



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

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SUBMISSION DEADLINE

5 PM CST, 04/26/2024

RFP TITLE: FOREIGN MARKET RESEARCH, IDENTITY PRESERVED FIELD CROPS

RFP CONTACT:

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PROPOSAL DEADLINE: APRIL 26, 2024

INTRODUCTION:

The Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance (SSGA) – the identity preserved alliance of the United States – requests proposals to assist in implementing projects related to its programs under the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)/Agricultural Trade Program (ATP) to increase exports of U.S. identity preserved specialty soya and specialty grains through foreign market development programs.

SSGA is the business alliance of identity preserved agriculture in the United States – the leading voice for the industry that delivers traceable, high-quality, variety-specific field crops to food markets worldwide. Its members include producers, processors, suppliers and transportation allies whose work ensures integrity throughout the supply chain.

SSGA's mission is to build, grow and sustain a reliable supply chain that ensures integrity of the end-product, with a commitment to quality, stewardship and innovation. SSGA's vision is to promote and enhance value throughout the supply chain, from farmers to food businesses.

The purpose of the contract is to advance approved ATP projects for branding the United States as a quality origin for identity preserved field crops like soybeans, soya products and specialty grains (e.g. non-GMO corn, colored or waxy corn, wheat varieties, buckwheat, millet, sorghum, ancient grains, etc.). The contractor will research and survey the value chain of importers and end users to determine the level of interest in identity preserved field crops and the ingredients derived from

these crops and determine what product qualities might influence their choices to source agricultural commodities from the United States including the traceability of the crop from farm to table. The research will test the likelihood for which quality characteristics the end user would be willing to pay more for; how they may respond to quality and traceability messages; and under what conditions is the customer willing to pay more, and charge more for their products, if using higher, premium processing inputs.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

Researching and surveying identity preserved soya and specialty grains buyers and others in the value chain in one or more regions approved as part of SSGA's program, including Southeast Asia (target markets: Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia), North Asia (target markets: Japan, Korea, Taiwan) and South Asia (target markets: India, Nepal).

SSGA seeks proposal(s) that build on past research and projects under this program. That research, noted below, is available from SSGA upon request. Proposals should encompass one or more of the following topics:

- Country-specific market research that highlights opportunities for identity preserved field crops in one or more of the targeted markets, including but not limited to: buyer satisfaction survey(s), trends in innovation (products, flavors, etc.) and purchases of higher-quality foods in those countries/regions. *(Note that SSGA has, in previous contracted projects, received market research specific to the Philippines (2020) as well as an initial identity preserved and U.S. Identity Preserved brand perception report (2022). Available from SSGA upon request.)*
- Consumer and buyer/manufacturer research that shows the perception of identity preserved ingredients; and perception of labels such as the U.S. Identity Preserved brand and how it can represent quality, traceability and other attributes consumers may be seeking in their food-purchasing choices. This includes helping SSGA best translate/interpret the verbiage and concept of "identity preserved" in different countries/regions in a way that consumers will understand and/or that will help food manufacturers educate consumers about identity preserved ingredients.
- Market opportunities specifically for specialty grains, including but not limited to consumer trends (i.e. innovative products and flavors, gluten-free options, challenges and suggestions solutions/alternatives due to perceived allergens such that can occur in specialty grains like buckwheat).
- Creation of proof points that showcase the benefits of using identity preserved field crops from the U.S. as ingredients in food manufacture, including economic/financial models. *(Note that SSGA has, in a previous project, received one strong economic proof related to soymilk manufacturing (2022). Available from SSGA upon request.)*

- Study the competition U.S. suppliers of identity preserved soy and grains currently face, such as similar high-quality, containerized crops from other countries, identifying the advantages and disadvantage other countries' exporters have. *(Note that SSGA has, in a previous project, received information related to competition, including perceptions of different countries' available products (2022). Available from SSGA upon request.)*

PURPOSE OF RFP

FAS/USDA awarded foreign market development grants in February 2019 for SSGA to implement several broadly defined projects overseas. SSGA built a U.S. Identity Preserved assurance plan and created an Identity Preserved United States brand mark that were launched in December 2021 and currently in use by 15 U.S. companies. Since the launch and following the growth of the program, more market research is required to improve understanding of impressions abroad about the ability of the United States to both supply identity preserved goods and be paid a premium for those goods that have the exact features and characteristics desired by the buyer. It is generally accepted that food manufacturers will pay premiums for features and characteristics they need in processing commodities. What are those conditions in the identified locations? And how does this program and brand help food manufacturers and consumers understand the benefits of those features and characteristics?

The purpose of this RFP is to undertake an initial survey of foreign buyers and value chain clients of container shipping in commodities about whether their interest or preference to purchase could be influenced by understanding traceability is achievable through identity preserved shipping processes. This will include full development, distribution and reporting.

SSGA's standard practice is to RFP in an open and competitive manner. This type of cost analysis will assist in determining the fair market value for the work to be performed and allows SSGA the opportunity to evaluate various proposals and select the best contractor – or multiple contractors – for the job(s) based on experience, availability, expertise, approach, and cost.

SCOPE (SERVICES) OF WORK

Choose one or more of the topics above. Proposals may cover one, some or all of these topics. SSGA seeks innovative approaches, including new and creative ideas from firms that have successful track records of tackling complex trends.

Studies should achieve the following:

- Identify, define and consider the target markets and market segments, addressing the topic with your recommended research methodology.
- Identify and prioritize target types of food manufacturers and buyers of identity preserved field crops in the identified country/region of interest.
- Identify the benefits and/or advantages and strengths and weaknesses of use of identity preserved products in the targeted regions.

- Identify the types/varieties of soybeans and specialty grains and products that end users prefer and use. SSGA is especially seeking more information on the identity preserved/specialty grain segment and understanding its growth in the targeted regions.
- Identify those who use soybean products and derivatives and specialty grains and products and may be willing to, through more education, communication and information, make the choice to move up to a higher-quality or variety-specific ingredient.
- Profile the types of enterprises that use identity preserved soybeans and specialty grains and products by sector and develop a segmentation model. This profile is for use by future vendors in successor projects to look for those type of enterprises in target countries.
- Profile the enterprises who have moved from buying soybeans and specialty grains as bulk commodities to now buying them as identity preserved, what factors drive the change and what conditions will move countries up to purchasing identity preserved products from a bulk purchased variety type. Study how those companies market those changes and how a label, such as the U.S. Identity Preserved label, can help communicate quality and traceability and be an attractive product label for consumers.
- Identify the constraints and opportunities on selling more identity preserved soybeans and specialty grains for food uses in target countries, including adoption of identity preserved purchases from the United States.
- Identify how much value is in the value chain. What is the food manufacturer willing to spend to get quality attributes that can return greater value in their product? What is the consumer willing to spend to get these same attributes? What motivates consumers to make that choice? If labeling matters, how best to communicate what a U.S. Identity Preserved label or marketing campaign means in that community, country, region?
- Identify any pertinent issues in the view of the contractor that could enhance or may detract from the preference a foreign buyer may have for identity preserved crops from the United States.

Business Confidentiality: To whom and how a business sells its products is often business confidential. The contractor will at all points protect confidentiality and provide assurances that the results are to collect data to make policy decisions on how best to market goods and to gain feedback for better market development.

Deliverables and Report results: SSGA will expect the selected contractor to prepare a useful report that can be distributed to SSGA member exporters and be widely used by the U.S. agricultural industry. The report should be prepared by the mid-September 2024 deadline. The contractor should be prepared to provide contact details of companies and contacts for resurvey. After preparing the report, the contractor would be expected to present follow-up information and answer industry questions at SSGA board meetings in September and/or December 2024.

TERMS

Exporter – SSGA will provide the contact details and lists of those companies that import U.S. field crops to the contractor. The contractor should work to expand that list to further links in the value chain.

Value chain participant – a company who uses an imported product in manufacture.

End user – an enterprise in a foreign market who is using soybeans or other grains and ingredients to manufacture, process, or in any way transform the grains or ingredients into a product.

Food grade soybeans and products – <https://soyagrainsalliance.org/soy-foods/>.

Specialty grains and products – <https://soyagrainsalliance.org/specialty-grains/>.

Identity preserved/identity preservation/IP – a process or system of maintaining the segregation and documenting the identity of a product – <https://usidentitypreserved.org/>.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION (if applicable)

The contractor will travel as needed, by prior agreement with the purchaser (SSGA) as to cost and reimbursement. The contractor will primarily use telephone, video conference, or travel (by prior agreement with the purchaser) to conduct the survey. All travel will be at rates and regulations for U.S. Federal travel and will be reimbursed under prior agreement.

The contractor will submit the written report by the agreed deadline for acceptance. The purchaser will have the right to review the submitted report, and identify gaps, omissions, or mistakes, and request the contractor to repair its submission. The contractor will agree to finish at their expense any missing text or data requested by the purchaser if the report is rejected at the contractor's cost.

RFP TIMELINE

- **RFP Distribution: April 5, 2024**
- **Last Day to Submit Questions: April 19, 2024, by 5:00 PM Central Daylight Time**
- **Project Proposals Due: April 26, 2024, by 5:00 PM Central Daylight Time**
- **Selections Made By: May 1, 2024**
- **Prospective Contractors Notified By: May 6, 2024**
- **Deliverables Due By: September 16, 2024**
- **Final Invoicing Due By: October 10, 2024**

SSGA may award contracts to multiple vendors under this RFP. SSGA also reserves the right to divide or combine projects among multiple contractors, connect contractors with those working on current projects or combine market research as necessary to fulfill the topics.

INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must contain at a minimum the specific criteria listed below:

1. An emailed proposal to rfp@soyagrainsalliance.org by 5:00 PM Central Daylight Time, April 26, 2024.

2. A description of Prospective Contractor's capabilities, resources and experience. Emphasis should be placed on experience related to this RFP.
3. A thorough proposal outlining Prospective Contractors' planned work, deliverables and timeline to complete the work.
4. Resumes for each of the Prospective Contractor's personnel assigned to work directly on the implementation of the contract.
5. A minimum of two names and contact information for other similarly sized clients for reference purposes.
6. Detailed Budget
 - a. All bids for services must provide a breakout of how the fee was derived including but not limited to a breakdown of hourly rate and the amount of effort they anticipate doing the work.
7. A proposal no longer than 10 pages (8 ½" x 11").

NOTES

- Prospective Contractors are hereby notified that proposals will be duplicated for internal review only. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of all information presented. The appropriate representatives from staff and legal counsel will review proposals. Proposals will not be returned.
- SSGA reserves the right to retain all proposals submitted. Submission of a proposal indicates acceptance by the submitter of the conditions contained in the request for proposal, unless clearly and specifically noted in the proposal submitted and confirmed in the contract between SSGA and the contractor selected.
- Confidentiality. Without SSGA's prior written consent, Prospective Contractors and its officers, employees, agents, representatives, affiliates, and subcontractors shall not disclose to any third party any documents, materials or information that the Prospective Contractors learns from or is provided in relation to the RFP request.
- During the evaluation process, SSGA reserves the right to request additional information or clarifications from proposers, or to allow corrections of errors and omissions.
- SSGA reserves the right to reject any proposal that is in any way inconsistent or irregular. SSGA also reserves the right to waive proposal defects or deficiencies, to request additional information, and/or to negotiate with the Prospective Contractor regarding the proposal.
- Prospective Contractor agrees that Fees are in lieu of any and all other benefits, including, but not limited to, repayment of any and all taxes related to contractor service fees, health and life insurance, administrative costs and vacation.
- Prospective Contractor agrees that any income taxes, value added taxes or any other form of direct or indirect taxes on compensation paid under the contract shall be paid by Contractor and not by SSGA or Funding Sources.
 - Prior to any payment to a Contractor, a contractor must provide a W-9, W-8, or W-8BEN upon agreement signature
- Non-Competition. Contractor shall not act as agent or representative for any product or service directly or indirectly competitive with U.S. soybeans or soybean products for the length of the contract.

- SSGA and Prospective Contractor agree to comply with the provisions of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). SSGA provides EEO to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, marital status, amnesty, or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND

Information about SSGA can be found here: soyagrainsalliance.org.

Information about U.S. Identity Preserved can be found here: usidentitypreserved.org.

SSGA is the business alliance of identity preserved agriculture in the United States – the leading voice for the industry that delivers traceable, high-quality, variety-specific field crops to food markets worldwide. Its members include producers, processors, suppliers and transportation allies whose work ensures integrity throughout the supply chain.

SSGA's mission is to build, grow and sustain a reliable supply chain that ensures integrity of the end product, with a commitment to quality, stewardship and innovation. SSGA's vision is to promote and enhance value throughout the supply chain, from farmers to food businesses.

This RFP is part of an activity approved for financing under the FAS/USDA Agricultural Trade Promotion program with a focus on Southeast Asia, North Asia and South Asia and a goal of creating an identity preserved brand that identifies the United States as a quality origin for U.S. field crops and helps growers, processors, shippers, end users and food and health professionals to:

- Source U.S. IP soybeans and soy products, and specialty grains
- Connect seamlessly with exporters
- Understand the benefits of U.S. identity preserved products
- Trace the origin of U.S. identity preserved soybean and specialty grain products
- Navigate regulatory pitfalls to food processing
- Better understand logistics of getting products to end user

SSGA is undertaking this RFP directly with the contractor, with operational support and assistance by agreement with the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC). Through a global network of international offices USSEC helps build a preference for U.S. soybeans and soybean products, advocate for the use of soy in feed, aquaculture and human consumption, promote the benefits of soy use through education and connect industry leaders through a robust membership program.

USSEC's strategic plan can be found here: ussec.org/about-ussec/vision-mission.

SSGA and USSEC partner when applicable to provide resources for the identity-preserved industry. SSGA also focuses on other identity preserved crops and the shipping of these products.

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

CIVIL RIGHTS CLAUSE

Contractor agrees that during the performance of this Agreement it will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status, parental status or protected genetic information. Contractor further agrees that it will fully comply with any and all applicable Federal, State and local equal employment opportunity statutes, ordinances and regulations, including, without limitation, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Nothing in this section shall require Contractor to comply with or become liable under any law, ordinance, regulation or rule that does not otherwise apply to Contractor.