



**STATE OF MAINE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
RFP SUBMITTED QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SUMMARY**

RFP NUMBER AND TITLE:	RFA # 2024ARDRFSIEQUIP1
RFP ISSUED BY:	State of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
SUBMITTED QUESTIONS DUE DATE:	September 23, 2024
QUESTION & ANSWER SUMMARY ISSUED:	September 26, 2024
PROPOSAL DUE DATE:	October 28, 2024
PROPOSALS DUE TO:	RFSI.AGR@maine.gov

Provided below are submitted written questions received and the Department’s answer.

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section D Allowable Use of Funds Page 22	We are a small dairy that has expanded in 2024 and need to upgrade milking equipment- milking claws, pump, pipeline, etc. - to improve efficiency and herd welfare. Is that eligible?
	Answer	
1	<p>No. Milking equipment is considered to fall within the beginning of the food supply chain activities related to “farming,” “production,” and “harvesting.” Milking equipment is NOT eligible for RFSI funding.</p> <p>This RFSI Equipment-only grant may only support middle of the supply chain equipment. Agricultural production expenses (pre-harvest and harvesting equipment) are unallowable in this grant opportunity.</p> <p>Special purpose equipment to be utilized for processing, packing, storage (including cold storage), aggregation, adding value, and shipping are considered “middle of the supply chain” and are eligible. Only special purpose equipment that will be utilized AFTER the milk is harvested from the cows will be eligible for this grant opportunity.</p> <p>Visual of middle of the supply chain: https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/images/rfsi-middle-supply-chain.png</p>	

RFP Section & Page Number	Question
Part IV Activities and Requirements Section D Allowable Use of Funds Page 22	<p>We make farmstead cheese and with the increased milk capacity are making more cheese. To improve efficiency we need to buy more cheese molds, draining tables, and a dishwasher.</p> <p>Can we apply for both the milking equipment and the cheese equipment?</p>
Answer	
2	<p>Milking equipment is NOT eligible for RFSI funding.</p> <p>Special-purpose equipment necessary for value-added processing (cheese making) is allowable.</p> <p>However, if cheese molds, draining tables, and a dishwasher each have a per unit cost of less than \$2,500, they would not be eligible for this grant as equipment must meet the RFA definition for special purpose equipment and must be at a unit cost of \$2,500 or greater.</p> <p>See RFA page 34 for the definition of “Equipment” “Also known as special purpose equipment.”</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Special purpose equipment' is tangible, nonexpendable, personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost that equals or exceeds, for the purpose of this Maine RFSI Equipment-only grant, \$2,500 per unit.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Special purpose equipment must be used for a specific middle of the supply chain food and beverage activity and not be used for general business operational needs. Items under \$2,500 per unit are considered supplies and not eligible for this grant.”</p> <p>See RFA page 20 “All equipment purchases must meet the following criteria:”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment is necessary for the middle of the supply chain activities and is not otherwise reasonably available and accessible. Equipment is normally charged as a direct cost by the organization and is acquired in accordance with organizational practices. • The equipment investment must create greater resiliency in Maine’s middle of the supply chain. • There must be a specific need making it necessary for the applicant to purchase this specific equipment at this particular time. • The equipment must improve the applicant’s organizational capacity to successfully

integrate more or diversified product(s) into their business model

- Equipment must be used solely to meet the purpose of the program and objectives of the RFSI equipment-only program.
- Equipment is subject to the full range of acquisition, use, management, and distribution requirements under [2 CFR § 200.313](#) as applicable.
- The equipment investment must increase the applicant’s production capacity, allow the business to reach new markets, or create new products.
- The equipment investment must be a primary component of a robust plan for moving raw and/or finished product through the food and beverage supply chain.
- Items under \$2,500 per unit are considered supplies and not eligible for this grant.

See RFA page 18 “Applicants can request multiple pieces of equipment.”

Applicants can request multiple pieces of equipment; however, the proposed equipment investment responds to one overarching purpose. Applicants must define and describe the specific and existing problem, barrier, gap, and/or need in Maine’s middle of the supply chain that this equipment investment will address. For example, if an equipment investment is to expand from making local salsa to making local tomato sauce, the applicant could request funds for tomato processing equipment and then pasta sauce canning equipment, as both are required and connected in order to get the final product. If the equipment investment is to expand the quantity of products to a new market, the applicant could ask for a new delivery vehicle and an electric pallet jack to load into that new delivery vehicle, as both are connected and necessary. However, requesting a new cooler for storing raw produce and also a new milk bottling line would not be aligned with the same overarching challenge.

RFP Section & Page Number	Question
Part II Files Required And/Or Recommended, Page 13	Regarding the correct “formatting” of our grant application, can you tell us if there is a place for us to find specific formatting guidelines and if so do those guidelines pertain to formatting issues concerning, font type/font size/margins/the way the documents are saved and in what type of format, etc?
Answer	
3	<p>Per RFA Part II Files Required and or Recommended, page 13, complete application packages must include 3 required files and may include one optional 4th file:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. File 1: Application file One (required) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Applicants must download the required File 1 Word document template from the RFA by double-clicking on the document icon ○ Application File One (includes Cover Page, Debarment Performance and Non-Collusion Certification, Litigation Form, RFSI Equipment-only Narrative, and the Maine RFSI Environmental Prescreening Worksheet) ○ Applicants must not change the formatting of the provided template (do not change the font type, font size, or margins) ○ File 1 must be saved and submitted as one Word .Doc or .Docx document file. 2. File 2: Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure (required) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Applicants must download the required Word document template from the RFA by double-clicking on the document icon ○ Applicants are required to document that the critical resources and/or infrastructure that are necessary to complete the proposed equipment investment are committed and in place at the time the application is submitted. ○ Application File Two must include, at minimum, one Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure (EOCR) Letter using the provided template (but placed on the letterhead of the entity writing and signing the letter). Font type, font size, and margin size will not be a scorable factor, but ensuring that the instructions provided on the template and in the RFA are followed is a scorable factor. ○ Applicants must follow the instructions in this RFA Part VI Section F Evidence of Critical Infrastructure to complete this file. ○ Multiple letters must be combined into one file and submitted together as File 2. ○ File 2 must be saved and submitted as one Word .Doc or .Docx or Adobe .PDF document file.

3. File 3: Vendor Quotes (required)

- Applicants are required to submit a quote for each piece of equipment listed in the application.
- Applicants must follow the instructions in this RFA Part VI Section G Vendor Quotes to complete this file.
- **Font type, font size, and margin size will not be a scorable factor, but ensuring that the instructions provided on the template and in the RFA are followed is a scorable factor.**
- **Multiple files must be combined into one file and submitted together as File 3.**
- Applicants must include a quote for each piece of equipment requested
- Also in this file, applicants intending to purchase equipment costing more than \$100,000 must include a pre-qualification or pre-approval letter from a financial institution IF they intend to use loan funds to fund the difference between purchase cost and grant award.
- **File 3 must be submitted as one Adobe .PDF document file**

4. File 4: Letters of Support (recommended but not required)

- Applicants are encouraged to submit a letter(s) of support. A maximum of three letters of support are accepted for review.
- **Font type, font size, and margin size will not be a scorable factor,**
- **Multiple files must be combined into one file and submitted together as one Adobe .PDF document file**

See also RFA Part VI Proposal Submission Requirements, pages 29-30

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
4	Application File One Section 6 Expected Performance Measures, page 16-17	In outcomes 2 & 3, does it behoove us to include additional outcomes that are included on your list and that we know we will experience, even though you are asking for no more than 3 outcomes?
Answer		
No. Please only select 1-3 of the predetermined indicators and provide expected numbers based on the application's scope of work.		

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question																		
5	Application File One Section 6 Expected Performance Measures, page 16-17	Additionally, are any of the outcomes weighted with value in scoring more than others?																		
Answer																				
No. Please see RFA Part 1 Scoring Rubric to view how scoring points are determined. The scoring rubric for expected performance measures is on RFA page 10:																				
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 45%;">15. Expected Performance Measures</th> <th style="width: 15%;">RFSI Equipment-only Narrative Section 6 Expected Performance Measures</th> <th style="width: 35%;">more external supporters (5 points)</th> <th style="width: 5%;"></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>a) Does the applicant provide one or more of the predetermined indicators under Outcome 2 or Outcome 3?</td> <td></td> <td>o 1-3 Predetermined indicator(s) selected (1 point)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>b) Does the applicant provide quantifiable results for the indicator(s) selected?</td> <td></td> <td>o 1-3 Predetermined indicator(s) selected and realistic anticipated quantifiable results are provided (3 points)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>c) Do the selected indicators align with the purpose and description of equipment activities and goals stated in all areas of the application?</td> <td></td> <td>o 1-3 Predetermined indicator(s) selected and realistic anticipated quantifiable results are provided, and the expected performance measures are easily identifiable, aligned, justified, and well described within the application materials (5 points)</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					15. Expected Performance Measures	RFSI Equipment-only Narrative Section 6 Expected Performance Measures	more external supporters (5 points)		a) Does the applicant provide one or more of the predetermined indicators under Outcome 2 or Outcome 3?		o 1-3 Predetermined indicator(s) selected (1 point)		b) Does the applicant provide quantifiable results for the indicator(s) selected?		o 1-3 Predetermined indicator(s) selected and realistic anticipated quantifiable results are provided (3 points)		c) Do the selected indicators align with the purpose and description of equipment activities and goals stated in all areas of the application?		o 1-3 Predetermined indicator(s) selected and realistic anticipated quantifiable results are provided, and the expected performance measures are easily identifiable, aligned, justified, and well described within the application materials (5 points)	5
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RFP Section & Page Number	Question
Application File One Section 5 Equipment Investment Benefit and Stakeholder Support. Pages 14- 16	Section 5, parts C & D, can you tell us what is the difference between listing the individual farms In Section C and the external stakeholders in Section D?
Answer	
6	<p>C. Community Impact (Who will this funding support)</p> <p>Applicants must quantify (estimate), list, and describe the specific farms, processors, food businesses and community members that funding will benefit. In other words, who other than the applicant will a grant award support? These are typically the farms where the raw agricultural products (ingredients) will be purchased from.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>“Please estimate the number of local and regional farms and agricultural producers this proposal will impact (do not include the applicant). For example, if the applicant will purchase apples from 3 orchards and strawberries from 5 farms to make strawberry and apple jam, list 8 in the box.”</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">And</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>“Please list and describe the specific farms, processors, food businesses and community members the equipment investment will benefit (other than the applicant entity; 250 word maximum).”</i></p> <p>D. External Stakeholder Support (Who will provide support to the stated activities)</p> <p>Applicants must list and describe the partners and stakeholders that will provide support to the activities described in the application. This could be another entity that is providing shared space or a commodity group, organization, or alliance that may help a grant recipient to secure agricultural ingredients and/or market their food and beverage products. This could also be an organization that certifies your value-added products (e.g. MOFGA) or a retailer that will promote your new product line or entry into a new or expanded market.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>“Please list and describe the partners and stakeholders (other than the applicant) that support this equipment investment. Why do they support your work and how will they demonstrate their support as you implement your proposal if awarded?”</i></p>

RFP Section & Page Number	Question
File 2: Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure Template	In the File II Word Document, what specifically is being asked for regarding Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure?
Answer	
7	<p>Please see RFA Part IV Activities and Requirements, Section F, Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure, Pages 23-24:</p> <p>Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure (EOCRI) is required to document that the critical resources and/or infrastructure that are necessary to complete the proposed equipment investment are in place at the time the application is submitted. Critical resources and infrastructure can be facilities, land, structure, use of city streets/parks, shared-used kitchens, and/or other essential resources for the proposed application. Land, structures, and other critical resources must be in place and in working condition at the time of application submission. The letter(s) must identify and describe the critical resources necessary for acquiring and implementing the equipment and certify that they are in place and committed at the time of application submission.</p> <p>One EOCRI Letter must be submitted by the applicant entity. More than one EOCRI Infrastructure letter may be required to fully demonstrate that the infrastructure and resources are in place. As critical resources include things like a building lease or access to in-kind shared-use space, a letter may be necessary from a landlord or non-applicant entity owner of any space where the equipment will be operational. If equipment will be installed and/or operated at a location not owned by the applicant entity, a letter will be required from the organization/owner of the property/facility where the equipment will be utilized.</p> <p>EOCRI Letters may also be provided from contractors, lending institutions, town building permit and code departments, and other individuals and/or agencies with understanding of the critical resources and infrastructure needed for the equipment investment to be successful.</p> <p>If the equipment quote is greater than the \$100,000 maximum award amount, applicants must provide an EOCRI letter to document the funding source of the additional equipment cost. If a loan will be utilized, the applicant must provide a pre-qualification or pre-approval letter from a financial institution.</p> <p>EOCRI letters must show that the physical location (building, land, etc.) is in place and committed at the time of the application and will be available to receive the equipment when the funds are awarded.</p>

	<p>Letters of Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure must minimally include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant Entity Name • A statement about committing/approving/granting permission, etc., of the critical resource or infrastructure needed for the equipment • A description of the approved use of the critical resource or infrastructure approved for the equipment, any costs associated with use, and any qualifying circumstances. <p>See also RFA Part II Files Required and or Recommended, File 2, page 13.</p>
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	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
8	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section B Maine RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities, Page 19	Define “Processing” in relation to it being a part of the middle-of-the-supply-chain. Need clarification that an activity as simple as washing and sorting carrots (for example) and packing them for storage before wholesale, retail, or further value-added processing falls into this definition of “processing.”
	Answer	
	<p>For this RFA, “Processing” is defined as the act of transforming a food’s natural state. Processing activities include washing, cleaning, milling, cutting, chopping, heating, pasteurizing, blanching, cooking, canning, freezing, drying, dehydrating, mixing, packaging, storing, filtering, fermenting, extracting, concentrating, or other procedures that alter the food from its natural state. Processing activities may include adding other ingredients or additives approved for use in food products. “Processing,” “Substantial Transformation,” and “Value-added” are synonymous and interchangeable for the purpose of this RFA.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
9	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section A Purpose and Background, Page 15	The term “substantial transformation (processing)” is used several times – again, is washing/sorting/packing of a piece of produce “substantial” enough to qualify or will priority be given to further processed foods?
	Answer	
	<p>For this RFA, “Processing,” “Substantial Transformation,” and “Value-added” are synonymous and interchangeable and are defined as the act of transforming a food’s natural state. Processing activities include washing, cleaning, milling, cutting, chopping, heating, pasteurizing, blanching, cooking, canning, freezing, drying, dehydrating, mixing, packaging, storing, filtering, fermenting, extracting, concentrating, sorting, packing, or other procedures that alter the food from its natural state. Processing activities may include adding other ingredients or additives approved for use in food products.</p> <p>Per the RFA Part I Scoring Rubric, the amount of transformation and processing that a food undergoes is not considered in application scoring.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
10	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section B Maine RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities and Section C USDA RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities, Page 19	Define “value-added”. Does washing/sorting/packing a vegetable count as “value-added”?
	Answer	
	<p>For this RFA, “Processing,” “Substantial Transformation,” and “Value-added” are synonymous and interchangeable and are defined as the act of transforming a food’s natural state. Processing activities include washing, cleaning, milling, cutting, chopping, heating, pasteurizing, blanching, cooking, canning, freezing, drying, dehydrating, mixing, packaging, storing, filtering, fermenting, extracting, concentrating, sorting, packing, or other procedures that alter the food from its natural state. Processing activities may include adding other ingredients or additives approved for use in food products.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
11	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section A Purpose and Background, Page 14	<p>We need assurance that the “Application Product Category” we apply as would be “Foods and beverage products inclusive of 51% or more specialty crops (farm cultivated and processed for human food consumption)” even though in our application/narrative we will address that some of the produce we process (wash/sort/pack) on the proposed equipment will undergo further transformation into a product that may be less than 51% local (because of ingredients like oil/vinegar).</p> <p>To be clear, 100% of what we wash/sort/pack on this proposed equipment will be 100% local (Maine) product.</p> <p>The vast majority of what we process on the equipment will move through the middle-of-the-supply-chain and into wholesale/retail as a raw or minimally processed item at 100% local. For example – whole, raw carrots, or frozen, diced carrots. However, a minority poundage of the carrots we process on this equipment may move on to a local food processor to be turned into Carrot Ginger dressing (less than 51% local product). Can we still discuss that “channel” of movement of the carrots without penalization if we apply under the “Specialty Crop” category?</p>
	Answer	
	<p>If the majority of ingredients that will be processed, aggregated, or distributed on the funded equipment (51 percent or more of all product ingredients by weight or volume, excluding water) are specialty crop produce that are grown and harvested in Maine, then you may apply in the specialty crop product category.</p> <p>Please see Application File One Section 3: Product Information Subsection B Primary Ingredients. If your “product type” includes whole packaged carrots, washed carrots, frozen carrots, diced carrots, etc., and your carrots are 100% grown in Maine, then you may apply in the specialty crop product category. (Carrots in this example are interchangeable with all Maine-grown and harvested specialty crops for human consumption).</p> <p>However, if your “product type” includes carrot ginger dressing, ginger oil, ginger-infused mayo, etc., and any one of your listed “product types” has less than 51% Maine-grown and harvested ingredients (e.g., olive oil), you should apply in the specialty food and beverage product category.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Application File One Section 3: Product Information Subsection B Primary Ingredients.	Regarding the above question, do we fill out the last column on the chart in SECTION 3: PRODUCT INFORMATION section B of the application or leave it blank so as not to confuse the application (and only reference the ultra-value-added products (dressings) in our narrative?)
	Answer	
12	<p>If you are applying in the specialty crop product category, please do NOT complete the last column of the table labeled “ONLY applicants applying in specialty food and beverage product category”</p> <p>If you are applying in the specialty food and beverage product category, please ensure that you DO complete the last column of the table labeled “ONLY applicants applying in specialty food and beverage product category”</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section A Purpose and Background, Page 14	Reads “...(no foods intentionally produced or processed for donation to a food bank or pantry network)”. We use charitable food organizations as a “safety” for some of the volume of what we produce. Products are not intentionally grown for that, but often poundage goes that way because of a glut of something or the timing of harvest. Also, much of the food that goes into the charitable food channel isn’t donated but purchased from us by organizations that have funds for stocking these pantries and kitchens. Do these then qualify?
	Answer	
13	<p>No. Food products that are intentionally produced or processed for donation or sale to a food bank or pantry network do not qualify for RFSI funding and should not be referenced in an RFSI application.</p> <p>No reference to charitable food organizations should be made in an RFSI application as this would demonstrate intent and be unallowable.</p> <p>Once a contract is awarded, unintentional product surplus may be donated or sold to the charitable food system provided that an attempt was made to sell the products into the market channels proposed in the RFSI application and no other market channel could be identified and the products were not intentionally processed for the charitable food system.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section C USDA RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities, Page 20	Define “underserved community”. Does this refer to communities that have less access to food because of location (“food desert”), less access financially (charitable food system), or less access because of a lack of culturally appropriate food items (certain ethnic communities)?
14	Answer	
	<p>In this RFA “underserved communities” refers to the USDA community groups that are identified in Farm Bill legislation and in USDA policy as being Historically Underserved (HU). Members of these groups have been historically underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, Federal policies and programs. Four groups are defined by USDA as “Historically Underserved,” including farmers or ranchers who are: Beginning; Socially Disadvantaged; Veterans; and Limited Resource.</p> <p>See the definition of Beginning Farmer on RFA page 34 See the definition of Socially Disadvantaged Farmer on RFA page 36 See the definition of Veteran Producers or Processors on RFA page 36 See the definition of Limited Resource Farmer on RFA page 35</p> <p>Page 20 “Diversity of processing infrastructure-Equipment investments that increase diversity in processing options in terms of business model approaches, geography, and availability to underserved communities” refers to equipment investments that will increase Maine’s diversity in food processing business models, and/or diversity across Maine’s middle of the supply chain with regard to state geographic local of food and beverage processing, and/or equipment investments that create new or improved market channels for agricultural historically underserved (HU) agricultural producers that are growing and harvesting the raw agricultural ingredients to be processed.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
15	Application File One Section 5 Equipment Investment Benefit and Stakeholder Support Subsection C Community Impact	In SECTION 5C of the application it asks for the number of “regional farms and agricultural producers this proposal will impact”. Then, underneath it asks to describe the “specific farms, processors, food businesses...etc”. Are we to only count farms/producers and not processors or distributors in the first part of the question?

Answer
<p>Yes. Please only include the number of local/regional agricultural producers who will benefit from the new or improved processing/aggregation/storage or distribution capacity. Please only include farms that are conducting the beginning of the supply chain activities of “farming” and “harvesting” and that the applicant entity will purchase raw agricultural products (ingredients) that are grown and harvested in Maine from. For example, if the applicant will purchase apples from 3 orchards and strawberries from 5 farms to make strawberry and apple jam, list 8 in the box below.</p>

RFP Section & Page Number	Question
<p>Application File One Section 1 Applicant Information Subsection G Historically Underserved Farmer Applicant</p> <p>And</p> <p>Application File One Section 5 Equipment Investment Benefit and Stakeholder Support Subsection A Benefit to Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers</p>	<p>How do LFPA producer partners fit into this grant if food produced with the intention of movement into the charitable food system is not permitted for this funding opportunity?</p>
16	Answer
	<p>Applicants may receive up to five points if the “Applicant fully demonstrates being a historically underserved farmer or disadvantaged entity in one of the defined categories” (RFA scoring rubric, page 4). It is assumed that LFPA Producer Partners have additional market channels other than the charitable food system and should describe their background and purpose (Application File One, page 11) and a description of the funding impact on the applicant’s business (Application File One, page 12). The charitable food system is not eligible as an equipment investment to improve sales channels and increase access to more and better markets for the applicant’s business entity, and therefore, sales to charitable organizations should not be referenced in describing proposed activities in an RFSI application.</p> <p>Applicants are not asked to describe charitable food donations or sales plans or projects for the applicant entity or for the farmers and producers that may benefit from the equipment investment.</p>

	<p>Applicants are asked to indicate, if the applicant entity is a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning Farmer; • Socially Disadvantaged Farmer; • An entity that meets the SBA determined criteria for one or more of the SBA categories of small disadvantaged business, women-owned small business, or veteran-owned small business; • Veteran Producer or Processor; • Limited Resource Farmer; • LFPA Producer Partner <p>Applicants are also asked to identify if this equipment investment will benefit (meaning will raw agricultural ingredients be purchased from) Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers other than the applicant (see RFA for definitions applicable to this application; select all that apply).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning Farmer and Ranchers • Socially Disadvantaged Farmer • Veteran Producer or Processor • Limited Resource Farmer • Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Producer Partner <p>See RFA page 35 definition of “LFPA Producer Partners” : Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Producer Partners with a current LFPA contract with the Department are also determined by the RFSI Program to meet the criteria to be considered processors or other middle-of-the-supply chain businesses owned by socially disadvantaged individuals.</p>
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	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part I Scoring Rubric #13, page 9.	Would our retail customers count as “community stakeholders”? Would a letter of support outlining the value we bring as a retailer in the community, signed by customers or by a town manager be allowed?
	Answer	
17		Yes. Retail customers may count as community stakeholders in the “community impact” scoring criteria if the retail customers will benefit from the equipment investment. Usually, “community impact” refers to the agricultural producers will benefit from increased sales due to the enhanced processing capacity related to the equipment investment. However, if a description and/or letter(s) of support described how the equipment investment would benefit other “community stakeholders other than the applicant entity)” this would be a positive example of documenting community impact. A letter from a town manager that described how the equipment investment would benefit other “community stakeholders other than the applicant entity)” would be permissible.

RFP Section & Page Number	Question		
<p>Part I Scoring Rubric #9, page 6.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Part IV Activities and Requirements Section B Maine RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities, page 19</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Application File 1 Section 4: Purpose and Scope of Work, subsection F Maine RFSI Priorities, page 12</p>	<p>In the RFA Part IV Section B, we are asked to address how the proposed equipment will allow “one or more” of the listed Maine RFSI Priorities to be met, but in the actual application, we can choose only the ONE that best illustrates this. Can we choose one but discuss multiple in the allowed narrative area of SECTION IV.F of the application?</p>		
Answer			
18	<p>No. applicants should not discuss multiple Maine RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities. Per the scoring rubric and application file one instructions, applicants must “<i>Select one Maine priority area that best aligns with the purpose of this application.</i>”</p>		
	<p>9. Maine Priorities</p> <p>a) Does the equipment investment address one or more of the Maine priorities identified in Part IV Section B of this RFA?</p> <p>i. Equipment investments that will support processing and packaging improvements (including value-added processing, co-packing, canning, preserving, drying, hulling, shelling, milling, cooking, baking, juicing, distilling, and fermenting).</p> <p>ii. Equipment investments that will support storage and distribution improvements (including cold storage, refrigeration, delivery and distribution).</p>	<p>RFSI Equipment-only Narrative Section 4 Application Purpose and Scope of Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The applicant checked the box to indicate a Maine priority area they feel is related to the application (1 point) o The applicant's Maine priority selection is not clearly aligned or fully described in the application materials (3 points) o The application provides a well-articulated and compelling description of how the equipment investment will address a Maine RFSI priority (5 pts).
<p style="text-align: right;">Page 6</p>			
<p>RFA#– Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program</p>			
<hr/>			
<p>iii. Equipment investments that will resolve middle-of-the-supply-chain challenges within Maine’s targeted agricultural products (specialty crops, dairy and eggs, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, value-added specialty foods).</p>			

RFP Section & Page Number	Question								
<p>Part I Scoring Rubric #10, page 7.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Part IV Activities and Requirements Section C USDA RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities, page 19</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Application File 1 Section 4: Purpose and Scope of Work, subsection G USDA RFSI Priorities, page 13</p>	<p>The same question goes for PART IV.C of the RFA – it prompts “one of more” but the application asks us to choose ONE USDA priority (SECTION IV.G).</p>								
Answer									
<p>19</p>	<p>No. applicants should not discuss multiple USDA RFSI Equipment-only Program Priorities. Per the scoring rubric and application file one instructions, applicants must <i>“Select one USDA priority area that best aligns with the purpose of this application.”</i></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>aquaculture, value-added specialty foods).</th> <th></th> <th></th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <p>10. USDA Priorities</p> <p>a) Does the equipment investment address one or more of the USDA priorities identified in Part IV Section C of this RFA?</p> <p>i. Expand value-added product capacity and resiliency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Equipment investments that support the development of value-added products available to consumers. o Focus on small and medium-sized enterprises that add options and choices for consumers and producers (emphasis on value-added); <p>ii. Workforce/economic impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Equipment investments that support activities that provide fair prices, fair wages and new and safe job opportunities that keep profits in rural communities. o Equipment investments that offer family-supporting job quality and treatment/safety of workers; <p>iii. Diversity of processing infrastructure</p> </td> <td> <p>RFSI Equipment-only Narrative Section 4 Purpose and Scope of Work</p> </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The applicant checks the box to indicate a USDA priority area they feel is related to the application (1 point) o The applicant's USDA priority selection is not clearly aligned or fully described in the application materials (3 points) o The application provides a well-articulated and compelling description of how the equipment investment will address a USDA RFSI priority (5 points). </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> <p>5</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	aquaculture, value-added specialty foods).				<p>10. USDA Priorities</p> <p>a) Does the equipment investment address one or more of the USDA priorities identified in Part IV Section C of this RFA?</p> <p>i. Expand value-added product capacity and resiliency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Equipment investments that support the development of value-added products available to consumers. o Focus on small and medium-sized enterprises that add options and choices for consumers and producers (emphasis on value-added); <p>ii. Workforce/economic impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Equipment investments that support activities that provide fair prices, fair wages and new and safe job opportunities that keep profits in rural communities. o Equipment investments that offer family-supporting job quality and treatment/safety of workers; <p>iii. Diversity of processing infrastructure</p>	<p>RFSI Equipment-only Narrative Section 4 Purpose and Scope of Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The applicant checks the box to indicate a USDA priority area they feel is related to the application (1 point) o The applicant's USDA priority selection is not clearly aligned or fully described in the application materials (3 points) o The application provides a well-articulated and compelling description of how the equipment investment will address a USDA RFSI priority (5 points). 	<p>5</p>
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	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section C Eligibility to Submit Application, Page 16	<p>We are not actually processing specialty food products, but we provide testing services for Maine food processors.</p> <p>Our clients are mostly Maine farmers and food entrepreneurs sending in canned shelf stable, fermented and dehydrated food products for testing and a process review before these products can be legally sold in the marketplace. This is mandated by the MDACF and the FDA. Our key testing equipment are approaching the normal service life span (~20 years).</p> <p>Most of our clients use local (Maine) ingredients in their specialty food products, but we have no way to tell how much of their ingredients are from Maine. The clients that use our food testing services are predominately from Maine (~60% or higher). I am curious if we meet the eligibility requirements listed under this section.</p>
20	Answer	
	<p>From the USDA AMS RFSI federal staff team:</p> <p><i>The institution is an eligible entity as they are a university, however, the project activities must align with the RFSI program as well.</i></p> <p><i>I would recommend looking at how these activities are middle of the supply chain, how it will benefit and increase market opportunities for local and regional producers, and what types of testing they will be conducting.</i></p> <p><i>If their facility is to do product testing and experimenting (research focused), I'd recommend another program like the SCBGP. If they are running special food testing for producers and processors in order for the food products to be deemed safe for public distribution and consumption, it would be allowable. I think it really depends on how the equipment funding will be used and by who.</i></p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section C Eligibility to Submit Application, Page 16	Would the UMaine Food Testing Services/testing activities be considered middle-of-the-supply chain activities and be eligible to meet the program requirements for institutions/schools? We act as a conduit between the processor (who processes their products) and the ability to sell their products through wholesale and retail distribution channels.
20	Answer	
	<p>The University’s Food Testing Lab would qualify for special purpose food testing equipment that would benefit multiple producers in completing the middle of the supply chain activities (post harvest and pre markets) related to the testing stage of value-added food processing for consumer safety purposes as required by law. Funding would be allowable for <i>“specialized food testing for producers and processors in order for the food products to be deemed safe for public distribution and consumption.”</i></p>	
	<p>This funding for special purpose equipment would qualify per RFSI Program Scope and Requirements Section 1.5.2 Entities Eligible for Infrastructure Grants (page 8):</p> <p><i>Institutions such as schools, universities, or hospitals bringing producers together to establish cooperative or shared infrastructure or invest in equipment that will benefit multiple producers in middle-of-the-supply chain activities such as processing, aggregation, and distribution of targeted agricultural products.</i></p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
21	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section E Non-Allowable Use of Funds Page 22	Seeds are listed as non-allowable use of funds, however RFA does not distinguish between seeds grown/harvested for planting/animal feed versus seeds grown/harvested for human consumption. Would seeds grown for human consumption be allowed for processing with RFSI equipment, i.e., are Buckwheat/Sunflower seeds for human consumption allowable crops to be processed with RFSI equipment?
	Answer	
	Seeds grown intentionally for human consumption are eligible to be processed with RFSI funded equipment (eligible examples include seeds processed directly for consumption and/or products baked with seeds such as seeded breads and crackers).	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section E Non-Allowable Use of Funds Page 22	Are buckwheat and sunflower seeds eligible in the specialty crop product category?
22	Answer	
	<p>No. Buckwheat and sunflower are considered commodities and do not meet the USDA definition for specialty crops. Food products made with 51% or more buckwheat, sunflower, or other commodities (e.g. peanuts, rice, soy, tofu, oats) are not eligible in the specialty crop product category.</p> <p>However, these food products would be eligible in other RFSI product categories such as grains for human consumption or the specialty food and beverage products category.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section D Allowable Use of Funds Page 21	RFA lists “drying, hulling, shelling, and milling” as allowable use of funds however RFA does not list threshing. Would a threshing machine be considered special purpose equipment allowable by the RSFI, if, assuming the threshing machine is being used off-field as a standalone machine, and for post-harvest processing/threshing of crops for human consumption?
23	Answer	
	Yes. A threshing machine used for post-harvest processing of crops for human consumption is an example of an eligible middle of the supply chain special purpose equipment item.	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
24	Scoring Criteria #4. Evidence of Critical Infrastructure – Page 4 AND Part IV Activities and Requirements Section F Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure Page 23-24	If applicant has commenced construction of a new commercial kitchen, however facility is not licensed for commercial food processing and/or construction has not been completed by the time of application submission, would applicant Pass or Fail Scoring Criteria # 4 of the Scoring Rubric
	Answer	
	<p>If the critical resources and infrastructure of constructing the new commercial kitchen is secured at the time of the application and will be completed by the estimated contract start date, this would pass. However, the applicant will need to adequately demonstrate evidence that the construction permits are in place, construction has started, funds are secured and committed (at the time of application) to complete the construction of the new commercial kitchen, and that if funded the equipment will be purchased and ready to implement within six months, or according to an alternate proposed and justified timeline within the grant period ending May 24, 2026.</p> <p>A Letter of Critical Resources and Infrastructure must come from the applicant entity and may also come from the landowner (if not the applicant), the town building/code permit office, a financial institution, a general contractor, and other entities involved with the described critical resources and infrastructure.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
25	RFA Part IV Activities and Requirements, Section F, Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure, Pages 23-24	If an applicant specifies a particular commercial kitchen facility within the Letter of Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure - is the applicant obligated to using the equipment only at the facility specified on the letter during the RFSI reporting period? If not, is applicant allowed to relocate RFSI equipment to an alternate facility and must the alternate facility be listed within a separate Letter of Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure? What if the alternate facility doesn't exist or isn't operable at the time of application submission?
	Answer	
	<p>The applicant will be obligated to utilize the equipment only at the facility specified in the application documents (including the Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure) during the grant period of performance ending May 24, 2026.</p> <p>If funding is awarded, it may be possible to receive approval to relocate the equipment in the event of an unusual circumstance requiring it to be relocated to complete the contracted RFSI activities.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
26	Application File One Section 7 Budget Narrative Subsection C Budget Prioritization	If applicant lists multiple pieces of equipment under their equipment budget, are there any circumstances when only some of the equipment (part of the budget) would be approved, or are awards issued on an all or nothing basis only?
	Answer	
	<p>Applicants can request multiple pieces of equipment.</p> <p>Applicants are asked to indicate a prioritized ranking of their proposed budget. This may be useful in the event of partial funding awards. The prioritized ranking may also be useful if the quoted equipment pricing is no longer accurate at the time of award.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
27	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section A Purpose and Background, Page 14	Our tortillas use 58% Maine Grains sifted wheat flour and 9.5% Black Bear sunflower oil from Yost Farms. Would this product fall into category 3 or 5?
	Answer	
	<p>As described, your tortillas would fall into Product Category #3 as it is described to include 51% or more Maine-grown and harvested grains intended for food.</p> <p>Product Category # 3: Food and beverages inclusive of 51% or more Maine grains intended for human consumption;</p> <p>Product Category # 5: Maine specialty food and beverages products produced with 51% or more Maine-grown and harvested ingredients OR specialty foods and beverages that include one or more Maine-grown and harvested ingredients but are unable to be manufactured with 51% or more Maine grown and harvested ingredients.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
28	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section A Purpose and Background, Page 15	Considering the above, the flour and oil considered “raw agricultural products”?
	Answer	
	Yes. Flour is considered a raw agricultural product and sunflower oil that is made with Maine-grown and harvested sunflower seeds also meets the definition for “primary Maine grown and harvested ingredients” to be included in the table provided in Application File One Section Three Product Information subsection B Primary Ingredients and also should be included in subsection C Percentage of Maine-grown and Harvested Ingredients.	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
29	Part III Overview of the Grant Opportunity Section A Purpose and Background, Page 15	Considering the two questions above, does this product qualify for the extra points?
	Answer	
	As stated in this question, yes. A product with 58% Maine Grains wheat flour and 9.5% Maine-grown and harvested sunflower oil meets the 67% Maine-grown and harvested ingredient criteria for the 3 competitive bonus points.	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
30	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section D Allowable Use of Funds Page 22	Our application will be for locally sourced flour tortilla production, packaging, and storage. Is this an allowable use of funds? It is unlike anything I see on the allowable or non-allowable use lists.
	Answer	
	Yes. These are all allowable middle of the supply chain special purpose equipment activities. RFA page 22 lists processing, packing, and storage as allowable activities. Packaging equipment is eligible as a “packing” activity.	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
31	RFA Part II Files Required and/or Recommended, page 13 AND Part IV Activities and Requirements Section G Vendor Quotes Required Page 23-24	If we are getting multiple pieces of equipment from one vendor is one vendor quote acceptable or does each piece of equipment need its own quote regardless of the vendor?
	Answer	
	<p>Applicants must include a quote for each piece of equipment requested. It is ok to have multiple pieces of equipment on one quote from the same vendor. Please ensure that each piece of equipment is clearly identifiable and itemized.</p> <p>Vendor Quote(s) must minimally include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date of quote • Vendor Name • Equipment name (for each piece of equipment) • Itemized breakdown of each of the expenses included in the special purpose equipment quote (e.g. shipping, handling, delivery, implements, attachments for each equipment item). • Total price of each special purpose equipment item <p>Multiple vendor quote files must be combined into one file and submitted together as File 3.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
32	Part IV Activities and Requirements Section G Vendor Quotes Required Page 23-24	Does all the equipment need to be purchased at the same time?
	Answer	
	No equipment does not need to be purchased at the same time if funding is awarded for multiple pieces of equipment.	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
33	RFA Part II Files Required and/or Recommended, page 13	Which file naming structure is correct? “File 1 Rolling Fatties LLC—Application File One (required)” or “File 1 Rolling Fatties LLC”
	Answer	
	<p>File 1 Applicant Entity Name is the stated naming convention which in your example would be: File 1 Rolling Fatties LLC</p> <p>File 1 Rolling Fatties Application File One would also be acceptable.</p> <p>Symbols such as dashes and parentheses may cause technical challenges in saving and/or naming files.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
34	Application File One Section 4 Purpose and Scope of Work Subsection D Impact to Maine’s Middle of the Supply Chain, page 11.	Could you please clarify what you are looking for in the request to “ <i>describe the impact on Maine’s middle of the supply chain capacity and resilience this equipment investment will have. Describe the specific and existing problem, barrier, gap, and/or need in Maine’s middle of the supply chain that this equipment investment will address</i> ”. Is question 4.D looking for a problem, barrier, gap, and/or need the applicant is facing or that the State of Maine’s middle of the supply chain faces?
	Answer	
	<p>This question is asking the applicant to describe the problem, barrier, gap, and/or need that Maine’s middle of the supply chain faces (e.g. lack of aggregation space in your county or region, limited availability of commercial kitchens, transportation barriers, insufficient processing capacity for xyz ingredient, a need for automation due to workforce shortages, etc).</p> <p>Please see RFA Part 1 Scoring Rubric #7, page 6, to view the description of how this will be scored.</p>	

	RFP Section & Page Number	Question
35	Application File One Section 5 Equipment Investment Benefit and Stakeholder Support Subsection B Distressed Communities Index, page 15.	I was unable to open the link to the Distressed Communities Index in the application. Could you please include the link again in your response or provide another way to access this document?
Answer		
https://eig.org/distressed-communities/?geo=states&lat=38.01&lon=-96.42&z=3.95		

Additional Question and Answer Information:

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry held four online office hours between August 8, 2024 and September 9, 2024. The question and answer summaries from these office hours and USDA AMS RFSI team communication can be found on the [Maine RFSI program webpage](#) and are linked individually here:

- **August 8 Office Hours**
 - [Question & Answers \(PDF\)](#)
- **August 20 Office Hours**
 - [Question & Answers \(PDF\)](#)
- **September 5 & 9**
 - [Presentation \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Question & Answers \(PDF\)](#)