page was signed by both the PD and AR. Social security numbers, budgets, and some material containing biographical information were removed to protect confidentiality.

Visit the following web page to see the sample applications available only in PDF version at: www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/sbir/sbir_sample.html.

9.0 DEFINITIONS

The following definitions apply for purposes of this solicitation:

9.1 Ad hoc Reviewers

Experts or consultants, qualified by training and experience in particular scientific or technical fields to render expert advice on the scientific technical merit of the grant applications in those fields, who review on an individual basis one or several of the eligible proposals submitted to this program in their area of expertise and who submit to the Department written evaluations of such proposals.

9.2 Affiliate

This term has the same meaning as set forth in 13 CFR part 121—Small Business Size Regulations, §121.103, What is affiliation? (available at <http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr;sid=03878acee7c064a02cac0d870e00ef43;rgn=div6;view=text;node=13%3A1.0.1.1.17.1;idno=13;cc=ecfr>). Further information about SBA's affiliation rules and a guide on affiliation is available at www.SBIR.gov and www.SBA.gov/size.

9.3 Applicant

The organizational entity that, at the time of award, will qualify as a small business concern and that submits a grant application for a funding agreement under the SBIR Program.

9.4 Authorized Departmental Officer

The Secretary or any employee of the Department who has the authority to issue or modify grant instruments on behalf of the Secretary.

9.5 Authorized Organizational Representative

The president, director, chief executive officer or other designated official of the applicant organization who has the authority to commit the resources of the organization. Also referred to as the Authorized Representative (AR).

9.6 Budget Period

Interval of time into which the project period is divided for budgetary and reporting purposes.

9.7 Commercialization

The process of developing marketable products, processes, technologies, or services and the production and delivery (whether by the originating party or others) of the products, processes, technologies, or services for sale to or use by the Federal government or commercial markets.

9.8 Department

The United States Department of Agriculture.

9.9 Direct Costs

Costs that occur in direct support of a single project or that can be clearly identified, segregated and billed directly to the project via the companies' accounting system.

9.10 Essentially Equivalent Work

Occurs when (1) substantially the same research is proposed for funding in more than one grant application submitted to the same Federal agency; (2) substantially the same research is submitted to two or more different Federal agencies for review and funding consideration; or (3) a specific research objective and the research design for accomplishing an objective are the same or closely related in two or more applications or awards, regardless of the funding source.

9.11 Fee

The amount of profit a company will receive from the grant.

9.12 Funding Agreement

Any contract, grant or cooperative agreement entered into between any Federal agency and any small business concern for the performance of experimental, developmental or research work, including products or services funded in whole or in part by the Federal Government.

9.13 Grant

A financial assistance mechanism that provides money, property, or both to an eligible entity to carry out the approved project or activity. A grant is used whenever the Federal agency anticipates no substantial programmatic involvement with the awardee during the period of performance.

9.14 Grantee

The small business concern designated in the grant award document as the responsible legal entity to whom the grant is awarded under this part. Also referred to as an "awardee."

9.15 Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone)

A small business concern meeting the following criteria:

- (A) Located in a "historically underutilized business zone" or HUBZone area located in one or more of the following:
 - (1) **A qualified census tract** (as defined in section 42(d)(5)(C)(i)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986); or
 - (2) **A qualified "non-metropolitan county"** (as defined in section 143(k)(2)(B) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986); or
 - (3) **On an Indian Reservation-** Land within the boundaries of a federally recognized Indian Reservation.

(B) Owned and controlled by one or more U.S. Citizens; and

(C) At least 35 percent of its employees **must** reside in a HUBZone.

9.16 Indirect Costs

Costs which occur in support of more than one objective and therefore cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular project, often called overhead or General & Administrative (G&A).

9.17 Innovation

A new or improved item having marketable potential including (1) development of new technologies; (2) refinement of existing technologies; or (3) development of new applications for existing technologies.

9.18 Intellectual Property

The separate and distinct types of intangible property that are referred to collectively as “intellectual property,” including but not limited to: patents, trademarks, copyrights, trade secrets, SBIR technical data (as defined in this section), ideas, designs, know-how, business, technical and research methods, other types of intangible business assets, and all types of intangible assets either proposed or generated by a small business concern as a result of its participation in the SBIR program.

9.19 Joint Venture

An association of concerns with interests in any degree or proportion by way of contract, express or implied, consorting to engage in and carry out a single specific business venture for joint profit, for which purpose they combine their efforts, property, money, skill or knowledge, but not on a continuing or permanent basis for conducting business generally. A joint venture is viewed as a business entity in determining power to control its management.

9.20 Manufacturing Related

Encompasses improvements in existing methods or processes as well as wholly new processes, machines, or systems. Four main areas include:

(A) Unit process level technologies that create or improve manufacturing processes, including:

1. Fundamental improvements in existing manufacturing processes that deliver substantial productivity, quality, or environmental benefits; or
2. Development of new manufacturing processes, including new materials, coatings, methods, and associated practices.

(B) Machine level technologies that create or improve manufacturing equipment, including:

1. Improvements in capital equipment that create increased capability, such as accuracy or repeatability, increased capacity through productivity improvements or cost reduction or increased environmental efficiency, such as safety, energy efficiency and, environmental impact; or

2. New apparatus and equipment for manufacturing, including additive and subtractive manufacturing, deformation and molding, assembly and test, semiconductor fabrication, and nanotechnology.

(C) Systems level technologies for innovation in the manufacturing enterprise, including:

1. Advances in controls, sensors, networks, and other information technologies that improve the quality and productivity of manufacturing cells, lines, systems, and facilities;
2. Innovation in extended enterprise functions critical to manufacturing, such as quality systems, resource management, supply change integration and distribution, scheduling, and tracking; or
3. Technologies that enable integrated and collaborative product and process development, including computer-aided and expert systems for design, tolerancing, process and materials selection, life-cycle cost estimation, rapid prototyping, and tooling.

(D) Environment or societal level technologies that improve workforce abilities, productivity, and manufacturing competitiveness, including:

1. Technologies for improved workforce health and safety, such as human factors and ergonomics; or
2. Technologies that aid and improve workforce manufacturing skill and technical excellence, such as educational systems incorporating improved manufacturing knowledge and instructional methods.

9.21 NIFA

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

9.22 Outcomes

The measure of long-term, eventual, program impact.

9.23 Outputs

The measures of near-term program impact.

9.24 Peer Review Group

Experts or consultants, qualified by training and experience in particular scientific or technical fields to give expert advice on the scientific and technical merit of grant applications to those fields, who assemble as a group to discuss and evaluate all of the eligible applications submitted to this program in their area of expertise.

9.25 Program Solicitation

A formal request for applications whereby a Federal agency notifies the small business community of its Research or Research and Development (R/R&D) needs and interests in broad and selected areas, as appropriate to the agency, and requests applications from small business concerns in response to these needs and interests.

9.26 Project Director / Principal Investigator (PD/PI)

An individual designated by the applicant to provide the scientific and technical direction to a project supported by the funding agreement.

9.27 Prototype

A model of something to be further developed, which includes designs, protocols, questionnaires, software, and devices.

9.28 Project Period

The total length of time approved by the Department for conducting the research project as outlined in an approved grant award. Also referred to as the period of performance.

9.29 Research or Research and Development (R/R&D)

Any activity that is:

- (1) A systematic, intensive study directed toward greater knowledge or understanding of the subject studied;
- (2) A systematic study directed at applying new knowledge to meet a recognized need; or
- (3) A systematic application of knowledge toward the production of useful materials, devices and systems or methods, including design, development and improvement of prototypes, and new processes to meet specific requirements.

9.30 Research Project Grant

The award by the Department of funds to a grantee to assist in meeting the costs of conducting for the benefit of the public an identified project, which is intended and designed to establish, discover, elucidate, or confirm information or the underlying mechanisms relating to a research topic area identified in the annual solicitation of applications.

9.31 SBIR Participants

Business concerns that have received SBIR awards or that have submitted SBIR applications.

9.32 SBIR Technical Data

All data generated during the performance of an SBIR award.

9.33 SBIR Technical Data Rights

The rights a small business concern obtains in data generated during the performance of any SBIR award that an awardee delivers to the Government during or upon completion of a Federally-funded project and to which the government receives a license.

9.34 Small Business Concern (SBC)

To be eligible for award of funding agreements in SBA's SBIR programs, a business concern must meet the requirements below at the time of award of an SBIR Phase I or Phase II funding agreement:

(a) *Ownership and control for the SBIR program.*

(1) An SBIR awardee must:

(i) Be a concern which is more than 50% directly owned and controlled by one or more individuals (who are citizens or permanent resident aliens of the United States), other small business concerns (each of which is more than 50% directly owned and controlled by individuals who are citizens or permanent resident aliens of the United States), or any combination of these;

(ii) Be a concern which is more than 50% owned by multiple venture capital operating companies, hedge funds, private equity firms, or any combination of these (for agencies electing to use the authority in 15 U.S.C. 638(dd)(1)); or

(iii) Be a joint venture in which each entity to the joint venture must meet the requirements set forth in paragraph (a)(1)(i) or (a)(1)(ii) of this section. A joint venture that includes one or more concerns that meet the requirements of paragraph (a)(1)(ii) of this section must comply with § 121.705(b) concerning registration and proposal requirements.

(2) No single venture capital operating company, hedge fund, or private equity firm may own more than 50% of the concern.

(3) If an Employee Stock Ownership Plan owns all or part of the concern, each stock trustee and plan member is considered an owner.

(4) If a trust owns all or part of the concern, each trustee and trust beneficiary is considered an owner.

For a complete definition of a concern that meets the requirements set forth in 13 C.F.R. §121.702 is available at <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=ed6f63f5ac608f6a2a4eca3c17eda4a1&n=13y1.0.1.1.17&r=PART&ty=HTML#13:1.0.1.1.17.1.273.46>.

9.35 Small and Mid-Size Farms

Small Farms are defined as farms or ranches with less than \$250,000 in annual agricultural sales. Mid-Size Farms are defined as farms or ranches with less than \$500,000 in annual agricultural sales.

9.36 Socially and Economically Disadvantaged

See 13 CFR part 124, Subpart B (<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=1&SID=5b38876de036171b35fa9d45ddb515d1&ty=HTML&h=L&n=13y1.0.1.1.19&r=PART#13:1.0.1.1.19.2>).

Note: The certification of socially and economically disadvantaged small business is for statistical purposes only.

9.37 Subcontract

Any agreement, other than one involving an employer-employee relationship, entered into by an awardee of a funding agreement calling for supplies or services for the performance of the original funding agreement.

9.38 United States

The 50 states, the territories and possessions of the Federal Government; the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; the District of Columbia; the Republic of the Marshall Islands; the Federated States of Micronesia; and the Republic of Palau.

9.39 Women-owned Small Business Concern (WOSB)

An SBC that is at least 51% owned by one or more women, or in the case of any publicly owned business, at least 51% of the stock is owned by women, and women control the management and daily business operations.

Note: Certification of women-owned small business is for statistical purposes only.