



**The Appalachian Regional Commission  
Request for Proposals**

# **Agriculture and Local Food Activity in the Appalachian Region**

**Proposals due on or before 12:00 p.m. EDT  
August 19, 2020**

Attention: Logan Thomas  
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## **The Appalachian Regional Commission Request for Proposals: Agriculture and Local Food Activity in the Appalachian Region**

Open Date: July 15, 2020  
Proposal Due Date: August 19, 2020  
Selection Date: September 30, 2020  
Contract Period: October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

### **I. Overview of Request for Proposals**

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) invites proposals from qualified researchers and consultants to examine agriculture and local food activity in the Appalachian Region (Region) using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. A core element of the research should be the analysis of data from the Census of Agriculture, as well as data from other relevant sources, to document agricultural activity throughout the Region and how it may have changed over recent years. Building in part on this initial analysis, additional steps should then be undertaken by the research team to provide a more comprehensive overview of agricultural activity in Appalachia, with particular emphasis given to local food systems. Best practices and promising models should then be explored in-depth, and findings should be made relatable for communities across the Region. Additionally, emerging opportunities in the field, in terms of both types of crops and strategic developments, should be identified. All analyses should be geared towards the following audiences: support organizations, including nonprofits; economic development professionals; and local government officials. A comprehensive literature review should inform each step of the research, and ARC will rely on the expertise of the research team to help determine the focus and scope of certain elements. Throughout the research, special consideration should be given to how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted local food systems throughout the Region, in terms of both daily operations and their roles in communities, as well as how the pandemic may shape the nature and importance of these systems moving forward.

The main purposes of the research are to:

- Provide a comprehensive quantitative overview of agricultural and local food activity throughout the Appalachian Region, including changes over recent years;
- Identify best practices and promising models from across Appalachia, as well as elsewhere in the country, that support the development of local food systems and help farms increase revenues;
- Identify emerging opportunities in agriculture throughout the Region, including types of crops and products as well as strategic and technological innovations.

Required deliverables include quarterly reports, intermediate drafts when appropriate, a final report, and an executive summary that summarizes and interprets key findings of the study. Although some components of the report may inherently be technical in nature, the final report should be written for a non-technical audience, with the narrative discussion weaving together statistics, analyses, graphs, maps, and tables where appropriate. The selected researcher or consultant will work closely with ARC staff in the development of this report.

A Microsoft Word file and an Adobe PDF file must be submitted upon completion of the project. All relevant databases compiled during the study, including all raw data, edited datasets, and results of statistical analyses, must also be submitted upon completion of the project.

## **II. Background**

### **A. About Appalachia**

The Appalachian Region, as defined in ARC's authorizing legislation, is a 205,000 square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Forty-two percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population.

The Appalachian Region's economy, which was once highly dependent on extractive industries, has become more diversified in recent times and now includes larger shares of manufacturing and professional services, among other industries. Appalachia has made significant socioeconomic progress over the past five decades: Its poverty rate, which was 31 percent in 1960, fell to 16.3 percent over the 2013–2017 period. The number of high-poverty counties in the Region (those with poverty rates greater than 1.5 times the U.S. average) declined from 295 in 1960 to 98 over the 2013–2017 period.

These gains have transformed the Region from one of widespread poverty to one of economic contrasts: some communities have successfully diversified their economies, while others still require basic infrastructure such as roads, clinics, and water and wastewater systems. The contrasts are not surprising in light of the Region's size and diversity—the Region extends more than 1,000 miles from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi and is home to more than 25 million people.

### **B. About the Appalachian Regional Commission**

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is an economic development agency of the federal government and 13 state governments focusing on 420 counties across the Appalachian Region. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, ARC is

composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states, as well as a federal co-chair appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts.

ARC's mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia to help the Region achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation. ARC funds projects that address the five goals identified in the ARC's strategic plan:

1. Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia's economy.
2. Increase the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.
3. Invest in critical infrastructure—especially broadband; transportation, including the Appalachian Development Highway System; and water/wastewater systems.
4. Strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets.
5. Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.

Each year, ARC provides funding for several hundred projects in the Appalachian Region in areas such as business development, education and job training, telecommunications, infrastructure, community development, housing, and transportation. These projects create thousands of new jobs; improve local water and wastewater systems; increase school readiness; expand access to health care; assist local communities with strategic planning; and provide technical and managerial assistance to emerging businesses.

Additional information about Appalachia and the Appalachian Regional Commission can be found at [www.arc.gov](http://www.arc.gov).

### **III. Scope of Work**

Proposals should present an outline of the research and analysis to be conducted, a work plan, and a schedule for reports and deliverables. The scope of work requires a team of researchers and consultants with a broad set of skills to execute the project. The final report should be visually engaging and written for a non-technical audience.

The scope of work should be informed by various data sources and a review of current literature. An extensive knowledge and command of the subject areas should be evident throughout. In addition to the [Census of Agriculture](#) and any additional data sources, the USDA's [Economics of Local Food Systems Toolkit](#) and

the Federal Reserve System's [Harvesting Opportunity](#) may be useful resources as applicants are shaping their proposals' scope of work. Other reports, such as those commissioned by nonprofit support organizations in the field, should also be referenced. Additionally, proposals should be informed by ARC's [program areas](#) and [past research projects](#), as well as by its current [strategic plan](#).

The following components should be incorporated into or addressed in proposals. Additional elements, as well as amendments to the components described below, may be offered as needed.

#### **A. Literature Review**

The types of literature reviewed should be wide-ranging and include items beyond academic studies. Given the amount of literature available related to agriculture and local food systems, as well as the distinct components of this project, special consideration should be given to the organization and scope of this section; it should be comprehensive but also comprehensible. This section should serve as a foundation for later components.

#### **B. Quantitative Overview of Agriculture and Local Food Activity**

The report should include a comprehensive examination of the two most recent releases of the Census of Agriculture, as well as any additional datasets that could provide insights into local food activity in the Region. Throughout the report, when the data permit, the Appalachian Region should be compared to the rest of the United States. Differences within the Region should also be noted, based on the common aggregations found in ARC research: Appalachian subregions, metro designations, economic status of counties, and the Appalachian and non-Appalachian portions of states. Tables, maps, and infographics should be utilized to make this component of the research engaging and easy to interpret.

#### **C. Identification of Best Practices and Promising Models**

Based in part on the previous two components, researchers should identify best practices and promising models from across Appalachia, as well as elsewhere in the country, that support the development of local food systems and help small farms increase revenues. Examples of strategies may include but not are limited to the following: using technology to improve harvest yield; improving storage and transportation practices; and increasing access to institutional markets such as restaurants, grocers, schools, and hospitals.

Case studies of enterprises and organizations related to agriculture and local food systems may be used to highlight and reinforce findings. A wide range of enterprises and organizations may be featured, including farms, food hubs, and enterprises and organizations that provide the type of support and resources critical to local food system development. Additionally, communities with strong local food systems may also be examined. When applicable and if possible, case studies may

highlight ARC-funded projects that embody best practices. Case studies should be selected and undertaken in such a way that key findings and takeaways are relevant to communities throughout Appalachia.

#### **D. Identification of Emerging Opportunities**

Based in part on the previous three components, researchers should identify emerging opportunities in agriculture throughout the Region, both in terms of types of crops and products (e.g., heirloom crops and non-forest timber products), as well as strategic and technological innovations that small farmers and support organizations may be able to implement to increase yields and improve efficiency (e.g., precision agriculture).

When appropriate, strategies and recommendations identified in the third and fourth components of this research should be framed within ARC's current priorities, which are found [here](#).

Within each component of the research, researchers should consider the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on local food systems and agricultural activity throughout the Region, as well as the ways in which these impacts may bring about long-lasting changes to these areas.

#### **IV. Methodology**

The successful applicant will develop a detailed methodology to analyze the topics specified in the Overview and Scope of Work. The methodology should include:

- Description of the literature review to be undertaken, including search methods, types of materials, and potential themes to be explored. A thorough knowledge of the field should be evident; including examples of literature is highly encouraged.
- Specification of datasets to be used in the quantitative component of the research. This should include discussion of variables, time periods, limitations, level of detail, and coverage of data sources.
- Preliminary protocols for identifying best practices and promising models. Additionally, protocols for selecting potential case studies should also be included, and examples of the types of enterprises and organizations should be offered. Methodologies for subsequently conducting the studies should be described, as well as ideas for their scope and format. Note that ARC will play an integral role in the selection process of these case studies, and all proposals should incorporate this aspect into their protocol development.
- Description of how the first three components in Section III, "Scope of Work," will be used and built upon in order to identify emerging opportunities for communities throughout the Region. The scope and format of this section should be discussed, and examples of potential opportunities should be provided.

Proposals can offer additional methodological approaches as needed, as well as changes to those described above. For example, depending on the experience of the research team, it may be beneficial to include an advisory council to be consulted throughout the course of the project; if so, details regarding the selection process and roles should be included. For any methodological additions or changes, the proposal should make clear why the approach is being included and how it will lead to a better overall final report.

The selected researcher or consultant will work closely with ARC in the development and management of this report.

## **V. Technical, Management, and Cost Proposal Contents**

### **A. Technical Proposal**

The narrative should not exceed 10 pages, not including the abstract and accompanying resumes and organizational background materials.

#### *i. Summary Abstract (300 words)*

In this section, provide a brief abstract of the proposal by summarizing the background, objectives, proposed methodologies, and expected outputs and results of the research.

#### *ii. Methodology*

Describe the step-by-step approach or methods intended to accomplish all the tasks specified in this request for proposals (RFP). The proposal should provide a detailed explanation of the methodologies to be used, describe the limitations of the selected methods, and justify why the methods were selected over others. The proposal should identify the points and tasks in this research project that will require participation by ARC staff. Finally, the proposal should identify any difficulties that may be encountered in this project and propose practical and sound solutions to these problems.

#### *iii. Project Work Plan and Milestones*

The proposal should describe the phases into which the proposed research can be logically divided and performed. Flow charts should be included as necessary. A schedule of milestones and deadlines should be specified for the completion of the various components, including intermediate steps and preliminary drafts for review. Written quarterly progress reports and monthly call-ins with ARC staff are required.

#### *iv. Key Personnel*

All personnel taking part in the research must be described in this section. Brief resumes should include the professional classifications (e.g., project director, economist, analyst, consultant, etc.), education, and relevant experience of key personnel. The selected contractor will be required to furnish the services of those identified in the proposal as key personnel. Any change in key personnel is subject to approval by ARC.

## **B. Management Proposal**

Resources and capacities related to the planning and management of the research project will be considered as part of the proposal selection process.

### *i. Business Management Organization and Personnel*

Furnish a brief narrative description of the organization, including the division or branch planned to perform the proposed effort, and the authority responsible for controlling these resources and personnel.

### *ii. Staffing Plan*

A staffing plan is required that describes the contractor's proposed staff distribution to accomplish this work. The staffing plan should present a chart that partitions the full time equivalent (FTE) commitment of each professional staff member to the project's tasks and schedule. In addition, the proposal should include a detailed description of activities for key project-related personnel and anticipated deliverables. Finally, the proposal should identify the relationship of key project personnel to the contracting organization, including consultants and subcontractors.

### *iii. Relevant Prior Experience*

The proposal must describe the qualifications and experience of the organization and the personnel to be assigned to the project. Information provided should include direct experience with the specific subject-matter area and must provide examples (via web links and/or printed materials) of the three most similar research reports undertaken by the applicant's organization and the extent to which performance goals were stated and achieved. Provide organization names and addresses, names of contact persons, and telephone numbers for reference.

### *iv. Contract Agreement Requirements*

This section of the proposal should contain any special requirements that the contractor wants included in the contract.

## **C. Cost Proposal**

Proposals must contain all cost information, including direct labor costs (consistent with the staffing plan), labor overhead costs, transportation, estimated cost of any subcontracts, other direct costs (such as those for databases), university overhead, total direct cost and overhead, and total cost and fee or profit.

ARC requests that the selected contractor formally present and discuss study findings with key officials in Washington, D.C. An initial kick-off meeting in Washington, D.C. is also required. These activities will be over and above routine meetings with ARC staff during the course of the project, and the contractor should price its part in this activity separately, assuming travel to two one-day meetings.



## **VI. Cost and Timing**

This is considered a mid-level research project, with a total budget of \$150,000 to \$175,000.

The contract awarded for this research project will be a FIRM FIXED-PRICE CONTRACT, with payments on a quarterly schedule. The contract terms shall remain firm during the project and shall include all charges that may be incurred in fulfilling the terms of the contract.

## **VII. Copyrights**

The Federal Government, through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use, and to authorize others to use, for federal government purposes, any work developed under a contract, grant, subgrant, or contract under a grant or subgrant, and to use, and authorize others to use for federal government purposes, any copyrights which a grantee, a subgrantee, or a contractor purchases with grant support or contract funds. Such license to use includes but is not limited to the publication of such work on an ARC website and social media. Use of such works for purposes related to Appalachia and the development of Appalachia is generally authorized by ARC to state and local governments in the Appalachian Region and to other public and private not-for-profit organizations serving Appalachia, including the Appalachian local development districts.

## **VIII. Evaluation of Proposals**

All proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- A complete, clearly articulated, and logical study design.
- Technically competent methodology.
- Qualifications and relevant prior experience in the fields of agricultural economics and local food systems.
- Knowledge of agriculture-related enterprises and organizations, including small-scale farms, food hubs, and support organizations.
- A credible management proposal for staffing, and the capability to carry out and support the project in a timely fashion.
- Cost effectiveness of the proposal.
- All else being equal, preference will be given to firms and organizations located in or near the Appalachian Region.

It is anticipated that the contractor will be selected by September 30, 2020 for an estimated contract start date of October 1, 2020 and completion date of September 30, 2021.

## **IX. Proposal Submission**

Proposals are due on or before 12:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on August 19, 2020.

Please send proposals as one Word or PDF file to:

Logan Thomas, Economist  
Division of Research and Evaluation  
Appalachian Regional Commission, Washington, D.C.  
202-884-7766  
lthomas@arc.gov

### **Additionally:**

- Telephone or fax responses will not be accepted for this RFP.
- Submissions **MUST** be sent via email.
- Responses or unsolicited amendments will not be accepted after the closing date and time.
- Requests for time extensions past any deadlines will not be considered.