

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

5:00 PM CST, 1/31/2024

RFP TITLE: THIRD PARTY AUDITS OF SUSTAINABLE US SOY LABEL USAGE

RFP CONTACT:

Name: Kim Liliensiek

Phone #: +1-636-449-6056 or +1-660-537-3964

Email: kliliensiek@ussec.org

PROPOSAL DEADLINE: JANUARY 31, 2024

INTRODUCTION:

In response to the increasing global demand for sustainably sourced soy products, the adoption of the Sustainable U.S. Soy Label (SUSS) and the Fed with Sustainable U.S. Soy (Fed With SUSS) Label is contributing to the global recognition of responsible practices within the soy industry. This project aims to engage a qualified certification body in developing third-party audits for companies utilizing the SUSS or Fed With SUSS Label on their packaging or marketing materials. The objective is to ensure that soybean sourcing aligns with the established licensing agreement requirements. Given the integral role of soy across sectors, these audits will guarantee that companies adhere to sustainability requirements outlined in the SUSS and Fed with SUSS licensing agreements, reflecting our commitment to transparency and responsible sourcing.

PURPOSE OF RFP:

This Request for Proposals (RFP) invites qualified certification bodies to propose third-party audits for companies using the SUSS or Fed With SUSS Label. We are seeking a credible certification body with experience in ensuring compliance with the sourcing requirements specified in the licensing agreements. The selected body will independently assess and verify adherence to established requirements involving soy sourcing with the U.S. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol (SSAP) certificates. The ultimate goal is to preserve the integrity of the SUSS and Fed With SUSS Label, assuring stakeholders that labeled products and marketing materials align with sustainable practices.

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE OF PROJECT:

Having implemented a comprehensive verification program, the U.S. Soybean industry promotes sustainable practices under the U.S. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol. The SUSS Label serves as a reliable marker for international consumers seeking sustainably produced soy-based products. To uphold transparency and accountability, we are seeking a reputable

certification body to conduct thorough third-party audits of companies using the SUSS and Fed With SUSS Label.

The audits will verify compliance with licensing agreements, specifically evaluating soybean sourcing with SSAP certificates. These agreements mandate a minimum percentage of verified soybeans in processed products, whole soybeans, and products fed with soy. Through third-party audits, we aim to enhance the credibility of the SUSS Label, reinforce companies' commitment to sustainable practices, and instill confidence in consumers, stakeholders, and the industry. This initiative aligns with our overarching goal of fostering a sustainable soy industry, addressing the escalating demand for responsible sourcing.

TARGET AUDIENCE: The direct audience for the study is the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) Sustainability Team and USSEC Regions.

SCOPE (SERVICES) OF WORK:

- Attend a kick-off meeting with USSEC to align project objectives and expectations.
- Collaborate with the USSEC to create a comprehensive audit plan. This plan will define audit protocols, sampling methods, and evaluation criteria specifically tailored to the SUSS and Fed With SUSS licensing agreement requirements.
- Communicate with USSEC Regions and companies using the SUSS or Fed With SUSS Label. Inform them about upcoming baseline audits, explain the audit process, and outline necessary preparations.
- Conduct desk audits following the comprehensive audit plan for companies utilizing the SUSS or Fed With SUSS Label.
- Collect relevant documentation to accurately represent the company's adherence to licensing agreement requirements.
- Prepare detailed audit reports highlighting findings, compliance levels, and any identified non-conformities. Provide a clear overview of the company's adherence to licensing agreement requirements.
- Submit finalized audit reports and documentation to the USSEC Sustainability Team and USSEC Regions.
- Collaborate with USSEC Regions to implement corrective actions for audited companies, addressing non-compliance issues identified during the audit process.
- Provide recommendations for continuous improvement of the audit plan.
- Respond to queries from USSEC Regions, USSEC Sustainability Team, and companies offering necessary clarifications regarding audit outcomes.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- All work must be completed by August 30, 2024. Other dates listed in the deliverables section below are illustrative, and applicants may propose adjustments to the deliverables schedule, if doing so will result in a higher quality product.

DELIVERABLES:

Completion Date	Description of Deliverables
February 12, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend Kick-off meeting with USSEC to align project objectives
February 23, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit a draft comprehensive audit plan document, defining audit protocols, sampling methods, and evaluation criteria.
March 1, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalize comprehensive audit plan document incorporating feedback from USSEC.
March 4, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inform the USSEC Regions and companies using the SUSS or Fed With SUSS Label of the upcoming baseline audits.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Explain the audit process and outline necessary preparations.
June 28, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct desk audits of the companies following the comprehensive audit plan.
August 16, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit finalized audit reports to USSEC Regions and USSEC Sustainability Team.
August 23, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact companies to address non-compliance issues identified during the audit process.
August 30, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit pilot report providing recommendations for continuous improvement of the audit plan based on the lessons learned during the pilot.
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respond to queries from USSEC Regions, USSEC Sustainability Team, and companies using the label.

PROJECT TIMELINE:

Our expectation is for the contract to last from February 5, 2024 to August 31, 2024. We are asking that the Project Proposal include details about what the proposed timeline and scope would look like.

RFP TIMELINE:

- **RFP Distribution:** January 15, 2024,
- **Last Day to Submit Questions:** January 29, 2024 by 5:00PM Central Time
- **Project Proposals Due:** January 31, 2024 by 5:00PM Central Time
- **Prospective Contractors Notified By:** February 5, 2024

INSTRUCTIONS:

Proposals must contain at a minimum the specific criteria listed below:

1. Please email the proposal to RFP@USSEC.ORG by **5:00PM Central Time on January 31, 2024**
2. A description of Prospective Contractor's capabilities, resources and experience. Emphasis should be placed on experience related to this RFP.

3. A thorough proposal outlining Prospective Contractors planned work, deliverables and timeline to complete the work.
3. Resumes for each of the Prospective Contractor's personnel assigned to work directly on the implementation of the contract.
4. Provide a minimum of two names and contact information for other similarly sized clients for reference purposes.
5. Detailed Budget
 - All bids for services must provide a breakout of how the fee was derived including but not limited to a breakdown of hourly rate and the amount of effort they anticipate to do the work.
6. Proposals should be no longer than **10 pages** (8 ½" x 11").

NOTES:

- Prospective Contractors are hereby notified that proposals will be duplicated for internal review only. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of all information presented. The appropriate representatives from staff and legal counsel will review proposals. Proposals will not be returned.
- USSEC reserves the right to retain all proposals submitted. Submission of a proposal indicates acceptance by the submitter of the conditions contained in the request for proposal, unless clearly and specifically noted in the proposal submitted and confirmed in the contract between USSEC and the contractor selected.
- Confidentiality - Without USSEC's prior written consent, Prospective Contractors and its officers, employees, agents, representatives, affiliates, and subcontractors shall not disclose to any third party any documents, materials or information that the Prospective Contractors learns from or is provided in relation to the RFP request.
- During the evaluation process, USSEC reserves the right to request additional information or clarifications from proposers, or to allow corrections of errors and omissions.
- USSEC reserves the right to reject any proposal that is in any way inconsistent or irregular. USSEC also reserves the right to waive proposal defects or deficiencies, to request additional information, and/or to negotiate with the Prospective Contractor regarding the proposal.
- Prospective Contractor agrees that Fees are in lieu of any and all other benefits, including, but not limited to, repayment of any and all taxes related to contractor service fees, health and life insurance, administrative costs and vacation.

- Prospective Contractor agrees that any income taxes, value added taxes or any other form of direct or indirect taxes on compensation paid under the contract shall be paid by Contractor and not by USSEC or Funding Sources.
 - Prior to any payment to a Contractor, a contractor must provide a W-9, W-8, or W-8BEN upon agreement signature
- Non-Competition. Contractor shall not act as agent or representative for any product or service directly or indirectly competitive with U.S. soybeans or soybean products for the length of the contract.
- USSEC and Prospective Contractor agrees to comply with the provisions of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). USSEC provides EEO to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, marital status, amnesty, or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND

BUILDING A PREFERENCE FOR U.S. SOY

USSEC's strategy can be found here: <http://ussec.org/about-ussec/vision-mission/>

USB's Long Range Strategic Plan can be found here: <http://unitedsoybean.org/about-usb/strategic-planning/>

We are a dynamic partnership of key stakeholders representing soybean producers, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusiness and agricultural organizations.

Through a global network of international offices and strong support in the U.S., we help build a preference for U.S. soybeans and soybean products, advocate for the use of soy in feed, aquaculture and human consumption, promote the benefits of soy use through education and connect industry leaders through a robust membership program.

Our 15-member board of directors is comprised of four members from the American Soybean Association (ASA), four members from the United Soybean Board (USB), and seven members representing trade, allied industry, and state organizations.

New board members are seated annually. We are receiving funding from a variety of sources including soy producer checkoff dollars invested by the USB and various state soybean councils; cooperating industry; and the American Soybean Association's investment of cost-share funding provided by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agriculture Service.

The United Soybean Board, created by the 1990 Farm Bill to manage and direct the National Soybean Checkoff, is dedicated to marketing and research for the soybean industry. USB is comprised of 73 volunteer soybean farmers representing the interests of fellow growers nationwide. Each board member is nominated by Qualified State Soybean Boards (QSSBs) and appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

Because of the limitations on administrative and salary costs established in the Act, USB outsources the majority of its program management responsibilities to USB's three primary contractors:

- SmithBucklin-St. Louis for domestic marketing, new uses, production research and Board initiative activities;
- Osborn & Barr Communications for communications/public relations activities and;
- U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC), Inc. for international marketing and global opportunities activities.

As one of these three primary contractors USSEC may also undertake initiative activities on behalf of USB. USB considers primary contractor staff (approximately 60 people) as core USB staff. These three primary contractors use a number of subcontractors and, together, these entities carry out approximately 450 projects each year for USB. USB also manages approximately 10 subcontractors.

Non-Discrimination Statement

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, audiotope, 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 [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) 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.

Civil Rights Clause

Contractor agrees that during the performance of this Agreement it will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status, parental status or protected genetic information. Contractor further agrees that it will fully comply with any and all applicable Federal, State and local equal employment opportunity statutes, ordinances and regulations, including, without limitation, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Nothing in this section shall require Contractor to comply with or become liable under any law, ordinance, regulation or rule that does not otherwise apply to Contractor.