

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Fiscal Year 2018 Sustainable Agricultural Systems

Transcript for Information Session #1 on May 10, 2018

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Webinar Recording

A recording of the webinar was made, but due to technological issues it starts a few minutes into the presentation. However, the transcript below contains both the slide material and what was said during the entire webinar. After clicking the link, you will need to enter in the password (case sensitive) to access the recording.

- [AFRI SAS Informational Webinar Recording](#)
- Webinar password: Sustainable2018

Slide 1: Goal of the Webinar

- Answer questions
- Provide clarification

The answer to most questions is in the RFA. Please, please read the RFA.

Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome to the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative 2018 Sustainable Agricultural Systems informational webinar. The goal for today is to answer your questions and really to provide clarification. The answer to most of your questions is going to be found in the RFA so please take the time to read the RFA.

Slide 2: Agenda

- Welcome
- Overview of AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems (SAS)
- Questions & Answers

Speaker: Our agenda is also very simple. The welcome, that we are actually executing right now, followed by a brief overview of the sustainable agricultural systems program and then leading to questions and answers.

Slide 3: Introductions

NIFA participants in today's webinar:

- Olivia Kwong
- Rachel Melnick
- Mervalin Morant
- Mathieu (Mat) Ngouajio
- Carlos Ortiz
- Steve Smith
- Suresh Sureshwaran

Speaker: Joining me today here in the room is Olivia Kwong, Program Specialist from the Division of Animal Systems; Rachel Melnick, the National Program Leader of Global Climate Change; Mervalin Morant, National Program Leader from the Division of Food Safety; Mathieu Ngouajio, National Program Leader Division of Plant Systems – Production; Carlos Ortiz, Program Specialist from the Division of Community and Education; myself, Steve Smith from Division of Animal Systems; Suresh Sureshwaran, Division Director of Community and Education.; and Robin Shoemaker, from the Division of Agricultural Systems will be joining us shortly, but is not currently in the room.

Slide 4: Sustainable Agricultural Systems

- New RFA for 2018 in the Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)
Budget FY2018: \$80 million
Award size: Up to \$10 million
Number of awards: ~8 awards
- Progression of the Challenge Areas to new multi-disciplinary systems-level work
No Challenge Area RFAs in 2018

Speaker: The Sustainable Agricultural Systems program is a part of our Agriculture and Food Research Initiative which is new for 2018. It has been given a budget of \$80 million offering award sizes up to \$10 million. Which if you do the simple math, it suggests that we are going to be making about eight awards. This is a progression of the challenging areas to a new multi-disciplinary system-level approach, there are not going to be any challenge area RFAs in 2018.

Slide 5: Projects

SAS is soliciting creative, visionary project applications that:

- use transdisciplinary approaches
- integrate research, education, and extension activities
- promote convergence of science and technology
- solve present and future food and agricultural production system challenges
- result in societal benefits

Speaker: SAS is soliciting creative and visionary project applications that integrate research, education, and extension activities, to promote the convergence of science and technology to solve present and future food and agricultural production system challenges, and result in societal benefits.

Slide 6: 25-Year Goals

“Catalyze transformational changes throughout US agricultural systems”

Applications must address one or more 25-year goals:

- Increase agricultural total factor productivity growth from the current 1.5 percent to 2 percent per year and agricultural production by 2 percent annually in all U.S. regions, providing models for similar agro-ecological niches
- Improve water and nitrogen use efficiency by 50 percent
- Reduce crop losses due to environmental stress and pests, or diseases by 20 percent
- Produce 50 billion gallons of biofuels and 50 billion pounds of biobased chemicals and bioproducts
- Reduce food-borne illnesses down to 8.5 cases per 100,000

Speaker: We want to catalyze transformational change throughout the U.S. agricultural systems. And to do that, we want our applicants to address one or more of the 25 year goals. These are 25 year goals: to increase agricultural total factor productivity growth from the current 1.5% to 2% per year and agricultural production by 2% annually in all U.S. regions providing models for similar agro-ecological niches; to improve water and nitrogen use efficiency by 50%; to reduce crop losses due to environmental stress and pests or diseases by 20%; to produce 50 billion gallons of biofuels and 50

billion pounds of bio-based chemicals and bioproducts; to reduce foodborne illnesses down to 8.5 cases per hundred thousand.

Slide 7: Systems of Interest

Agricultural systems are inclusive of value chains from production to consumption for food or other products from farms, ranches, and managed forests across the rural-urban continuum from conventional open-fields to controlled production in built environments (RFA pg. 8).

- One grant of \$10 M and 5 years will not likely achieve 25 year goals.
- Each application should define the system under investigation.

Speaker: We have stated many times we want to do this with the systems level approach, and by that we mean agricultural systems that are inclusive of the value chain of production to consumption for food or other products from farms, ranches, and managed forests across the rural urban continuum from conventional open fields to controlled production in built environments. Now, that is extremely broad. So, I think it is understood that one grant of \$10 million, although it is a large award, \$10 million in five years will not likely achieve a 25-year goal. So, what we really want our applicants to do is to define the system that is under investigation, and then to identify the pieces of that system that their team intends to address.

Slide 8: Grant Types

- Only Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP) and Strengthening CAP Grants
- No Conference, etc...

Eligibility for Strengthening CAPs

- Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR States listed in RFA pg. 10)
- **Minority-serving institutions**
>50% single or combination of minority groups
(not among the most successful)
- **Small or mid-sized institutions**
17,500 enrollment or less
(not among the most successful)

Speaker: Grant types. We are only entertaining only Coordinated Agricultural Projects and Strengthening CAP grants. And the only difference between those two is eligibility. To be Strengthening eligible, you have to reside in an EPSCoR state as listed on page 10 of the RFA or be an applicant from a Minority-Serving Institution or small to mid-size institution, but not among our most successful institutions. So, by Minority-serving, our definition is the enrollment is including more than 50% minorities. And for small or midsized institutions, you have to have enrollment of 17,500 or less. So, again, the grant types are only CAP so there are no conference awards, no seed, sabbatical or equipment grants, just CAP grants.

Slide 9: Project Type

- Only Integrated Projects (Research, Extension, and Education)
- All three functions are required

- No more than two-thirds of a project's budget allocated to any single activity (RFA p.10)

Speaker: Project types, again, only one. These are to be integrated projects. For this Sustainable Agriculture Systems program, they must include all three functions, research, extension, and education. Now I know some of our other RFA have offered a definition of integration as research with extension, or research plus education or all three. But in this case, we will only entertain applications that draw in all three functions. And no more than two thirds of the projects budget may be allocated to any single activity.

Slide 10: Education

What is Considered Education for SAS

- Education activity or teaching activity means formal classroom instruction, laboratory instruction, and practicum experience in the food and agricultural sciences and other related matters such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies.
- Routine use of graduate and postdoctoral students as personnel on research projects is not considered education for the purposes of this program. Only active engagement of students in the scholarship of research/extension projects is considered education.

Speaker: Okay, so they are going to be integrated, we need some definitions of what is considered education? Well education activity or teaching activity means formal classroom instruction, laboratory instruction, and practicum experience in the food and agricultural sciences and other related matters such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovate teaching methodologies. However, routine use of graduate and postdoctoral students as personnel on research projects is not considered educational for the purposes of this program. Only active engagement of students in the scholarship of research or extension projects is considered education.

Slide 11: Extension

What is Considered Extension for SAS

- Extension activity means an act or process that delivers science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions.
- A high degree of engagement among researchers, extension or other engagement personnel, and relevant stakeholders - from inception through implementation of the project

Speaker: Okay, what about extension? Well extension activity means an act or process that delivers science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions. But, keep in mind that we expect a very high degree of engagement among researchers, extension or other engagement personnel and relevant stakeholders from the inception through the implementation of the project. Extension is not an add-on to the back and of a project. It needs to be woven completely and intimately throughout the project.

Slide 12: Type of Applications

- Only New Applications are accepted (RFA pg. 12)

Speaker: We are only accepting new applications. Now, I have received some questions from applicants to previous Challenge Areas; those applications could serve as an outstanding foundation upon which to build an application for this program. However, if you consider the scope of the previous Challenge Areas versus the scope of the SAS program, they can only serve as the foundation so only new applications are being accepted.

Slide 13: Other Requirements

- Management Plan (RFA pg. 9)
- Data Management Plan (RFA pg. 9)
- Logic Model (RFA pg. 10)

Speaker: Other requirements. These projects must include: a management plan discussing how the project will be executed; a data management plan describing how the data will be released into the public domain, as well as a logic model.

Slide 14: Eligibility

(RFA pg. 15)

Eligible applicants for Integrated Projects include:

- Colleges and Universities
- 1994 Land-Grant Institutions
- Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities

Speaker: Because these are integrated projects, eligibility is limited to college and universities, 1994 Land-Grant institutions, and Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities.

Slide 15: Matching

(RFA pgs. 16-17)

- \$-for-\$ match from non-Federal sources if the work is commodity-specific and not national in scope
- NIFA may waive the matching if:
 - The results of the project are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally, or
 - The project involves a minor commodity

Speaker: There is also a matching requirement. Dollar for dollar match for non-federal sources if the work is commodity specific and not-national in scope. Now, NIFA may waive the match if you request it and if the results of the project are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally. Or, the project involves a minor commodity.

Slide 16: Indirect Costs

(RFA pg. 22)

30% of the total Federal funds awarded or your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate, whichever is less

Speaker: Indirect costs are defined as 30% of the total federal funds awarded or your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate, whichever is less.

Slide 17: International Partnerships

(RFA pg. 6)

- Applications may include collaborations with international partners, but may only be submitted by eligible U.S. institutions.
- Such applications must clearly demonstrate **benefits to the United States.**

Speaker: International partnerships are encouraged. Keep in mind, the applications may include collaborations with international partners, but the application itself may only be submitted by an eligible U.S. institution. Also keep in mind that these applications must clearly demonstrate the benefit of those collaborations to the United States.

Slide 18: AFRI-SAS Timeline

- LOI deadline: June 27 (+64 days after RFA posted)
- LOI response: July 11
- Application deadline: October 10 (+105 days after LOI deadline)

Speaker: A quick look at our timeline, we will have another webinar very similar to this one on May 23 for anyone who missed this one or just wants to hear it again. Our Letter of Intent deadline is June 27. You will receive an encourage or discourage letter of intent response by July 11 with full applications being due by October 10.

Slide 19: AFRI-SAS Application Timeline

- Submit LOIs to: afri-sas@nifa.usda.gov
- Submit full proposals to Grants.gov
- Your application will be rejected or not reviewed if:
 - You are not an eligible applicant
 - You did not submit an LOI
 - You are missing required items or they are in the wrong format
 - You used the wrong application package
 - You submit even one second after the deadline

Speaker: To facilitate that, we want you to submit your letters of intent to a SAS mailbox set up specifically for that purpose. That address is AFRI-SAS@nifa.usda.gov. As always, submit your full proposal through grants.gov and keep in mind, your application will be rejected or not reviewed if you are not an eligible applicant, you did not submit a Letter of Intent, you are missing required items or they are in the wrong format, if you used the wrong application package, or if you submit even one second after the deadline.

Slide 20: AFRI-SAS Application Timeline (continued)

- Don't wait until the last minute to submit
- It is not easy to troubleshoot error messages from Grants.gov
- The critical time stamp on your application is when it actually goes through without an error, not when the submission process is initiated

Speaker: So with that in mind, please do not wait until the last minute to submit. It is not uncommon to have small minor errors in your application and most of those will trigger an email message back to you from Grants.gov saying an error exists in your application. You need to have enough time to go back in and look at the application, but this email really will not tell you what the error is. Most commonly, you have to go back and look at your application and see where the error resides and resolve it. The troubleshooting is not always entirely simple, and the critical message here though is that just because you initiated the submission process on time, it does not mean that you have met the submission deadline requirement unless it is the final version and it's on time. The critical timestamp is when it actually goes through without an error, not when the submission process is initiated.

Slide 21: Additional Resources

- [SAS Web Page](#)
- [SAS FAQs](#)
- [SAS Glossary](#)

Speaker: You do have some additional resources available to you, the SAS webpage. These are all on our website by the way. We have frequently asked questions and a sustainable ag systems glossary for you as well. All on our website.

Slide 22: Summary

AFRI-SAS Contact Info: afri-sas@nifa.usda.gov or (202) 401-6602

Read the RFA. Read the RFA. Read the RFA. Read the RFA. Finally, read the RFA.

Speaker: So, in summary, please read the RFA. Most of your answers will be found there, but if you find that you need additional information, feel free to contact us either through the AFRI SAS mailbox that I mentioned to you earlier, AFRI-SAS@nifa.usda.gov, or you can call us at (202) 401-6602.

Questions and Answers

So with that, are there questions? Understanding that we have almost 250 people online, it may be a little difficult for the questions to go through, so we will be using the chat box. If we can proceed in an orderly fashion by phone with questions we would be happy to entertain them that way otherwise, please send your questions to the chat box and we will address them as they arrive. Hello everyone, we ask that if you're not asking a question, to please mute your phone.

Question: So, one of the questions that we have received reads: does agricultural systems include natural resources like forest ecosystems or is it just for food systems?

Answer: So, this is Rachel Melnick, I work in our Institute that covers natural systems, national resources. It could address forest systems, however your application must address one of the 25-year goals that are listed in the RFA. So if you're going to work with forest systems, you have to make sure that the application addresses one of the goals listed in the request for applications.

Question: Would you define commodities more?

Answer: Yes, the question was whether we can define commodities more? This is Mat Ngouajio. This RFA is not commodity specific, we are not targeting any specific system or crop or any commodity. It's up to the applicant to define what system they would be working with, what commodity they will be working with, and define the boundaries of that system. So it is wide open, not specific.

Question: Can we share funds with international collaborators?

Answer: Yes, that was pointed out in one of the slides, international collaborations are encouraged. The international partner of course would not be eligible to submit themselves, but they can be a collaborator on a project submitted by an eligible U.S. entity. I did stress that the benefit of that collaboration, they need to document benefit the U.S., so can be done by the international collaborator and what it would bring to the U.S. needs to be stressed, but absolutely, money can flow that way for the subaward, and absolutely, you can absolutely collaborate.

Question: One of the goals is 50 billion gallons of biofuel and 50 billion pounds of biochemical and bioproducts, does the proposal have to address both biofuels and chemicals or can you only address one of the two?

Answer: So, that is a 25-year goal of the program. The proposal can address biofuels or bio-based products in singularly or together, that's really at the discretion of the applicant.

Question: By addressing a goal, is a project required to demonstrate how its completion will lead to satisfaction of a goal or is it sufficient to simply show how you will contribute to the goal?

Answer: That's a very good question, and repeating the question, paraphrasing it, do you have to fully complete a goal of one of the 25-year goals or merely to show progress towards those goals. And it's almost inherent but I want to specifically state it again, that five years and \$10 million, even though that is a very nice award; it is not our expectation that you will fully accomplish a 25-year goal within the scope of that five years and the \$10 million. What I do expect though is that you will define the system that you are working on, identify where you think the pinch points are, what is limiting you from achieving those goals, and addressing some of those challenges. So potentially not all of those challenges in order to move us closer to achieving our 25-year goal.

Question: Can a regional group be competitive for this program or does the proposal need to be national in nature?

Answer: I honestly think yes. It all depends on, a lot of it depends on what is the nature of the problem that you are addressing. And if it's more regional in nature, absolutely, or if you can make meaningful progress toward a 25-year goal staying within your region. I think that's entirely acceptable as well, and we are deliberately broad in this and we are not limiting it to strictly national or international groups, but we want the best science to float to the top to move us towards accomplishing our goal and if you can do that regionally, I wouldn't prohibit you from that.

Question: And we did get another question that relates to this one and the question is how would you define geographical region?

Answer: And I think I'm going to go back to Mat's answer in a little bit of a different context and say we aren't. Those will vary by commodity, those will vary by problem, and the problems that might exist in one region, like Southeast, might be very different than those in the Pacific Northwest. And it might be that those are both valuable commodities, that are more regional in nature, and I'm not going to even attempt to put geographic boundaries around those problems because I think our applicants are more cognizant of the boundaries of the challenges that they are facing than we are.

Question: Regarding LOIs, does it provide information as to how long or detailed should the LOI be. Can you elaborate on the requirements?

Answer: The LOI requirements are actually stated in two different places in the RFA I think one is on page 10, and the other is on page 19. The two may actually have an appearance of being slightly different, but they are very compatible, and I think in fact we are going to in the very next few days, publish clarification on how the two will dovetail but very specific guidelines are given where what is supposed to be on the first page and what's to be on the second page and the order of presentation of the information so please look it up or there. One is actual instructions, written instructions and the other links to further instructions that are AFRI codified instructions that are very compatible. In addition to that, page 19 of the RFA is where you have the instructions for the LOI, and you have a link that would bring you to a webpage with even more details. Your LOI is going to be three pages. We have that laid out in the document, very clear instructions.

Question: Would your proposal include a site visit?

Answer: The question is whether the full proposal will include a reverse site visit? And the answer is no at this moment.

Question: Does the external evaluator have to be external from all institutions involved or just be external from the lead principal in the investigator?

Answer: So, for the external evaluator, it would be at the discretion of the team. We have seen people pull in an evaluator from one of our regional IPM centers that is outside of the group or potentially from a University of one of the subawards that does not have an affiliation with the project. That's really the key, you do not want to have a team member on the project as an evaluator as well.

Question: I understand the submission is limited to the universities and colleges, can they partner with a private sector entity?

Answer: Yes, they can partner with the private sector entity, and that person can be a co-PI and receive a subaward.

Question: How does NIFA define transdisciplinary?

Answer: So our definition of transdisciplinary is basically a merging or an evolved interdisciplinary state, where you have a variety of disciplines that essentially merge to create a nth discipline if you will. So, it's just not a collection of different disciplines working together, it is where they actually have developed a scientific method or research approach that actually kind of merges the disciplines into one.

Some of you with questions, about definitions of particular terms, if you see on the screen, there is a link for the [SAS glossary](#), I advise that you take a look there for some definitions. There is also a link on that page to a longer list of NIFA definitions as well that might be helpful, and as advised before, definitely read the RFA, a number of things are discussed in the text itself.

Question: Will there be a single panel or multiple panels for the different teams?

Answer: The question is, whether there will be only one panel or multiple panels for the applications that we will have received? Right now, we do not expect to have multiple panels, but it will depend on what we receive, and we will make the final determination at that time.

Question: I also heard on the phone, a question of whether the strengthening-eligible applicants would receive any sort of preferential treatment

Answer: And in one respect, the answer is in a subtle respect, the answer is no, and all of the applications will be reviewed for scientific merit. However, we do have a strengthening requirement, within the AFRI programs that allocate a little over 11% of our funds that are required to go to strengthening-eligible institutions, and that will be honored in this program. So, in effect for strengthening-eligible entities, they do get a second bite at the apple so to speak.

Question: We have another question online asking, stakeholders must be part of project development, is that following other models at NIFA like SARE? And how involved must stakeholders be in developing the proposal?

Answer: Having stakeholder involvement upfront is a good way to be really competitive in terms of being evaluated. There is no strict place where it says you must have that, but from past experience, projects with stakeholder involvement upfront have done very well, in terms of the competition.

Question: Can you discuss more of the matching funds?

Question: So the next question, we will get back to the one on the phone, is to qualify for the center of excellence, applicants must provide financial or in-kind support, that supersedes the criterion, what level of match for SAS COE do you require?

Answer: So, if you look at the centers of excellence criteria, it refers to applicable matching requirements. So for the Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA, you can find that information in the RFA in Part III C, at the bottom of page 16 and it specifies, like Steve went over in the presentation, that applied research or integrated projects with an applied research component, is commodity specific and not of national scope, the grant recipient is required to match, so you just follow the same matching requirements, as mentioned.

Yes, I would say that we have covered the matching requirement in the presentation, but specifically with regard to the centers of excellence, there is no special requirement for matching them. But for the application itself, if it is commodity specific and not of national importance, then we require dollar for dollar match. And, as we covered during the presentation, NIFA may waive that matching requirement under the condition that was explained in the presentation. So for the center of excellence, there is no requirement for matching. That information is on page two of the RFA. You will have a link to our webpage on the centers of excellence requirements.

Question: We have another question from online. How much is NIFA looking from this program, the development of basic understanding of sustainable agricultural systems versus practical on the ground solutions?

Answer: This is Mat. For a program of this size, we do not want to duplicate our Foundational RFA here. So we have an RFA that is specifically targeting you know, creating new knowledge, foundational knowledge. Here we are looking more at applied things that would change the lives of people. That's why we are asking for all three functions, research, education, and extension, to be fully integrated here.

Question: Is forestry considered a commodity?

Answer: So there is forestry as a whole, forestry for pulp, there is softwood, hardwood, so looking at it just as forestry, in terms of matching, I would not worry about that as a commodity requirement. But if

you are going to propose a forestry based project, you do have to make sure that it aligns with one of the 25-year goals.

Question: Can individuals be a PI, co-PI or senior personnel on more than one application?

Yes.

Question: Is there any limit to the number proposals that can be submitted per institution?

Answer: No. There is not a limit per se, but I will offer my personal bias, and that is, it takes so much effort to craft a competitive application, and particularly for a CAP grant that I will routinely question, subtly discourage folks from doing that, because often times both applications even if they are good can tend to suffer, and so I will question whether that will be in your best interest, but there is nothing to prohibit you from submitting multiple applications. As long as you are submitting applications that are unique, you cannot submit the same application to more than one program, that is prohibited, but you if you have two or more unique proposals that you want to submit to SAS, you certainly may.

Question: We have another online question, does NIFA want is a cutting-edge research that has an element of risk, and if so, how risky should proposals be?

Answer: All right, I will take that, the simple answer is yes, even though it is not a dichotomous choice here. We want you to be exploring methods that are really new, that is why there is the transdisciplinary aspect to it. So there is some risk to doing that, although we don't want to totally blue sky stuff because we want to see something get on the ground. So while there is an element of risk to it, we want to move towards practical applications which is probably a little less risky endeavor, I would say.

Question: We are a collaboration of NGOs and local government agencies with university connections, we are learning capacity and have great interest, how do we get at list a few referrals for sub-grantees?

Answer: So, if you're interested in applying, you would have to have the university apply, but we do not help you to develop a connection with that university, we would ask that you work with the universities that you are potentially already working with to develop an application.

Question: How much technical detail should there be in the proposal. Should we just describe big pictures and ideas?

Answer: The advice I give to applicants about any proposal is that it's got to be compelling and convincing. And, by compelling I mean, a good idea where you identify it as a significant and important problem which you would expect to shed light on, or resolve, and then you need to provide sufficient information to the reviewers that they can see that you actually know what you're talking about, and are going to bring the appropriate tools and approaches to addressing the problem. So, it's an 18 page limit, you have to use that space wisely. But sufficient detail to provide good evidence that you have an approach that you think will be successful.

Please keep in mind that a letter of intent is required, so write your letter of intent before you start writing your application.

Answer: May I jump back to the risk question? Only to toss out, we've got 25-year goals, but those are really ambitious goals. And we talk about wanting transformational change and I don't want to minimize our understanding of that and our acceptance of risk. So, Robbin is absolutely right, that we do want things that are applicable to the field and makes sense that it would move us towards the goal, but if

you've got an idea that you think is truly innovative that would make a very major step forward in achieving the goal, we do not want to discourage that, we want to see it.

Question: Does collaboration with institutions that are eligible for strengthening funds in anyway strengthen the proposal, if the lead institution is not eligible for strengthening grant?

Answer: Strengthening grants are only strengthening grants for the institution applying, the lead institution. Collaborating with those institutions would not give you more chances of getting funded. The strengthening is for the institution that is the lead for that proposal.

We, for other reasons, encourage collaborations between 1862s and the minority-serving institutions and the 1994s. Those might actively strengthen your application but not in the AFRI definition of strengthening. It will make it more compelling and the reviewers might review it more favorably, but you will not get special consideration or set-aside funds to fund those projects.

Question: On the strengthening grants, you specify 50%, minority enrollment for that classification. Is that the same for Hispanic serving institutions?

Answer: It's my understanding that no it is not. The Hispanic serving institution, the bar is lower for them, it's 25% for them. But so what that means, is that not all Hispanic-serving institutions are considered minority-serving institutions. But both could be considered Hispanic-serving institutions.

Question: So for strengthening, are Hispanic serving institutions considered, you didn't mention that earlier?

Answer: In that case, in order to be an HSI, you need to have 25% Hispanic enrollment, some HSIs might not be a minority-serving institution if they only have 25% of minorities. And MSIs are actually categorized as the addition of all the minority groups within the institution; so there will be Hispanics, African-Americans, Native Americans, and so on. These institutions when adding all of these values when it is more than 50%, then it is considered an MSI.

Question: You are saying that there is a strengthening consideration for MSIs, but not HSIs, unless they are also MSIs.

Answer: Unless they are HSACUs, which are Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities. I think the key metric here is more than 50%. If you have more than 50% of any minority or group of minorities within an institution, then you qualify. You have to hit that threshold of 50%.

Question: My institution is 29% Hispanic serving, but we are only about 34% minority.

Answer: Then that does not qualify as an MSI. Unless you have an HSACU certification.

There is actually a link to a flowchart at the very end of RFA. It will help you determine your eligibility for strengthening grants.

Question: The next question is, if we have a program that we feel will require less than 10 million, perhaps only 3 or 4 million, should we still apply?

Answer: The question is should we still apply for less than 10 million, the answer is yes. If you can achieve any of those five goals that we laid out in the RFA, even with one dollar, we will accept it, but the thing is, are you going to be able to do that with only \$1 or \$2 million? Because again, one of the things that we do not want to see here is that this is a new program, and if we have some people who

like to repackage proposals that were sent to the Challenge Areas before, and resubmit here. We think, they can resubmit here, but given the fact that it is a new program with new metrics, we see them, it will be difficult to really do that. Again, we are not going to reject proposals based on the budget. No.

Question: Next question says, the RFA says no more than 60% will be directed towards the grants for fundamental or basic research, and 40% total towards grants for applied to the research, which seems a little different than your recent statement, can you elaborate?

Answer: Those percentages are for the total AFRI program, it is not just this RFA. That includes our Educational and Workforce Development RFA, the Foundational Program RFA, and this RFA. So those are not percentages you need to worry about for your specific project.

Speaker: We have come to the bottom of our list of submitted questions, are there any other questions? If so, would you please submit those.

Question: There is one, does aquaculture, page 5, include ocean cultivation of kelp, that is kelp farming with research, education, and extension.

Answer: Again, aquaculture qualifies for this program. However, we still want the applicant to look not just at aquaculture, but look at our five broad goals for 25-years and try to make sure that the proposal that you submit, even though it is focusing on aquaculture, just make sure it addresses some of those 25-year goals. But for sure, aquaculture would qualify.

Question: Is there a desired or required format for the LOI?

Answer: Yes, please see page 19 of the request for applications, there is actually a link on that page for LOI instructions. When you open that, it describes the desired and required format. I will stress to everyone on the call now, you must submit your Letter of Intent as a PDF file. That is the only acceptable way, and it must be sent to the AFRI SAS inbox, do not send it to any other NPLs.

Are there any other questions?

Question: There is one that says, does applied research also include educational research?

Answer: Yes. It also includes research in the area of extension because extension, as we define it, you can also do research in the area of extension, as you can do research in the area of education.

But, I think it is also important to note that applied research doesn't only mean the student doing the work, as in a grad student performing the research, that really does not qualifies as education per se. The student has to be involved in the actual planning of the research, not just during the fieldwork that is required from the research part. Because that would fall under student labor, right? If you just hire a student to run a lab or to help you on your research plot, that is not education, that is student labor.

Question: Does it have to be multi-state collaborations?

Answer: No. You do not have to have multi-state. Just like you do not have to have international collaboration. It is what works best for your project. We are not specifically looking at multi-state, multi-institutional or anything. But you have to keep in mind at every point, every decision you make, just how competitive will you be, will your application be, amongst the pool that we will get.

Question: Can you elaborate on NIFA's definition for system?

Answer: Sorry, we are trying to get the slide back up, but while we are doing that, according to the glossary that we have published online, there is a definition for a systems approach, and that is: any process of estimating or inferring how local policies, actions, or changes influence the state of the neighboring universe. It is a framework that is based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation.

Question: Another question, 8 times 10 million divided into five major thematic areas, is there a number or limit to the number of grants awarded within a thematic area. For example 4 to food safety, one to each of the others, or vice versa? Or 4 to biofuels and one to others? Or maybe zero to some themes?

Answer: There are no numbers or dollar figures assigned to any of the goals because we are asking and encouraging that you address one or more of the goals. So we are looking for the best projects or applications that come in. Perhaps one, or the other, but there is no specific calculation as to how many awards will be made to any of those goals. No.

Question: Can the research university be in Europe?

Answer: The eligibility for this program is limited to U.S. institutions for the lead institution.

Question: Can USDA scientists submit applications?

Answer: Again, it is an integrated program so the USDA scientist can be a co-PI or a sub-awardee, but you are not able to be the lead institution due to the eligibility requirements of integrated projects.

Actually, they have to be collaborators, because to be even a co-PI, because if the PI is not available then the co-PI should be able to take over the project. And if you are not eligible, you can't even be a co-PI, you can be a collaborator on the project.

Question: What if we a good project idea, but do not have matching funds?

Answer: The matching funds is only if the research or the program that you are proposing is commodity specific and is not of national importance. So if you have a great idea that is not commodity specific that would apply at the national level to other crops, then you do not need to have it matching. So when you start applying, do not worry about this matching fund, just apply and if you can make it, then we can work through that.

We have a five minutes left, do you guys have any other questions?

Question: I'm having trouble finding minor commodities, are fruit and vegetables minor?

Answer: The question is, are fruit and vegetables minor commodities, the answer would be no. It depends on which fruit, which vegetable you are working on. There are for sure specialty crops, but they are not altogether minor commodities, it depends on the ones you are working on. And, again, even if you're working on the minor commodities, but the research can be applied to other minor commodities, then you do not need matching funds.

Question: If a person at the same university, but from a different department compared to the PI, can be considered as an external evaluator?

Answer: The question would be whether that person plays a role in the project outside of the evaluation role. So if they are a team member on the project and off of the external evaluators then no, but if their

role in the project is solely as the external evaluator and they have no other role in the project then they could be eligible.

Question: Is nutrition and food science included in sustainable agriculture or the RFA?

Answer: Yes. This is Mervalin, I was introduced as being from the Division of the Food Safety, I am in the Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition. And so definitely nutrition is included. I'm trying to find a page in the RFA, if you look at goal five it says to reduce foodborne illnesses, and you will see foodborne illnesses, nutrient composition of foods, diet quality, and nutritional security that can greatly impact overall quality of life and human health and well-being. So that's all a part of the nutrition component of our Institute. So definitely, nutrition is included in this RFA and we expect to get a lot of applications from the community.

Question: And the external advisor be a nonprofit organization?

Answer: Yes.

Speaker: Are there any other questions? Hearing none, I thank you very much for your time and participation. I look forward to seeing your applications, thank you.