



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program

April 5, 2024

On behalf of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Environmental Activities Division of the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center, and in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) was prepared to evaluate the environmental consequences anticipated to result from implementing the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI). The RFSI Program is authorized by Section 1001(b)(4) of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (Pub. L. No. 117-2), which funds “loans and grants and other assistance to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency”.

The USDA AMS has proposed to fund grants and agreements to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency. USDA AMS will cooperate with states to fund and coordinate initiatives for non-meat and poultry food products in the middle-of-the-supply-chain. The term “State” means the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Funds will support expanded capacity for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distribution of locally and regionally produced food products, including specialty crops, dairy, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry. States would make subawards to support local and regional food and farm businesses and other entities. States would also provide supply chain and market development services.

Since the RFSI Program is being implemented nationally, the geographic scope of this PEA covers the entire U.S. Given the broad nature of the program, the Environmental Assessment (EA) is programmatic (PEA) and is intended to provide full NEPA coverage for activities clearly within the scope of the PEA. This PEA also serves as the basis for tiered, site-specific NEPA analysis, when additional documentation is required, that will occur prior to implementation of activities with possible resource impacts. The PEA was available for public review and comment from February 12, 2024, through March 13, 2024, and was announced through a Notice of Availability published in the Federal Register ([89 FR 9843](#)). No comments were received. As such, no changes were made to the document.

The Notice of Availability of the final PEA and signed FONSI will be published in the Federal Register and available for public viewing following the announcement at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/rfsi> for a period of 30 calendar days.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action Alternative will implement the RFSI Program as outlined in the Program Scope and Requirements issued on May 3, 2023, and updated on November 3, 2023. AMS will grant up to \$420 million through RFSI to strengthen local and regional food systems. Through this program, AMS has entered into cooperative agreements with state agencies, commissions, or departments responsible for agriculture, commercial food processing, seafood, or food system and distribution activities or commerce activities in states and U.S. territories. The applicants' facilities must be in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. These facilities must be independently and domestically owned, and applicants or their designees must hold all required permits and plans and comply with all relevant environmental requirements.

Reasons for Finding of No Significant Impact

Programmatic environmental documents analyze impacts on a broad scale, in this case the introduction of a new program that will result in subsequent specific actions. Because of the large geographic scope and the innovative nature of the RFSI Cooperative Agreement Program, it is not possible to meaningfully predict the location of the site-specific access and improvement activities, nor the environmental conditions that exist on those lands. Thus, before implementing projects with possible protected resource impacts, a site-specific environmental review will be completed to demonstrate that actions are within the scope of the PEA and do not have impacts not already analyzed.

In consideration of the analysis documented in the PEA and the reasons outlined in this FONSI, the Proposed Action would not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared. The determination is based on the following:

1. All potential beneficial and adverse impacts of implementing the Proposed Action have been fully considered within the PEA; no significant adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects were identified based on this analysis.
2. All projects with potential resource impacts will undergo site-specific environmental reviews. The analysis will assess these impacts based on the conditions of each site, including the following factors: Cultural Resources, Threatened and Endangered Species, Coastal Barriers, Coastal Zone Management Act Areas, Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers and Nationwide Rivers Inventory, National Natural Landmarks, Sole Source Aquifers, Wetlands, Floodplains, Important Land Resources, and Environmental Justice.
3. As detailed in the analysis presented in the PEA, the Proposed Action would not significantly affect water quality, soils, wetlands, vegetation or wildlife, air quality, climate change, socioeconomics, and environmental justice, or other important resources.
4. The Proposed Action would not involve effects to the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial.
5. The Proposed Action would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
6. The Proposed Action does not result in cumulative significant impacts when considered with other actions that also individually have insignificant impacts.

7. The Proposed Action does not threaten a violation of Federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.
8. No comments were received on the Draft PEA.

Determination

In accordance with the NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations found at 40 CFR parts 1500-1508, I find the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment; therefore, no Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

Melissa Bailey
Agricultural Marketing Service
Associate Administrator



Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Agricultural Marketing Service

FINAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program Cooperative Agreements

**Prepared by the USDA Farm Production and Conservation Business Center
Environmental Activities Division and the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service**

April 5, 2024

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COVER SHEET

Proposed Action: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has proposed to fund grants and agreements to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency. USDA AMS will cooperate with states (50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island) to fund and coordinate initiatives for non-meat and poultry food products in the middle-of-the-supply-chain. Funds will support expanded capacity for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distribution of locally and regionally produced food products, including specialty crops, dairy, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry. States will make subawards to support local and regional food and farm businesses and other entities. States will also provide supply chain and market development services.

Type of Document: Final Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA)

Lead Agency: USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

Cooperating Agencies: None

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Comments: This Final PEA was prepared in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970, Public Law 91-140, 42 US Code 4321-4347, as amended.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service
BABA	Build America, Buy America Act
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CWA	Clean Water Act
CZMA	Coastal Zone Management Act
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FPPA	Farmland Protection Policy Act
FWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
GHG	Green House Gases
IPaC	Information Planning and Conservation
RFSP	Regional Food System Partnership Program
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
OO	Office of Outreach
PEA	Programmatic Environmental Assessment
RFSI	Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure
ROD	Record of Decision
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
WOTUS	Waters of the United States

Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Introduction

[The Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure \(RFSI\) Program](#) is a significant step toward building resilience in the middle of the food supply chain. The purpose of this program is to enhance the resilience of food systems, particularly in the face of challenges such as climate change, market volatility, and supply chain disruptions. This document is a final programmatic environmental assessment (PEA) for the RFSI Program. This final PEA describes the planned actions of the RFSI Program and potential environmental impacts resulting from those actions.

This PEA has been prepared to streamline the overall RFSI grant review process, and AMS anticipates using this PEA to review projects for site-specific actions over the next four years. Each proposed subaward will be evaluated to determine if its potential environmental impacts have been addressed in the PEA. Any activities not clearly within the scope of this review, have extraordinary circumstances, or involve new or expanded structures will be further evaluated using the site-specific environmental review process and form AMS-ENV-B found in Chapter 6. The site-specific review, if necessary, will be conducted by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and State agencies.

1.1.1 Background

The RFSI Program is funded under Section 1001 (b) (4) of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) of 2021 (Pub. L. 117-2), as amended authorizes the USDA, to make grants and agreements to maintain to improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency. RFSI provides up to \$420 million of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding. The purpose of the RFSI is to assist U.S. states and territories (States) to build resilience in the middle-of-the-supply-chain and strengthen local and regional food systems by creating new revenue streams for their state's producers.

The primary goal of the RFSI Program is to:

- Support food system crops and products meant for human consumption (excluding meat and poultry products, which are funded through other USDA programs).

The program also aims to:

- Support development of value-added products available to consumers;
- Support proposals that provide fair prices, fair wages, and new and safe job opportunities that keep profits in rural and underserved communities; and
- Increase diversity in processing options in terms of business model approaches, geography, and availability to underserved communities.

The program is also aligned with efforts to:

- Ensure equitable access to USDA programs and benefits from USDA-funded projects and support the policies of Executive Order 13985 (Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government).
- Contribute to the resilience of the food and agricultural supply chains through support for diversified, value-added agriculture and support the policies of Executive Order 14017 (Executive Order on America's Supply Chains).
- Promote competition in the food system and support the policies of Executive Order 14036 (Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy).

- Implement the Build America, Buy America (BABA) Act.

1.1.2 Program Administration

The USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), has entered into cooperative agreements with each U.S. State, as well as its commonwealths and territories, for the RFSI Program. Once they have executed their agreements, states submit State Plans to AMS describing how they will develop and administer coordinated initiatives to build resilience across the middle-of-the-food-supply-chain in their state. Funds will support expanded capacity for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distribution of locally and regionally produced human food products, including specialty crops, dairy, grains, aquaculture, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry. States may use a limited portion of funds to develop and/or strengthen the State's supply chain coordination and targeted market development services for locally and regionally produced products. USDA will review, inform, and approve this State Plan before approving expenditures by the State under the cooperative agreement. AMS will prioritize underserved producers and businesses and the support program goals stated in this PEA. An AMS review board may respond to the State with questions and recommendations to adjust award recommendations.

In all programs and initiatives, USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encourages applicants to consider including goals and activities related to mitigating and adapting to climate change in their project's design and implementation.

1.1.3 Program Activities

RFSI serves as an important component of USDA's framework to transform the food system to benefit consumers, producers, and rural communities by providing more options, increasing access, and creating new, more, and better markets for small and mid-size producers. The pandemic and recent supply chain disruptions have revealed the perils of a national food system that depends on capacity concentrated in a few geographic areas and requires many steps to get from farm to fork. To be more resilient, the food system of the future needs to be more diversified, distributed, and local.

Infrastructure Projects

States must offer most of their RFSI funding to Infrastructure Grants through a competitive subaward process. Infrastructure Grants will fund projects that expand capacity and infrastructure for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of targeted agricultural products.

- The minimum award amount is \$100,000 and maximum award amount is \$3,000,000. Infrastructure grant recipients are required to contribute 50% of the total proposed project cost as a match to federal funding. This applies to all applicants except those who qualify for the reduced match.

- Simplified Equipment-Only Projects: Lead State Agencies may issue Simplified Equipment-Only Projects. These projects offer a simplified application to fund smaller grants between \$10,000 and \$100,000 for equipment purchases. The Simplified Equipment-Only option is a Fixed Price Grant, meaning it will fund only equipment purchases (and not associated facility upgrades, staffing, or other costs), and the amount awarded will be equal to the cost of the equipment up to \$100,000. No match is required for Simplified Equipment Only Projects.

Supply Chain Coordination

States may allocate up to 20% of their RFSI funding, or up to \$1 million (whichever is less), to Supply Chain Coordination activities, led by the Lead State Agency or one or more partner state agencies, aligned with the purposes of the program, and designed to serve the producers and supply chains targeted by this RFSI program, including but not limited to Infrastructure Grant subaward recipients. States are encouraged to conduct these activities themselves to build state-level capacity but may contract or enter sub-agreements for some of the activities. Coordination with the USDA Regional Food Business Centers is strongly encouraged. Activities include nonmonetary assistance to businesses through either targeted technical assistance or training and other relevant resources. Through these efforts, the RFSI program aims to enhance market access for small and mid-size producers and food businesses, contributing to a more resilient and sustainable food system.

1.2 NEPA Compliance

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321, et seq.), was enacted in 1970 to establish a national policy for the protection of the environment. It applies to Federal agency actions that have the potential to affect the quality of the human environment. It requires Federal agencies to conduct a review considering potential environmental impacts through a systematic and interdisciplinary approach, including the natural and social sciences in planning, evaluation, and decision-making. Federal agencies are obligated to comply with NEPA regulations coordinated by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508). These regulations outline Federal agency requirements under NEPA and provide specific procedures for preparing environmental documentation to comply with NEPA.

If the action is subject to NEPA review, then the environmental impacts must be documented at one of three levels of NEPA analysis by:

- 1) Applying a categorical exclusion (CE); (*AMS does not have a NEPA implementing regulation with CEs*);
- 2) Preparing an environmental assessment (EA), and, if appropriate, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI); or
- 3) Preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD).

1.2.1 Purpose of Using a Programmatic Environmental Assessment

Generally, Federal agencies prepare an EA to determine whether an action will have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (40 C.F.R. 1508.27). One of the overall goals is to provide decision-makers and the public with information about the potential for impacts due to AMS's proposed action before a final decision is made. Once this process is final, AMS has performed the necessary analysis to determine if the effects may be significant. If there is potential for significant impacts, then an EIS is prepared. If the impacts are not expected to be significant, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is prepared.

A PEA is necessary because AMS does not have a NEPA regulation with categorical exclusions and it therefore operates at a higher, national programmatic level of NEPA compliance. PEAs are broad in scope and may address several related actions or projects, an entire program, a broad action, or Federal Financial Assistance activities. A PEA is intended to accomplish NEPA compliance by:

1. summarizing the current environmental situation;
2. describing the purpose and need for the activities;
3. identifying alternative actions; and
4. assessing the potential environmental impacts of all alternatives.

Before a Federal agency implements policies, programs, plans, and projects, NEPA requires documented analysis of a hard look at major Federal actions and potential impacts associated with alternatives to the action.

A PEA allows AMS to reduce paperwork and streamline NEPA reviews to the extent an assessment of potential impacts have already been addressed in the PEA. Programmatic environmental impact statements and environmental assessments and tiering from other analyses can reduce or eliminate redundant and duplicative efforts and effectively address cumulative effects. In this case, a PEA may be used to address the impacts of actions, or project types that are similar in nature or broad in scope, including cases where cumulative impacts are of concern. For consideration of potential impacts from specific actions and/or individual projects, tiering allows an agency to rely largely on the analysis of the programmatic NEPA document to address the impacts (Canter, 1996).

If the project type or impacts are not adequately covered in this PEA, the proposed project will require additional site-specific NEPA review. Depending upon the degree of the project's potential impacts, this review could involve the preparation of a site-specific environmental review documenting consistency with the PEAs FONSI or additional support for a categorical exclusion, a supplemental EA tiered from this PEA, a new EA, or an EIS. This PEA addresses NEPA compliance at the program level. Evaluation of site-specific impacts will be addressed during the planning and selection process for each project to ensure that any significant environmental issues are identified; that consultation among agencies, other area programs, and the public occurs; and that a decision may be made on whether the FONSI, EA, or EIS is the appropriate level of analysis. This process is further documented in the implementation chapter below (see Chapter 6).

1.3 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

1.3.1 Purpose of the Action

The purpose of the RFSI Program is to assist U.S. states and territories (States) in building resilience in the middle-of-the-supply chain and strengthening local and regional food systems by creating new revenue streams for their state's producers. Grants made to middle-of-the-supply chain businesses will create more diverse local and regional market options and create more economic opportunities for communities, allowing them to retain more of the value chain dollar. RFSI investments aim to create a food systems infrastructure to support competitive and profitable market access for domestic farm products.

In addition, the RFSI program focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting efficient use of resources, and improving air and water quality. Through these efforts, the RFSI Program aims to build a more resilient and equitable food system. The environmental assessment of the program is a critical component of this effort, ensuring that the program's activities align with environmental best practices and contribute to the

broader goal of combating climate change. The program is expected to enhance the resilience, diversity, and sustainability of the U.S. food system.

1.3.2 The Need

The RFSI Program is designed to strengthen the food supply chain and enhance the resilience of food systems. The program aims to provide more and better markets to small farms and food businesses, support the development of value-added products for consumers, ensure fair prices and wages, and create new and safe job opportunities.

The need for the RFSI Program arises from the challenges faced by small farms and food businesses in accessing markets and developing value-added products. Additionally, the program addresses the need for fair prices for consumers and fair wages for workers in the food supply chain. By building resilience in the middle of the food supply chain, the program will help to ensure the stability of food systems, creating more diverse local and regional market options and create more economic opportunities for communities, allowing them to retain more of the value chain dollar.

The proposed action is consistent with the goals and objectives of the [USDA Strategic Plan 2023-2027](#), which include:

- Increasing agricultural opportunities by expanding markets and supporting a competitive agricultural system that creates greater access for producers.
- Fostering rural prosperity by investing in rural infrastructure, businesses, services, and housing.

1.4 Decision To Be Made

AMS must decide if the proposed action affects the quality of the human environment. If AMS determines it will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, then a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared and signed. Projects entered under the RFSI Program will be analyzed individually to determine the need for site-specific environmental reviews.

1.5 Regulatory Compliance

This PEA was prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190, 42 United States Code 4321 et seq.); the Executive Office of the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] §§ 1500–1508); and the RFSI Program, (AMS, 2023). The intent of NEPA is to protect, restore, and enhance the human environment through well-informed Federal decisions. The following non-exclusive list of laws and Executive Orders (EOs) apply to actions undertaken by Federal agencies and form the basis of the analysis presented in this PEA:

- Clean Air Act (42 USC 85 parts 7401 et seq., 1999)
- Clean Water Act (33 USC 26 parts 1251 et seq., 2000)
- Endangered Species Act [ESA] of 1973, as amended (16 USC 35 parts 1531 et seq., 1988)
- National Historic Preservation Act (54 USC 300101 et seq., 2014) and associated Section 106 process (54 USC 306108, 2014)

- EO 11514, Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality (35 Federal Register [FR] 4247, 1977)
- EO 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (59 FR 32, 1995)
- EO 13985 Executive Order on Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
- Implement the Build America, Buy America (BABA) Act
- EO 14008 Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (86 FR 19, 2021)
- EO 14017 (Executive Order on America's Supply Chains)

1.6 Public Involvement and Consultation

Scoping is a process that seeks opinions and consultation from the interested public, affected parties, and any agency with interests or legal jurisdiction. Scoping occurs early and is an open process to allow for input on issues to be addressed in the environmental review document. Among other tasks, scoping eliminates non-significant issues and focuses on the significant issues for analysis.

This document was available for public review and comment from February 12, 2024, to March 13, 2024 through the [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program- Agricultural Marketing Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/pea) webpage. Notice of Availability published in the Federal Register ([89 FR 9834](https://www.federalregister.gov)). No comments were received. As such, no changes were made to the document.

1.7 Organization of PEA

This PEA assesses the potential impacts of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative on potentially affected environmental and economic resources.

- **Chapter 1** provides background information, defines the Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action, and identifies the scoping process for this PEA.
- **Chapter 2** defines the two alternatives, the No Action, and the Proposed Action, as well as those alternatives considered but not fully evaluated.
- **Chapter 3** includes the Affected Environment (i.e., existing conditions) and defines the Environmental Consequences (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts) anticipated to result from the implementation of each alternative.
- **Chapter 4** describes the cumulative impacts of the action.
- **Chapter 5** describes Federal environmental laws and regulations that are likely to apply to proposed projects, as well as a description of compliance by the RFSI Program
- **Chapter 6** outlines how the RFSI Program will use this PEA for site-specific actions.
- **Chapter 7** provides the list of individuals and agencies who collaborated to complete the PEA.
- **Chapter 8** includes the references utilized in this PEA's preparation.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

This PEA considers two options: The No Action Option and the Preferred Option (Proposed Action). No significant effects on important resources were found during the scoping process. The AMS review board will examine if individual subaward projects are viable, meet the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program goals, and address environmental compliance needs. More NEPA documentation will be prepared for specific projects if they are found to be beyond the scope of this programmatic review. These documents will be completed when the projects are ready for evaluation.

1.8 Alternative A - No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, AMS will not fund projects to support the development, coordination, and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing, local, and regional food markets and enterprises, and value-added agricultural products. This alternative would result in the continuation of the current conditions and would not invest in rural economic opportunities or state agency supply chain coordination.

1.9 Alternative B – Proposed Action Alternative (Preferred)

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, AMS will implement the [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program](#) as described in the Program Scope and Requirements and award up to \$420 million over four years among each State based on the share of commodity by sales, small farm sales, and rural populations living in distressed communities. AMS has entered into cooperative agreements with each State and territory Department of Agriculture. Cooperative agreements are a form of Federal financial assistance provided to state agencies or non-governmental organizations (NGO) that anticipate substantial involvement by the awarding Federal agency. After executing a cooperative agreement, states submit a State Plan which describes the outreach activities, monitoring and evaluation strategies associated with the proposed activities, and how the applicant will manage the project. This plan also includes the specific needs and priorities for the targeted agricultural products in the State, as informed by local stakeholder feedback.

There are two sections within the RFSI Program:

1. Infrastructure Grants
2. State-Led Complementary Supply Chain Coordination Activities

After AMS accepts a State Plan, states may open their subaward competitions for Infrastructure Award Grants. States will recommend to USDA funding awards (i.e., subawards) for projects in their states to expand capacity and infrastructure for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of targeted local and regional agricultural products such as:

- Expanding processing capacities, including adding product types, increasing production volumes, and supporting new wholesale/retail product lines;
- Modernizing equipment or facilities through upgrades, repairs, or retooling; (e.g., adapting product lines for institutional procurement or adding parallel processing capacity);
- Purchase and installation of specialized equipment, such as processing components, sorting equipment, packing, and labeling equipment, or delivery vehicles;
- Modernizing manufacturing, tracking, storage, and information technology systems;

- Enhancing worker safety through adoption of new technologies or investment in equipment or facility improvements;
- Construction of a new facility;
- Increasing packaging and labeling capacities that meet compliance requirements under applicable laws (e.g., sealing, bagging, boxing, labeling, conveying, and product moving equipment);
- Increasing storage space, including cold storage;
- Develop, customize, or install climate-smart equipment that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, increases efficiency in water use, improves air and/or water quality, and/or meets one or more of USDA's climate action goals;
- Modernize equipment or facilities to ensure food safety, including associated Hazard, Analysis, and Critical Control Points (HACCP) consultation, plan development and employee training; and
- Training on the use of all equipment purchased under the grant and associated new processes.

These infrastructure grants will be available to:

- Agricultural producers or processors, or groups of agricultural producers and processors;
- Nonprofit organizations operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products;
- For-profit entities operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, or distribution of targeted agricultural products, whose activities are primarily focused for the benefit of local and regional producers, and that meet the eligibility requirements of the SBA small business size standards are eligible;
 - For-profit entities must meet the eligibility requirements of the SBA small business size standards matched to industries described in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).
- Local government entities operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products;
- Tribal governments operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products; and
- 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 middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural product.

Up to 20% of a State's RFSI funding, or up to \$1 million, may be allocated to Supply Chain Coordination activities. Such activities are to be led by the Lead State Agency or partner State agency, aligned with the purposes of the program, and designed to serve the producers and supply chains targeted by this RFSI Program, including but not limited to Infrastructure Grant recipients.

Specific forms of assistance may include:

- Assessing supply chain needs and opportunities in the state to benefit agricultural producers, expand product offerings for consumers, expand processing options and capacity, facilitate cooperative solutions to bottlenecks, and plan for best use to meet needs and build opportunities through Infrastructure Grants;
- Providing innovative, yet practical, planning for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storage, transportation, wholesaling, or distribution of food;
- Developing or facilitating general informational websites, webinars, conferences, trainings, plant tours, and field days; and
- Business assistance, including business plan development for processed products, strategic planning assistance, and distribution and supply chain innovation.

Affected Environment and Environmental Impacts

This chapter describes the existing environmental conditions for resources potentially affected by the implementation of the RFSI Program, as well as the potential environmental consequences.

As a final PEA, this document evaluates the effects of implementing changes to a nationwide voluntary program. As such, the geographic scope of the program is extensive and not fully defined at this stage of program implementation. Therefore, the utility and availability of modeling and quantitative analysis is limited. The potential impacts of implementing the program changes will be discussed on a national or regional level, as appropriate. Site-specific environmental reviews would occur prior to the implementation of on-the-ground activities, such as activities involving new or expanded structures. This PEA and any supplemental site-specific environmental reviews will provide the full NEPA coverage for activities under RSFI.

Applicants from all states, territories, and freely associated states of the United States can apply for the RFSI Program. However, the specific locations of the proposed projects are not yet determined, as AMS has yet to approve the state plans and begin reviewing proposals. Therefore, this PEA only gives a general description of the environmental setting based on the kinds of projects that qualify for funding under the program.

The environmental analysis for projects that may be funded include the following resources or features:

- Vegetation and Wildlife
- Cultural resources
- Coastal Barrier Resource and Coastal Zones
- Wild and Scenic Rivers and Nationwide Rivers Inventory
- Wilderness Areas and National Natural Landmarks
- Floodplains and Wetlands
- Soils and Other Important Land Resources
- Water Quality
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Socioeconomic conditions and Environmental justice

The baseline conditions and potential impacts of these resources or features are discussed in Chapter 3 of this PEA.

1.10 Resources Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1501.7(a)(3)) indicate that the lead agency should identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues that are not important or that have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they will not have a significant effect on the human or natural environment.

Vegetation and Wildlife. Most of the activities under RFSI will take place indoors or in areas that are already disturbed by existing structures, where wildlife and vegetation are unlikely to be present or affected. Therefore, the program will have negligible impacts on wildlife, vegetation, and migratory birds. The program will not affect any Federally listed threatened or endangered species or critical habitats or introduce or spread any invasive species or pests. The program will comply with all relevant Federal, state, and local laws and regulations for wildlife and vegetation protection.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on wildlife and vegetation resources. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected wildlife and vegetation species and communities. For example: some projects may require the clearing of land, the removal of trees, the alteration of landscapes, the installation of fences, or the short-term generation of noise which could affect listed species or destroy habitat.

To ensure consistency with the FONSI, any activities under RFSI that may affect wildlife and vegetation resources will require a site-specific environmental review and consultations, if applicable, prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this PEA. The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on wildlife and vegetation beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to wildlife and vegetation. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation of wildlife and vegetation. The site-specific review process for RFSI Program activities will be followed according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Cultural Resources. Most of the activities under RFSI will take place indoors or in areas that are already disturbed by existing structures, where cultural resources are unlikely to be present or affected. Therefore, the program will have negligible impacts on cultural resources. This program is not expected to cause any significant adverse effects on archaeological resources, historic buildings or structures, historic landscapes, or other cultural features. The program will comply with all relevant Federal, state, and local laws and regulations for cultural resource protection.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under the PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on cultural resources. The type and magnitude of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and historical use of the area. For example: projects may result in the disturbance or destruction of cultural resources, the alteration or loss of historic character or integrity, or the reduced access or visibility of the resources to the public or stakeholders.

To ensure the consistency with the FONSI, any activities under RFSI that may affect cultural resources will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this PEA. The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on cultural resources beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to cultural resources. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the preservation of cultural resources.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS RFSI program will have no significant impact on cultural resources. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, should any inadvertent discoveries of cultural resources be encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Coastal Barriers and Coastal Zones. Most activities under RFSI will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impact to coastal barriers or coastal zones. Therefore, the potential impacts on coastal barriers or coastal zones from the proposed activities are expected to be negligible. No significant adverse effects on coastal ecosystems, habitats, species, or processes are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable Federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding coastal barriers or coastal zones protection.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on coastal barriers or coastal zones. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected coastal barriers or coastal zones. For example: some projects may require the clearing of land, the removal of trees, the alteration of landscapes, the installation of fences, or the short-term generation of noise which could affect the water quality and hydrology of coastal barriers or coastal zones.

To ensure the consistency with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), any activities under RFSI that may affect coastal barriers or coastal zones will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation or consistency review completion prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA). The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the potential impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on coastal barriers or coastal zones beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to coastal barriers or coastal zones. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation of coastal barriers or coastal zones. A site-specific review process for RFSI Program activities that may impact coastal barriers or coastal zones will be followed according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Wild and Scenic Rivers and Nationwide Rivers Inventory. Most proposed activities under the AMS RFSI Program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impact to Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory. Therefore, the potential impacts on Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory from the proposed activities are expected to be negligible.

No significant effects on river-related values, such as scenery, recreation, fish, and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable Federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory protection.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory. For example: some projects may require the clearing of land, the removal of trees, the alteration of landscapes, or the short-term generation of noise which could affect the view shed, water quality, and hydrology of Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory.

To ensure consistency with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), any activities under RFSI that may affect Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation or consistency review completion, as necessary, prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA). The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on areas listed as Wild and Scenic River systems or listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to areas listed as Wild and Scenic River systems or listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of areas listed as Wild and Scenic River systems or listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS RFSI Program will have no significant impact on areas listed as Wild and Scenic River systems or listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation of Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory. A site-specific review process for RFSI Program activities that may impact Wild and Scenic Rivers or Nationwide Rivers Inventory will be followed according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Wilderness Areas and National Natural Landmarks. Most activities under the AMS RFSI Program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impact to Wilderness Areas or National Natural Landmarks. Therefore, the potential impacts on Wilderness Areas or National Natural Landmarks from the proposed activities are expected to be negligible. No significant effects on wilderness character traits or on biological and geological resources (such as scenery, habitats, species, or processes) are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable Federal and state local laws and regulations regarding Wilderness Area and National Natural Landmark protection.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on Wilderness Areas or National Natural Landmarks. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected Wilderness Areas or National Natural Landmarks. For example: some projects may require the clearing

of land, the removal of trees, the alteration of landscapes, or projects in proximity that could affect the viewshed, Wilderness Areas or National Natural Landmarks.

To ensure the consistency with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), any activities under RFSI that may affect Wilderness Areas or National Natural Landmarks will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation or consistency review completion prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this PEA. The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on Wilderness Areas and National Natural Landmarks beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to areas listed as Wilderness Areas and National Natural Landmarks. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of areas listed as Wilderness Areas and National Natural Landmarks.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS RFSI Program will have no significant impact on Wilderness areas and National Natural Landmarks. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any impacts on Wilderness Areas and National Natural Landmarks are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Floodplains and Wetlands. Most activities under the AMS RFSI Program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impacts to floodplains and wetlands. Therefore, the potential impacts on floodplains and wetlands from the proposed activities are expected to be negligible. No significant adverse effects on hydrology, soils, vegetation, wildlife, or other resources associated with floodplains and wetlands are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable Federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding floodplain and wetland protection.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on floodplains and wetlands. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected floodplains and wetlands. For example: some projects may involve the alteration or disturbance of floodplains and wetlands, such as filling, grading, new structures, or changes in water levels and drainage patterns that will require a site-specific environmental review.

To ensure the consistency with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), any activities under RFSI that may affect floodplains and wetlands will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation review completion prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this PEA. The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on areas listed as floodplains or wetlands beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to areas listed as floodplains or wetlands. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of areas listed as floodplains or wetlands.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS RFSI Program will have no significant impact on floodplains and wetlands. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on floodplains and wetlands are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed including required permits according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Soils and Other Important Land Resources. Most activities under the AMS RFSI Program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures that are properly permitted where there is little chance of impact to soils and other important land resources. Therefore, the potential impacts on soils and other important land resources from the proposed activities are expected to be negligible. No significant adverse effects on soil quality, quantity, or productivity are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable Federal and state local laws and regulations regarding soil and land resource protection.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on soils and other important land resources. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected soils and other important land resources. For example: some projects may involve the alteration or disturbance of soils and other important land resources, such as filling, grading, erosion, and sedimentation, or reduced biological productivity.

To ensure the consistency with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), any activities under RFSI that may affect soils and other important land resources will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation completion prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this PEA. The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on soils and other important land resources beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to areas related to soils and other important land resources. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of areas related to soils and other important land resources.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS RFSI Program will have no significant impact on soils and other important land resources. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on soils and other important land resources are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed including required permits according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Noise. Most activities under the AMS RFSI Program are designed to take place either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing, properly permitted structures; this minimizes the likelihood of increased noise levels. Noise can cause annoyance, disturbance, and complaints from the community. Noise can also disrupt the natural behavior and habitat of animals, especially those that rely on sound for communication, navigation, and survival. The potential impacts on noise from the proposed activities are anticipated to be negligible. The proposed activities will adhere to all relevant Federal and state local laws and regulations.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on noise. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected environment. For example: an increase in traffic noise, construction and development noise may cause some species to temporarily avoid the area, humans may notice that ambient levels of noise increase during the construction phase, these impacts are expected to be short-lived and to return to normal levels upon completion of the construction.

To ensure the consistency with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), any activities under RFSI that may affect water will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation completion prior to implementation, if necessary, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this PEA. The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on noise levels beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS RFSI Program will have no significant impact on noise levels. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if impacts on noise levels are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed including required permits according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Air Quality. Most activities under the AMS RFSI Program are set to occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing, properly permitted structures. The potential impacts on air quality from the proposed activities are expected to be negligible. The proposed activities will comply with all relevant Federal, state, and local laws and regulations concerning the protection of air resources.

However, some activities under RFSI may involve new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under this PEA, which may have direct and indirect impacts on air quality. The type, magnitude, and duration of the impacts may depend on the location, scale, and design of the projects, and the sensitivity and adaptability of the affected environment. For example: Diesel exhaust from construction equipment; fugitive dust from earth moving and dirt roads; exhaust from onsite equipment and deliveries; release of particulate matter from initial installation of new equipment. As per the intent of the program, upon the completion of the initial installation, the expectation is that there will be a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality, as facility upgrades, and modern equipment purchases are expected to be more efficient.

To ensure the consistency with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), any activities under RFSI that may affect air quality will require a site-specific environmental review and consultation completion prior to implementation, following the procedures outlined in Chapter 6 of this PEA. The site-specific review will identify the potential impacts and mitigation measures for each project and evaluate the significance of the impacts.

The AMS RFSI Program will not have any cumulative impacts on air quality beyond those already occurring from existing food system operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to air quality. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of air quality.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS RFSI Program will have no significant impact on air quality. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on air quality are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed including required permits according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.11 Resources Considered with Detailed Analysis

This section describes the environment that could be affected by implementing the alternatives described in Chapter 2. Aspects of the affected environment described in this section focus on the relevant major resources or issues. Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. The No Action Alternative would result in the continuation of the current land and resource uses in the project area.

1.11.1 Water Quality

Definition of Resource

Water Quality is applicable to surface waters, as defined by The Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as waters of the U.S., including streams, lakes, rivers, estuaries, coastal waters, and wetlands. The principal law governing pollution of the nation's surface water resources is the Clean Water Act (CWA). The CWA aims to prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution in the nation's water to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters", CWA Section 101 (a).

The Clean Water Act was designed to eliminate the discharge of pollutants into U.S. waters and protect water quality. There is a permitting process in place to mitigate any negative impacts to water quality.

Affected Environment

The RFSI Program does not increase any pesticide use in the environment, as it does not fund the use of pesticides on crops. However, some of the value-added products may require washing or rinsing before processing, which could introduce residual pesticides in rinse water. These pesticides are approved by the EPA for fruits and vegetables and typically degrade or wash off within 5-7 days after application. They also have EPA mandated harvest restrictions after application. Therefore, the water quality concern is minimal, and no permits are necessary.

States and Tribes are additionally required to establish water quality standards under Section 303(d) of the CWA and allowable Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) that meet water quality standards. Section 401 of the CWA

requires states to certify that Federal permits, such as Section 404 CWA permits issued by USACE, are not in violation of any state water quality standards.” Alternatively refer to regulatory considerations under Section 5.1.

Major impacts on water quality are not anticipated, given the individual project funding levels and program limitations. Infrastructure improvements performed under the RFSI Program with extraordinary circumstances may require consultation with the USACE and a Section 404 permit or require a Section 402 NPDES permit from the state or Tribal authority and undergo an additional level of regulatory review.

The RFSI Program is designed to have a positive impact on maintaining existing food system resilience and establishing more opportunities for a sustainable food system. By supporting the middle segment of the food supply chain, the RFSI Program can expand capacity for processing, aggregation, and distribution of agricultural products. The program will encourage projects which reduce food waste, increase food access, enhance food quality and safety, and promote local and regional food systems. The RFSI Program can also foster innovation and collaboration among food system stakeholders, such as farmers, processors, distributors, retailers, consumers, and policymakers.

Environmental Consequences

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the potential benefits of the RFSI Program are aimed to build resilience in the middle of the food supply chain, provide more and better markets to support the development of value-added products for consumers, and support fair prices and wages would not be realized.

Proposed Action Alternative

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, AMS would make funds available through the RFSI Program.

The RFSI program represents a significant step towards creating robust local food economies that offer more and better market opportunities creating new streams of revenue for small and mid-sized agricultural producers.

Through implementation of all pertinent Federal, State, and local regulatory requirements, good engineering practices, construction BMPs, as well as applicable stormwater pollution prevention controls during infrastructure improvements, the program anticipates no significant adverse effects to water quality. However, if any unforeseen impacts on water quality are detected during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific environmental evaluation process will be conducted according to Chapter 6 of the PEA.

1.11.2 Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Definition of Resource

Socioeconomics is a branch of economics that studies how social processes affect and are affected by economic activity. Socioeconomics considers factors such as income, education, occupation, place of residence, ethnicity, and religion, and how they influence the well-being, opportunities, and choices of individuals and groups. Socioeconomics also examines how economic policies and practices impact the distribution of wealth, power, and resources among different segments of society. A USDA Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) should analyze the socioeconomic impacts of the proposed actions and alternatives on the affected communities, such as changes in employment, income, production, consumption, public services, and quality of life.

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice aims to ensure that no population bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or from the execution of federal, state, and local laws; regulations; and policies. Environmental justice also requires effective access to decision makers for all, and the ability in all communities to make informed decisions and take positive actions to produce environmental justice for themselves. A USDA Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) should evaluate the environmental justice impacts of the proposed actions and alternatives on the affected communities, such as potential effects on health, safety, culture, subsistence, and human rights.

Affected Environment

The Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program is designed to build resilience in the middle of the food supply chain, provide more and better markets to small farms and food businesses, support the development of value-added products for consumers, ensure fair prices and wages, and create new and safe job opportunities. Food resilience ensures that the food system can withstand and recover from disruptions, guaranteeing a sufficient supply of acceptable and accessible food for all.

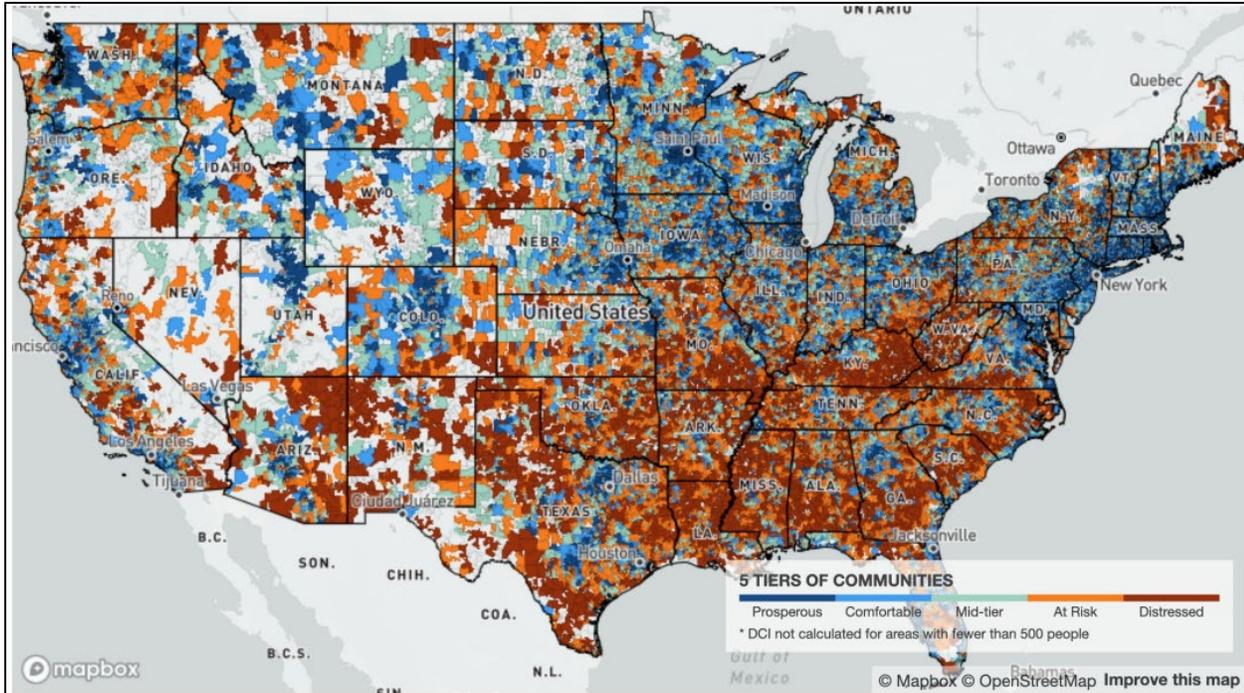
RFSI aims to provide opportunities to create more and better processing options for local and regional producers across the specialty crops, dairy, grain and other non-meat and poultry sectors. This will create more diverse local and regional market options and create more economic opportunities for communities, allowing them to retain more of the monetary value within that populace. The RFSI Program supports proposals that provide fair prices, fair wages, and new and safe job opportunities that keep profits in rural communities and will increase diversity in processing options in terms of business model approaches, geography, and availability of underserved communities.

However, the specific impacts on socioeconomic development and environmental justice would depend on the implementation of the program and the specific projects undertaken.

The statistics in figure 1 highlight the challenges faced by those living in the underserved communities within the United States and underscore the importance of programs and policies aimed at improving food resilience and security among these populations. In its funding distribution, AMS weighted the state's percent share of rural populations living in distressed communities to direct more funds towards those areas, as defined by the Distressed Communities Index (DCI). The DCI is a tool for measuring the comparative well-being of U.S. communities and helps illuminate ground level disparities across the country. The seven components of the index are: no high school diploma, housing vacancy rate, adults not working, poverty rate, median income ratio, change in employment and change in establishments.

Figure 1 is a map which shows that 14.8% of the United States qualifies as a distressed community based upon the U.S. Census reports (Group 2023). Most distressed communities are in the south and southeast regions of the United States.

Figure 1. Distressed Communities in the U.S. (Group 2023)



States will have the ability to distribute funds to areas with historically underserved producers and allow them the ability to retain a large portion of the profits by having access to markets. The RFSI Program is designed to have a positive impact on maintaining existing food system resilience and establishing more opportunities for local and regional food systems.

Environmental Consequences

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would eliminate the potential for positive socioeconomic impacts and could mean that the existing conditions continue without the implementation of the AMS RFSI program.

Under the No Action Alternative, the potential benefits of the AMS RFSI program in terms of environmental justice and socioeconomic impacts may not be realized. These benefits include strengthening regional food economies, increasing access to local knowledge and networks, and potentially improving food access and economic conditions in local communities, especially those primarily considered to be underserved and at risk.

Proposed Action Alternative

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, AMS will make funds available through the AMS RFSI Program.

The benefits of the AMS RFSI program on socioeconomic development are numerous. It supports the development of business plans, and strategies for local and regional marketing opportunities, and local and regional food systems infrastructure development. It also aids in regional food system development and

improved healthy food access through community collaboration and expansion of food hubs, mid-tier value chains, and other similar types of business ventures. Furthermore, it creates economic opportunities for producers and food businesses through possible job creation.

Overall, the AMS RFSI program represents a significant step towards creating robust local and regional food economies that are economically viable and socially equitable.

The program anticipates no significant adverse effects and positive impacts are predicted to be slightly beneficial for Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice. However, if any unforeseen impacts on Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice are detected during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific environmental evaluation process will be conducted according to Chapter 6 of the PEA.

1.11.3 Climate Change

Definition of Resource

According to the EPA, “climate change refers to changes in global or regional climate patterns attributed largely to human-caused increased levels of atmospheric greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and certain synthetic chemicals, trap some of the Earth’s outgoing energy, thus retaining heat in the atmosphere.” (EPA, 2023)

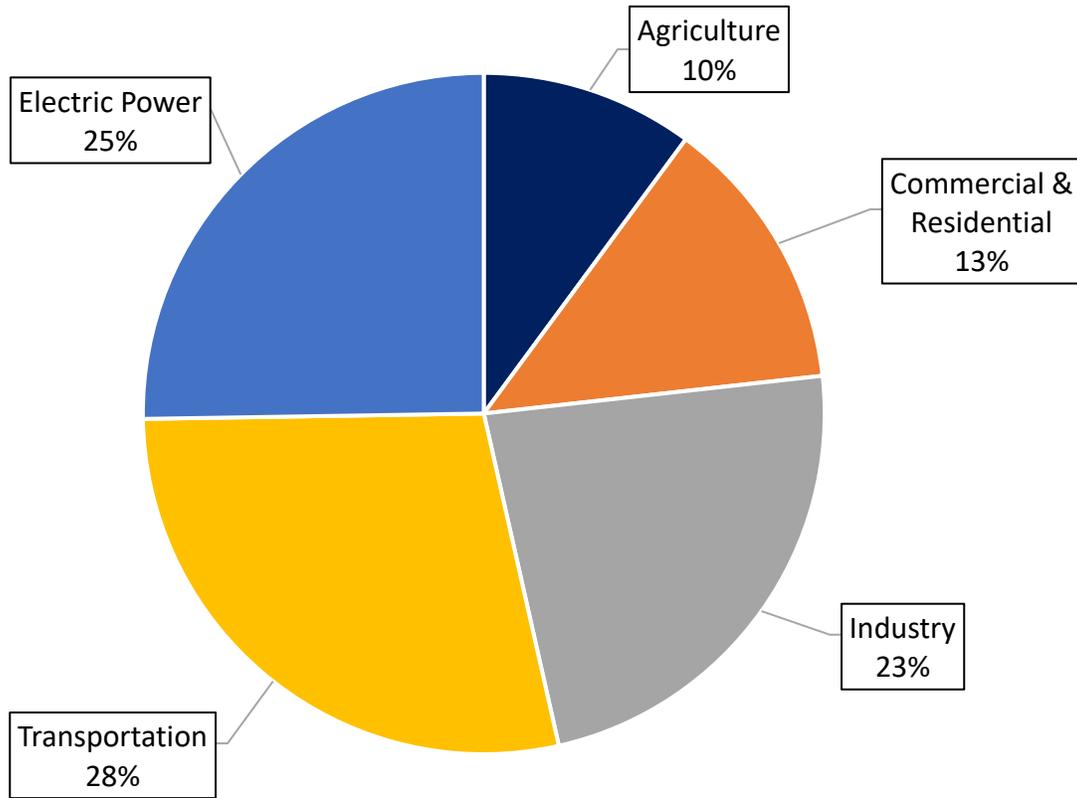
The changes of the earth’s climate can be seen in changing temperatures and precipitation patterns, increases in ocean temperatures, sea level and acidity, melting glaciers and sea ice as well as changes in the frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme weather events.

Climate change involves longer-term trends, such as shifts toward warmer, wetter, or drier conditions. These trends can be caused by natural variability in climate over time, as well as human activities that add greenhouse gases to the atmosphere like burning fossil fuels for energy” (EPA, 2022).

Affected Environment

Climate change presents real threats to U.S. agricultural production, forest resources, and rural economies. These challenges are complex as agriculture generates 10% of GHG emissions in the U.S. (Figure 2) through sources such as the operation of internal combustion engines, enteric fermentation by livestock, agricultural soil management, manure management, field burning, and other practices. Agricultural activities contribute directly to emissions of GHGs including carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

Figure 2. Sources of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2021.



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2023).
Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2021

Environmental Consequences

USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encouraged applicants to consider including goals and activities related to mitigating or adapting to climate change in their project’s design and implementation.

No Action Alternative

Not implementing the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program would miss the opportunity to create positive impacts on climate change. The middle of the supply chain improvements would be forgone, and the trajectory would remain unchanged.

Proposed Action Alternative

The RFSI Program encourages applicants to consider goals and activities related to reducing and stabilizing the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere or adapting to the already occurring climate change in their project’s design and implementation.

The AMS RFSI Program can have several climate change benefits:

- **Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** The program encourages the development, customization, or installation of equipment that reduces greenhouse gas emissions. This could include energy-efficient machinery, renewable energy sources, or practices that sequester carbon in the soil.
- **Increasing Efficiency in Water Use:** The program supports initiatives that increase efficiency in water use. Efficient water use is crucial in the context of climate change, as it can help mitigate the impacts of droughts and water scarcity.
- **Improving Air and Water Quality:** The program also aims to improve air and water quality. This could involve supporting farming practices that reduce air and water pollution, which can also contribute to climate change mitigation.
- **Supporting Climate-Smart Agriculture:** The program supports the development of value-added products for consumers. This could include products that are produced using climate-smart agricultural practices, which increase productivity, build resilience, and reduce emissions.
- **Building Resilience:** By building resilience in the middle of the food supply chain, the program can help ensure that the food system can withstand and recover from the impacts of climate change.

The AMS RFSI Program represents a significant step toward creating robust local and regional food economies.

The program anticipates no significant adverse effects and positive impacts are predicted to be slightly beneficial for climate change. However, if any unforeseen impacts on climate change are detected during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific environmental evaluation process will be conducted according to Chapter 6 of this PEA.

Cumulative Impacts

1.12 Definition

CEQ regulations stipulate that a cumulative effects analysis be conducted to consider the potential environmental impacts resulting from “the incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.”

Cumulative effects most likely arise when a relationship exists between a proposed action and other actions expected to occur in a similar location or during a similar period. An action which overlaps with or is in proximity to other proposed actions would be expected to have more potential for a cumulative effect on the same resources than actions that are more geographically separated. Similarly, actions that coincide, even partially, in time tend to have potential for cumulative effects.

1.13 Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

The pandemic and recent supply chain disruptions have revealed the perils of a national food system that depends on capacity concentrated in a few geographic areas and requires many steps to get from farm to fork.

Although the pandemic has subsided and the food supply chains have largely recovered to their pre-pandemic levels, the looming threat of climate change makes it imperative for the nation to enhance its resilience, especially regarding its food systems. The future food systems need to be more diversified, distributed, and local, so that they can adapt to the changing environmental conditions and reduce the risks of disruptions and shortages in national supply chains.

Considering the ongoing climate crisis, the RFSI Program will urge applicants to incorporate goals and activities that aim to mitigate or adapt to the effects of climate change in their project's design and implementation. This could include reducing and stabilizing the levels of greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere or adjusting to the already observed changes in the climate that impact the food systems.

1.14 Cumulative Impacts of the Proposed Action

The RFSI Program aims to enhance the sustainability and resilience of food systems by supporting the adoption of climate smart equipment that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption, as well as improving air quality and creating employment opportunities. The environmental impacts of implementing this program are expected to be negligible or slightly positive, as no significant adverse effects on the natural resources, ecosystems, or human health are anticipated.

1.15 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

NEPA requires that environmental analysis include identification of any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which will be involved should an action be implemented. Irreversible and irretrievable resource commitments are related to the use of nonrenewable resources and the effects that the use of these resources has on future generations. Irreversible effects primarily result from the use or destruction of a specific resource that cannot be replaced within a reasonable time frame. Irretrievable resource commitments involve the loss in value of an affected resource that cannot be restored because of the action. The implementation of the AMS RFSI Program will result in no irreversible or irretrievable resource commitments.

Compliance with Environmental Laws and Regulations

AMS is responsible for ensuring that projects comply with all relevant authorities. Compliance with these authorities will result in few, if any, negative environmental, social, and/or economic impacts. Consultation, permits, authorities, and actions relative to water quality, endangered, threatened, and protected species, historic and cultural resources, environmental justice, and wetland protections are described in Chapter 5 below, and will be required as applicable.

1.16 Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act (CWA) was established with the goal of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters. Pursuant to this goal, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regulates the discharge of dredged or fill material in waters of the United States (WOTUS) under Section 404 of the CWA, which includes adjacent wetlands. Work and structures located in, or that affect, WOTUS, including work below the ordinary high-water mark in non-tidal waters, also are regulated by USACE and require permits.

Section 402 of the CWA established the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) which sets forth conditions and permitting requirements for point source discharges into WOTUS, including wetlands. In most cases, EPA has delegated NPDES authority to the States and Tribes. Point sources of pollution are primarily defined as direct discharges into surface waters from pipes, ditches, and channels, but also include CAFO's and construction sites. Nonpoint sources of pollution, such as runoff from an agricultural field, are defined as an exclusion to the NPDES program under CWA and are not considered a point source of pollution according to CWA.

There are several CWA provisions that address non-point source pollution which are administered by the states and Tribes. Section 319 of the CWA requires states and Tribes to identify waters impaired by non-point source pollution and adopt a management program. States and Tribes are also required to establish water quality standards under Section 303(d) of the CWA and allowable Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) that meet water quality standards. Section 401 of the CWA requires states to certify that Federal permits, such as Section 404 CWA permits issued by USACE, are not in violation of any state water quality standards.

Major impacts on water quality are not anticipated, given the individual project funding levels and program limitations. Activities performed under the AMS Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program with extraordinary circumstances may require consultation with the USACE and a Section 404 permit or require a Section 402 NPDES permit from the state or Tribal authority and undergo an additional level of regulatory review.

1.17 Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

The Coastal Zone Management Act encourages coastal states, Great Lakes states, and US territories and Commonwealths (collectively referred to as "coastal states" or "states") to be proactive in managing natural resources for their benefit and the benefit of the Nation. The CZMA Federal consistency provision (16 U.S.C. § 1456 and 15 C.F.R. part 930) provides states with an important tool to manage coastal uses and resources and to facilitate cooperation and coordination with Federal agencies. Under the CZMA, Federal agency activities that have coastal effects must be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with federally approved enforceable policies of a state's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)-approved coastal management program. In addition, the CZMA requires non-federal applicants for federal authorizations and funding to be consistent with enforceable policies of state coastal management programs.

Activities performed under the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program with extraordinary circumstances may require a Federal consistency review for activities taking place within a state-designated coastal zone management area. Each project will be evaluated for consistency with the CZMA, and additional regulatory review will be performed on a case-by-case basis.

1.18 Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA)

The Coastal Barrier Resource Act (CBRA) provides landscape-level conservation benefits for fish, wildlife, and plant resources by reducing the intensity of development. CBRA does this by restricting Federal funding and financial assistance within designated System Units. The CBRS includes 588 System Units, which comprise nearly 1.4 million acres of land and associated aquatic habitat. There are also 282 "Otherwise Protected Areas," a category of coastal barriers that are mostly held for conservation and/or recreation purposes that include an additional 2.1 million acres of land and associated aquatic habitat. Section 6 of the CBRA permits certain federal

expenditures and financial assistance within the Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS), but only after consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Activities performed under the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program with extraordinary circumstances may require a consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service for activities taking place within a state-designated coastal barrier resource area. Each project will be evaluated in accordance with the CBRA, and additional regulatory review will be performed on a case-by-case basis.

1.19 Endangered Species Act (ESA)

Section 9 of the ESA, as amended, and Federal regulations pursuant to Section 4(d) of the ESA prohibit the take of endangered and threatened species, respectively, without special exemption such as by a permit.

Section 7 requires Federal agencies to use their authorities in furtherance of the purposes of the ESA by carrying out programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species. Agencies are further required to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species or result in destruction or adverse modification of habitat for such species. If AMS proposes to fund or undertake an action that may affect ESA-listed species, it must initiate a Section 7 consultation with the Department of the Interior (US Fish and Wildlife Service – FWS) or Commerce (NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service - NMFS). Regulations specify the procedural requirements for these consultations (50 Part C.F.R. 402). Federal agencies must determine whether their proposed actions will have no effect on threatened and endangered species or whether informal or formal consultations are required with the FWS or NMFS. Informal consultation requires that the action agency prepare a Biological Assessment for concurrence by the FWS or NMFS.

A formal Section 7 consultation results in a Biological Opinion (BO) prepared by the NMFS or FWS. If unintentional but not unexpected take of ESA-listed species may result from the action, and it is determined that the take will not jeopardize the continued existence of the species, the BO may include an incidental take statement. The incidental take statement specifies the amount or extent of anticipated take that is allowable due to the Federal action. It also outlines reasonable and prudent measures to minimize the take, and terms and conditions that must be observed when implementing those measures.

AMS has made a no effects determination regarding ESA species. However, if extraordinary circumstances are identified, consultations will be initiated at the earliest planning stage for site-specific environmental evaluation consistent with Chapter 6 below.

1.20 Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)

The FPPA, implemented by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, aims to minimize the impacts Federal programs have on the irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. For FPPA, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance. Farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for cropland. It can be forest land, pastureland, cropland, or other land, but not water or urban built-up land.

Activities under the AMS RFSI Program are already converted and therefore not subject to the FPPA.

1.21 Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA)

The MBTA protects over 1,000 species of migratory bird species from any attempt at hunting, pursuing, wounding, killing, possessing, or transporting any migratory bird, nest, egg, or part thereof, unless permitted by regulations (i.e., for hunting and subsistence activities). Additional protection is allotted under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act for the identified species. Compliance with the MBTA does not usually require a permit or authorization; however, the FWS is currently working on proposed rulemaking that may impact whether permits for certain Federal activities are required.

Generally, activities under the AMS RFSI Program are expected to have no adverse impacts on migratory bird species. However, if extraordinary circumstances are identified, consultations will be initiated at the earliest planning stage for site-specific environmental evaluation consistent with Chapter 6 below.

1.22 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The NHPA of 1966, amended in 1992, requires that responsible agencies taking actions that may potentially affect any property with historic, architectural, archeological, or cultural value that is listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) comply with the procedures for consultation and comment issued by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). The responsible agency also must identify properties affected by the action that are listed on or potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP, usually through consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and/or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO).

The AMS RFSI Program, while unlikely to affect cultural resources, requires associated site-specific projects to comply with the NHPA by coordinating with the SHPO, THPOs, or relevant Tribes, when necessary, in accordance with Chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.23 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA)

The WSRA established the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to preserve rivers deemed to have outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values. The National Wild and Scenic River System consists of a river or river segments that are in free-flowing condition which have been categorized as wild, scenic, or recreational. The National Wild and Scenic River System is administered by various land management agencies. To ensure continued protection of these waterways, Federal agencies may not provide financial assistance for projects which would have a direct and adverse effect on the values for which a river was designated.

AMS has made a no effects determination regarding a river or river segments listed under the WSRA, AMS. However, if extraordinary circumstances are identified, consultations would be initiated at the earliest planning stage for site-specific environmental evaluation consistent with Chapter 6 below.

1.24 Wilderness Act

The Wilderness Act established the Wilderness Preservation System to protect and preserve the wilderness character of designated areas by prohibiting certain uses, such as timber harvest, new grazing and mining activity, or any other kind of development. The Wilderness Preservation System is administered by various land management agencies. To ensure the continued wilderness character of designated wilderness areas, Federal

agencies must consider whether proposed actions will result in an adverse impact on wilderness areas within the action area.

As areas designated as part of the Wilderness Preservation System are Federal lands, it is not anticipated that any available AMS RFSI Program projects will occur within wilderness areas. However, if extraordinary circumstances are identified, consultations will be initiated at the earliest planning stage for site-specific environmental evaluation consistent with Chapter 6 below.

1.25 Executive Order 11990: Protection of Wetlands

The purpose of Executive Order 11990 is to minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. To meet these objectives, the order requires Federal agencies, in planning their actions, to consider alternatives to wetland sites and limit potential damage if an activity affecting a wetland cannot be avoided.

There should be no AMS RFSI Program activities that will impact a wetland. Should there be any existing facility upgrades that are within a wetland area, proper USACE permits will be required prior to project activities.

1.26 Executive Order 11998: Floodplain Management

The purpose of Executive Order (EO) 11998 is to avoid the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains and to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative. It requires each Federal agency take actions to reduce the risk of flood loss, to minimize the impact of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, and to restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains. Each agency should determine if any actions undertaken will occur in a floodplain and evaluate the potential effects of any actions. If an agency has determined to, or proposes to, conduct, support, or allow an action to be in a floodplain, then the agency shall consider alternatives to avoid adverse effects and incompatible development in the floodplains.

When an AMS RFSI Program project involves access or improvement activities impacting a floodplain, AMS will ensure a floodplain development permit is obtained.

1.27 Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations

The purpose of Executive Order (EO) 12898 is to focus Federal attention on the environmental and human health effects of Federal actions on minority and low-income populations with the goal of achieving environmental protection for all communities. It directs Federal agencies to identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law. AMS complies with EO 12898 by reviewing a proposed project to identify the presence of low-income and/or minority populations that could be affected by the project. AMS then analyzes if those populations/communities will bear any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects from the project's implementation. If AMS determines that the proposed project could cause disproportionately high and adverse effects for low-income or minority populations, measures to minimize, mitigate, or avoid those impacts will be implemented.

Activities under the AMS RFSI Program are not expected to result in disproportionate adverse impacts to minority and low-income populations, as an adverse impact will defy the purpose of the program. Further, the RFA states AMS will prioritize applications from applicants that engage with underserved producers. AMS also encouraged applications that support smaller farms and ranches in the region, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. Therefore, it is expected that the AMS RFSI Program will have beneficial long-term and short-term impacts to communities with environmental justice concerns.

1.28 Executive Order 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad

The purpose of (EO) 14008 builds on and reaffirms actions already taken to place the climate crisis at the forefront of this Nation's foreign policy and national security planning, including submitting the United States instrument of acceptance to rejoin the Paris Agreement. In implementing — and building upon — the Paris Agreement's three overarching objectives (a safe global temperature, increased climate resilience, and financial flows aligned with a pathway toward low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development), the United States will exercise its leadership to promote a significant increase in global climate ambition to meet the climate challenge.

The AMS RFSI Program is designed to encourage a wide range of activities to fund applications that support the development, coordination, and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises, and value-added agricultural products.

1.29 Executive Order 14017: Executive Order on America's Supply Chains

Executive Order (EO) 14017 was issued to strengthen the resilience of America's supply chains for critical products and sectors, such as semiconductors, batteries, pharmaceuticals, and minerals. The order directed each department in the administration to assess potential supply-chain risks within their jurisdiction and come up with strategies to mitigate or overcome these. The order also sought to revitalize the U.S. manufacturing base, promote innovation and research, create well-paying jobs, and cooperate with allies and partners who share our values.

In response, USDA published a [report](#) outlining the risks and resilience of the US agri-food supply chains, as well as identifying potential solutions to address vulnerabilities. This report was informed by public comments solicited through the Federal Register.

The AMS RFSI program responds to the recommendations of this report by supporting partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. It focuses on strengthening the viability and resilience of regional food economies through collaboration and coordination. The program offers different types of projects, including planning and design, implementation and expansion, and farms to institutions. The goal is to strengthen the food supply chain at the local level.

Implementation

Site-specific actions are projects undertaken or funded by AMS through the RFSI Program that are consistent with the categories identified in Section 1.1.3 and the Proposed Action Alternative. AMS anticipates using this PEA to guide decision-making for site-specific actions for applications received for the RFSI Program. For any future funding opportunities considered substantially similar, AMS will review the PEA, and relevant

environmental concerns, to determine whether the PEA's scope and analysis remain applicable to the program. If the program's mandate or focus shifts substantially during that time, a new PEA may be prepared, or this PEA may require additional environmental evaluation to allow evaluation under the existing FONSI.

As site-specific actions are being considered under the AMS RFSI Program, this PEA will be reviewed to determine whether they are within the scope of its analysis. If additional NEPA analysis is warranted for a specific decision, it may be tiered from this PEA, as appropriate. Consistent with CEQ regulations at 40 CFR. 1508.28, the tiered NEPA documents will incorporate by reference the applicable general discussions in this PEA and concentrate solely on the issues specific to the analysis being prepared.

Site specific environmental evaluation analysis will be prepared consistent with CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508 if:

- The AMS RFSI Program is considering an action that is substantially different from the proposed action and the changes are relevant to environmental concerns; or
- There are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.

1.30 Process for Screening Site-Specific Projects

A PEA cannot be used to avoid or defer the consideration of extraordinary circumstances that may arise from individual actions within the program.

The RFSI Program funding covers most projects which have minimal or no impact on any protected resources, and they can be evaluated under the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA). However, some extraordinary circumstances, such as new or expanded structures, wastewater structures, or potential resource impacts, may have direct or indirect effects on protected resources and will need further review using the site-specific environmental review below. The utilization of the NEPA Screening Flowchart (Figure 3) will assist in determining if the proposed action is consistent with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

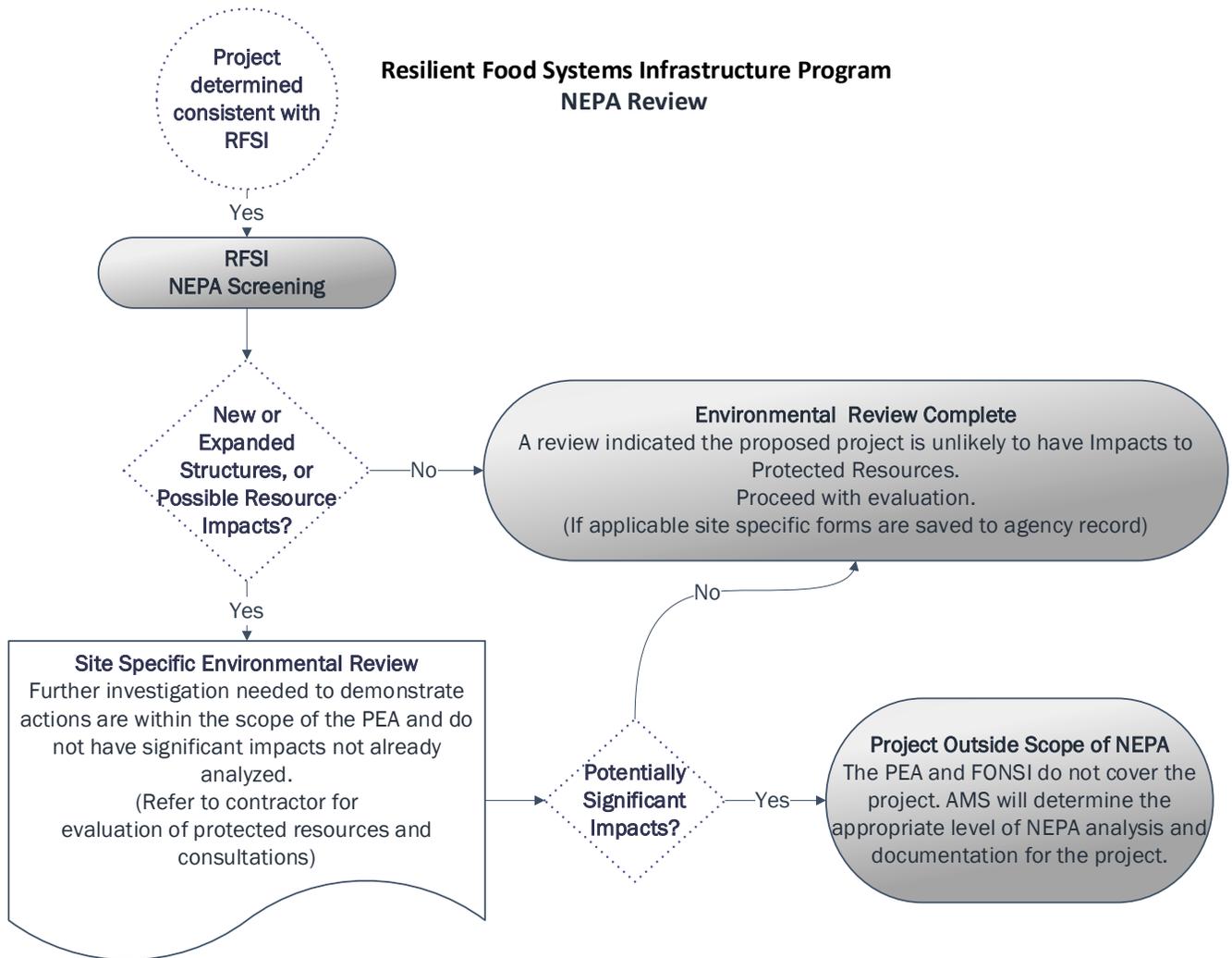
When it is found that the PEA may not cover the scope or impacts of the proposed action, these are called extraordinary circumstances. The Agency must do a site-specific analysis that fills in the gaps of this PEA. This way, the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) can be valid for the specific site.

Some examples of extraordinary circumstances are:

- Actions that have significant impacts on a resource or issues that were not analyzed in the PEA, such as endangered species, remodeling, or demolition of structures older than 50 years of age, cultural resources discovered in previously disturbed areas, or human health concerns not considered.
- Actions that involve new technologies, methods, or locations that were not considered in the PEA.
- Actions that have cumulative effects that were not accounted for in the PEA, such as multiple projects in the same area or region over time.
- Actions that have changed substantially since the PEA was completed, such as new information, regulations, or public input.

The Agency should engage with relevant stakeholders, such as other agencies, Tribes, Fish and Wildlife Service, or the public, to ensure that the environmental impacts of the action are thoroughly addressed in the site-specific environmental review. If an extraordinary circumstance is identified, and the agency cannot confirm that the FONSI is still applicable after further investigation, the agency should document the reasoning for why the PEA does not apply.

Figure 3. NEPA Screening Flowchart



List of Preparers and Reviewers and Agencies Contacted

List of Preparers

Name and Title	Education and Experience
Jason E. McMillin, Natural Resource Specialist, FPAC BC, Environmental Activities Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Certificate in Energy and Environmental Law, Texas A&M University School of Law, MS Agriculture Economics, Texas A & M University • BS Agriculture Business & Management, Texas State University • 21 Years of experience in preparing NEPA documents for USDA
Adriana Alcorn, Agricultural Program Specialist, Iowa SEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BA Criminal Justice, Loras College • State Environmental Coordinator • Compliance Specialist • 7 years of experience in preparing environmental documents for USDA

List of Reviewers

Name and Title	Education and Experience
Robyn Rose, FPAC BC, Deputy Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ph.D. Entomology • Deputy Director for USDA Farm Production and Conservation Business Center Environmental Activities Division • 26 years of Federal government experience
Emily West, Grants Management Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BT Animal Science, State University of New York at Cobleskill • USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Transportation and Marketing Program
Lara Shockey, AMS, Natural Resources Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BS Agricultural and Environmental Education, MS Agriculture; West Virginia University • 8 Years of experience in preparing NEPA documents for USDA

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Appendix

Appendix A - AMS ENV-A – Environmental Prescreening Worksheet

This form is available electronically.

AMS-ENV-A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (12-13-2023) Agricultural Marketing Service		1. GENERAL INFORMATION 1A. Applicant Name and Application Number	
ENVIRONMENTAL PRE-SCREENING WORKSHEET			
1B. Grant Program <input type="checkbox"/> Local Meat Capacity Grant <input type="checkbox"/> Organic Market Development Grant <input type="checkbox"/> Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program		1C. Brief Description of Proposed Action <div style="background-color: #cccccc; height: 40px;"></div>	
2. PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS A. Does the project involve any ground disturbing activities? B. Does the project involve any vegetation or habitat removal? C. Will the project alter a structure greater than 50-years of age or the general aesthetic of the property (i.e., new interior or exterior configuration)? D. Is there an adjacent river, stream, or water body? E. Will there be a permanent increase in noise, odor, or traffic as a result of the project? F. Will the project increase the emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and/or nitrous oxide (increased use of internal combustion engines, manure management, etc.)?		YES <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
IF ANY "YES" BOX IS SELECTED IN SECTION 2, A SITE-SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING WILL BE REQUIRED.			
3. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS <div style="background-color: #cccccc; height: 40px;"></div>			
4. PRE-SCREENING DETERMINATION Based on the results of the screening checklist above, the preparer recommends (check which applies): <input type="checkbox"/> The proposed project fits within the scope of the FONSI and triggers no extraordinary circumstances. This screening checklist is sufficient to document the potential impacts of the project, and they are considered insignificant to the environment and/or human health. <input type="checkbox"/> The project information reviewed may be outside the scope of the PEA and will require a site-specific environmental review. More information is required to show consistency with the PEA on the level of environmental documentation required before funding the project in conformance with NEPA.			
5. PREPARER INFORMATION AND SIGNATURE			
A. NAME OF PREPARER		B. TITLE OF PREPARER	
C. SIGNATURE OF PREPARER		D. DATE DOCUMENT WAS PREPARED (MM-DD-YYYY)	
6. RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL OFFICIAL SIGNATURE			
A. NAME OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		B. TITLE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL	
C. SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		D. DATE OF APPROVAL SIGNATURE (MM-DD-YYYY)	

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Appendix B - AMS ENV-B – Environmental Screening Worksheet

This form is available electronically.

AMS-ENV-B (12-13-2023)		U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Agricultural Marketing Service		1. GENERAL INFORMATION	
				1A. Producer or Applicant Name and Application Number	
ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING WORKSHEET					
1B. Location of Proposed Action (address, GPS location, etc.)			1C. Description of Proposed Action (building construction, equipment purchase, approximate acreage, connected actions, etc.)		
2. ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AND POLICY REVIEW					
	A. Is the resource located within the area of potential effect?		B. Does the proposed action have the potential to impact the resource?		C. EFFECT DETERMINATION
	YES	NO	YES	NO	
T&E Species or Critical Habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Migratory Birds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Cultural or Historic Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
	YES	NO	YES	NO	C. EXPECTED IMPACT
Coastal Barrier Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Coastal Zone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Wilderness Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Wild and Scenic River	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Nationwide River Inventory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Nationwide Natural Landmarks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Sole Source Aquifer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Floodplains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Wetlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Highly Erodible Land	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
303(d) Listed Waterway	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Prime and Unique Farmlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
Environmental Justice Communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make a selection
3. CONSULTATIONS AND COORDINATION					
<i>For any resource where 2B was answered "YES", select and attach the appropriate documentation below.</i>					
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Section 106 Consultation	<input type="checkbox"/> Floodplain Development Permit	<input type="checkbox"/> USACE Jurisdictional Determination			
<input type="checkbox"/> THPO Section 106 Consultation*	<input type="checkbox"/> FEMA Letter of Map Change	<input type="checkbox"/> USACE Section 404 Permit			
<input type="checkbox"/> Tribal Consultation*	<input type="checkbox"/> Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan Permit (Construction)	<input type="checkbox"/> Determination of Section 404 Exemption			
<input type="checkbox"/> USFWS Official Species Report	<input type="checkbox"/> National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (Operating)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Agency Coordination			
<input type="checkbox"/> USFWS Section 7 Consultation	<input type="checkbox"/> Coastal Zone Consistency Review	<input type="checkbox"/> Outreach to Affected Parties			
<input type="checkbox"/> NMFS Section 7 Consultation	<input type="checkbox"/> State Agency Section 401 Certification	<input type="checkbox"/> Other State or Local Permitting			
<i>* These consultation or coordination efforts must be completed by the Responsible Federal Official.</i>					
4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS					
5. PREPARER INFORMATION AND SIGNATURE					
A. NAME OF PREPARER			B. TITLE OF PREPARER		
C. SIGNATURE OF PREPARER			D. DATE DOCUMENT WAS PREPARED (MM-DD-YYYY)		

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS TO BE APPROVED BY THE RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL OFFICIAL OR DESIGNEE.			
6. EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES REVIEW		YES	NO
A. Is the proposed action expected to cause significant effects on public health or safety?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Is the proposed action expected to significantly affect unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, listed species, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Are the effects of the proposed action on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Does the proposed action have highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks on the human environment?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Does the proposed action establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Is the proposed action known or reasonably expected to have potentially significant environment impacts to the quality of the human environment either individually or cumulatively over time?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Is the proposed action likely to have a significant adverse effect on ANY of the resources analyzed in the Environmental Law and Policy Review?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Will the proposed action threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements for the protection of the environment?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. NEPA COMPLIANCE FINDING			
I have reviewed and considered the types and degrees of adverse environmental impacts identified by this evaluation. I have also analyzed the proposed action for its consistency with the National Environmental Policy Act and have considered the potential benefits of the proposal. Based upon this consideration and balancing of these factors, I recommend one of the following:			
<input type="checkbox"/> This proposed action has been sufficiently analyzed in an existing Programmatic Environmental Assessment with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and there are no predicted significant adverse environmental effects or extraordinary circumstances. This document is being tiered from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Local Meat Capacity Grant (FONSI) <input type="checkbox"/> Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Organic Market Development Grant (FONSI) <input type="checkbox"/> Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (FONSI) 			
<input type="checkbox"/> This proposed action includes activities that do not fit within the Scope of the Programmatic Environmental Assessment or has the potential to significantly impact a protected resource. A Site-Specific Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement should be completed to provide further and more complete analysis of any adverse impacts and approval of the action must be delayed pending the outcome of the analysis.			
6. RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL OFFICIAL SIGNATURE			
A. NAME OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		B. TITLE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL	
<hr/>		<hr/>	
C. SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		D. DATE OF APPROVAL SIGNATURE (MM-DD-YYYY)	
<hr/>		<hr/>	

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