

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Rural Business-Cooperative Service****Request for Proposals; Fiscal Year 2003 Funding Opportunity for 1890 Land Grant Institutions Rural Entrepreneurial Program Outreach Initiative**

AGENCY: Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) announces the availability of approximately \$1.5 million in competitive cooperative agreement funds allocated from fiscal year (FY) 2003 budget. RBS hereby requests proposals from the 1890 Land Grant Universities and Tuskegee University (1890 Institutions) interested in applying for competitively awarded cooperative agreements for support of RBS' mission goals and objectives of outreach to small rural communities and to develop programs that will develop future entrepreneurs and businesses in rural America in those communities that have the most economic need. These programs must provide sustainable development that is in keeping with the needs of the community and designed to help overcome current identified economic problems. Proposals in both traditional and nontraditional business enterprises are encouraged. The initiative seeks to create a working partnership between the 1890 Institutions and RBS through cooperative agreements.

Grants will be made for proposals found to be meritorious by a peer review panel to the extent that funds are available. However, there is no commitment by RBS to fund any particular proposal or to make a specific number of awards.

Eligible applicants must provide matching funds in support of this project. Matching funds must equal at least 25 percent of the amount provided by RBS in the cooperative agreement. This notice lists the information needed to submit on application for these funds.

DATES: Cooperative agreement applications must be received by 4 p.m. July 11, 2003. Proposals received after July 11, 2003, will not be considered for funding.

ADDRESSES: Send proposals and other required materials to Mr. Edgar L. Lewis, Program Manager, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA, Stop 3252, Room 4221, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-3252.

Telephone: (202) 690-3407. e-mail: edgar.lewis@usda.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Edgar L. Lewis, Program Manager, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA, Stop 3252, Room 4221, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-3252. Telephone: (202) 690-3407. e-mail: edgar.lewis@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**General Information**

This solicitation is issued pursuant to section 607(b)(4) of the Rural Development Act of 1972, as amended by section 759A of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996. Also, this solicitation is issued pursuant to Executive Order 13256 (February 12, 2002),—"President's Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities."

RBS was established by the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994. The mission of RBS is to enhance the quality of life for rural Americans by providing leadership in building competitive businesses including sustainable cooperatives that can prosper in the global marketplace. RBS meets these goals by: investing financial resources and providing technical assistance to businesses and cooperatives located in rural communities and establishing strategic alliances and partnerships that leverage public, private, and cooperative resources to create jobs and stimulate rural economic activity.

The primary purpose of the 1890 Land Grant Institutions Rural Entrepreneurial Program Outreach Initiative is to promote Rural Development programs, provide outreach and technical assistance, and encourage and assist underserved rural community residents to participate in the USDA-Rural Development programs, especially those administered by RBS. This outreach initiative is also designed to develop programs that will develop future entrepreneurs and businesses in rural America in those communities that have the most economic need. These programs must provide sustainable development that is in keeping with the needs of the community and are designed to help overcome current identified economic problems. Proposals in both traditional and nontraditional business enterprises are encouraged. The initiative seeks to create a working partnership through cooperative agreements between 1890 Institutions and RBS, to develop

programs to assist future entrepreneurs and businesses.

RBS plans to use cooperative agreements with the 1890 Institutions to strengthen the capacity of these communities to undertake innovative, comprehensive, citizen led, long-term strategies for community and economic development. The cooperative agreements will be for an outreach effort to promote RBS programs in targeted underserved rural communities and shall include, but are not limited to:

(a) Developing a program of business startup and technical assistance for assisting with new business development, business planning, franchise startup and consulting, business expansion studies, marketing analysis, cashflow management, and seminars and workshops for small businesses;

(b) Developing management and technical assistance plans that will:

(1) Assess small business alternatives to traditional agricultural and other natural resource based industries;

(2) Assist in the development of business plans or loan packages, marketing, or bookkeeping;

(3) Assist and train small businesses in customer relations, product development, or business planning and development.

(c) Assessing and conducting feasibility studies of local community weaknesses and strength, feasible alternatives to agricultural production, and the necessary infrastructure to expand or develop new or existing businesses;

(d) Providing community leaders with advice and recommendations regarding best practices in community economic development stimulus programs for their communities;

(e) Conducting seminars to disseminate information to stimulate business and economic development in selected rural communities; and

(f) Developing computer technology outreach and establishing and maintaining a computer network system, linking community leaders and residents to available economic development information.

To obtain application instructions and all required forms, please contact the Cooperative Services Program at (202) 690-3407 or FAX (202) 690-2723. The application forms and instructions may also be requested via e-mail by sending a message with your name, mailing address, and phone number to edgar.lewis@usda.gov. The application forms and instructions will be mailed to you (not e-mailed or faxed) as quickly as possible. When calling or e-mailing the Cooperative Services Program,