



## **BUSINESS BUILDER FARM AND FOOD GRANT PROGRAM**

### **Request for Applications (RFA)**

RFA Release Date: March 03, 2025

**Proposal submission deadline: 11:59 pm MT on May 2, 2025**

The Rio Grande Colonias USDA Regional Food Business Center (RGC-RFBC) is one of 12 Regional Food Business Centers funded by the USDA nationwide to serve as a regional hub, providing localized assistance to address the needs of small and mid-sized food and farm businesses in three key areas: Coordination, Technical Assistance, and Capacity Building. The RGC-RFBC serves small and mid-sized food producers and food businesses in Texas and New Mexico, with focused support to businesses that stimulate the economic development in the region and address gaps in the food supply chain. By promoting increased collaboration between rural and urban areas, producers, aggregators, distributors, and other key players along the agricultural supply chain, the RGC RFBC aims to fortify the regional food system and increase economic opportunity throughout the region.

The RGC-RFBC is pleased to invite applicants to submit proposals for a **Business Builder Farm and Food Grant (BBFFG)**. Guidelines and selected information are included in this RFA to assist eligible entities in preparing a formal funding proposal.

We expect that the program through the awards would:

- Improve the viability and production capacity of the farm and food businesses that participate.
- Build the capacity of Texas and New Mexico food supply chains.
- Increase opportunities for more value-added products to diversify offerings and extend availability.
- Implement sustainable agricultural practices and technologies to keep agriculture in business in Texas and New Mexico and bring food closer to where it is ultimately consumed.

### **Program Overview**

The BBFFG is a sub-award program of the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service-led Regional Food Business Centers. The goal is to provide financial assistance of up to **\$100,000.00** to support and build the capacity of farm and food projects focused on regional needs and businesses that are working towards expansion and other investments. This award may support staff time, business planning activities, software implementation, value chain coordination, the purchase of special purpose equipment, such as food safety, processing and packaging equipment, and other expenses.



Please visit the FAQs on the center’s website for a comprehensive list of [allowable costs](#) and expenditures.

Please note that the BBFF grant award is primarily a [reimbursable grant](#). However, upfront funding which would be paid directly to a vendor may be available for special purpose equipment valued at over \$5,000.

**Minimum award amount:** \$1,000

**Maximum award amount:** \$100,000

### **The program generally will not fund**

The center will not fund farm, gardening, and production activities and supplies; including, but not limited to soil, seeds, shovels, gardening tools, greenhouses, and hoop houses, land or property acquisition, payoff of existing debts, fines penalties and other settlements, and goods or services for personal use. For a more comprehensive list of [unallowable](#) activities generally not funded by the RCG-RFBC, visit the FAQs on the RGC-RFBC’s [website](#).

### **Application Dates & Requirements**

The RFA period will open on March 3, 2025. Submitting your proposal is a two-step process. An Intent to Apply is due at 11.59 pm (Mountain Time) **April 3, 2025**. Then proposals are due at midnight (Mountain Time) on **May 02, 2025**.

#### **1. Intent to Apply:**

We encourage interested food businesses that meet the eligibility criteria to submit an Intent to Apply within 31 days of the RFA release. You'll be required to complete an [intake form](#) for this step. Upon successful verification of the intake form, a client profile will be created and a link to the proposal application dashboard will be sent to you via email. This link is uniquely generated for each applicant. Please use the link throughout the proposal application process. After **April 3, 2025**, you will be unable to register an Intent to Apply.

#### **2. Proposal Application and Submission:**

Use the unique link sent to you during the Intent to Apply step to access your client dashboard. This would be used to start and submit your proposal for the grant.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis for eligibility and **\$1,000,000** will be awarded in this application cycle. The outcome of your application will be communicated by **Friday, June 27, 2025**.



Submitted applications will not be considered unless complete. A completed application includes all required documentation to be uploaded. Therefore, the application submission date will be based on the date ALL documents are submitted correctly and accurately. The system automatically provides a timestamp for each document uploaded. Please note that incorrect and incomplete information or documents will not be accepted, and the timestamp will be set for the date all correct and accurate documents are submitted.

### Eligibility Criteria for Businesses

- For-profit or non-profit [farm and food businesses](#) (small-medium sized agricultural, value-added producer, or food system-related business)
- Must be registered in Texas or New Mexico. (Please see the [list](#) of Texas counties not supported by this grant [below](#)).
- Must have a [Unique Entity Identifier \(UEI\) number](#). For more information on how to get a UEI number please visit the website at this [link](#).
- Must have a [North American Industry Classification System \(NAICS\)](#) code(s). For more information on how to check for the NAICS code for your business, please visit the website at this [link](#).
- Must be directly related to or directly impact the local and/or regional economic development and food supply chains.
- Must have been in operation for 2 or more years
- Food Producers must have an annual gross revenue of less than **\$500,000**. Food Businesses must have an annual gross revenue of less than **\$5,000,000**.

### The RGC RFBC will prioritize projects/businesses that meet one or more of the following areas:

- [Post-harvest](#) agricultural activities and/or businesses that support farm and food businesses.
- Capacity to stimulate local and regional economic growth and development
- Utilizes practices that align with the center's values including [stewardship](#), [fostering business relationships](#), and [adaptability](#).
- Addresses a critical issue in the regional food supply chain. This may involve projects related to [Infrastructure Modernization](#), [Product Development](#), and [Food Safety](#). Categories may include the establishment of new/enhanced distribution routes, marketing & branding, process innovation & development, and value-added product development.



### Proposal Review and Selection

All applicants must meet the minimum priority and eligibility requirements described in the sections above to be considered. The following selection criteria will be utilized during the review of all proposal applications and throughout the selection process.

- Complete proposal application
- The degree to which the project in the proposal aligns with the RGC-RFBC priority areas (listed above).
- Clearly defined objectives in the proposal; project outcomes are clear, measurable and realistic.
- Demonstrated impact on the regional food system.
- Demonstrated operational and award management capacity.
- Reasonable, detailed and clear budget for the funds applied for.
- Clear and measurable milestones for utilization of funds, if approved.
- Ability to provide documentation necessary to verify business aligns with eligibility criteria and RGC-RFBC priority areas.

### Notification of Award and Disbursement

The outcome of all applications will be communicated on **June 27, 2025** (8 weeks after the application window closes). Applicants recommended for funding will be required to provide the following for verification before funds are awarded:

- State Issued Identification or Residency Card
- Social Security Number or Tax Identification Number Card
- UEI verification (Letter)
- Tax EIN verification (Letter)
- Texas and/or New Mexico Business Registration (DBA, LLC, Partnership, Corporation, etc.)
- Breakdown Use of Funds

Upon successful verification of documents, a notification of a grant award will be sent to all awardees. Each awardee will be required to sign and return a Memorandum of Agreement. This agreement summarizes reporting and other requirements before and after the disbursement of funds. Awardees will also be required to declare that they have not received or have pending funding through the RFBC program.



Applications not approved can apply in other cycles of the sub-award announced in subsequent RFAs. Please continue to check the RGC-RFBC [website](#) for announcements and newsletters. The submitted proposal will remain with the center and will not be returned to the applicant. The center is the only organization authorized to clarify, amend, alter, or withdraw requirements, terms, or conditions of the RFA, and any agreement awarded because of this RFA.

### **Online Application Guidelines/Submission Requirements**

Please use this [link](#) to start your application. You will be required to fill in an intake form to register your intent to apply. We will verify your eligibility for the grant and a link to the proposal application dashboard will be sent to you via email. This link is uniquely generated for each applicant. Please use the link throughout the application process.

### **Application Assistance/Support**

The center will be providing technical assistance for the procurement of a UEI and to answer questions about the proposal application process. Applicants may request assistance with the proposal development and questions regarding online proposal submission on our [contact us](#) page. Furthermore, open sessions for questions regarding online proposal submission will be published on the BBFF grant page. Applicants are strongly advised to register and attend one open session for guidance on how to complete their online proposal applications. Also check the [FAQs](#) on the center's [website](#) for questions related to the grant applications.



## **Glossary of Definitions and FAQs**

### **List of Texas Counties not covered by the RGC-RFBC grant**

Anderson, Angelina, Austin, Bastrop, Bell, Brazoria, Brazos, Burleson, Caldwell, Chambers, Cherokee, Colorado, Falls, Fayette, Fort Bend, Freestone, Galveston, Gonzales, Grimes, Hardin, Harris, Hill, Houston, Jasper, Jefferson, Lavaca, Lee, Leon, Liberty, Limestone, Madison, Matagorda, McLennan, Milam, Montgomery, Nacogdoches, Navarro, Newton, Orange, Polk, Robertson, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Travis, Trinity, Tyler, Walker, Waller, Washington, Wharton, Williamson.

### **What is a reimbursable grant?**

A reimbursable grant is a funding mechanism where you initially cover project expenses yourself and then submit documentation to the RFBC for reimbursement. Unlike upfront funding, these grants require you to spend according to an approved budget or project plan before receiving funds.

### **Examples of Eligible Food Businesses**

- Non-Profit/Community-based Organizations
- For-Profit Businesses
- Value Added Producers
- Fleet/Food Distribution Businesses
- Food Hubs
- Commercial/Shared Kitchen and food manufacturing sites
- Co-Packing facilities
- Food Storage Facilities (Cold and Grain)

### **Post-Production or Post-Harvest Activities**

The post-harvest period runs from exit from the field to the time of culinary preparation. These activities encompass the delivery of a crop from the time and place of harvest to the time and place of consumption, with minimum loss, maximum efficiency and maximum return for all involved.

### **Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)**

A Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) is a 12-character alphanumeric code that is used to identify entities that do business with the U.S. government. The federal government uses UEIs to track the distribution of grant funds. Find out more about the UEI [here](#).



### **North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)**

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is the standard used by Federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy. Find out more about the NAICS [here](#).

### **Infrastructure Modernization, Product Development, and Food Safety**

#### *Infrastructure Modernization*

Production projects proposing upgrades to sanitizing or manufacturing equipment to expand their operation and capacity. Other examples of equipment may include cold or dry storage and any associated installation costs, but NO new construction. In addition to equipment, project proponents may also apply for training or workforce development for staff to safely use upgraded equipment and commercial facilities. Associated permitting/licensing costs related to the business expansion may also be included. Technical assistance and coordination with regards to transportation and logistics for the movement of food throughout the region may also be administered as needed.

#### *Product Development and Food Safety*

Value added production is a major revenue driver for food related businesses and a key feature of the overall food supply chain. Funding can be applied towards product testing, permitting and licensing costs, as well as workforce development and training, marketing and branding.

### **Land/Environmental Stewardship**

Is the responsible and accountable administration, care, development, and enjoyment of resources placed under our control. The faithful steward is rewarded, not necessarily with praise from others, but with a rich inheritance passed down through generations. Stewardship is a unifying concept, excluding no one, in the call to maintain and improve both our built and natural environments.

### **Fostering Business Relationships**

In the context of the RGC-RFBC, this involves building and strengthening networks among small and mid-sized food producers, processors, distributors, and retailers. The center aims to support initiatives that promote collaboration, resource sharing, and market expansion, enabling businesses to access larger markets and improve their economic resilience.

### **Adaptability**

In the context of the RGC-RFBC, adaptability refers to the capacity of food businesses to respond effectively to changing market conditions, consumer preferences, and environmental challenges. The center supports projects that enhance a business's flexibility, such as adopting new technologies,



diversifying product lines, or implementing innovative farming practices to remain competitive and sustainable.

### Open sessions and weekly schedule for proposal writing questions

TBA

### List of allowable costs or activities generally funded by the Rio Grande Colonias USDA Regional Food Business Center:

- Working capital for post-harvest activities
- Staff time/labor costs  
This should be reflective of post-production or business retention and expansion-related activities, such as value-added product development and distribution, program implementation, marketing/branding, and business development
- Software implementation
- Marketing
- Trainings
- Purchase of special purpose equipment (*Refer to [Equipment Policy](#)*)  
This must be related to post harvest activities, such as food safety, processing, and/or packaging equipment
- Value chain, supply chain coordination and innovation
- Business planning
- Product development
- Business expansion
- Maintenance

### List of unallowable costs or activities generally not funded by the Rio Grande Colonias USDA Regional Food Business Center:

- Farm, gardening, and production activities and supplies; including, but not limited to: soil, seeds, shovels, gardening tools, greenhouses, and hoop houses.
- Construction
- Land or property acquisition





- Pay off existing debt
- Fines, penalties, damages, and other settlements
- Goods or services for personal use
- Lobbying or any political activity
- Alcoholic beverages
- Contributions or donations
- Fundraising and investment management costs
- Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Machines