FFAR Virtual Briefing
Questions and Answers

Can applicants leverage local/state government agency funding opportunities (from non-federal sources) aligned with a proposed project towards FFAR’s 1:1 cost-sharing requirement? i.e. new funding (not yet executed) for complementary projects with overlapping objectives. Interested in cost-sharing common new equipment, supplies, and travel costs, etc.

Yes, in fact that is how much of our funding match works. It can be state or local government and other governments. It CANNOT be U.S. Federal government funds. We have a requirement that the funding for the match will be expended during the course of the grant. If you have spent money on the grant prior to our grant’s initiation you cannot back count that as a match.

It appears that most, if not all, of the partnerships with FFAR deal with on-farm production. Do you see a future where post-harvest research with manufacturers/processors will be addressed?

Yes. We are very interested in that. In fact, even our Crops of the Future Collaborative has post-harvest traits that will be very important. Our Food Waste and Loss Challenge Area includes post-harvest consumption and manufacturing. Although most of our work so far has been on-farm, we do include the entire value chain and that also includes economic research.

Do you fund any research addressing the challenges internationally, such as in developing countries?

Yes. We are working on several collaboratives that have an international slant. Of course, agriculture is global. While our focus has been on U.S. agriculture we certainly have engaged in global issues with international entities and will continue to do that. But we do look for places where there’s space for us. Since we’re a small organization we must be laser focused on what we are going to do so global questions that have not been addressed by other groups is what we typically deal with on the international front.

If Congress is late in reauthorizing the Farm Bill, what happens to FFAR during the interim?

We have our funding right now and the way that we work is we fund incrementally. That means if I give you a 5-year award, I give you each of that funding by year. We will still have funding available to us come 2018 and we believe our corpus will not be obligated down until early 2019. We’re hopeful that the Farm Bill decisions will be made by that time and then we’ll be up and running for the next round.

Does FFAR provide any assistance in match-making or connecting with likely prospective partners in the private sector? Or do prospective grantees need to come with partners already in hand?
Yes, we do. Let me explain how our funding works. Ideally, we would go out and we would find individual donors and partners who would put up money for example, a request for applications. Then the grantees themselves would not have to worry about the match. But because matching can be very problematic we are flexible. Some programs require the applicants to come up with the match and other programs have a match built into the program. We do help in soliciting matches. For example, with Tipping Points it goes both ways. We’re having applicants submit potential national matching partners and we will go out and solicit funding from them. We also know who our partners currently have been in a scenario of interest and we can suggest matching partners.

**Do you see a future where support for instrumentation for university labs will be available?**

Not specifically through a program so we won’t have a specific instrumentation program because we’re too small to do that. There are some instrumentation programs in the USDA and other federal agencies that support scientific research. However, you can ask for instrumentation in a specific grant project. Depending on the size of that, you are able to ask for it in our grant. We are not going to be able to support very large pieces of equipment because that would occupy too much of the grant, but typical instrumentation that’s required to pursue the grant is a perfectly legitimate thing to ask for in our grant.

**What level of funding are you asking for in the Farm Bill and are you confident of congressional support?**

We’re asking for full funding so if you think about what that means we are very hopeful that we will again be reauthorized at the $200 million level. We’ve had incredible support from Congress. We’ve worked very closely with them at every level all along since we started and we keep them updated regularly. I think all of us recognize what a difficult budget climate this is so I think that is the deciding factor in funding a program. We believe that we are an institution and not an experiment. It doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense to start a program like ours and in the midst of it end it. Three years of scientific research is a very short time. I’m confident Congress sees the value of our program and sees the innovation and the research that we’re supporting and I’m very hopeful for our future.

**How does FFAR determine the best models for public-private partnerships when responding to a call for proposals? Is this driven by applicants, or are the models prescribed by FFAR?**

In some cases, we will have the funding or partners already set up. Our Crops of the Future Collaborative is a good example of that. We already have our partners in line and we will be funding research probably at academic originations that are supported by all of the partners. In other cases, we let you decide who the partners will be and who is most interested in your project. It’s a very competitive world out there and one of the things we do is we know what many of the companies and organizations are interested in so we know which of those organizations we can approach on specific topic areas that are more likely to be open and receptive to the type of research we are going to do. We share that with the community as
Is the protein challenge open to plant based forms of protein?

Yes. In the Seeding Solutions program, we took applications both in the animal and plant-based protein areas. It is true that most of our emphasis up to this point has been on sustainable livestock production and looking at ways that we can mitigate the impact of livestock production and improve the efficiency of livestock production. But we are also looking for work in plant-based proteins as well.

The February announcement of the Pollinator Health Fund indicated a $10M commitment to this area, and that $4M was available during the initial RFA that just closed. Will there be another RFA for that fund?

We don’t know at this point. We are looking at the applications and ultimately it will depend on what grants we fund. There could possibly be another RFA and some direct funding as well.

Would FFAR be willing to do some infrastructure projects investments- like building new kinds of facilities to experiment with for agriculture, GMO containment, etc.?

No. We aren’t big enough to support those kind of facilities although we’ve had a number of requests for infrastructure support. We are unable to fund construction. That is prohibited in the Farm Bill. But we can think about things like equipment and other things that might be necessary. It is unlikely that we would be funding infrastructure. We have talked as a community about research infrastructure support being part of the overarching infrastructure initiatives that Congress and the White House are taking up. We want research to be part of that because there are dire needs in agriculture research as well as all the other research areas – agriculture research being in some of the most dire need of all of the research areas. We’re hopeful that research will be considered in any infrastructure program that comes forth from Congress.

Will you continue to require matching funds for your New Innovators Program?

At this point, yes we are still requiring matching funds. I know it is difficult for ARS since they can’t use their own internal funds as our match because we require a non-federal match. We are looking for sponsors of our New Innovators, which would be a delightful way to overcome this problem. At this point, we have been unable to locate sponsors. It is about a $2.5 million program per year. But we will continue to seek out sponsors for the New Innovators.

Understanding that FFAR does not want to overlap with USDA funding priorities, what would you recommend is the best way or resource to stay on top of what USDA priorities so there is no overlap?
For FFAR as an organization, not only do we have USDA as vital members of the FFAR Board, but we also meet regularly with them. We also have a process by which we send our concepts to the USDA to have them talk to us about whether or not they are complementary to what they are doing so that we can avoid duplication of areas and also really work in those areas where there are white spaces and gaps. Of course, for the USDA itself with the intramural programs you can find out a lot of information about them on the ARS or the ERS website. And NIFA puts out all of its requests for applications and its strategic plan so you can see what they are interested in as well. I think there is no piece of research that you can do that wouldn’t have some overlap with something in the USDA. They’re a big organization that funds more than $3 billion a year. That’s why it’s important for us to have USDA as partners so we can see how we support the mission of the USDA and how we can work together on the white spaces and gaps.

Who owns the IP that may come out of the research projects?

That really depends on the research and who is doing the research and at what stage the research is in. We are a Foundation so we have the ability to negotiate IP and also to own IP that comes out of the research as long as we feed any of the revenue back into our program as we are a non-profit organization. However, in general, when we fund a university we abide by the Bayh-Dole Law that allows the IP to be owned by the grantee as long as the grantor has certain rights to those IP. But there are some cases where we fund more applied research that is further along on the pipeline that may be supported by industry or where we fund industry. In those cases, we may negotiate the IP to have nonexclusive licensing to get a piece of the royalties or other such measures where part of the IP can come back to us as an organization. Basically, each grant is negotiated for its IP individually. We don’t have an across the board policy because our grants are so different and the grantees are quite different.

Is FFAR interested in agricultural systems modeling that considers likely future challenges, including impacts from climate, pests, land use, sustainability, global trade - or is the focus mostly on the near term? Similarly, is FFAR interested in the use of models to project not just yield but also nutrition from foods in the present and future?

Yes. We’re very interested in modeling. We funded the beginning of a project called Crops in silico at the University of Illinois, which is a fascinating modeling project that lets you predict impacts from environmental change, nutrient traits, and other characteristics. Tipping Points is all about system dynamics modeling of community food systems. There’s also a very interesting area that we are working on in part through our animal health programs, which is how do we predict how changing practices impact the management of a particular commodity. For example, in the case of our animal welfare program on cage-free chickens, we’ve moved towards cage-free in many instances but there are many issues that occur in cage-free environments that don’t happen in a contained environment. How do we predict what those things are? How do we get science ahead of changing practices? That in part will take modeling. We’re interested in modeling, but it depends on each project.
Will FFAR explore food safety research (new technologies, rapid detection, etc.) at the post-harvest level (manufacturers and processors)?

We have specifically stayed away from food safety. There is a large piece of funding at NIH and USDA in food safety. We know there are some very critical issues in food safety, but given our limited resources we try to hone in on areas that are ripe for influxes of funding. Not to say that we wouldn’t consider some. Post-farm issues can be and often are dealt with by other organizations so we stay primarily away from food safety issues.