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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, Office of Advocacy and Outreach

**OUTREACH AND ASSISTANCE FOR SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS
AND RANCHERS (OASDFR) COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM**

ANNOUNCEMENT TYPE: Request for Applications

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: OAO-00001

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NUMBER: 10.443

DATE: Applications must be received on Grants.gov by close of business on March 1, 2010 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The OASDFR competitive grants program, also known as the “Section 2501” program after its farm bill section number, provides grants to eligible entities, as defined in section 2501(e)(5) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, also known as the “FACT Act.”

Approximately \$20 million will be available in fiscal year (FY) 2010 for competitive grants to eligible applicants. This notice identifies the objectives for OASDFR projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an OASDFR competitive grant.

The Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO) is established and required to carry out outreach, technical assistance, and education that is targeted at socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers by section 226B of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6934).

The primary purpose of OASDFR is to enhance the coordination of outreach, technical assistance, and education efforts authorized under USDA programs through eligible entities and to reach socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in a linguistically appropriate manner to improve their participation in the full range of USDA programs. OASDFR supports a wide range of outreach, technical assistance, and education activities in farm management, financial management, marketing, application and bidding procedures, and other areas.

Proposed projects should identify one or more of the goals targeted at socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers:

- (1) coordinate existing USDA outreach efforts and create new outreach, technical assistance, and education networks focused on increasing participation in USDA program;

- (2) enhance the effectiveness of outreach, technical assistance, and education efforts already authorized under USDA programs;
- (3) improve the means by which assistance is provided through USDA programs; and
- (4) increase participation in USDA programs by socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. For the purposes of this request for applications (RFA) all references to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers include forest landowners.

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Part I—Funding Opportunity Description

- A. **Legislative Authority and Background:** The authority of the Secretary to make grants to eligible institutions and organizations for the provision of outreach, technical assistance, and education that is targeted at socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers is at section 2501 of the FACT Act, 7 U.S.C. 2279, as amended by section 14004 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA), Pub. L 110-246, 122 Stat. 1651, 2205-2206.
- B. **Project Design:** OASDFR is a competitive grants program which provides funds to an eligible entity in exchange for administration of a project by the eligible entity that involves outreach, education, technical assistance, and education activities targeted at socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The purposes of these projects are to reach the target groups in a linguistically appropriate manner and to enhance and coordinate outreach, technical assistance, and education efforts authorized under USDA programs, and to increase participation by socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in USDA programs. Projects that incorporate multiple collaborators, particularly community-based collaborators, are encouraged. It is incumbent upon applicants to:
- (1) Adequately define and justify the needs of targeted groups;
 - (2) Document the potential impact of their project upon socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers; and
 - (3) Identify the USDA program(s) being incorporated into their proposed project.

Proposed projects must address specific needs of targeted groups with the goal of increasing participation of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in USDA programs, such as:

- (1) marketing expertise and proficiency (e.g. producer's ability to market fresh produce, specialty crops, and dairy);
- (2) commodity mixes suitable to a specific growing region;
- (3) organic farming, sustainable agriculture, agri-tourism, and energy crops;
- (4) risk management needs;
- (5) participation in farm loan programs;
- (6) production, marketing, financial, legal, and human resource conditions in the area(s) of the targeted group in terms of how they affect participation in USDA programs; and
- (7) other factors in USDA programs that affect ownership and operation of farms and ranches.

Applicants should provide information about the degree to which partnerships and collaborations would enhance:

- (1) the services to be delivered; and
- (2) the areas and numbers of the targeted audience that the applicant expects to assist.

Applicants should fully describe the outreach, technical assistance, and education efforts and expected outcomes of their proposed projects that would either inform the targeted audience of the assistance available through a USDA program, or increase participation in USDA programs. While applicants may develop a needs assessment as part of the project, applications that use existing needs assessments to justify proposed projects are more competitive than those that

include the development of an assessment as one of the project objectives. Applicants can strengthen their submission by documenting how certain methodologies or results can be transferred to another geographical area.

Applicants are encouraged to coordinate with other existing regional projects and to complement applicable cross-regional activities. Projects that build on existing information networks and offer innovative or expanded activities are encouraged. Applicants are encouraged to refer to the evaluation criteria for the OASDFR program as they prepare their applications.

Finally, applications should address or target at least one of these items:

- (1) Meet a specialized OASDFR need that is local, State-specific, regional, or national in scope, (e.g., national coordination of OASDFR efforts) and that has common characteristics that can be addressed in a single project. Projects that are local or State-specific need to provide evidence that the need being addressed exists elsewhere and that the methodologies and results may apply in these other areas; and
- (2) Be willing to share findings with USDA and other interested entities and organizations by providing information on methodologies, data, analytical techniques, findings, etc.

Part II—Award Information

Approximately \$20 million will be available in FY 2010 to support this program. To the extent that funds are available for this purpose, OAO will award grants for applications found to be meritorious by a peer review panel. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. Eligible entities can apply for projects lasting no more than three (3) years. Projects caps are limited to \$1.2 million with annual caps of \$400,000.

The 2501 Program, now managed by the OAO, was previously administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Congress created NIFA through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. NIFA replaced the former Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), which had been in existence since 1994. Grants awarded by NIFA prior to 2010 will continue to be managed by NIFA.

Projects will be reviewed annually for progress to determine level of and continuation of funding. For projects in their 3rd year applications for renewals/continuation of funding will be accepted. Grantees will be required to reapply with submission of a new application.

Part III—Eligibility Information

Applications by eligible entities, as defined in this section, must contain documentation that identifies the socially disadvantaged group that is being targeted for assistance and justification that explains why the targeted group is appropriate for assistance under the OASDFR program. If the identity of a targeted group does not fit within the definition of a socially disadvantaged group, the eligible entity should inquire with the Director of OAO (see part VII for contact information) whether the targeted group qualifies as a socially disadvantaged group.

Eligible applicants, include:

- (1) Any community-based organization, network, or coalition of community-based organizations that –
 - a. has demonstrated experience in providing agricultural education or other agriculturally related services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
 - b. has provided to the Secretary documentary evidence of work with, and on behalf of, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers during the 3-year period preceding the submission of an application; and
 - c. is a nonprofit corporation under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
- (2) An 1890 institution, including Tuskegee University and West Virginia State University (as defined in the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7601)) or 1994 institution (as defined in section 532 of the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 301 note)).
- (3) An Indian tribal community college or an Alaska Native cooperative college.
- (4) An Hispanic-serving institution (as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103)).
- (5) Any other institution of higher education (as defined in the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)) that has demonstrated experience in providing agriculture education or other agriculturally related services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in a region.
- (6) An Indian tribe or a national tribal organization that has demonstrated experience in providing agriculture education or other agriculturally related services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in a region.

Part IV—Application Submission Information

A. Application location

Applications are located online at www.grants.gov (applications will ONLY be accepted from this site).

- Go to the “Apply for Grants” heading on the left side of page
- Click on “Download a Grant Application Package”
- Search for the application using CFDA number 10.443

B. Content and form of application submission

All applications must be submitted online via the Grants.gov Web site. The Web site walks applicants through the application process, and includes: application instructions, application check list, acronym guide, required forms, and a recommended Project Summary template. It is strongly recommended that applicants allow themselves sufficient time (a minimum of several weeks) to become familiar with and complete the electronic application process, which includes registration (for new users), converting document formats, and downloading software.

To submit an application:

- Go to www.grants.gov (applications will ONLY be accepted from this site.) Information about submitting an application using Grants.gov can be found on the Grants.gov site with supplementary materials.
- Go to the “Apply for Grants” heading on the left side of page.
- Click on “Download a Grant Application Package.”
- Search for the application using CFDA number 10.443.

C. Information applicants must submit upon award

Upon notification of selection, grantees will be notified of documentation required for receipt of award.

D. Submission dates and times, treatment of late submission, and contact information for questions regarding the application forms

Due Date: Applications must be received by Grants.gov by close of business on March 1, 2010 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time).

Late Submission: Will not be considered for funding.

For Further Information Contact -

Questions specific to the OASDFR Competitive Grants Program:

Email: oadsfr@osec.usda.gov

In the Subject Line type: OASDFR Competitive Grants Program RFA

Contact: OASDFR Grant Specialist

Phone: 1-202-720-6350

M-F 8:00 am – 4:00 pm ET, excluding Federal Holidays

Questions related to Grants.gov, contact:

Email: support@grants.gov

Phone: 1-800-518-4726

24 hours a day, 7 days a week, excluding Federal Holidays

Reference Links:

Application Web site: www.grants.gov

Convert documents to PDF: <http://grants.gov/assets/PDFConversion.pdf>

Application Guide: <http://www.grants.gov/assets/ApplicantUserGuide.pdf>

E. Funding restrictions

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. Eligible entities can apply for up to \$400,000 each year with projects lasting no more than three (3) years.

F. Supplemental information

In addition to the 2501 Grant Application, applicants will find the following supplemental materials on Grants.gov to aid them in the application process: application instructions, a summary of acronyms, definitions, and a template for the Project Summary/Abstract.

Part V—Application Review Information

A. General

Evaluated applications will be ranked based on merit. Each application will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the

administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel. The panel will conduct a merit review based on the evaluation criteria. The views of the individual reviewers will be used by OAO to determine which applications will be recommended for funding. Final approval of applications recommended for award will be made by the Assistant Secretary for Administration.

Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors:

- (a) level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or outreach and extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged or has been engaged in providing outreach, technical assistance, and education to disadvantaged groups;
- (b) experts from various areas of specialization within relevant community based and/or scientific, education, or extension fields that provide outreach, technical assistance, and education to disadvantaged groups;
- (c) other experts (e.g., members of community-based organizations, producers, range or forest managers/operators, processors and/or consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs;
- (d) experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations;
- (e) maintaining a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and gender representation and an equitable age distribution;
- (f) reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of outreach, technical assistance, and education projects for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers; and

B. Evaluation Criteria

To assure equitable participation by socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, OASDFR will give priority to projects that provide outreach, technical assistance, and education in applying for and receiving aid under USDA programs. These programs are listed in part VIII. Applicants should provide a brief, relevant synopsis on the program(s) they are incorporating in their proposed project.

The evaluation criteria noted below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA.

- (a) The degree to which the proposed project addresses the major purposes of OASDFR to reach socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in a linguistically appropriate manner as described in Part I (B). Note: Applications that do not directly address at least one of the major purposes of the OASDFR program will not receive consideration for funding.
- (b) The degree to which the statement of work reflects effective strategies for providing outreach, technical assistance, and education to socially disadvantaged groups and the potential for achieving project objectives described in Part I (B).

- (c) Adequacy of managing the project and the experience and expertise of key personnel in working with and on behalf of socially disadvantaged clientele; adequacy of facilities and institutional commitment, and collaborations.
- (d) The quality of stakeholder/participant involvement in the proposed project.
- (e) The soundness of the plan for assessing and evaluating project outcomes and the accomplishment of project goals.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 6400 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 648, Falls Church, Virginia 22042. Phone: (703) 532-2300. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>

Names of submitting institutions, application content, and peer evaluations will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

D. Access to Review Information

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent to the applicant Project Director (PD) after the review process has been completed.

Part VI— Award Administration Information

A. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

a. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official shall make grants to those responsible eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of OAO as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which a project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations ratified at 7 CFR 3015 and 3019. Additional regulations governing this program will be forthcoming.

b. Reporting Requirements for Grantees

A reporting system will be developed within the new OAO for use by grantees. Grantees will be provided information on how to use the new reporting system. The system is expected to contain narrative project information, progress/impact statements, and final technical reports that are made available to the public. For applications recommended for funding, instructions on

preparing and submitting project documentation will be provided to the applicant by the agency contact.

c. Annual Project Directors Meeting

If a project is funded, the PD will be required to attend an annual PDs’ meeting each year for the duration of the award. Reasonable travel expenses should be included as part of the project budget.

d. Subcontracts

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply for the OASDFR program if such subcontracting is necessary for the conduct of the project. The subcontracted amount may not exceed one-third of the total grant award.

Part VII—Agency Contact Information

Questions specific to the OASDFR Competitive Grants Program:

Email: oasdf@osec.usda.gov

In the Subject Line type: OASDFR Competitive Grants Program RFA

Contact: OASDFR Grant Specialist

Phone: 1-202-720-6350

M-F 8:00 am – 4:00 pm ET, excluding Federal Holidays

Part VIII—Other Information

A. Comments Regarding this RFA: Comments regarding this RFA must be submitted within three months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

E-mail comments to:

Email: oasdf@osec.usda.gov

In the Subject Line type: OASDFR Competitive Grants Program RFA Comments

Mail comments to:

Attn: 2501 Grant Specialist
Office of Advocacy and Outreach
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave
Washington, DC 20250-9821

B. Electronic Subscription to OASDFR Announcements

To receive e-mail notifications for new OASDRF RFA announcements:

Go to: <http://www.grants.gov/search/subscribeAdvanced.do>

C. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the grant state otherwise, the grantee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of grant funds.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in subtitle A, title 2 of the code of Federal Regulations, this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Changes in Project Plans

- a. The permissible changes by the grantee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project grant shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the grantee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the USDA Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.
- b. Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved that are outside the scope of the original approved project.
- c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.
- d. Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the grant.
- e. Changes in Project Period: The project period may be extended by OAO without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed five years. Any extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the grantee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of a grant.
- f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

F. Definitions: For the purpose of this program, the following definitions are applicable:

Alaska Native is a citizen of the United States who is a person of one-fourth degree or more Alaska Indian (including Tsimshian Indians not enrolled in the Metlaktla Indian Community), Eskimo, or Aleut blood, or combination thereof. It also includes, in the absence of proof of a minimum blood quantum, any citizen of the United States who is regarded as an Alaska Native

by the Native Village or Native group of which he/she claims to be a member and whose father or mother is (or if deceased, was) regarded as Native by any village or group.

Alaska Native cooperative colleges is any post-secondary education institution that at the time of application has an enrollment of undergraduate students that is at least 20 percent Alaska Native students.

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) is the foundation of the Federal Register publication system. The CFR is an annual codification of the rules of each Federal agency.

Community-based organization is a nongovernmental organization with a well-defined constituency that includes all or part of a particular community, e.g., communities consisting of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Eligible Applicant is an entity that is eligible to enter into a contract under the OASDFR program to provide outreach, technical assistance, and education, and includes:

- A. Any community-based organization, network, or coalition of community-based organizations that –
 - (a) has demonstrated experience in providing agricultural education or other agriculturally related services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
 - (b) has provided to the Secretary documentary evidence of work with, and on behalf of, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers during the 3-year period preceding the submission of an application; and
 - (c) is a nonprofit corporation under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
- B. An 1890 institution, including Tuskegee University and West Virginia State University (as defined in the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7601)) or 1994 institution (as defined in section 532 of the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 301 note)).
- C. An Indian tribal community college or an Alaska Native cooperative college.
- D. An Hispanic-serving institution (as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103)).
- E. Any other institution of higher education (as defined in the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)) that has demonstrated experience in providing agriculture education or other agriculturally related services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in a region.
- F. An Indian tribe or a national tribal organization that has demonstrated experience in providing agriculture education or other agriculturally related services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in a region.

Farmer/Rancher for the purposes of this RFA all references to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers include forest landowners. Farmer/Rancher is an owner and/or operator who has a vested interest in the operation of the farm or ranch.

Hispanic serving post-secondary educational institution is a post-secondary educational institution that: (a) at the time of application, has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students; and (b) provides assurances that not less than 50 percent of the institution's Hispanic students are low-income individuals.

Indian Tribe or national tribal organization is any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (85 Stat. 688) (43 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.), which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians.

Indian Tribal Community College is a post-secondary education institution which:

- (a) is formally controlled, or has been officially sanctioned, or chartered, by the governing body of an Indian tribe or tribes, except no more than one such institution shall be recognized with respect to any such tribe; and
- (b) includes an institution listed in the Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act of 1994, as amended (7 U.S.C. 301 note).

Institution of Higher Education is an educational institution in any State that

- (a) 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;
- (b) is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education;
- (c) provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree;
- (d) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and
- (e) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted pre-accreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary of Education has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.

Junior or Community College is an institution of higher education:

- (a) that admits as regular students persons who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance in the State in which the institution is located and who have the ability to benefit from the training offered by the institution;
- (b) that does not provide an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree (or an equivalent degree); and
- (c) that
 - i. provides an educational program for not less than 2 years in duration that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree; or
 - ii. offers a 2-year program in engineering, mathematics, or the physical or biological sciences, designed to prepare a student to work as a technician or at the semiprofessional level in engineering, scientific, or other technological fields requiring an understanding and application of basic engineering, scientific, or mathematical principles of knowledge.

Low-income individual is an individual from a family whose taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level determined using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census.

Outreach is the use of formal and informal educational and training presentations, materials, Web site materials, etc., which are designed to inform socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers about USDA programs in a linguistically appropriate manner, and to increase their participation.

Peer review is an evaluation of a proposed project for scientific or technical quality and relevance performed by experts with the scientific knowledge and technical skills to conduct the proposed work or to give expert advice on the merits of a project.

R&R refers to official Government forms that are required to be completed as part of the application and is available at www.grants.gov/. (See Part IV (B) of this announcement for list of forms.)

Socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher is a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group.

Socially disadvantaged group is a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Socially disadvantaged groups include, but are not limited to, African Americans, Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asians, and Pacific Islanders. The Secretary will determine on a case-by-case basis whether additional groups qualify under this definition, either at the Secretary's initiative or in response to a written request with supporting explanation.

Technical Assistance is providing hands-on educational and technical assistance through workshops, site visits, and other means of contact with socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to enable them to understand the application process and to apply for, and increasingly participate in, USDA programs.

USDA Authorized Departmental Officer is the Director, OAO, who is the signatory for the award document.

USDA Programs are those programs and activities established or authorized by: the Agricultural Act of 1949 (7 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.); the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1921 et seq.); the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1281 et seq.); the Soil Conservation Act; the Domestic Allotment Assistance Act; the Food Security Act of 1985; and other such acts as determined by the Director, OAO, USDA, on a case-by-case basis, either at the Director's initiative or in response to a written request with supporting explanation for inclusion of an Act. USDA programs include, but are not limited to the: Federal Crop Insurance, Farm Loan Program, Agricultural Conservation Program, programs comprising The Environmental Conservation Acreage Reserve Program, Conservation Technical Assistance Program, Emergency Conservation Programs, Forestry Incentives Program, Great Plains Conservation Program, Integrated Farm Management Option Program, Price Support and Production

Adjustment Program, Rural Environmental Conservation Program, Soil Survey Program, Water Bank Program, and Farm Loan Programs (Farm Ownership, Operating Soil and Water, Emergency Loans, and Bio-Crop Assistance Program.)