REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

SUBMISSION DEADLINE
5:00 PM CST, 9/17/26

RFP TITLE: Third Party Evaluation of the Sustainable U.S. Soy (SUSS) Program

RFP CONTACT:

Name: Waris Mustamandi
Email: mmustamandi@ussec.org

PROPOSAL DEADLINE: 5:00 PM CST, 9/17/26

INTRODUCTION:

Through a global network of international offices and strong support in the U.S., USSEC helps build a preference for U.S. soybeans and soybean products, advocates for the use of soy in livestock and aquaculture feed and human consumption, promotes the benefits of soy use through education and connects industry leaders through a robust membership program.

PURPOSE OF RFP:

USSEC's standard practice is to RFP every 3 years in an open and competitive manner. This type of cost analysis will assist in determining the fair market value for the work to be performed and allows USSEC the opportunity to evaluate various proposals and select the best contractor for the job based on experience, availability, expertise, approach, and cost.

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE OF PROJECT:

USSEC works to build international demand for sustainable U.S. soy across the value chain — producers, feed manufacturers, livestock/aquaculture and food industries, sustainability organizations, financial institutions, government agencies, researchers, and other partners. Its Sustainability Program is guided by annual Sustainability Action Plans organized around three strategic initiatives: Market Access, Sustainability Differentiation, and Preference for Sustainable U.S. Soy.

USSEC launched the Sustainable U.S. Soy (SUSS) logo in 2016 and added the complementary Fed with Sustainable U.S. Soy label in 2023 for animal-protein products. Both are verified under the U.S. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol (SSAP) and licensed at no cost once a company meets minimum sourcing thresholds — 90% for whole soybean products, 60% for other food, feed, or animal-protein products — and signs a license agreement with USB/USSEC. As of August 2026, 146 companies were licensed across 22 countries, representing 1,200 labeled products.

The Program activity varies by region: SSAP-verified shipment shares have risen in several markets, and new companies continue to sign up in different regions.

A similar evaluation was recently conducted by another funding source on a related sustainability program. USSEC would like to conduct a similar independent evaluation of the SUSS logo and labeling program to better understand licensing uptake, market recognition, and the logo's influence on businesses in a market or region to be confirmed.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

Primary users of evaluation: USSEC leadership, Sustainability Program staff, regional and in-country implementation teams, funding partners, and other stakeholders identified by USSEC.

SCOPE (SERVICES) OF WORK:

Findings will be used to:

- Assess progress of the SUSS logo/labeling program against the Sustainability Program's strategic objectives.
- Understand how licensing, promotion, and engagement activities drove company uptake and market-level recognition of the logo.
- Identify which promotional and licensing-support approaches were most and least effective.
- Complement the Country Progress Reports (CPRs) with focused, logo-specific analysis, where relevant.
- Inform future Sustainability Action Plans, logo program design, and resource allocation.
- Support USSEC's ongoing programmatic evaluation and reporting requirements to its funding sources.

Evaluation Objectives:

- Assess the extent to which the SUSS logo/labeling program contributed to the Sustainability Action Plan objectives, particularly Sustainability Differentiation and Preference for Sustainable U.S. Soy.
- Evaluate growth in logo licensing agreements and product-level usage, distinguishing companies that have earned recognition/eligibility from those actively displaying the logo commercially and assess how existing licensees are retained and renewed (e.g., through periodic compliance audits), alongside changes in customer/market awareness and recognition of the logo.
- Assess how promotional, technical assistance, and licensing-support activities — including promotional campaigns — contributed to uptake and recognition.
- Identify internal and external factors that enabled or constrained licensing uptake and market recognition, including relevant regulatory developments, decarbonization or ESG-linked financing trends, and competing-origin or competing-certification dynamics.
- Document lessons learned and opportunities to strengthen the logo program's design, promotion, and licensing process.
- Provide practical, evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the SUSS logo/labeling program going forward.

Evaluation Key Questions:

- How many companies and products have been licensed and are actively using the SUSS or Fed with SUSS logos, and how has this changed over the evaluation period, (exact years of evaluation to be confirmed in the inception phase)?
- What share of eligible companies have chosen not to pursue recognition after learning about the SUSS logo or licensing at all, and what explains reasoning to not adopt the logo? How many companies have not met purchasing requirements and have had to stop using the logo?

- Among existing licensees, how well is the relationship being retained and renewed over time (e.g., through periodic compliance audits, leadership transitions, or contract changes), and what USSEC engagement contributed to that retention?
- To what extent do downstream customers, retailers, and end-consumers recognize and value the SUSS logo as a marker of sustainability?
- How does recognition of the SUSS logo compare with recognition of competing sustainability labels or schemes (e.g., RTRS, Rainforest Alliance, ProTerra), and to what extent are buyer decisions being reshaped by broader forces such as decarbonization targets, ESG-linked financing, or evolving carbon-footprint benchmarking?
- Has use of the logo produced measurable business benefits for licensee companies — such as sales growth, access to sustainability-linked financing, or improved customer trust?
- Is there evidence associating licensing or logo use to broader, trade-volume-level outcomes (e.g., SSAP-verified shipment growth, buyer retention, or market share) in USSEC market/region (to be confirmed in the inception phase) beyond individual company anecdotes?
- Do customers report a preference for products carrying the SUSS logo over unlabeled or differently labeled alternatives?
- How do licensees describe the process of obtaining and maintaining the license, including cost, administrative burden, and USSEC support provided?
- What factors discourage eligible companies from licensing the logo?
- Where companies show executive-level interest but have not converted to full licensing or commercial adoption, what internal barriers (e.g., unclear monetization pathways, KPI or budget structures) appear to be slowing that conversion?
- Which promotional and licensing-support approaches were most effective in driving uptake and recognition — including any promotional or advertising activity and what lessons and recommendations can strengthen the logo program going forward?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION (if applicable)

Additional Considerations to include any specific information regarding the proposal that could affect the Prospective Contractors' ability to submit a proposal.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation will use a mixed-methods, utilization-focused design that triangulates multiple data sources, applying internationally recognized evaluation principles — transparency, impartiality, confidentiality, and methodological rigor.

Inception

Review of background documentation, refinement of methodology, work plan, evaluation questions, and instruments; development of a sampling strategy; identification of risks and limitations; and submission of an Inception Report for USSEC approval before data collection begins.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary methods may include key informant interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, case studies, or observation, supplemented by the appropriate secondary sources. Quantitative instruments should capture logo licensing/usage rates and comparative recognition against competing labels, using question design comparable to the reference survey instrument that will likely be provided in the inception phase (e.g., banded usage-share questions, burden ratings, and comparison categories) so findings can be cross-referenced. Qualitative and quantitative data will be integrated and triangulated, with findings clearly distinguishing evidence, stakeholder perspectives, and interpretation. Any limitations affecting data quality or completeness will be transparently documented.

Stakeholder Engagement, Quality Assurance, and Ethics

The consultant will engage a representative range of stakeholders listed above to ensure balanced representation and credible findings, applying transparent data procedures, validation and verification of information, protection of confidential and commercially sensitive data, informed participant consent, and independent, objective interpretation — consistent with internationally accepted evaluation standards.

DELIVERABLES:

Completion Date	Description of Deliverables
October, 2026	Inception Report – methodology, work plan and timeline, final evaluation questions, data collection instruments, sampling strategy, analysis and triangulation approach, and risks/limitations; requires USSEC approval before data collection.
November, 2026	Data Collection Debrief – brief presentation on activities completed, stakeholder groups consulted, initial observations, emerging themes, challenges, and next steps.
December, 2026	Draft Evaluation Report – Executive Summary, Background, Purpose and Objectives, Methodology, Limitations, Findings on Licensing Uptake, Market Recognition, Business Influence, and Program Experience, Cross-Cutting Assessment, Conclusions, Lessons Learned, Recommendations, and Annexes; subject to USSEC review and consolidated comments.
January, 15, 2027	Final Evaluation Report – incorporates agreed revisions and clearly distinguishes findings, conclusions, and recommendations, with recommendations that are specific, actionable, prioritized, and evidence-linked.
January, 30, 2027	Presentation of Findings – to USSEC leadership and designated stakeholders, covering key findings, conclusions, lessons learned, strategic recommendations, and opportunities to strengthen the logo program.

January, 30, 2027	USSEC Funding Source Reporting Summary – a short summary of findings, recommendations, and proposed program changes, for USSEC to submit to its funding source(s) as part of ongoing compliance reporting.

PROJECT TIMELINE:

Our expectation is for the project to last from October 2026 to January 30, 2027.

RFP TIMELINE:

- **RFP Distribution:** September 3, 2026
- **Last Day to Submit Questions:** September 11, 5 pm Central Time
- **Project Proposals Due:** September 17, 2026, 5 pm Central time
- **Selections Made By:** September 25, 2026
- **Prospective Contractors Notified By:** September 29, 2026

INSTRUCTIONS:

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

1. Please email the proposal to RFP@USSEC.ORG and Waris Mustamandi at mmustamandi@ussec.org by ***5:00PM Central Time*** on ***September 17, 2026***
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.
4. Resumes for each of the Prospective Contractor's personnel assigned to work directly on the implementation of the contract.
5. Provide a minimum of two names and contact information for other similarly sized clients for reference purposes.
6. Detailed Budget

7. All bids for services <u>must</u> 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.

8. 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: https://ussec.org/about-ussec/
USB's Long Range Strategic Plan can be found here:
https://www.unitedsoybean.org/strategic-plan/

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

The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) focuses on attaining market access, differentiating, and elevating preference for the use of U.S. Soy for human consumption, aquaculture, and livestock feed in more than 90 countries. USSEC members represent the soy supply chain including U.S. Soy farmers, processors, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusinesses, and agricultural organizations. USSEC is funded by the Soy Checkoff, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) matching funds, and industry. Visit www.ussec.org for the latest information about USSEC and U.S. Soy internationally.

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 Agricultural 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 over 70 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 primary contractors. U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC), Inc. is contracted to manage projects for international marketing and global opportunities activities.

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, 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 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.

MANDATORY CONTRACTUAL TERMS

Contracts: ***the following terms are required***:

1. USSEC, as well as the Secretary of Agriculture, may terminate the contract and be relieved of payment. USSEC will pay for all work performed under contract until the date of termination.

2. Any work a contractor undertakes prior to contract approval by AMS is at their own risk and USSEC is not financially liable if the contract is not approved.

3. Funds paid to the contractor may not be used for the purpose of influencing legislation or governmental policy or action. "Influencing legislation" is defined as any attempt to affect the opinions of the general public or any segment thereof concerning current or proposed legislation or any attempt to influence legislation through communication with any member or employee of a legislative body or with any government officials who may participate in the formulation of legislation. "Government officials" refers to federal employees outside of USDA, foreign, and State governments/officials, legislators, and legislative staffs. "Influencing of governmental policy or action" is defined as any action the principal purpose of which is to bring about a change in existing policy or regulation or affect the outcome of proposed policy or regulation, except those actions which are specifically provided for in the Soybean Act and Order.

4. The contractor must (a) keep accurate records, books and documents involving transactions relating to the contract; (b) retain the records, books and documents for 3 years; and (c) said records, books and documents may be subject to inspection and audit by a representative of USDA and/or USSEC.

5. EEO policy statement: contractor agrees that, during the performance of this Agreement, contractor will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, national origin, religion,

sex, age, disability, protected genetic information, or reprisal. 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, but not limited to, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, Genetic Information Act of 2008, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Nothing in this section shall require contractor to comply with or become liable under any law, ordinances, regulation or rule that does not otherwise apply to the contractor.

6. Subcontractors. Subject to USSEC's approval, the contractor may subcontract specific tasks to outside parties. Should the contractor elect to subcontract specific tasks, subcontractors will be subject to the same contractual terms as its contract agency in regard to:

   (1) Reporting and record keeping;
   (2) Travel expenses;
   (3) Title of property;
   (4) Confidential information
   (5) Influencing legislation and/or influencing governmental policy or action;
   (6) Federal civil rights policies.

   The primary contractor agency who has a direct contract with USSEC will be fully responsible for the quality of all work product, including any approvals from AMS. Any such authorization in the contract must state that entering into a subcontract does not relieve the contractor of primary responsibility to carry out the terms and conditions of the underlying contract in accordance with the Act, Order, Regulations and USDA policies.

7. Confidentiality

   Financial or commercial information obtained under contract with USSEC that is privileged and confidential shall be kept confidential by all persons, including employees and former employees of USSEC, USDA and the contractor having access to such information.

Contracts: ***the following terms are not allowed***:

1. Indemnification provisions, unless it is clear that the indemnification will in no way obligate the U.S. government to pay on a potential claim.

2. Liquidated Damages

Intellectual property. Rights will be governed by the Bayh Dole Act, 35 U.S.C. §200-212 for any entity that is a "contractor" as defined by the Act at §201(c).

Expenses. The following expenses are prohibited under the Act and Order:

1. University Principal Investigator salaries;
2. University overhead/indirect costs; non-Principal Investigator salaries are an exception
3. Entertainment expenses;
4. Spousal/family/companion expenses;
5. Personal expenses (except as specifically allowed in USSEC's Travel policies;
6. Open bars;
7. Funding of capital equipment unless the equipment is purchased (a) in direct connection with a plan or project, and (b) necessary for the completion of the plan or project.