

# **National Awards Program for Excellence in College and University Teaching in the Food and Agricultural Sciences**

## **Nomination Guidelines (Revised February 2020)**

**Note: New, Electronic Nomination Submission Guidelines described in Section IV, below.**

Sponsored by:

U.S. Department of Agriculture,  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture,  
Division of Community and Education

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### **Section I. General Introduction and Purpose**

To address the national priority of providing sufficient quality and quantity of graduates entering the food and agricultural sciences workforce, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), will offer—subject to the availability of funds—a National Awards Program for Excellence in College and University Teaching in the Food and Agricultural Sciences (hereafter referred to in this document as the "Awards Program").

The Awards Program is offered annually to honor excellence in teaching by recognizing faculty from a college or university (as defined below) who both practice and promote effective, innovative teaching. Recipients must exhibit sustained, meritorious and exceptional teaching at the postsecondary level within the food and agricultural sciences. The Awards Program focuses national attention on the role of teaching; fundamental to recruiting and retaining the scientific and professional expertise essential to the future growth and progress of our nation's food and agricultural system.

### **Authority**

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (Public Law No.95-113; 7 U.S.C. 3152), as amended, designates USDA as the lead federal agency for teaching, extension, and research programs in the food and agricultural sciences. Section 1417(i)(1) of this law further authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a National Food and Agricultural Sciences Teaching Awards Program.

### **Definitions**

For purposes of administering the Awards Program, the following definitions will apply:

Award Categories—Annually, under the National Awards for Excellence in College and University Teaching in the Food and Agricultural Sciences Program, awards will be made in the following three categories:

### *Category 1*

**National:** A recipient selected from the pool of potential Regional award recipients, from any of the four regions, and deemed by the review panel to exhibit sustained, meritorious and exceptional teaching, and who has more than seven years of experience in higher education teaching as defined in this section. While a sustained pattern of exceptional activity is expected, this award does not recognize teaching longevity so much as it recognizes the quality of recent achievements involving teaching philosophy, methodology, and self-assessment aimed at improvement. National recipients are also expected to demonstrate these attributes broadly within the academic community outside of the nominee’s home institution.

**Regional:** A teacher selected from any of the four regions, deemed by the review panel to exhibit sustained and meritorious teaching, and who has more than seven years’ experience in higher education teaching, as defined in this section. While a sustained pattern of meritorious activity is expected, this award does not recognize teaching longevity so much as it recognizes the quality of recent achievements involving teaching philosophy, methodology, and self-assessment aimed at improvement.

### *Category 2*

**Early Career Teacher:** A teacher selected from any of the four regions, who has demonstrated a commitment to a career in teaching and is deemed by the review panel to exhibit meritorious teaching, but who has no more than seven years of experience in higher education teaching, as defined in this section. The “no more than seven years of experience” refers to time in a full-time faculty position and does not include teaching experience as a Teaching Assistant or Adjunct.

### *Category 3*

**Teaching and Student Engagement** – A teacher selected from any of the four regions who has more than seven years of experience in higher education teaching, as defined by this section, and is deemed by the review panel to exhibit meritorious teaching and significant levels of student engagement in formal, non-formal and outreach settings. This award is intended for individuals who have a very high teaching appointment.

College or university: An educational institution located within any of the four Regions that: (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate, (2) is legally authorized within such state to provide a program of education beyond secondary education, (3) provides an educational program for which a bachelor's degree or any other higher degree is awarded, (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution, and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.

Food and agricultural sciences: Denotes teaching activities concerned with the production, processing, marketing, distribution, conservation, consumption, research, and development of food and agriculturally related products and services, inclusive of academic programs in agriculture, natural resources, forestry, veterinary medicine, human sciences / family and consumer sciences, and other, closely allied fields.

Teaching: Denotes activities to promote student learning of the food and agricultural sciences. Includes various aspects of instruction and student support, such as: formal classroom activities; instruction via innovative delivery systems; student internships and study tours; course and instructional materials development; student advising and counseling; and scholarship related to teaching, including preparation of textbooks, instructional software programs, videos, and other publications of an instructional nature.

Teacher: A faculty member at a college or university who holds a full-time appointment which reflects sustained and continuing responsibility for undergraduate and/or graduate teaching as determined by the college or university.

Course: Instruction, both classroom and online, offered for academic credit and included in the official course catalog of a college or university, and for which assessments are conducted to evaluate student learning.

Regions: The four regions of the United States, as defined for the purposes of this program are as follows:

**Northeast** (CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, WV, DC);

**North Central** (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI);

**Southern** (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, PR, USVI);

**Western** (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY, and any Insular Area Institution designated as a college or university (i.e., offering a baccalaureate degree) within: Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.)

## **Section II. Program Description**

### **Funding**

Section 1417(i)(2) states the Secretary of Agriculture may use funds appropriated for the conduct of any agricultural research, extension, or teaching program for the purpose of conducting the Awards Program. USDA, through NIFA, will support management of the Awards Program (solicitation and evaluation of nominations), monetary awards, travel for two National and two Teaching Student Engagement winners to participate in an awards ceremony, and preparation of certificates of merit. Institutions employing the Regional and Early Career Teacher award recipients will be expected to provide expense support for their travel to the national awards ceremony.

## **Eligibility**

Teacher nominees must be employed by a college or university that: (1) confers a baccalaureate or higher degree in at least one area of the food and agricultural sciences for which the teacher is nominated, (2) has demonstrated a commitment to the food and agricultural sciences, and (3) attributes a high priority to its education mission.

A teacher nominee must hold a full-time appointment as an active faculty member as of the nominee submission due date and have responsibility for higher education teaching in an area of the food and agricultural sciences.

Individuals who do not receive an award in a given year are eligible for re-nomination. However, a new nomination package must be submitted as nominations are not retained for reconsideration.

National Award recipients are not eligible for re-nomination for the Regional or National Award. Regional Award recipients may be re-nominated to receive the National Award. Such re-nomination may occur no sooner than three years following receipt of the Regional Award. Regional or National Award recipients may be nominated for the Teaching and Student Engagement Award no sooner than seven years following receipt of the Regional or National Award. Early Career Teacher Award recipients may be nominated to receive the Regional or National Award. Such re-nomination may occur no sooner than three years following receipt of the Early Career Teacher Award. Teaching and Student Engagement recipients may apply for a Regional or National Award no sooner than seven years following receipt of the Teaching and Student Engagement Award.

Each college is limited to submitting one nominee in each category per year. Universities having more than one college that cover the agriculture, natural resources, forestry, veterinary medicine, human sciences / family and consumer sciences, and other, closely allied fields are allowed one nominee per category per college per year.

## **National, Regional, Early Career, Teaching and Student Engagement Awards**

This Awards Program will recognize outstanding teachers at the National, Regional, Early Career Teacher, and Teaching and Student Engagement levels. A maximum of two \$5,000 National, two \$5,000 Teaching and Student Engagement, six \$2,000 Regional, and two \$2,000 Early Career Teacher awards will be made annually. These monetary awards will be disbursed to the recipient's college or university for the purpose of strengthening instructional programs in the food and agricultural sciences. Teachers honored through this competition will be asked to designate the unit(s) and institution(s) to receive their awards as well as the purpose for which such funds will be used.

A minimum of one Regional recipient will be selected from each of the four regions, with the balance of the six to be at-large Regional awards. Early Career Teacher recipients may be from any region. The review panel reserves the right to make less than the maximum number of awards in each of the three Award Categories due to insufficient meritorious nominations.

## Awards Program Schedule

The annual schedule for the Awards Program will be as follows:

Step in Process	Timeline
Request for Nominations	2+ months prior to deadline
Electronic Nomination Submission Deadline	5:00 pm Eastern Daylight Time, April 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2020
Merit Evaluation of Nominations	June-July
Notification	After Merit Review
National Awards Ceremony	Fall

\*Award *recipients* and non-recipients will be contacted immediately following Merit Evaluation.

### Section III. Nomination Review and Evaluation Criteria

The *Awards Program* evaluation process includes both USDA internal staff review and an external, merit evaluation by a panel of experts. In any given year, the peer review panel may include a combination of university faculty and administrators, public school teachers or administrators, representatives from professional associations, and personnel from other federal agencies. Reviewers follow strict rules governing conflict of interest.

#### Review Process

Nominees from each of the four regions will be evaluated first in competition with others from within the same region. Teachers deemed most meritorious in each of the four regions will then be placed in competition for the National Awards. Early Career Teacher Award category nominees will be evaluated separately from the Regional Award category nominees, but each group of nominees should use the same Evaluation Criteria and nomination forms. Teaching and Student Engagement nominees will be evaluated separately from the Regional, National, and Early Career Teacher awards, using criteria specified for this award. The review panel reserves the right to make less than the maximum number of awards in each of the three Award Categories due to insufficient meritorious nominations.

#### Evaluation Criteria

Each nominee is required to complete and submit a nomination package as described in Section IV, below.

The primary component of that package is a written response to each of the following six Evaluation Criteria. Responses should be organized by Evaluation Criterion number and include the bold-type criterion wording and submitted as Attachment #1. Responses for Evaluation Criterion # 6, 'Endorsement by an Administrator, and Two Others', may be submitted via signed letters, on letterhead. All such letters are to be included as Attachment #2, described below in Section IV. Award recipients are selected based upon responses in the nomination package that best address the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Weight for National, Regional, and Early Career Teacher Awards
<p><b>1. Teaching Quality Assessment:</b> Briefly document how the nominees’ most recent (3–5 year) teaching assignments, both classroom and online, align with and support the food and agricultural sciences disciplines. Responses must demonstrate how this nominee excels when compared to others within the department, college and university. Refrain from including student comments that lack measurable assessments (i.e., Rather than including the comment “This teacher is awesome!”, instead, document why the teacher is “awesome!”).</p> <p><u>Note.</u> For Regional nominees who have had changes in their teaching appointment, indicate whether, when, and how much a nominee’s teaching assignment increased or decreased.</p>	25%
<p><b>2. Philosophy of Teaching and Teaching Methodology:</b> The degree to which the nominee: (a) articulates a cohesive, creative philosophy which is foundational to her/his teaching, and (b) documents substantive expertise in evidence-based teaching. In other words, what is the nominee’s philosophy of teaching and how do they put it into practice? [Note: Nominees are required to provide a first-person response to this Evaluation Criterion.]</p>	20%
<p><b>3. Service to the Teaching Profession and Professional Growth in Teaching:</b> The degree to which the nominee has either organized or led teaching improvement initiatives, served as teaching mentor to other faculty and graduate students, or otherwise has contributed to the support of excellence in teaching at the K-12, college, departmental, university, regional, and national levels. Consideration will be given to activities related to teaching, advising and curriculum (both classroom and online), such as committee activity, publications (print or electronic), teaching/curriculum enhancement grants received (indicate whether PI or co-PI), presentations, and recognition received. Emphasize only the nominee's most significant activities/publications related to scholarship of teaching and learning, not those related to a professional discipline (for those, see #5, below).</p>	15%
<p><b>4. Self-Improvement Professional Growth and Scholarly Activity:</b> The degree to which the nominee's professional competence is evidenced by continuing intellectual accomplishments and pursuits. What is the nominee doing to improve their knowledge base in their scientific discipline or improve their teaching in that discipline? This may include such items as participation in teaching improvement workshops, service as author or</p>	15%

<p>editor for textbooks or other activities which enhance the nominee’s understanding of the instructional content.</p>	
<p><b>5. Service to Students:</b> The degree to which the nominee has an exemplary record of contributing to student success through such activities as academic and career advising, undergraduate research, mentoring, supervising internships, competitive team activities, career exploration or placement, advising of student associations (on campus, regionally or nationally), graduate committee service, etc.</p>	<p>15%</p>
<p><b>6. Endorsement by Administrator, and two others, who may be Alumni, Current Students, or Colleagues:</b> The degree to which statements substantiate the nominee's excellence in and dedication to the teaching role.</p> <p>Letters should convey special contributions that distinguish the nominee from other teachers, and to the extent possible, provide details not found elsewhere in the nomination packet. Include statements (preferably on signed letterhead) from: (a) the administrator of the college or department. This individual is also the nominator for this faculty member and should discuss how the nominee has made an impact on teaching and learning at the home institution. (b) a former student, current student or colleague and (c) a former student, current student or colleague. Student letters must identify the student's current relationship to the nominee and institution. For example, is the student currently a graduate student in the nominee's department?</p>	<p>10%</p>

## Section IV. Nomination Preparation and Submission

All nominations must be submitted electronically, and arrive no later than 5:00pm, Eastern Standard Time, on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

### Nomination Preparation

Submit only the materials requested. All submitted documents should use Times New Roman 12 point (or equivalent) font, have 1 inch margins, and be single spaced. **Documents not adhering to this format will not be accepted for review.**

Limit Regional, National, and Teaching and Student Engagement submissions to only superior educators who excel in each of the six published Evaluation Criteria, and who exhibit sustained, consistent and long-term commitment to achieving the highest quality of teaching excellence.

Early Career Teacher-category nominees should demonstrate a commensurate level of commitment based upon their teaching tenure.

Determine institutional and teacher/nominee eligibility from Section I Definitions, and/or Section II Eligibility criteria, above. **Non-compliant nominations will not be accepted for review.**

### Nomination Submission

Paper copies of nominations, nominations submitted via fax, or submissions received after the posted deadline date and time **will not be accepted for review.**

**An eligible nomination must include the NIFA-supplied Information Cover Page, Personal Data Page, Evaluation Page, the answers to Criteria 1-5, and the three endorsement letters as described below, all submitted in PDF format as a single pdf, sent in one email message to arrive by 5:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time, on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The PDF document should be named using the first initial and full last name of the nominee. For example, the PDF name for Dr. Jane Smith would be JSmith.**

**Submit each nomination to: TeachAward@nifa.usda.gov**

A submitted nomination must contain the following items in a single pdf:

- **NIFA-supplied Information Cover Page (Page 1 of the Nomination Packet)**
- **Personal Data Page (page 2 of the Nomination Packet)**
- **Teaching Evaluations (page 3-4)**
- **Responses to Evaluation Criteria #1-5 (pages 5-9 of the Nomination Packet)**
- **Endorsement and nomination letter from an Administrator (pages 10-11 of the Nomination Packet)**
- **Endorsement letters from another source (alumnus, student, or colleague) (pages 11-12 of the Nomination Packet)**

## Nomination Acknowledgment

NIFA will attempt to acknowledge all email nominations received within two business days of receipt (excluding weekends and any Federal holiday). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the nominator to submit a nomination well ahead of the deadline to ensure it has been received in time for review. This NIFA acknowledgment of receipt of a nomination does not constitute a review of all attachments to ensure accuracy and completeness for panel evaluation. Therefore, applicants will not have the opportunity to resubmit multiple nominations for the same individual. NIFA will submit for panel review only the first nomination received from an individual.

## Helpful Hints—Nomination Package Submission

### Application Submission Tips:

- Information Cover Page – provide physical campus address (for courier delivery); **do not list P.O. Box Address**
- Personal Data Page – Under “2. Professional Experience,” follow the date format (e.g. 01/05/1998 – 05/23/2009, 08/12/2009 – Present)
- Evaluation Criteria – Each Criteria need not take a full page.
- **Maximum Total Nomination Pages = 12:**
  - Information Cover Page, Personal Data Page, Teaching Evaluation Page (2 pages max), Evaluation Criteria (5 pages max.);
  - Letters of Support (4 pages max).

### Evaluation Criteria Tips:

- Evaluation Criterion #1: Reviewers want to know how the nominee’s teaching accomplishments compare to others providing similar instruction. Include numerical data when available but concentrate on how the nominee excels in comparison to others, both within the academic unit and especially across the greater college or university.
- Evaluation Criterion #2: Reviewers are interested in the nominee’s teaching philosophy (beliefs or understandings) that underlie the teaching methodology. An explanation of how this has emerged over time is useful. Peer panel members especially like to read how the nominee designs special teaching practices to address specific topics, material, or learning styles of students. Focus on the “how” and “why,” and not just on the “what.” Further, reviewers would like to know the impact of those methodologies on student learning. Specific examples are encouraged.
- Evaluation Criterion #3: Tell the review panel the nominee’s accomplishments in helping others to improve their teaching. Did they teach a course, lead a teaching academy, etc.? Every nominee is already recognized as a good classroom teacher and mentor. What demonstrates

how this nominee is different or special? For example, most past National recipients are also well known off campus for regional, national, or international contributions. How has the nominee impacted others to become better teachers or advisers? This section may also include service to their professional and/or scientific societies.

- Evaluation Criterion #4: What has the nominee done to ensure that he/she is up-to-date concerning both pedagogy and disciplinary content. What have they done to advance their personal understanding of teaching and learning? Did they take a course or sabbatical, or participate in a teaching academy? Have they conducted studies of teaching methods? It should be clear that the nominee works to maintain him/herself as a student of teaching. For the National, Regional and Early Career Teacher nominees, this section may also include information about their disciplinary research program because top-ranked nominees are also frequently leaders within their discipline.
- Evaluation Criterion #5: Advising, participating in student organizations, or mentoring are all examples of activities benefiting students. What has the nominee done to serve students in their capacity as a teacher? Are there notable achievements, recognitions or initiatives that they have developed or achieved? Peer panel members like to see activities other than advising undergraduate and/or graduate students. What are specific, formal or informal activities that demonstrate a unique student-focus and engagement in a student's overall academic and/or personal development? What has been the impact of those activities?
- Evaluation Criterion #6: The nominating letter should come from the unit's person in charge of academic instruction. Letters should refrain from repeating information already included in the nomination. What special contributions distinguish the nominee from other teachers? Specific examples of unique contributions or impacts on students are helpful to the peer panel members.

### **View the Historical List of Award Program Recipients**

Questions on this National Awards Program for Excellence in College and University Teaching in the Food and Agricultural Sciences should be directed to:

National Awards Program for Excellence in College and University Teaching

Telephone: (202) 720-2082

Email: [TeachAward@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:TeachAward@nifa.usda.gov)