

government offices in the Washington, DC area now requires.

5. RMA cannot accommodate transmissions of applications by facsimile or through other electronic media. Therefore, applications transmitted electronically will not be accepted regardless of the date or time of submission or the time of receipt.

6. The deadline for receipt of an application is 5 p.m. EDT on July 28, 2003. The application deadline is firm as to date and hour and applies to submission of the original application and two copies.

D. Acknowledgement of Applications

Receipt of applications will be acknowledged by e-mail, whenever possible. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to provide e-mail addresses in the application. If an e-mail address is not indicated on an application, receipt will be acknowledged by letter. There will be no notification of incomplete, unqualified or unfunded applications until the awards have been made.

When received by RMA, applications will be assigned an identification number. This number will be communicated to applicants in the acknowledgement of receipt of applications. An application's identification number should be referenced in all correspondence regarding the application. If the applicant does not receive an acknowledgement within 15 days of the submission deadline, the applicant should contact Michelle Fuller at (202) 720-6356.

Part IV—Review Process

A. General

Each application will be evaluated using a two-part process. First, each application will be screened by RMA personnel to ensure that it meets the requirements in this announcement and sorted. RMA will first sort applications by program (either Commodity Partnership or Targeted States) then by States, area, or Targeted State in which the applicant proposes to conduct the project. Applications that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or are incomplete will not receive further consideration.

Second, a review panel will consider the merits of all applications that meet the requirements in the announcement. The evaluation of each application will be conducted by a panel of not less than three independent reviewers. Reviewers will be drawn from USDA, other federal agencies, and others representing public and private organizations as needed.

The narrative and any appendixes provided by each applicant will be used by the review panel to evaluate the merits of the project that is being proposed for funding.

The panel will examine and score applications for each program (Commodity Partnerships and Targeted States) and for each State or area within each program based on the "Evaluation Criteria and Weights" contained in this paragraph B of this part. Each State or area's applications will be evaluated and scored independently.

Applications for each State or area within each program will be evaluated and scored in each of the criteria listed below. The panel will be looking for the specific elements listed with each criterion when evaluating the applications and scoring them. For each application, panel members will assign a point value up to the maximum for each criterion. After all reviewers have evaluated and scored each of the applications, the scores for the entire panel will be averaged to determine an application's final score. After all applications have been rated and scored, a lottery will be used to resolve any instances of a tie total score for the winning application for a given State or area. If such a lottery is required for a given State or area within a program, the names of all tied applicants will be entered into a drawing. The first applicant drawn will be recommended to receive a partnership or cooperative agreement for that State or area under the program. The review panel will report to the Manager of FCIC on the results of the evaluation for both the Commodity Partnerships and Targeted States program. For the Commodity Partnership program, the panel's report will include the recommended applicant to receive a partnership agreement for each State or area. For the Targeted States program, the panel's report will include the recommended applicant to receive a cooperative agreement for each Targeted State. If the final score for the highest rated application for a State, area, or Targeted State is less than 50, the panel may, at its discretion, recommend that the Manager not provide funding for that States, area, or Targeted State. The Manager of FCIC will make the final determination on those applications that will be awarded funding.

An organizations, or group of organizations in partnership, may apply for funding under other FCIC or RMA programs, in addition to the programs described in this announcement. However, if the Manager of FCIC determines that an application recommended for funding under either

of the two programs of this announcement is sufficiently similar to a project that has been funded or has been recommended to be funded under another RMA or FCIC education or outreach program, then the Manager may elect to not fund that application in whole or in part.

B. Evaluation Criteria and Weights

Applications submitted under both the Commodity Partnerships and Targeted States programs will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Project Management—Maximum 25 Points

The applicant must demonstrate an ability to implement sound and effective project management practices. Higher scores will be awarded to applicants that can demonstrate organizational skills, leadership, and experience in delivering services or programs that assist agricultural producer in the State or area. If the applicant has been a recipient of other Federal or other government grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts, the applicant must also detail that they have consistently complied with financial and program reporting and auditing requirements. Applicants that will employ, or have access to, personnel who have experience in directing agricultural programs or providing educations programs that benefit producers in the State or area will receive higher rankings.

2. Partnering—Maximum 25 Points

The applicant must demonstrate experience and capacity to partner with and gain the support of grower organizations, agribusiness professionals, and agricultural leaders to carry out a local program of education and information in the State or area. Applicants will receive higher scores to the extent that they can document and demonstrate: (a) That partnership commitments are in place for the express purpose of delivering the program in this announcement; (b) that a broad and diverse group of farmers and ranchers will be reached; and (c) that a substantial effort has been made to partner with organizations that can meet the needs of producers that are small, have limited resources, are minorities, or are beginning farmers and ranchers.

3. Delivery Plan—Maximum 25 Points

The applicant must demonstrate that its program delivery plan is clear and specific. For each of the applicant's responsibilities contained in the