



# How to Become a Certified USDA Vendor

Andrea Lang, New Vendor Coordinator



Good Afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us today for our webinar on how to become an approved vendor with USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Commodity Procurement Program. Before we begin, I'd like to emphasize that this webinar is intended for processors or producers of food only. With that being said, let's provide a bit of background on who we are and what we purchase.



## What Do We Buy?

Each year, we purchase over \$3 billion in American-grown food. These purchases support American agriculture and feed millions of school children, families, and other qualified individuals through USDA's nutrition assistance programs and international food aid programs.

AMS purchases over **300 different products** including:

- Beef, pork, turkey, chicken, fish, and **eggs**
- Fruits, vegetables, beans, and tree nuts
- Dairy, grain, and oilseed products, including peanut butter



AMS purchases over \$3 billion of American-grown food in various forms and pack sizes. From livestock, poultry, fruits, vegetables, dairy, grain and oilseed, basically you name it, we buy it! These purchases not only support American agriculture but feed millions of school children, families, and other qualified individuals through USDA's nutrition assistance and international food aid programs.

All the products we purchase must be 100% domestically produced and processed. Supporting American agriculture is central to our program mission, so AMS will only purchase products which can be sourced domestically. We purchase truckload quantities for delivery to destinations. The commodities we purchase must be available in sufficient volume to meet the needs of national programs. Now, let's jump into learning the process of becoming an approved vendor.



## Get Started: 6 Steps

1. Review **AMS Master Solicitation** - contract clauses, provisions and requirements
2. Review **Product Specifications** to determine what you can supply
3. Get Approved: Review **Qualification Requirements**, Submit Application Package
4. Receive Solicitation and “Sharpen Your Pencil”
5. Submit Offer in WBSCM
6. Get Awarded, Perform, Get Paid



We’ve taken the new vendor process and broken it down into 6 steps. Today we will briefly go over the AMS Master Solicitation, review Product Specifications, and what happens after you become an approved vendor. Our focus; however, will be on Step 3 and what AMS requires of our new and potential vendors and exactly what you need to do to get your vendor application approved. Each of these “steps” involves a bit of work on your part, but we have an incredibly helpful staff and resources to get you through it.



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## Step 1. Review Master Solicitation

**Resource:** AMS Master Solicitation

**Link:** <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/solicitations>

The Master Solicitation for Commodity Procurements contains things like:

- Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) Clauses & Provisions
  - e.g., (<https://sam.gov/portal/SAM/#1>), Small Business Subcontracting Plans, Prompt Payment Act
- Ag. Acquisition Regulations (AGAR) Clauses & Provisions
  - e.g., Domestic Origin/Traceability
- AMS Policies
  - Plant Surveys; GHP/GAP; Food Defense Plans/Audits
  - Grading/Inspection/Certification
  - Use of the Web-Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM) System
  - Transportation and Delivery Requirements
  - Invoicing, etc.



The “AMS Master Solicitation for Commodity Procurements” is the main body of every contract awarded by AMS. It details the Federal Acquisition Regulation commonly referred to as FAR, clauses and provisions governing federal procurements, including financial capabilities, small business subcontracting, pre-bid certifications, product traceability, and more. I can’t cover it all in this presentation, so what I want to stress to all of you is that this is the contract document, know what it says and be aware that by submitting an offer to AMS you are confirming that you meet all the requirements laid out in this Master Solicitation- read it, understand it, and if you have questions, please call and get clarification.

You will notice throughout this presentation that we list in red the FAR clauses that support why we request certain items for your vendor application package.



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## Step 2. Review Product Specifications

**Resource:** <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/product-specs>

Specifications are referred to as “Commodity Specifications” or “Commodity Requirements Documents” or “Technical Requirement Supplements”  
(All are linked to on the above “Product Specs” page)

- **USDA Specifications include things like:**
  - Product Descriptions
  - Grades/Standards; Commercial Item Descriptions (CIDS)
  - Harvest/pack season – current production
  - Formulation/Fabrication requirements (fat, sodium, sugar)
  - Packaging/packing/labeling
  - USDA inspection, grading, and/or auditing requirements
  - Review any amendments to the specification



Let’s make sure you can supply the products we buy! Before you get into bidding, take some time to thoroughly review the USDA Commodity Specifications. These are located on our website. It is critical that you understand the technical requirements before you are awarded a contract. USDA takes product integrity very seriously, and we expect that our vendors supply product that consistently meet the quality and safety expectations of our customers.

The specifications detail technical requirements for the product and production, including raw materials, formulation, packaging and packing, inspection and certification requirements, and much more. These detailed specifications ensure USDA gets the same quality end product under every contract, regardless of which supplier is awarded. Sometimes, we make changes to our technical requirements for our products, these are called amendments which we link under the specification. Please take the time to review any associated amendments included with the product specification.

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## Qualification Requirement Checklist

• System for Award Management (SAM) <a href="http://www.sam.gov">www.sam.gov</a>	
• <b>Business Status.</b> As indicated in SAM, business status is one of the following:	
o Large Business	
o Small Business	
o Small Disadvantaged Business	
o Women-Owned Business	
o Veteran-Owned Business	
o Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business	
o HUBZone Business	
o 8(a) Small Business Development Concern	
• Completed <a href="#">WBSCM Vendor Registration Form</a>	
• <b>Company Letter.</b> certifying capability to perform	
• <b>Three (3) Letters of Reference</b> from customers your company sold the same or similar products to	
• <b>Business Type.</b> Check one: <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturer <input type="checkbox"/> Non-manufacturer	
• <b>Check one or more as applicable.</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Grower <input type="checkbox"/> Grower/Packer/Shipper <input type="checkbox"/> Processor <input type="checkbox"/> Distributor/Wholesaler <input type="checkbox"/> Broker	
• <b>Non-manufacturer.</b> The following requirements apply:	
o Letter from manufacturer/supplier certifying its willingness to provide product that meets the USDA commodity specifications	
o Complaint and Dispute Resolution Proposal	
• <b>Most Recent Audited Financial Statements</b>	

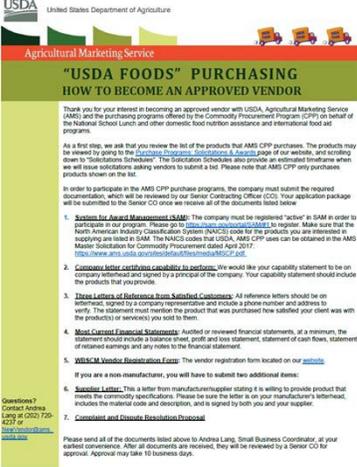
Found on our New Vendor Qualification Requirements PDF located on our New Vendor Website:  
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/becoming-approved>



On our New Vendor website we have a “Vendor Qualification Requirements” document. The “Vendor Qualifications Requirements” document lists the information AMS needs to approve you as a vendor in our purchase programs. Again, this is a document you’ll want to read and fully understand before submitting an offer to AMS. The Qualifications document includes a handy checklist to help you gather the necessary information and documentation.



## Additional Resources



**USDA** United States Department of Agriculture  
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**"USDA FOODS" PURCHASING  
HOW TO BECOME AN APPROVED VENDOR**

Thank you for your interest in becoming an approved vendor with USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and the purchasing programs offered by the Commodity Procurement Program (CPP) on behalf of the National School Lunch and other domestic food nutrition assistance and international food aid programs.

As a first step, we ask that you review the list of the products that AMS CPP purchases. The products may be viewed by going to the [USDA Foods Program Information & Jobs](#) page of our website, and scrolling down to "Specifications Schedule". The Specifications Schedule also provides an estimated timeframe when we will issue solicitations asking vendors to submit a bid. Please note that AMS CPP only purchases products shown on the list.

In order to participate in the AMS CPP purchase programs, the company must submit the required documentation, which will be reviewed by our Senior Contracting Officer (SCO). Your application package will be submitted to the Senior CO once we receive all of the documents listed below:

- System for Award Management (SAM):** The company must be registered "active" in SAM in order to participate in our program. Please go to <https://www.sam.gov> to register. Make sure that the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code for the products you are interested in acquiring are listed in SAM. The NAICS codes that USDA, AMS CPP uses can be obtained in the AMS Master Solicitation for Commodity Procurement dated April 2017: <https://ams.usda.gov/commodityprocurement/MSFCPP17>.
- Company letter certifying capability to perform:** We would like your capability statement to be on company letterhead and signed by a principal of the company. Your capability statement should include the products that you provide.
- Three Letters of Reference from Satisfied Customers:** All reference letters should be on letterhead, signed by company representatives and include a phone number and address to verify. The statement must mention the product that was purchased how satisfied your client was with the product(s) or services you sold to them.
- Most Current Financial Statements:** Audited or reviewed financial statements, if a minimum, the statement should include a balance sheet, profit and loss statement, statement of cash flows, statement of retained earnings and any notes to the financial statement.
- WHSAM Vendor Registration Form:** The vendor registration form located on our [website](#).

If you are a non-manufacturer, you will have to submit two additional items:

- Supplier Letter:** This is a letter from manufacturer/supplier stating it is willing to provide product that meets the commodity specifications. Please to sign the letter as your manufacturer's authorized individual, include the material code and description, and is signed by both you and your supplier.
- Consistent and Timely Evaluation Proposal**

Please send all of the documents listed above to Andrea Lang, Small Business Coordinator, at your earliest convenience. After all documents are received, they will be reviewed by a Senior CO for approval. Approval may take 10 business days.

Convenient Job Aids  
located on our New  
Vendor Website:  
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/becoming-approved>



In addition to our "Vendor Qualifications Requirements" document, there are also other tools you can utilize on our New Vendor webpage. We have several job aids which feature information on how to become an approved vendor, the benefits of selling to the USDA, and how the USDA purchasing process works. They are wonderful resources, that provide insight into our program. I highly recommend you visit our website and view these documents as you go through the new vendor process.



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**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

**“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors” -  
Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR 9.104-1  
and FAR 9.104-3)**

- ✓ System for Award Management Registration (<https://sam.gov/portal/SAM/#1>), in accordance with FAR Part 4.11
  - ✓ Notarized Letter
  - ✓ SAM HelpDesk: 1-866-606-8220 Option 1
  - ✓ Business Status-[www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)
  - ✓ Help Tab on SAM
- ✓ WBSCM Vendor Registration Form
- ✓ Company Letter certifying capability to perform



Okay, technical requirements: check; contractual requirements: check. Step 3 is to submit your vendor application.

System for Award Management or SAM is a Federal government owned and operated free website. Every vendor who wants to participate in a federal government procurement must be registered in SAM. This is a onetime registration used to provide basic information about your company that is relevant to government procurement and financial transactions. You can also register your company in SAM as a small business, service disabled veteran owned small business, HubZone, 8(a), the list goes on! Please note that if you are interested in receiving Small Disadvantaged Business, HUBZone, or 8(a) certifications, you will need to refer separately to the Small Business Administration to complete that process.

SAM will validate the vendor’s information and electronically share pertinent information from your vendor account to provide paperless payments through electronic funds transfer. For example, SAM is linked up to our Web Based Supply Chain Management System or WBSCM, which is where you would submit bids on contracts and submit invoices for payment--but we will get into WBSCM later.

A couple of things to keep in mind, to register your company, you will need to

submit a notarized letter. If you visit the SAM website, there is a link to an instruction page on how to submit your notarized letter. While SAM registration is only needed to be done once, you must update or renew your registration annually. This system is free, please be aware of similar systems that will charge a hefty fee. There is no fee to register your company into SAM.

If you run into some trouble registering in SAM, there is a Help Tab on SAM's main page, which features FAQs, User Guides, and Helpful Hints. You can also contact the SAM HelpDesk: 1-866-606-8220.

Next in your package is the WBSCM vendor registration form, which is needed to create a user-profile and grant access to the WBSCM system once you are approved as a Vendor.

You must include a company letter certifying the company's performance; tell us about your company and what products you are interested in selling to the USDA. Your letter should include a brief history of the company, mention of satisfactory record of integrity, business ethics and so on. The letter must be signed and on company letterhead.



**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

**“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors” -  
Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR 9.104-1  
and FAR 9.104-3)**

- ✓ Three (3) Letters of Reference
- ✓ Current Audited or Reviewed Financial Statements, in accordance with FAR 9.104-1 (a) and FAR 9.104-3 (a)
  - ✓ At a minimum should include: balance sheet, profit and loss statement, statement of cash flows, statement of retained earnings, and any notes to the financial statement



We will also need three letters of references from satisfied customers on letterhead, signed with a phone number and address for verification purposes, and a statement mentioning how satisfied your client was with the product(s) or service(s) you sold them.

For assessing financial capabilities, we require the most current financials. The financials must be audited or reviewed by a CPA, in accordance with the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles and at a minimum have a balance sheet, profit and loss statement, statement of cash flows, statement of retained earnings, and any notes to the financial statement.

If you have any questions with regards to our financial requirements, please contact the Contracting Officer.



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**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

**“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors”-  
Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR9.104-1  
and FAR9.104-3)**

If you are a non-manufacturer, you will also need:

- ✓ Supplier Letter
- ✓ Complaint and Dispute Resolution Proposal

If you are a non-manufacturer, we will require some additional information from you. Non-manufacturers that use suppliers or manufacturers must submit a supplier letter. This is a letter from the manufacturer and supplier stating it is willing to provide product that meets the commodity specifications. Please be sure the letter is on your supplier’s letterhead, includes the material code and description of the product, and is signed by both you, the non-manufacturer, and your supplier.

Make sure your suppliers meet ALL the necessary AMS food audits, food defense requirements and inspections.

Non-manufacturers will also need to submit a Complaint and Dispute Resolution Proposal Agreement. This is an agreement between yourself and your supplier that should something happen to the product, for example, we need replacement or reimbursement then the proposal will list out what both parties have agreed to do in order to resolve the issue



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**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

- ✓ Application sent to Andrea at [NewVendor@ams.usda.gov](mailto:NewVendor@ams.usda.gov)
- ✓ Financial Statements are sent to financial officer for review
  - ✓ All financials are encrypted
  - ✓ Only viewed by myself, financial officer, and approving Senior Contracting Officer (CO)
- ✓ Application then sent to AMS CO for approval
  - ✓ May require additional information such as: FDA Registration, Food Defense Audit Plan, PDFs of product labels
  - ✓ Approval takes 5-10 business days



Once you've gone down the list and checked each item off, please save the trees and send in the complete package via email at [NewVendor@ams.usda.gov](mailto:NewVendor@ams.usda.gov). We process all new vendor applications and work with the approving Contracting Officer in reviewing the vendor qualifications.

Your financials will be sent to our financial officer for review. We consider your financials to be proprietary information. They are encrypted, and password protected and ONLY seen by myself, the financial officer, and the approving contracting officer.

We will also communicate with you, the prospective vendor, during this process. If any documents are missing or incomplete we will inform you via email or phone. So please make sure your contact information is current and correct. Once approved, the vendor is notified via email.



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### **\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

- ✓ Please make sure your company has passed the necessary inspections, food defense audits, and plant surveys prior to submitting a bid
  - ✓ Contact information for AMS Auditing Services, AMS Inspection Services, and links to our product specifications, etc. can be found on our New Vendor Qualification Requirement PDF on our New Vendor webpage: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/becoming-approved>
- ✓ Please review AMS Commodity Procurement Food Specifications and Master Solicitation prior to bidding



Once your application has been submitted and approved, you will receive an email from the approving Contracting Officer. The email will detail who you will need to contact to complete your AMS audits and inspections. You **MUST** have those audits and inspections approved prior to bidding. Please contact the AMS Auditing and Inspection point of contacts listed in your approval email.

Again, I cannot stress the importance of reading over the Master Solicitation and Product Specifications. You have worked so hard to complete the vendor application. So even if your vendor application package is approved by our contracting officer but you do not meet the product requirements, then you would not be able to submit a bid.



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## **Congratulations, you're approved! Now what???**

- ✓ Your WBSCM Vendor Registration form will be uploaded
- ✓ Receive an email from the WBSCM Support Branch
  - ✓ Fill out excel user registration
  - ✓ Please review the "WBSCM CVA-Roles and Responsibilities" document
  - ✓ Links to WBSCM training on how to submit a bid
  - ✓ WBSCM HelpDesk: [WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@ams.usda.gov](mailto:WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@ams.usda.gov)
- ✓ Sign up for GovDelivery in order to receive notifications on upcoming solicitations, etc.
- ✓ Read over Master Solicitation and Commodity Specifications



Congratulations! You've just received an email from our contracting officer stating that you are now an approved vendor subject to completing all food safety and sanitation requirements, such as plant surveys, food defense audits, and your technical proposal as applicable to your commodity! Well, now what do you do? Next, we will have the WBSCM team upload your form into the system, once that occurs you will receive an email from the WBSCM HelpDesk, asking for additional information to be filled out and submitted. PLEASE READ THIS EMAIL! It is your lifeline into our system and if the information requested by our WBSCM team is not submitted in a timely manner, it may hold up the process for you to submit bids.

Once you have access to WBSCM, you must enter your plant and shipping information before you can bid. Please read and follow the instructions and be sure to email the WBSCM team members once this is completed for approval. You can visit the website to the section titled "Step-by-Step Procedures" to review the "Corporate Vendor Administrative Roles and Responsibilities," this will also be attached to the email sent to you by the WBSCM team. If you have any WBSCM questions or need assistance, feel free to contact the WBSCM HelpDesk:

WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@ams.usda.gov. Once our WBSCM team has the company

information entered in the system (which can take a few days), then you can begin submitting offers on future solicitations.

But, how do you get the bids? Well in that handy email the WBSCM team sends you there is a description on how to sign up for "GovDelivery." Gov Delivery is our emailing list, and by subscribing to our email updates, you will receive information on solicitations, any specification changes we've made, and so on. It is the best way to stay up to date on our contracts.

Once again, I cannot stress enough the importance of reading the product specifications and master solicitation. If you have more technical questions or questions on the contract itself, please refer to the appropriate contracting specialist which can be found on the bid invitation.



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## **Points of Contact**

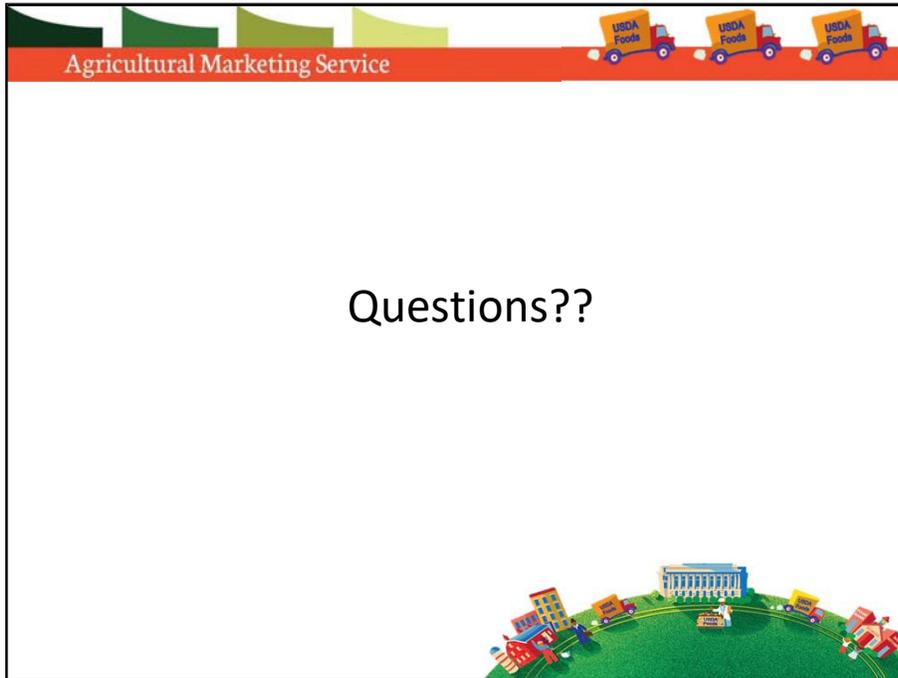
[NewVendor@ams.usda.gov](mailto:NewVendor@ams.usda.gov)

**Andrea Lang**  
**(202) 720-4237**

<b>Linda Steigerwald</b> <b>(816) 926-6168</b>	<b>Dean Danekas</b> <b>(816) 926-1899</b>
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Please feel free to contact me or the New Vendor email that is listed should you have any questions. If I am not available, Dean Danekas and Linda Steigerwald, members of our Operations Support Division would be happy to assist. Thank you!



WOW! That was a lot of information! Let's answer some questions that we have already received from our New Vendor email box.