



NEW JERSEY COMMISSION ON SCIENCE, INNOVATION, AND TECHNOLOGY

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of Commission on Science, Innovation, and Technology

FROM: Judith Sheft
Executive Director, Commission on Science, Innovation, and Technology

DATE: March 23, 2023

RE: Launch of Food and Agriculture Research and Development (R&D) Pilot Seed Grant Program

Request:

The Members of the Commission on Science, Innovation, and Technology (CSIT) are requested to approve the following:

- i. The launch of the \$750,000 Food and Agriculture Research and Development (R&D) Pilot Seed Grant Program, a competitive grant program supporting innovative technological solutions to food insecurity challenges.
- ii. Grant delegated authority to the Executive Director to:
 - a. Decline Applications that are deemed incomplete following the resubmission deadline
 - b. Decline applications that are deemed ineligible based on non-discretionary reasons at any point during the application process up to the board approval
 - c. Appoint a Hearing Officer for appeals, if necessary
 - d. Establish dates for opening and closing of grant submissions prior to publication of the Notice of Funding
 - e. Approve Applicant request of 3-month no cost extension at sole discretion of CSIT

Background:

In 2021, Governor Phil Murphy signed the New Jersey Economic Recovery Act of 2020, P.L. 2020, c.156 (ERA) into law. One of the programs established under the ERA is the Food Desert Relief Act (FDRA), which directs the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA or Authority) to address the



food security needs of communities across New Jersey by identifying and implementing ways to increase access to nutritious foods and develop new approaches to alleviate food deserts.

As the Authority works on regulations that allow for the rollout of programs under the FDRA, the state has appropriated \$3,500,000 to the Authority for “Food and Agriculture Innovation” from the FY22 Appropriations Act. The Food and Agriculture Research and Development (R&D) Pilot Grant Program would utilize \$750,000 of this appropriation to identify urgent challenges and the research needed to develop solutions that address food access in the state.

Summary of Food and Agriculture Research and Development Pilot Grant Program

The goal of the Food and Agriculture Research & Development Pilot Grant Program is to support innovation from researchers and entrepreneurs focused on developing technology, and other solutions to addressing food insecurity in the in New Jersey. The grant will engage early-stage innovation-based companies in NJ to accelerate research and development of technologies to transform new discoveries from research stage into commercially viable products and services that address food security needs of communities across New Jersey by identifying and implementing ways to increase access to nutritious foods and develop new approaches to alleviate food deserts.

The Food and Agriculture Research & Development Pilot Grant Program is for companies conducting research and development or testing technologies in the following target areas:

- Life Sciences (e.g., Next Generation Crop, Soil Health, indoor agriculture, and aquaculture)
- Technology (e.g., Digital services and platform development for improved food access, digital services to reduce food waste, digital platform to access emergency food and other services necessary for food security)
- Food and Beverage (Non-retail) (e.g., Improved connection between urban food systems and rural and urban communities to improve food access, increased capacity, and distribution of farm fresh products)
- Transportation and Logistics (e.g., online platform designed to facilitate business-to-business connections with local food systems to address disruptions to the local food supply, innovative food delivery models with reduced carbon footprint)

All Applicants for the Food and Agriculture Research and Development (R&D) Pilot Seed Grant Program should have achieved a demonstration of concept for their project proposed for funding. The demonstration evidence will include one of the following at a minimum:

- Description of the proof-of-concept results
- Published paper outlining results achieved



- Successful completion of a federal SBIR/STTR grant or contract related to the project
- Confirmation documentation from a university tech transfer office if the project relates to technology that has been developed at a university

The Food and Agriculture R&D Pilot Grant Program has a total budget of \$750,000 for ten (10) grant awards. Eligible Applicants can receive awards of \$75,000. Total funding of \$750,000 for the Food and Agriculture Research & Development Pilot Grant Program will come from New Jersey Economic Development Authority’s (“EDA” or “Authority”) Fiscal Year 2022 (FY2022) Appropriations Act (“Act”) for “Food and Agriculture Innovation” toward grants made through the Commission on Science, Innovation, and Technology’s (“CSIT”) Food and Agriculture Research & Development Pilot Grant Program. The program will be implemented by CSIT. Funding will be transferred from EDA to CSIT by a Memorandum of Understanding.

Program Eligibility

All applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria at the time of submission and throughout the application review period:

- Be authorized and in good standing to conduct business in New Jersey as evidenced by a current New Jersey tax clearance certificate (listing New Jersey Commission on Science, Innovation and Technology). All certificates listing another state agency will be rejected.
- Have no more than 25 full-time equivalent (FTE) workers (FTE calculated on a 35-hour work week) at time of application.
- Have a minimum of one (1) full-time worker (calculated on a 35-hour work week). A founder can be counted as a worker; a worker may be paid or unpaid.
- 50% or more of the cumulative hours worked by all workers, founders, and contractors must be conducted in NJ (calculated on a full-time equivalent basis – 35 hrs. per week).
- Have less than or equal to \$2,000,000 in 2022 calendar year sales revenue (excluding grant revenue).

The grant funding can be utilized to maintain direct project research and development activities.

The following expense categories are ineligible for funding from the Program:

- Direct services
- Manufacturing of products for sale or commercial use
- Real estate rental expenses
- Patient clinical trial expenses
- Construction costs



- Travel, entertainment, and other similar expenses
- Allocations of general overhead expenses
- Any expenditures incurred before the “Effective date”, the date representing the last date of execution of the Grant Agreement by the respective Parties
- Any expenses for equipment and materials that Applicant does not use for the Project during the Project period
- Fees related to Conferences not associated with the Project

Applicants that meet the above eligibility criteria will then be evaluated by a team of subject matter experts (SMEs) who will review each application. SMEs will review and provide input on the strength of the technology to all eligible and complete applications. SME input will not be used for scoring purposes. An evaluation committee comprised of CSIT and NJEDA staff will review and assign a score to each application. Scoring will be based on Innovation, Market opportunity, Implementation plan, Go-to-market strategy, Economic impact, and Team. Applicants will require a minimum of 70 points (out of a total 100 points) to be eligible for a grant award and to receive bonus points.

Bonus points will be awarded to applicants that are NJ-certified women-owned, minority-owned, or veteran-owned businesses; have a primary place of business/R&D located either within an opportunity zone eligible census tract or within Trenton, Paterson, or Atlantic City; or are using intellectual property initially developed at a NJ university, under an executed License Agreement with such university. To increase the percentage of first-time CSIT awardees, staff will implement a new scoring bonus for applicants that have not previously been awarded a CSIT grant or voucher.

Applicants that are denied will have the right to appeal. Appeals must be filed within the timeframe set in the declination letter. An Applicant may appeal a declination by submitting the basis for their appeal in writing to CSIT within 10 business days from the effective date of CSIT’s action. Appeals must include an explanation as to how the applicant has met the application criteria.

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Judith Sheft
Executive Director

Attachments

- i. The Food and Agriculture Research and Development (R&D) Pilot Seed Grant Program Specification Sheet