



Alcorn

SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS
AND RANCHERS POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

SUMMARY

The Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center (Policy Center) was constructed as a result of the 2014 Farm Bill and specializes in policy research that impacts socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The mission of the Policy Research Center is to: ***conduct research, analyze policy and make recommendations seeking to achieve equitable and economic integration of USDA programs and policies for socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, communities and rural landowners.***

The Policy Center is requesting proposals from qualified individuals (henceforth, External Researcher). These qualified individuals should be interested in developing and conducting a comprehensive research study and report on challenges and issues that specifically impact socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The submitted research study proposals should contribute to the advancement of heirs' property issues in the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill. The Policy-Legal Heirs Property Team, one of the planning teams working with the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), identified potential policy avenues for supporting heirs' property in the 2023 Farm Bill and grouped them into the following three categories:

- 1) strengthening the provisions added to the 2018 Farm Bill;
- 2) incorporating new provisions to ensure HEIRS PROPERTY owners are empowered to catch-up on ownership benefits they have not historically been able to access (e.g., preference in conservation programs); and/or
- 3) increasing attention to heirs' property as a critical issue that requires deeper understanding, coordination, and long-term, strategic planning across USDA.

Background: USDA Research mandated by the 2018 farm bill

Section 12607 of the 2018 Farm Bill directed the Secretary to gather and report data related to the land access and ownership related to heirs' property. \$3 million were authorized annually for this reporting requirement.¹ It is not clear if funds have been appropriated for this section. The farm bill required, due one year from the farm bill's enactment, a public report on barriers to beginning and social disadvantaged farmers obtaining farmland and the role of current federal programs in those areas, as well as the necessary reforms to improve access.² Such a report was not publicly available from the USDA Office of the Chief Economist at the time of this writing.

The farm bill also mandated reporting on "farmland ownership" every three years. This reporting is to encompass "farmland ownership, tenure, transition, barriers to entry, profitability, and viability of beginning ... and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers," as well as survey and

¹ 115 P.L. 334 Sec. 12607(c), 132 Stat. 4490, 2018 Enacted H.R. 2, 115 Enacted H.R. 2

² 115 P.L. 334 Sec. 12607(a), 132 Stat. 4490, 2018 Enacted H.R. 2, 115 Enacted H.R. 2

statistical and economic analysis on such variables in the Census of Agriculture.³ In addition, it required the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to include questions in the Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land survey on the extent to which real-estate speculation is impacting access of beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and operators on heirs' property.⁴ It does not appear that these statistics have been released yet.

Research is needed in the three categories identified above. The Policy Center has prioritized the research needs from two of the three categories as follows:

- 1) To support advocacy centered on *strengthening* the provisions added to the 2018 Farm Bill, advocates need data points showing administrative and political data on FSA county and state offices, the demand for loans under the new Section 5104 relending program, and the impact of the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act (UPHPA) in enacting states. These data will help policymakers understand the programs' effectiveness—and thus, perhaps, the need for additional funding or support—as well as deficiencies that need to be addressed.

- a. **Administrative and political data on FSA county and state offices:**

Objective: Document and analyze the implementation of 2018 farm bill provisions at the FSA field office level and the administrative and political contexts surrounding those efforts.

Tracking how 2018 Farm Bill provisions play out at a local level is crucial to understanding the successes, failures, and variations in rolling out the farm bill provisions. The 2019 GAO report on access to credit outlines important dynamics in how SDFR concerns are included in decision-making at the state and county level with FSA, including how priorities are set for outreach and for loan-making enrollment for SDFR.⁵ Understanding these processes requires representative data on FSA county officials' awareness of and attitudes towards the heirs' property provisions, as well as analysis of the composition of FSA county committees and the interaction between county and state FSA offices. Studies should also include analysis of the election procedures for FSA committees and the historical composition of committees.

- b. **Demand for loans under the new Section 5104 relending program:**

Objective: Document and analyze the demand for relending programs to help clear title and conduct estate planning to clarify the necessity of the program and address barriers to access.

Research on demand for relending programs can help bolster the case for expanding and permanently funding this program. It should also address what the barriers to accessing a relending program might be. Farmers may be hesitant to take on additional debt burdens for farm ownership, especially if they have not been able

³ 115 P.L. 334 Sec. 12607(b)(1)-(2), 132 Stat. 4490, 2018 Enacted H.R. 2, 115 Enacted H.R. 2

⁴ 115 P.L. 334 Sec. 12607(b)(3), 132 Stat. 4490, 2018 Enacted H.R. 2, 115 Enacted H.R. 2

⁵ U.S. Gen. Accounting Office, [GAO-19-539](#), *Information on Credit and Outreach to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Is Limited* (2019).

to access programs in the commodity, credit, or conservation titles that might make their farms more viable. Understanding the ability of farmers to take on new debt is important to think about changes that might be needed, including subsidizing risk assessments and providing waivers to allow access to FSA and NRCS programs, among other interventions.

c. **Impact of UPHPA in enacting states:**

Objective: *Document and analyze the benefits of adopting UPHPA for farmers, communities, and states in terms of economic development, conservation goals, and resilience.*

While more states have recently adopted or introduced the UPHPA, some early-adopter states have had an opportunity to see the statute's potential impacts. Georgia, for instance, enacted the law in 2012 and Alabama in 2014. Although it is too soon to analyze the Act's impact with respect to accessing USDA programs under the 2018 Farm Bill, observers could still anticipate moderate shifts in land ownership and related wealth indicators in these early-adopter states. This research could also be used to model the effect of UPHPA adoption in states considering the legislation. Research is needed to map and analyze these trends, which could provide evidence supporting further expansion and identify opportunities for additional improvements to the Act's provisions.

- 2) To support an *increased understanding* of heirs' property, its impacts, and sustained methods of addressing its challenges, advocates need research showing trend data on heirs' property, the effectiveness of existing heirs' property programs; and demographics of heirs' property producers and owners.

a. **Trend data on heirs' property included in Section 12607:**

Objective: *Document and analyze important trends on land ownership and access related to heirs' property, including what barriers exist and how they impact the economic status of farms and areas with high rates of heirs' property.*

It may be useful to understand and validate government-produced statistics by gathering data on the themes laid out in the 2018 farm bill, particularly if USDA is slow to implement these studies or slow to report findings. In addition, more focused, mixed-methods studies on the same types of data, constrained to smaller geographic areas with high levels of heirs' property may provide useful understanding of contextual factors and important covariates to be mindful of when interpreting NASS statistics. Also, NASS statistics can be supplemented with variables that are relevant to the 2023 provisions included in this document, such as the number and percentage of non-heir renters operating on heirs' property and of heirs' property holders who have kept up with the taxes on their land, all for consideration of the eligibility waiver proposed.

b. Effectiveness of existing heirs' property programs:

Objective: *Document and analyze which existing programs are effective, why they have succeeded, and the specific value propositions they pose for farmers and communities.*

Evaluating programs that have aided operators and owners of heirs' property are crucial to demonstrate success of a program for variables that can extend beyond the welfare of heirs' property holders. For example, a recent study of the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program (SFLR)—a joint initiative of the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and the NRCS—assessed the impact of cleared title on a broad number of outcomes including: financial benefits, access to forestry programs, improved forest management, access to forestry services and markets, and capacity and trust of farmers.⁶ Such analyses help to demonstrate the value of heirs' property programs across a variety of indicators, including the broader goals of USDA and food system actors for conservation, rural economic development, community development, cultural preservation, and others. Such studies should include the impact on cultural preservation. The cultural significance of land in communities impacted by heirs' property concerns demands an integrated analysis. The Management Plan created by the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission—a heritage area across four states created by the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-338)—provides a blueprint for how to incorporate these “intangible” issues into planning and research.⁷

c. Demographics of heirs' property producers and owners:

Objective: *Document and analyze how generational transitions will unfold in areas with high concentrations of heirs' property over the coming years.*

Many owners of heirs' property are aging, making a demographic transition in farm ownership inevitable in areas with high concentrations of heirs' property. Understanding the urgency of this issue is imperative to design and prioritize policies to support clearing of title, estate planning, and the transfer of property to a new generation of farmers. Designing and funding programs like the Land Contract Guarantee Program and the Conservation Reserve Program-Transition Incentive Program requires knowledge of the size of the problem. Research should focus not just on aging farmers and property owners, but on the concerns of a younger generation of farmers. What barriers to young farmers of color face in carrying on the tradition and connection to the land that many producers on heirs' property hold dear?

⁶ U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities & Forest2Market, Inc., *Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program – Measuring Success* (2020), <https://www.usendowment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/sustainable-forestry-and-african-american-land-retention-program-measuring-success.pdf>.

⁷ Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, National Park Service Denver Service Center, *Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Management Plan* (2012), available at <https://gullahgeecheecorridor.org/about/>.

DESCRIPTION

The goals of the research study include the following:

- 1) To gain insight based on empirical data about the challenges and issues that socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers are currently experiencing.
- 2) To provide valuable information that can be utilized for the farm bill and other agricultural policy recommendations.
- 3) To inform recommendations in one or more of the categories identified above.

The audience for the final research report will be primary stakeholders, including colleges, universities, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, policymakers, cooperatives, and many more.

SCOPE OF WORK

The External Researcher will work with the Policy Center to create a viable and cost-effective research approach, which provides transparency and informs key stakeholders about the current status of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The role of the External Researcher includes the following:

- 1) Classifying and refining specific indicators and measures, as they relate to the comprehensive research study.
- 2) Generating an overall research study timeline that would most effectively address the research questions.
- 3) Identifying key stakeholders from whom qualitative or quantitative data should be collected.
- 4) Identifying and developing appropriate data collection approaches and instruments.
- 5) Collecting, maintaining, and interpreting the research data from the research study.
- 6) Synthesizing the findings of the research study and providing research study reports, a final printer-ready report with graphics, and a one-page finding infographic.
- 7) Summarizing the policy implications, which are raised by the research study findings.
- 8) Offering policy recommendations.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Research Coordinator of the Policy Center staff will provide guidance on the research process and ensure that the research study aligns with the goals and mission of the Policy Center. The Research Coordinator will provide broad oversight of the research, including collaboration with the External Researcher. The External Researcher will be responsible for designing and carrying out the research study, including the collection, analysis, and reporting of the data.

TIMEFRAME

The anticipated date for research activities is August 2020. The expectation is that the research study will be conducted over seven to nine months as per the designated timeline:

Contract Start	October 1, 2020
Preliminary Draft Report	June 30, 2021
Final Report Draft	July 30, 2021
Contract End	August 31, 2021

DELIVERABLES

At regular times (monthly), the External Researcher will prepare a progress report that describes the research progress and key accomplishments for the reporting period/each month. These interval reports will serve as management tools by which the various aspects of the research study components may be changed if research findings dictate as such. The content, length, and format of these reports will be designed in consultation with the policy research analyst. Any necessary documentation related to the research plan will be included in these progress reports.

At the conclusion of the research study, the External Researcher will prepare and deliver a printer-ready final report, as well as electronic and hard copies of all research tools used for the research study, including but not limited to surveys, questionnaires, interview forms, and any raw data files in electronic format. The final report and executive summary should include charts and graphs.

Specifically, the External Researcher will deliver a:

- 1) Printer-ready designed executive summary of the report,
- 2) Printer-ready full report - the final report will include both text and graphic representations of the findings,
- 3) One-page infographic of the results.

PROPOSAL DETAILS

The proposal should not exceed fifteen (15) double-spaced pages, including the overview, research methodology, professional capability statement, and cost proposal. The statement of work, report sample, letters of support, and resumes or curricula vitae are not included in this page limit and can be separate. The proposal should contain the following:

1. Overview:

Describe the overall design that will guide the research study. ***This section of the proposal must explain how the proposed research study and methodology will align with the key goals and mission of the Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center.***

2. Research Design/Methodology:

Describe the overall methodological approach and modeling framework of the research study. The methodology must be clear and logical to analyze the topic and key objectives, which are specified in the statement of work. Identify and describe the key measures that will be used to inform the research questions and the research tools to be used. Describe

the limits of the selected methods. Justify the selected methods over others. Will the research include qualitative or quantitative data, and if so, how will these types of data be collected and from whom? Also, include the steps that will be taken in the start-up of the research and the drafting of the research plan. ***This section of the proposal must accurately explain the research methodology and the collection of quantitative or qualitative data.***

3. Timeframe:

Describe the key research activities. Create a schedule of milestones and deadlines for the completion of the research study. Include a timetable that proposes when specific data collection activities should be carried out during the entire research study period. ***This section of the proposal must explain the research study work plan.***

4. Professional Capability:

This information is required for the key research staff working on this project. Include a professional capability statement and information about other relevant past or present research projects (with particular emphasis on socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers). The proposal package must include resumes or curricula vitae of all professional staff, who will work on the project, and the nature of the proposed contribution detailed. If any persons must be hired for the project, say so, and explain why the need for the person(s) is not readily available within the organization or the institution. Include a minimum of three letters of support from organizations or individuals. ***This section of the proposal must adequately demonstrate the professional capability of all professional personnel.***

5. Report Sample:

The report sample should include an example of previously published research reports that incorporate infographics and visual representations of research data and findings. If a report is unavailable, provide a sample dummy report that displays examples of how the data could be presented. ***This section of the proposal must effectively demonstrate how the research study can be presented to key stakeholders.***

6. Budget:

The funding for research studies will range between ***\$45,000-\$75,000 for each proposed research study approved***. The budget must be a fixed price contract inclusive of all labor, research, and report designs. Include a detailed justification of budget. Indirect costs on total direct costs should be calculated at a maximum of ten percent (10%). ***This section of the proposal must provide a detailed budget (including any cost-sharing that the External Researcher can provide) for conducting all aspects of the research study and producing the deliverables as outlined in this Request for Proposal.***

REVIEW CRITERIA

Proposals will be reviewed based on the quality of the proposed research study, the expertise of the proposed personnel, the capability to carry out a research study, which is related to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, the feasibility of completing the research study within the timeframe, and the reasonableness of the proposed costs. In addition, The Policy Center reserves the right to interview the leading candidates. Incomplete research study proposals will not be reviewed. Final decisions for all proposals are at the sole discretion of the Policy Center.

LETTER OF INTENT

The hard deadline for individuals, institutions, or organizations that wish to submit a proposal should submit a one-page, electronic, non-binding letter of intent by **August 14, 2020, at 5:00 PM. (Central Standard Time)** to **Eloris Speight** at espeight@alcorn.edu The letter of intent must include the following:

- Official Letterhead
- Principal Investigator(s) name, mailing address, phone number, fax number, and e-mail address
- Organization name, mailing address, phone number, fax number, and email address
- Research Study Title
- Total Amount Requested (approximate)
- Abbreviated Budget
- Summary of the Research Study (including objectives)
- Specific Aims/Goals of Research Study

PROPOSAL DEADLINE

The deadline for the full research study proposal and budget is **September 8, 2020, at 5:00 PM (Central Standard Time)**. Questions about this Requests for Proposal should be submitted in writing by **August 12, 2020, at 5:00 PM (Central Standard Time)** to **Eloris Speight** at espeight@alcorn.edu. Answers will be compiled and distributed to all individuals, institutions, or organizations that intend to submit a proposal.

An electronic version of the research study proposal and budget can be sent to **Eloris Speight** at espeight@alcorn.edu. The format for the electronic version should be either a PDF file or Word document.

For institutions, organizations or individuals, who prefer to mail the research study proposals, mail five (5) hard copies to **Attention: Eloris Speight, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center, 1000 Alcorn State University Drive #449, Lorman, MS 39096.**

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL APPLICATION DATES

Request for Proposals Open	August 4, 2020
Interested Parties' Question Period	August 4- August 12, 2020
Answers to Questions	August 14, 2020
Last Date to Submit Letter of Intent	August 14, 2020
Request for Proposal Closed	September 8, 2020
Notice of Award	September 18, 2020

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center will treat all information submitted as confidential and will disclose this information only to its employees and those individuals bound by confidentiality, who may from time-to-time assist the Policy Center on this subject. All information provided to you by the Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center in connection with the process is to be treated as confidential and proprietary to the Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center. As such, this material is to be used by you solely for the purpose of responding to this Request for Proposals. Access shall not be granted to third parties except upon Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center expressed and prior written consent and upon prior written agreement of the intended recipient to treat the materials as confidential.