

Release Date: 7/10/2023

Response Due: 7/31/2023

PROJECT DETAILS:

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

**Development of a Comparison Study of Product Pricing between Vermont Farmers Markets and Retail Establishments**

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) seeks a contractor to collect and analyze pricing data from retail businesses and farmers market vendors and create a report documenting the cost of commonly purchased food items available during the height of the Vermont growing season at local farmers markets and retail establishments.

**Complete Proposal submissions should be sent to [andrew.watson@vermont.gov](mailto:andrew.watson@vermont.gov).**

Agency/Department

Name: Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

Contact: Drew Watson, Agriculture Development Specialist

Address: 116 State Street, Montpelier VT 05602

Email: [andrew.watson@vermont.gov](mailto:andrew.watson@vermont.gov)

Work Phone: 802-636-7793

**Timeline\*:**

Release Date: 7/10/2023

Responses Due: 7/31/2023

Contract Start Date: 9/1/2023

Contract End Date: 1/1/2024

*\*Timeline will be finalized after proposals are received and negotiated*

**Commented [MM(1):** My preference, but gerunds aren't the best for titles. I would change it to "Development of..." Also, the analysis and scope of work is looking at a comparison of prices BETWEEN VT Farmers Markets and Retail establishments, yes?

**Commented [MM(2):** How are you disseminating the RFP? I note you have both your email and phone number listed. Will this be posted on the agency website? I ask because for traditional/standard RFPs if there are questions, there is traditionally a 'question period'. Questions asked and the state's answers must be posted so any/all potential proposers have equal access to these answers. Typically, there is also a 'Questions deadline'.

I know I noted the 14th as the deadline, but we could stretch it to the 18th and then allow questions from the 11th - 13th with answers posted on the 14th. That's my thought.

**Commented [MM(3R2):** OH, also: how are proposals to be submitted? There's nothing indicating how (email, snail mail (I doubt)), and to whom they are to be sent.

**Commented [W(4R2):** Hi Melissa, since this qualifies as a simplified bid (less than 100k) the bulletin Thea referred me to does not require the bid be posted publicly, and does not require a question period. If you have different info please let me know but otherwise I will update to have the bids sent directly to me.

**Commented [M(5R2):** [@Watson, Drew \(he/him\)](#) True that. It's not a formal bid. I was going by formal process. However, if you receive questions, in fairness, it's advisable to share your answers with others. Kristina and Gina did that for a simplified bid they posted on our agency website last year.

**Commented [W(6R2):** Perfect I will do that! Thanks Melissa

**Commented [MM(7):** WAIT! I suspect you meant August 1st at the start date, yes - since the contractor will be collecting data in the month of August? Also, this only provides me with one week to enter the contractor into VISION (our requests are currently taking up to five days), and draft, review, approve, and execute the contract.

NOTE: Ten days is the required minimum for an RFP. I would strongly recommend you set the deadline to 7/14/23 so we (administratively) have sufficient time to set up the

**Commented [W(8R7):** I missed a few things here - we updated this to be the month of September, so the start date is 9/1. I corrected the remaining language to say "September" in the background and deliverables. Does

**Commented [M(9R7):** Yes, if the start date will be 9/1 then July 21st works for the due date.

**Budget:**

Maximum: \$15,000

**Project Background:**

In 2015, the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets produced a report titled “A Comparison Study of Product Pricing at Vermont Farmers’ Markets and Retail Establishments.” The report compared the average prices of commonly purchased food items during the height of Vermont’s growing season, 55 produce and protein products, from 13 local farmers markets and five retail establishments throughout Vermont.

The purpose of this project will be to update and expand upon [the 2015 report](#) for 2023 with a focus on organic products. An updated version of this report should give consumers confidence when deciding where and what to buy [within](#) the state of Vermont. This is a consumer-focused report which may also benefit food producers when deciding on competitive pricing and targeting consumers.

**Statement of Work:**

Contractor will collect and analyze pricing data from retail businesses and farmers market vendors. Pricing data will compare common food items across specific categories. The categories are listed below. Contractor will:

- 1) **Collect retail pricing data from ten retail establishments.** Contractor will work with the contract manager to identify ten retail establishments from which to collect pricing data that represent a diversity of geographic areas, types of businesses, and sizes. Contractor will collect pricing data in the month of September from the ten retail establishments on 55 or more organic and non-organic produce and protein products. These should include common vegetables, fruits, meat cuts, and eggs.
- 2) **Use pricing data collected through the Agency’s Local Food Price Tracking Program,** which collects data weekly from Farmers Market’s across the state, to compare to retail pricing. If there are less than eight markets reporting to the Local Food Price Tracking Program for the month of September Contractor shall work with the Contract Manager to identify additional markets to contact and/or

**Commented [MM(10):** I know this will make the RFP long, but will a copy of the 2015 report be part of the RFP (or a link to it)?

**Commented [ST11]:** Is it really only giving central vermont consumers an idea of where and what to buy?

**Commented [LT12R11]:** the project is intended to cover the whole state

**Commented [LT13]:** This whole section is a little confusing to me. You might want to start with a broad SOW summary like: "Contractor will collect and analyze pricing data from retail businesses and farmers market vendors. Pricing data will compare common food items across specific categories - organic vs. non-organic, locally produced vs. commodity e.g."

**Commented [ST14]:** Suggest leaving out "etc." if all categories are present and also if you want to really get what you want

**Commented [LT15]:** I would add language to say they will work with you to identify the retail establishments so we can weigh in on where we'd like to gather data from, geographically and types of business etc. The work focused on retail pricing should be a stand-alone paragraph.

**Commented [ST16]:** Is this now going to be beyond central Vermont?

**Commented [MM(17):** Do you mean geographic areas?

**Commented [ST18]:** Are you specifying how many conventional or how many organic? How specific do you need to be to get what you are looking for?

**Commented [LT19]:** There's 3 distinct data collection mechanisms and it feels like the contractor's tasks around each can be better defined.

**Commented [MM(20):** How will the contractor receive and/or access this pricing data? This should be spelled out.

**Commented [ST21]:** Is the "retail pricing" what is collected in 1)? Then it should ne called that above so this is clear.

visit to collect pricing data. The contractor will receive the data from the contract manager via email.

- 3) **Compile the pricing data into a report using graphical representations and analysis around a set of key comparisons between farmers markets and retail establishments.** Contractor will include in the report an introduction, the pricing data graphically represented in a manner consistent with the 2015 report, an analysis of each comparative data set, and a conclusion that gives a broad overview of the results. Contractor must ensure the report can be saved and presented as an Adobe PDF. The data set should include the following comparisons across categories and include all relevant collected datapoints:

#### Certified Organic

- Local produce (farmers markets) vs standard produce (retail)
- Local produce (farmers markets) vs local produce (retail)
- Local meat/eggs (farmers markets) vs standard meat/eggs (retail)
- Local meat/eggs (farmers markets) vs local meat eggs (retail)

#### Conventional/Not-Certified Organic

- Local produce (farmers markets) vs standard produce (retail)
- Local produce (farmers markets) vs local produce (retail)
- Local meat/eggs (farmers markets) vs standard meat/eggs (retail)
- Local meat/eggs (farmers markets) vs local meat eggs (retail)

#### **Target Audience:**

The target audience for this report is consumers of vegetables, proteins, and eggs in the state of Vermont. The report should give consumers an accurate and current comparison between retail and farmers market prices.

Past reports of a similar nature conducted by VAAFM and NOFA-VT have given consumers additional confidence when making purchases. VAAFM aims to maintain and increase consumer confidence by producing a straightforward and unbiased report.

This report should be written for consumers with easily digestible price comparisons in the form of visualizations like charts and graphs. The full dataset should be made available but be separate from the full report.

#### **Performance Measures and Deliverables:**

- Meet for monthly check-ins with the contract manager to give progress updates
- Use in-person visits, advertisements, or online shopping applications to collect pricing data from ten retail establishments
  - o In-person visits should be budgeted as anticipated travel costs

**Commented [ST22]:** What are the key comparisons? Are they the same as in the 2015 report? Be as specific as you need to be to get exactly what you want to get otherwise there is the possibility of contractor not doing the work in the manner in which you need it done.

**Commented [ST23]:** What is conclusion about?

**Commented [ST24]:** Are you specifying sample size? Or are you having contractor design data collection and amount and area of collection and give the design to approve? Right now as written there are not a lot of parameters around what contractor does and it seems you could get not what you want even though contractor fulfilled terms of contract

**Commented [ST25]:** What is the purpose of this reference? Are they sample reports that you want contractor to model its report on?

**Commented [ST26]:** Does this contradict what is written above -- see blue highlighting

**Commented [MM(27)]:** I believe you're requiring the selected contractor to meet with the contract manager each month, correct? This isn't clear to me.

- ❑ If necessary, collect additional data from farmers markets in the month of September
- ❑ Collect and clean data in a recognizable and organized Microsoft Excel workbook or Google Spreadsheet
- ❑ Provide a full copy of the finished dataset in an Excel Workbook or Google Spreadsheet
- ❑ Analyze data and write a report outlining price comparisons for produce and proteins per the statement of work
- ❑ Present the results of the report at an Agriculture Development Division meeting (25-minute presentation plus questions)

**Commented [ST28]:** Here it appears that the software system is being specified

**Submission Requirements (Complete submissions should be sent via email to [andrew.watson@vermont.gov](mailto:andrew.watson@vermont.gov))**

- 1) Background, interest, and experience
  - a. Provide a brief (one page or less) description of your background working with local food, data collection, or data visualization, as well as your interest in the contracted work and your experience.
- 2) Resumé for team lead and key team members
- 3) Work plan
  - a. Timeline for completion of deliverables
- 4) Budget
  - a. Budget cannot exceed \$15,000. Please submit a realistic budget with a complete scope of services.
  - b. Include any anticipated travel costs
  - c. Include costs relevant to [Attachment C](#), a State Provision requiring insurance coverage to do contracted work with a Vermont State Agency
- 5) At least one sample report, data collection effort, data visualization, or report that shows some experience in the contracted work
- 6) Certificate of Insurance (COI) that meets [Attachment C](#) requirements
- 7) A hand-signed and hand-dated signed [W9](#) (Must be dated within 6 months of start date)
- 8) Proof of a complete & successful registration at [sam.gov](http://sam.gov) with no exclusions. This process can take one week. Include your firm's [UEI](#) number with the proof of registration.

**Commented [MM(29):** 'anticipated' or 'budgeted'

**Commented [MM(30):** Wow! This is the first time I believe I've seen an RFP allowing a contractor to include COI costs. Typically, contractors carry their own business liability insurance. Also, since travel is an integral part of this contract, close attention to the required \$500K auto coverage will be important.

**Commented [MM(31):** Hand signed and hand dated W9. I recommend you include a blank W9 as well as the Attachment C with the RFP.

**Commented [MM(32):** OH! This is the first indication this is a Federally funded contract. Remember, the contractor must comply with any and all Federal Terms & Conditions to which we are required to comply. They, too, should be appended to the RFP.

The contractor must comply with all Federal Terms and Conditions listed in Attachment D below.

## ATTACHMENT D

### OTHER GRANT AGREEMENT PROVISIONS

1. **SUBRECIPIENT ANNUAL REPORT:** As a condition of your federally funded grant award from the State of Vermont, you must complete a [Subrecipient Annual Report](#) annually within 45 days after your fiscal year end. Answers to frequently asked questions for grantees are available on the Vermont Agency of Administration, Department of Finance and Management [Suppliers and Grantees](#) webpage.
2. **FEDERAL AWARD TERMS & CONDITIONS:** This grant is funded through federal award agreement number (FAIN) AM22LPGMN000C022 from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and the requirements of the federal award apply to this grant. This grant is subject to [2 CFR § 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards](#).

Grantee must review and comply with all applicable provisions in the 2021 [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\) Grants Division General Terms and Conditions](#) and [Appendix II of 2 CFR § 200](#), which are incorporated by reference into this grant as if fully set forth herein.

3. **WORK PRODUCT OWNERSHIP:** All documents submitted by Grantee for purposes of reporting become the sole property of the State and the State may use them for program marketing and reporting. This may include photographs, videos, narrative responses, and other materials.

**IMPORTANT PROVISIONS:** Several applicable provisions in the 2021 AMS Grants Division [General Terms and Conditions](#) and [Appendix II of 2 CFR § 200](#) are described below; however, as stated above, Grantee is responsible for reviewing and complying with all applicable provisions in the 2021 AMS Grants Division General Terms and Conditions and Appendix II of 2 CFR § 200.

4. **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT & INTERNAL CONTROLS:** Grantees are required to meet the standards and requirements for financial management systems set forth or referenced in [2 CFR § 200.302](#) Financial management.

The adequacy of a grantee's financial management system is integral to their ability to account for grant expenditures and track matching resources. Grantee must use Federal funds in a responsible manner and apply adequate internal controls and cash management practices consistent with the requirements outlined in [2 CFR § 200.303](#) Internal controls.

Grantee must expend and account for funds under an award in accordance with State laws and procedures. Financial management systems and related records, of the Grantee, and of any other entity involved in the grant, must be sufficiently detailed to prepare reports, trace funds, and demonstrate that fund management complies with Federal statutes, regulations, and these general and other program-specific terms and conditions.

The State is required to notify AMS when financial management problems are discovered. Deficiencies in financial management may result in the imposition of special award conditions, such as a high-risk designation or increased monitoring.

**Grantee shall notify the State, at least 30 days prior to the grant end date, if any grant funds awarded under this agreement will not be expended.** Grantee remains obligated to return funds due because of later refunds,

corrections, or other transactions, and the Federal government may recover amounts based on the results of an audit covering any part of the period of grant support.

5. **CHANGES REQUIRING PRIOR WRITTEN APPROVAL:** Grantees may need to make modifications, such as budget or personnel changes, to accomplish project objectives. Grantees are required to request prior written approval for the following items from the State in advance of a change or obligation of funds. Requests for prior written approval must be submitted via email to the grant manager, who will confirm receipt of the request, review, and communicate with the Grantee if there are questions before submitting a request for approval to USDA. Contact the Grant manager and consult Changes Requiring Prior Written Approval in the 2021 [General Terms and Conditions](#) for additional guidance.
  - A. **Change in Key Personnel/Time Devoted to the Project:** Grantee must request prior written approval if there is a change in key personnel, such as the project director, or if key personnel disengage from the project for a period of more than 3 months; reduces the time devoted to managing the project by 25% or more; or severs their connection to the grant.
  - B. **Change in Scope or Objectives:** Grantee must request prior written approval to modify the scope or objectives of the Grantee's project. Written approval is required even if there is no associated budget revision that would require prior approval. Grantee must use the same format/template to present this information that was used in the approved application with changes noted. A change in scope or objectives may affect the project narrative, outcome measures, budget, or timeline. If it does, Grantee must include these revisions in their request.
  - C. **Budget Change:** Grantees have some flexibility to re-budget within and between budget categories to meet unanticipated needs and changes. Grantee should contact the Vermont Grant manager for additional information on how a budget change may affect the award. Grantee must contact the Grant manager before modifying or adding contractual/consultant costs to the project's budget.
  - D. **Pre-Award Costs:** As defined in [2 CFR §200.458](#), pre-award costs are costs incurred prior to the effective date of the Federal award directly pursuant to the negotiation and in anticipation of the Federal award where such costs are necessary for efficient and timely performance of the scope of work. Grantee may incur pre-award costs beginning 12/01/2022 of the State's Federal award. These costs and associated activities must be included in the Grantee's project narrative and budget justification. All costs incurred before the award are at the Grantee's own risk. The incurrence of pre-award costs in anticipation of an award imposes no obligation on the State or AMS to award funds for such costs. If charged to the award, these costs must be charged to the initial budget period of the award, unless otherwise specified by the State or AMS.
  - E. **Contracting or Subawarding for Activities Central to the Award's Purpose:** Grantee must request prior written approval for a change that involves subawarding, transferring, or contracting out of any work under a Federal award. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
  - F. **Specific Allowable Costs Prior Approvals:** Prior approval is required for allowable costs (as referenced in [2 CFR §200.407](#)) and for those not previously submitted in the approved budget. See 8.2 Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities in the 2021 [General Terms and Conditions](#) for more information.
  - G. **Changes to Recipient Name or Address:** If Grantee is contemplating changing the name of their organization or address, they should contact the SCBGP Coordinator for additional information on how this action may affect the award. Grantee is responsible for properly updating their entity name or registration within the SAM.gov system. Grantee must inform the State of any pending changes in its legal status, divesture, or bankruptcy.

- H. **Cost Share or Match – Changes in the Amount:** If the award has specific cost sharing or matching requirements, Grantee must request prior written approval to change the amount of the approved cost share or match or to change the amount of approved cost sharing or match provided by a project partner.
6. **PROGRAM INCOME:** Program income, as defined in [2 CFR § 200.1](#), means gross income earned by the non-Federal entity that is directly generated by a supported activity or earned as a result of the Federal award during the period of performance and includes, but is not limited to (1) income from fees for services performed, (2) the sale of commodities or items fabricated under an award (including items sold at cost if the cost of producing the item was funded with grant funds), and (3) registration fees for conferences, workshops, etc.

The additive method ([2 CFR § 200.307\(e\)\(2\)](#)) will be used to dispose of program income. Program income generated during the grant period must be used, for the purposes and under the conditions of the Federal award, to further the objectives of the Grantee's project. Grantee is not accountable for program income earned after the grant period. Royalties or equivalent income earned from patents, inventions, trademarks, and copyrighted works are not subject to this section.

7. **PROCUREMENTS:** Grantee may acquire commercially available goods and services in connection with a project. In doing so, Grantee must have in place and use documented procurement procedures, consistent with applicable State, local and tribal laws and regulations. Grantee's documented procurement procedures must conform to the procurement standards identified in [2 CFR §§ 200.318](#) through [2 CFR § 200.327](#).
- A. To the greatest extent possible, Grantee should provide a preference for acquisition of **goods, products and services produced in the United States**, per [2 CFR § 200.322](#).
- B. **If printing or publications costs are charged to the award**, these costs must be charged to the final budget period of the award, unless otherwise specified by the State or AMS.
8. **PROPERTY MANAGEMENT:** The title to real property, equipment, and supplies acquired or improved by the recipient under the award will vest upon acquisition in the recipient. Grantees must, at a minimum, provide the equivalent insurance coverage for real property and equipment acquired or improved with Federal funds.

Grantees are expected to manage equipment whether acquired in whole or in part under the Federal award, until disposition takes place, by maintaining property records that include a description of the property, a serial number or another identification number, the source of funding for the property (including the FAIN), who holds title, the acquisition date, and cost of the property, percentage of Federal participation in the project costs for the Federal award under which the property was acquired, the location, use and condition of the property, and any ultimate disposition data including the date of disposal and sale price of the property. This is in addition to the other requirements of use, management, and disposition of real property, equipment and supplies acquired or improved by under a grant in accordance with [2 CFR §§ 200.311](#), [200.313](#) and [200.314](#).

#### **Disposition of Real Property, Equipment, and Supplies**

- When **real property** is no longer needed for the originally authorized purpose, Grantee must obtain disposition instructions from the Vermont SCBGP Coordinator.
- When **equipment** acquired under a Federal award is no longer needed for the original project or for other activities currently or previously supported by a Federal awarding agency, Grantee must request disposition instructions from the Vermont SCBGP Coordinator. Grantee may be required to compensate AMS for its share.
- If there is a residual inventory of unused **supplies** exceeding \$5,000 in total aggregate value upon termination or completion of the project and the supplies are not needed for any other Federal

award, Grantee must request disposition instructions from the Vermont SCBGP Coordinator. Grantee may be required to compensate AMS for its share.

9. **DISPARAGING LANGUAGE AND PROTECTED PII:** Grantees are prohibited from using AMS grant funds to conduct any activity that is false, misleading, or disparaging toward agricultural commodities or products or to disparage the mission, goals, and/or actions of another organization or individual.

Reports submitted to the State must avoid the use of Protected PII, including use of an individual's first name or first initial and last name in combination with any one or more types of information, including, but not limited to, social security number, passport number, credit card numbers, clearances, bank numbers, biometrics, date, and place of birth, mother's maiden name, criminal, medical and financial records, educational transcripts, etc. Personal contact information included in performance reports should be limited to the recipient project coordinator's name and email address as well as organization name, physical address, and telephone number.