

service on or before the deadline. Applicants are cautioned that express, overnight mail or other delivery services do not always deliver as agreed. Applicants should take this into account because failure of such delivery services will not extend the deadline. The address must appear on the envelope or package containing the application with the note "Attention: RMA/RED Partnership Application."

Mailed applications will be considered meeting the announced deadline if they are received on or before the deadline in the mailroom at the address stated above for mailed applications. Applicants are responsible for mailing applications well in advance, to ensure that applications are received on or before the deadline time and date. Applicants using the U.S. Postal Service should allow for the extra time for delivery due to the additional security measures that mail delivered to government offices in the Washington, DC area now requires.

4. 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.

5. The deadline for receipt of an application is 5 p.m. Central Daylight Time 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, each applicant is encouraged to provide an e-mail address 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 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 David Fulk at (816) 926-6343.

Part V—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 objectives stated in part I.C and part IV. Applications that do not meet the objectives stated in part I.C and all other requirements in this announcement or are incomplete will not receive further consideration.

Second, a review panel will consider the merits of all applications that are complete and meet the objectives in part I.C and all other requirements in this announcement. The evaluation of each application will be conducted by a panel of not less than three independent reviewers. The panel will be comprised of representatives 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 based on the "Evaluation Criteria and Weights" contained in this paragraph B of this part.

All eligible applications will be evaluated using the criteria in part V.B.1. Applications must score at least 32 points under these criteria in order to be evaluated further. All applications scoring the required 32 points will be evaluated further under part V.B.2 through 5. After assigning points upon those criteria, applications will be listed in initial rank order and presented, along with funding level recommendations, to the Manager of FCIC, who will make the final decision on awarding of a partnership agreement. However, if the Manager of FCIC determines that any lower rated application is sufficiently similar to a project that has been funded or has been recommended to be funded under this announcement or any other research and development program, then the Manager may elect to not fund that application in whole or in part.

B. Evaluation Criteria and Weights

1. Research Objectives—Maximum 40 points

The application must receive a minimum score of 32 points under this criterion in order to be considered for further evaluation and funding. Applications receiving less than 32 points will be eliminated and will not be evaluated under criteria 2 through 5.

The proposal clearly defines the development, management and implementation of a risk management tool designed to meet the needs of the producers outlined in the objectives in part I.C. Proposals that best meet the objectives in part 1.C and are innovative, clear, concise, useful and easy to understand will be given the highest score.

2. Indication of RMA Involvement and Non-financial Benefits—Maximum 10 points

The proposal clearly indicates areas of substantial involvement by RMA and clearly indicates benefits derived from the partnership that extends beyond the financial benefits or funding of the research proposal. Those proposals that clearly outline the involvement of RMA in all aspects of the project and demonstrate non-financial benefit will receive the highest score. Examples of non-financial benefits would be the benefits derived by an educational institution by providing research opportunities to students or benefits derived through the furtherance of an organization's mission.

3. Research Approach, Methodology, Development and Implementation—Maximum 40 points

The proposal clearly demonstrates a sound research approach and defines the methodology to be used as well as describes the development and implementation of the risk management tool. Proposals that demonstrate a clear, concise and generally accepted research methodology and innovative approach will receive the highest number of points.

4. Management—Maximum 10 points

The proposal clearly demonstrates the applicant's ability and resources to coordinate and manage all aspects of the proposed research project. The applicant whose approach is the most cost effective and optimizes the use and effective application of the funding will receive the highest score.

5. Bonus Points—Maximum 35 points

Because sections 522(d) and 523 of the Act require RMA to give priority for risk management tools for specific producers or commodities, 15 bonus points are available for proposals that meet one or more of these priorities. The priorities are for projects that cover the Priority Commodities (defined in part I.E), and wild salmon.

Due to the administrative burden of administering these partnerships, the substantial involvement required and RMA's limited resources, 20 bonus