



Billing Code 3410–10

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Notice of Funds Availability: Inviting Applications for the Quality Samples

Program

SUMMARY: The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) announces it is inviting proposals for the 2018 Quality Samples Program (QSP). The intended effect of this notice is to solicit proposals from eligible applicants for fiscal year 2018 and to set out the criteria for the awarding of funds under the program. The QSP is administered by personnel of the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

DATES: To be considered for funding, applications must be received by 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, August 15, 2017. Any applications received after this time will be considered only if funds remain available.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Applicants needing assistance should contact Curt Alt in the Program Operations Division, Office of Trade Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service *by courier:* Room 6512, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250, or *by phone:* (202) 720–4327, or *by fax:* (202) 720–9361, or *by e-mail:* podadmin@fas.usda.gov. Information is also available on the FAS Web site at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/quality-samples-program-qsp>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

A. Funding Opportunity Description

Announcement Type: New.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.605

Authority: The QSP is authorized under Section 5(f) of the CCC Charter Act, 15 U.S.C. 714c(f).

Purpose: The QSP is designed to encourage the development and expansion of export markets for U.S. agricultural commodities by assisting U.S. entities in providing commodity samples to potential foreign importers to promote a better understanding and appreciation for the high quality of U.S. agricultural commodities.

QSP participants will be responsible for procuring (or arranging for the procurement of) commodity samples, exporting the samples, and providing the on-site technical assistance necessary to facilitate successful use of the samples by importers. Participants that are funded under this announcement may seek reimbursement from CCC for the sample purchase price and for the cost of transporting the samples domestically to the port of export and then to the foreign port or point of entry. Transportation costs from the foreign port or point of entry to the final destination are not eligible for reimbursement. CCC will not reimburse the costs incidental to purchasing and transporting samples, such as: inspection or documentation fees, certificates of any kind, tariffs, etc. Although providing technical assistance is required for all projects, the costs of providing such technical assistance are not reimbursable under the program. A QSP participant will be reimbursed after CCC reviews its reimbursement claim and determines that the claim is complete.

General Scope of QSP Projects: QSP projects encompass the activities undertaken by a QSP participant to provide an appropriate sample of a U.S. agricultural commodity

to a foreign importer, or a group of foreign importers, in a given market. The purpose of these projects is to provide information to the target audience regarding the attributes, characteristics, and proper use of the U.S. commodity. A QSP project addresses a single market/commodity combination.

As a general matter, QSP projects should conform to the following guidelines:

- Projects should benefit the represented U.S. industry and not a specific company or brand;
- Projects should develop a new market for a U.S. product, promote a new U.S. product, or promote a new use for a U.S. product rather than promote the substitution of one established U.S. product for another;
- Commodities provided under a QSP project must be available on a commercial basis and in sufficient supply;
- The QSP project must either subject the commodity sample to further processing or substantial transformation in the importing country, or the sample must be used in technical seminars in the importing country designed to demonstrate the proper preparation or use of the sample in the creation of an end product;
- Samples provided in a QSP project shall not be directly used as part of a retail promotion or supplied directly to consumers. However, the end product (that is, the product resulting from further processing, substantial transformation, or a technical preparation seminar) may be provided to end-use consumers to demonstrate the consumer preference for that end product to importers;

- Samples shall be in quantities less than a typical commercial sale and limited to the amount sufficient to achieve the project goal (*e.g.*, not more than a full commercial mill run in the destination country); and
- Projects should be completed within one year of CCC approval.

QSP projects shall target foreign importers and audiences who:

- Have not previously purchased the U.S. commodity that will be supplied under QSP;
- Are unfamiliar with the variety, quality attributes, or end–use characteristics of the U.S. commodity;
- Have been unsuccessful in previous attempts to import, process, or market the U.S. commodity (*e.g.*, because of improper specification, blending, formulation, sanitary, or phytosanitary issues);
- Are interested in testing or demonstrating the benefits of the U.S. commodity; or
- Need technical assistance in processing or using the U.S. commodity.

B. Award Information

Under this announcement, the number of projects per participant will not be limited. However, individual projects that include further processing or substantial transformation of the sample will be limited to \$75,000 of QSP reimbursement, while projects comprised only of technical preparation seminars will be limited to \$15,000 of QSP reimbursement due to the need for smaller samples. Financial assistance will be made available on a reimbursement basis only; cash advances will not be made available to any QSP

participant.

All proposals will be reviewed against the evaluation criteria contained herein and funds will be awarded on a competitive basis. Funding for successful proposals will be provided through specific agreements between the applicant and CCC. These agreements will incorporate the proposal as approved by FAS. FAS must approve in advance any subsequent changes to the project.

C. Eligibility Information

1. *Eligible Organizations:* Any United States private or government entity with a demonstrated role or interest in exporting U.S. agricultural commodities may apply to the program. Government organizations consist of Federal, State, and local agencies.

Private organizations include non-profit trade associations, universities, agricultural cooperatives, state regional trade groups, and profit-making entities.

2. *Cost Sharing:* FAS considers the applicant's willingness to contribute resources towards the project, including cash, goods, and services of the U.S. industry and foreign third parties, when determining which proposals to approve for funding.

3. *Other:* Proposals should include a justification for funding assistance from the program – an explanation as to what specifically could not be accomplished without Federal funding assistance and why the participating organization(s) would be unlikely to carry out the project without such assistance. Applicants may submit more than one proposal.

D. Application and Submission Information

1. *Address to Submit Application Package:* Organizations must submit their QSP

proposals to FAS through the web-based Uniform Export Strategy (UES) system. The UES allows applicants to submit a single consolidated and strategically coordinated proposal that incorporates requests for funding for all of the FAS market development programs. The suggested UES format encourages applicants to examine the constraints or barriers to trade that they face, identify activities that would help overcome such impediments, consider the entire pool of complementary marketing tools and program resources, and establish realistic export goals.

Applicants must contact FAS' Program Operations Division to obtain UES web site access information. The Internet-based application may be found at the following URL address: <https://www.fas.usda.gov/ues/webapp/>.

Applicants experiencing difficulty or otherwise needing assistance applying to the program should contact the Program Operations Division, Office of Trade Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service *by courier*: Room 6512, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250, or *by phone*: (202) 720-4327, or *by fax*: (202) 720-9361, or *by e-mail*: podadmin@fas.usda.gov.

2. *Content and Form of Application Submission*: To be considered for the QSP, an applicant must submit to FAS, via the UES, the information detailed in this notice. Additionally, in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's policy directive (68 FR 38402 (June 27, 2003)) regarding the need to identify entities that are receiving government awards, all applicants must submit a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number. An applicant may request a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS number request line at (866) 705-5711.

In addition, in accordance with 2 CFR part 25, each entity that applies to the QSP and does not qualify for an exemption under 2 CFR 25.110 must:

- (i) Provide a valid DUNS number in each application it submits to CCC;
- (ii) Be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) prior to submitting an application; and
- (iii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application under consideration by CCC.

FAS may not make an award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements, and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time FAS is ready to make the award, FAS may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive the award and use that determination as a basis for making an award to another applicant.

Similarly, in accordance with 2 CFR part 170, each entity that applies to the QSP and does not qualify for an exception under 2 CFR 170.110(b) must ensure it has the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the applicable reporting requirements of 2 CFR part 170 should it receive QSP funding.

Incomplete proposals or proposals that do not otherwise conform to this announcement will not be accepted for review.

Proposals should contain, at a minimum, the following:

- (a) Organizational information, including:
 - Organization's name, address, Chief Executive Officer (or designee),

Federal Tax Identification Number (TIN), and DUNS number;

- Type of organization;
- Name, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address of the primary contact person;
- A description of the organization and its membership;
- A description of the organization's prior export promotion experience; and
- A description of the organization's ability to implement the required trade/technical assistance component.

(b) Market information, including:

- An assessment of the market;
- A long-term strategy in the market; and
- U.S. export value/volume and market share (historic and goals) for 2011–2017

(c) Project information, including:

- A brief project title;
- The amount of funding requested;
- The beginning and end dates for the proposed project;
- A brief description of the specific market development trade constraint or opportunity to be addressed by the project;
- A description of the activities planned to address the constraint or opportunity, including how the sample will be used in the end-use performance trial, the attributes of the sample to be demonstrated and its

end–use benefit, and details of the trade/technical servicing component (including who will provide and fund this component);

- The performance measures that will be used to benchmark performance and measure the effectiveness of the project, the long–term sales to the market, and the benefits to the represented industry;
- A description of the sample to be provided (*i.e.*, commodity, quantity, quality, type, and grade), including a justification for why a sample with such characteristics is needed (this justification should explain why the project would not be effective with a smaller sample);
- An itemized list of all estimated costs associated with the project for which reimbursement will be sought;
- The importer’s role in the project regarding handling and processing the commodity sample; and
- An explanation as to what specifically could not be accomplished without Federal funding assistance and why the participating organization(s) would be unlikely to carry out the project without such assistance;

(d) Information indicating all funding sources and the amounts to be contributed by each entity in support of the proposed project. This may include the organization that submitted the proposal, private industry entities, host governments, foreign third parties, CCC, FAS, or other Federal agencies.

Contributed resources may include cash, goods, or services.

3. *Submission Dates and Times:* QSP applications are reviewed on a rolling basis

during the fiscal year as long as QSP funding is available as set forth below:

- Proposals received by 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, August 15, 2017, will be considered for funding with other proposals received by that date;
- Proposals not approved for funding during the initial review period will be reconsidered for funding after the review period only if the applicant specifically requests such reconsideration in writing and only if funding remains available;
- Proposals received after 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, August 15, 2017, will be considered for funding in the order received only if funding remains available.

4. *Funding Restrictions:* Proposals that request more than \$75,000 of CCC funding for individual projects will not be considered. Projects comprised only of technical preparation seminars will be limited to \$15,000 in QSP funding. CCC will not reimburse unreasonable expenditures or expenditures made prior to the approval of a proposal.

E. Application Review Information

1. *Criteria and Review Process:* FAS will use the following criteria in evaluating QSP proposals, each weighted at 10%:

- The income, population, or market share growth potential in the proposed market;
- Whether the benefits of the project would accrue to the entire industry;
- The appropriateness of the proposed sample size for the project;
- The ability of the organization to provide an experienced staff with the requisite technical and trade experience to execute the proposal;
- The extent to which the proposal is targeted to a market in which the United States is generally competitive;

- The potential for expanding commercial sales in the proposed market;
- The nature of the specific market constraint or opportunity identified and how well it is addressed by the proposal;
- The extent to which the importer's contribution in terms of handling and processing enhances the potential outcome of the project;
- The amount of reimbursement requested and the organization's willingness to contribute resources towards the project, including cash, goods, and services of the U.S. industry and foreign third parties; and
- How well the proposed technical assistance component assures that performance trials will effectively demonstrate the intended end-use benefit.

FAS will also review and evaluate how well the following unweighted criteria are addressed in the proposal:

- The quality of the performance measures and how effective they will be in demonstrating the impact of the project;
- The assessment of the market;
- The long-term strategy in the market; and
- Export goals in each country.

2. Review and Selection Process: Proposals will be evaluated by the appropriate Commodity Branch in FAS' Cooperator Programs Division. The Commodity Branches will review each proposal against the factors described above. The purpose of this review is to identify meritorious proposals, recommend an appropriate funding level for each proposal based upon these factors, and submit the proposals and funding

recommendations to the Deputy Administrator, Office of Trade Programs.

In addition, FAS, prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (currently FAPIIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313). An applicant, at its option, may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through SAM and comment on any information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM. FAS will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR 200.205 "Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants."

F. Award Administration Information

1. *Award Notices:* FAS will notify each applicant in writing of the final disposition of the submitted application. FAS will send an approval letter and agreement to each approved applicant. The approval letter and agreement will specify the terms and conditions applicable to the project, including the levels of QSP funding and any cost-share contribution requirements.

2. *Administrative and National Policy Requirements:* The agreements will incorporate the details of each project as approved by FAS. Each agreement will identify

the terms and conditions pursuant to which CCC will reimburse certain costs of each project. Agreements will also outline the responsibilities of the participant, including, but not limited to, procurement (or arranging for procurement) of the commodity sample at a fair market price, arranging for transportation of the commodity sample within the time limit specified in the agreement (organizations should endeavor to ship commodities within 6 months of the effective date of the agreement), compliance with cargo preference requirements (shipment on United States flag vessels, as required), compliance with the Fly America Act requirements (shipment on United States air carriers, as required), timely and effective implementation of technical assistance, and submission of a written evaluation report within 90 days of expiration or termination of the agreement.

QSP projects are subject to review and verification by FAS' Compliance, Security, and Emergency Planning Division. Upon request, a QSP participant shall provide to CCC the original documents that support the participant's reimbursement claims. CCC may deny a claim for reimbursement if the claim is not supported by adequate documentation.

3. *Reporting:* A written evaluation report must be submitted via the UES within 90 days of the expiration or termination of each participant's QSP agreement. Evaluation reports should address all performance measures that were presented in the proposal.

G. Agency Contact(s)

For additional information and assistance, contact the Program Operations Division, Office of Trade Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

by courier: Room 6512, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250, or *by phone:* (202) 720-4327, or *by fax:* (202) 720-9361, or *by e-mail:*
podadmin@fas.usda.gov.

Signed at Washington, DC on May 12, 2017.

Holly Higgins,

Acting Administrator, Foreign Agricultural Service, and

Acting Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation.

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