Implementation of the USDA FAS Packaging Innovation Program to Assist U.S. Specialty Crop Exporters

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Context & Background

Worldwide, emergent restrictions on the use of single-use and plastic packaging will limit U.S. exporters' access for specialty crops to global markets[1]. Therefore, the United States Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA FAS) has launched a Packaging Innovation Program as part of the Assisting Specialty Crop Exports (ASCE) initiative to support U.S. specialty crop producers.

Clemson University and The Foundation for Fresh Produce (FFP), the philanthropic partner of the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), are partnering with the Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) were selected by FAS to implement this program and have launched the Packaging Innovation Program. Applications are invited for participation in this packaging innovation program to develop packaging and packaging alternatives for specialty crops compliant with the emergent packaging regulations in the EU, U.K., Canada, Japan and other key markets. For example, starting in 2030, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) in the European Union will require exporters of fresh fruits and vegetables to eliminate single-use plastic packaging for retail sales of less than 1.5 kilograms. It will also require all retail packaging to conform to design for recycling guidelines and will impose recycled content requirements for food contact materials. See footnote 1.a for additional details.

For the purposes of this program, the term "packaging" includes primary, retail and transportation packaging, ultra-thin bags for bulk fresh produce, box liners and moisture wicking pads, tags, labels and stickers affixed or attached to fresh produce or to other packaging for traceability, supply chain or inventory management. Proposals focusing on packaging alternatives capable of providing some of the same functions (for example, but not limited to the extension of shelf life, management of ripening, moisture and temperature control, prevention of molds, rots and other microbiological defects, and novel types of labeling) are also invited.

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[1] Illustrative examples of finalized and pending regulations in major U.S. trading partners could be found here:
(a)//apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=European%20Union%20Finalizes%20New%20Rules%20for%20Packaging%20and%20Packaging%20Waste%20Reduction_Brussels%20USEU_European%20Union_E42024-0012.pdf
(b) www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/corporate/transparency/consultations/consultation-pollution-prevention-planning-notice-primary-food-plastic-packaging.html
(c) www.gov.uk/guidance/single-use-plastics-bans-and-restrictions#restricted-items
(d) www.alcaldiabogota.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=125439
(e) www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_36419.html

For the purposes of this program, "containment of a product" is not the sole function of packaging, and applications focusing on materials, technologies or products that fulfil other functions typically associated with conventional packaging are welcome. The term "sustainable packaging" is defined situationally as "packaging that complies with the emergent packaging restrictions in export markets referenced in Footnote 1" and may include reusable and compostable packaging, packaging that is free from single-use plastics, as these are the types of new requirements that foreign governments will soon require U.S. exporters to comply with to maintain access to their market.

A broad adoption of packaging and packaging alternatives compliant with these emergent regulations will involve the development of entirely novel materials and technologies, optimization of the use of existing materials in novel formats, scale-up and pilots for novel packaging types or formats and technologies. Therefore, successful applicants to this program will be recruited into one of three tracks:

(1) **Applied R&D** aimed at bringing a nascent packaging format to the pilot stage to demonstrate commercial readiness,
(2) **Technology Accelerator** to commercialize a novel packaging or packaging alternative that is either in late stages of trials or market-ready or is already generating revenue through partnerships with end-users, industry mentorship and pilots; or
(3) **Scale-up or Pilot Projects** to establish commercial feasibility/manufacturability of innovative packaging or packaging alternative solutions, and test them with produce companies, handlers, or retailers.

Only specialty crops that are listed under the USDA AMS definition of specialty crops are eligible for work under this program, which generally includes fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, and pulses. Other commodities, other foods, including foods prepared from specialty crops through thermal processing or freezing, or any beverages are not eligible for this program.

Program Description

Clemson University and FFP in partnership with FFAR were selected by USDA FAS for the implementation of the Assisting Specialty Crop Exports program on Packaging Innovation for U.S. specialty crop exporters. More information about the ASCE initiative and the work on packaging innovation to meet foreign market requirements for U.S. exports is available on the USDA website.

FFAR will facilitate administrative screening and facilitate the technical peer-review of the proposal applications from interested researchers based on the criteria identified below, under Application Review Process. Highest scoring proposals will then be reviewed by the Program Executive Committee Review including industry and academic experts, specialty crop industry stakeholders as well as representatives from USDA FAS. This selection committee will finalize projects for the three tracks based on the scoring of peer reviewers, programmatic fit and portfolio balance. Clemson University will carry out post-award management of the projects selected for Track 1 (Applied R&D) and Track 3 (Scale-up and pilot), while FFP will manage companies selected for Track 2 (Technology Accelerator).

All of these tracks are intended as 12-month-long programs, with the first deliverable due by Sept 30, 2026.

Track 1 (Applied R&D) seeks proposals aimed at bringing a solution for specialty crop exports that is still at the laboratory stage but shows high promise to be implemented in pilot-scale manufacturing with minimal further effort. Such projects would exist at a Technology Readiness Level[2] (TRL) of 4 or 5 (demonstration/validated in a laboratory or relevant environment) at project inception with the goal of moving the technology to the pilot stage, where it can be demonstrated in a manufacturing or operational environment (TRL 6-8). It is highly recommended that applicants demonstrate capabilities to perform pilot-scale operations toward project completion or join with an industry partner with such capabilities. Project activities could include product development, validation and testing of packaging performance (with packaging manufacturers and/or produce growers/handlers), cost of the manufacturing process, and other activities aimed toward pilot, and ultimately, commercial scale production.

Track 2 (Technology Accelerator) seeks proposals aimed at scaling innovations in packaging for the fresh produce industry to meet requirements in foreign markets. Projects selected for this track would exist in TRL 6-9. Participants in the program will be mentored by fresh produce industry experts, have access to the consumer, retailer and market data to optimize their packaging, and each participant will present their technologies to customers and investors during a "demo day" and showcase their products to the fresh produce industry during the Global Produce & Floral Show, the largest produce industry trade show. Companies, researchers and other innovators in the accelerator will experience a blend of tailored business development, real-world testing environments, and market validation

[2] www.dst.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/basic_pages/documents/TRL%20Explanations_1.pdf

opportunities, helping them refine their packaging and packaging alternative solutions to prepare for successful market entry. More information about the Accelerator is available on the Fresh Produce website.

Track 3 (Scale-up and Pilot) seeks proposals to run pilot-scale manufacturing projects aimed at commercializing a packaging solution for specialty crop exports. Projects will consist of demonstrating the ability to commercialize a new packaging format, including initial pilot studies, process refinement, tooling, optimization for cost and repeatability, or refinement of a manufacturing process based on the needs of a new packaging format. The emphasis of this track is on transitioning a product to commercial production, satisfying the needs of new packaging requirements described below. Projects must also include piloting and testing new formats and materials directly with produce companies, handlers, or retailers/vendors and the associated costs of such testing, such as slotting fees in retail settings. Projects selected for this track would exist in TRL 7-8.

Key Dates

- **Full Application opens on October 15, 2025**
- Applications are due by 5 p.m. EST on **December 17, 2025**
- Notification of selected grantees: on or after **May 13, 2026**
- Earliest project start date: **June 1, 2026**

Award Information

Funding will be provided for up to twenty (20) awards of between $50,000 and $250,000 each. The performance period for the awards will be 12 months. This will be a reimbursable (not prepaid) award, with quarterly (based on the calendar year) invoicing and reporting. Indirect costs recovery is limited to 10% of total direct costs (TDC). In addition to funding, awardees will gain access to collaboration and networking opportunities, fresh produce industry and consumer insights, Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) tools and legal reviews of emergent packaging regulations. Awardees of Tracks 1 and 3 are required to attend the ASCE-Packaging Innovations awardee meeting at Clemson University, awardees should include funds in their budget for this trip.

What We Are Seeking

Through the three tracks of the program, we are seeking to identify and support companies of all sizes (from start-ups to established well-capitalized enterprises), researchers, and organizations to develop, scale-up and commercialize solutions that address emergent packaging regulations either pending approval or already in effect.

We seek novel sustainable packaging or packaging alternatives that can replace single-use packaging and single-use plastic packaging but can offer at least some of the same functions (for example, extension of shelf life, delay or management of ripening of climacteric fruits and florals, reduction of physical damage, reduction of food loss and waste, prevention of cross-contamination, absorption of moisture, containment or reconstitution of modified atmosphere, conveyance of information on traceability, indicator of food quality, safety and integrity, reduction of oxidative damage to fresh-cut and value-added products) in an economical and scalable manner.

Examples may include (but are not limited to):

- Increasing post-consumer recycled (PCR) content in primary food packaging
- Increasing reusability in transport and group packaging including traceability
- Compostable (home and/or industrially) packaging
- Finding new formats to replace banned materials such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) coatings
- Alternatives to shrink-wrapped individual containers, and containers for produce under 1.5 kg
- Developing sticky labels for fresh fruit and vegetables that are both home and industrially compostable
- Laser etching
- Edible coatings
- Compostable pads for absorbing moisture in clamshells or lidded trays
- Compostable or reusable inserts or satchels for sequestering ethylene or carbon dioxide
- Food-safe antimicrobial coatings for reusable packaging
- Devices or systems for tracking, collection and return of reusable packaging

Applications focusing on packaging and/or packaging alternatives for fresh-cut and value-added products (such as pre-made salads, peeled, sliced and/or diced ready-to-eat fresh fruits and vegetables currently sold in single-use packaging) are especially encouraged.

We take a material-agnostic view; however, single-use plastic packaging is not compliant with packaging restrictions being imposed by global markets, as referenced in Footnote 1. **Proposals that focus on the development of novel materials must clearly indicate the source of the material, its uniformity and its availability at the scale needed to provide packaging or packaging alternatives for a meaningful segment of approximately 7 million tons of specialty crops exported by the U.S. producers.**

Proposals that focus on compostable packaging must indicate compliance with common home and industrially compostable standards or plans to determine compostability of the packaging construct. Proposals describing "biodegradable" packaging (other than home and industrially compostable) must clearly explain the end-of-life of the packaging. Proposals that focus on reusable packaging must consider the regulations that require reusable packaging to be collected and returned to the origin and then reused for the same intended purpose.

Program Priorities & Requirements

All research activities must be structured to answer, directly or indirectly, at least two of the following questions before, during, and after the development and dissemination of research and development or commercialization outputs:

- How does the activity advance the goals of maintaining or increasing U.S. exports of specialty crops?
- How does the activity enable U.S. exporters to comply with emerging regulatory requirements (see Footnote 1) for packaging and labeling in other countries?
- How does the activity support the development of packaging materials that are alternatives to single-use plastic packaging?
- How does the activity support the development of reusable packaging systems for the export of specialty crops?
- How does the activity support the export of specialty crops that will be sold at retail without packaging?
- How does the activity reduce economic losses for U.S. exporters from food loss and waste of exported fresh produce?

- How does the activity promote the implementation of novel sustainable packaging at a commercial scale for exports of specialty crops?

Successful grantees are expected to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or metrics to track progress toward these program-wide goals.

Types of Activities That Will Not Be Considered

The following projects are not eligible for this opportunity:

1. Development or improvement of infrastructure for composting or recycling or refill or reuse;
2. Projects that are broadly considered as "social science research", for example (but not limited to) surveys of any kind, consumer and/or retailer education or behavior modification;
3. Fundamental research on materials that have no clear viable pathway to pilot scale production, or cannot be demonstrated so in the project timespan;
4. Packaging for foods and/or commodities other than specialty crops;
5. Packaging formats that need to be separated to be recyclable or compostable (for example, a compostable fiber tray with a single-use plastic non-compostable lid, or a cardboard tray with a non-compostable plastic liner that needs to be peeled off, etc.);
6. Shopping bags and alternatives;
7. Biodegradable or compostable packaging that generates known harmful by-products;
8. Packaging containing PFAS or other fluorocarbons;
9. Packaging containing materials that can be recycled, but for which collection and/or recycling infrastructure currently does not exist in key markets (Canada, EU, U.K.).

Eligibility

Clemson University and FFP welcome applications from domestic or international companies of all scales (from start-ups to well-capitalized enterprises), institutions of higher education, non-profit and for-profit organizations and government-affiliated researchers. Applications from international entities are invited provided there is a clearly described collaboration with U.S.-based researchers, packaging companies or U.S. exporters of specialty crops.

All applicants must have a UIE (Unique Entity Identifier) number, which can be obtained via registration in the U.S. Government System for Award Management (www.sam.gov) before

receiving any funds. Applicants with inactive, expired, pending, or excluded listings will be deemed ineligible. Exceptions, waivers, or extensions will not be considered.

Any individual(s) with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research as Program Director(s)/Principal Investigator(s) is invited to work with their organization to develop an application for support.

Resubmissions

Applicants are permitted to resubmit an application from a previous year. Revised applications must follow the RFA guidance and eligibility in effect at the time of resubmission. The title of the resubmission must be identical to the original application. All revised applications must submit a Resubmission Summary, consisting of the original notification of declination with complete review comments, followed by a summary response. The summary response must address substantive changes made to the application (1-page maximum, excluding the original review comments).

If the application is a resubmission, the original application reference number will be required (example 25-001000). For any previous submission to be considered a new application and not a resubmission, at least 50% of the content in the research plan must be changed, and the title must be different.

Application Components

Full Proposal

General consideration: Please use a common font not smaller than 11 points throughout the document. **The application must not exceed seven pages, single-spaced text**. Relevant figures, data (tables) and flowcharts are encouraged, but must be legible and must be uploaded as a separate document to be excluded from the page limit. Key Personnel, Budget, Budget Justification, References Cited and required Attachment documents are not included in the page limit.

1) Project Information
    a) Project Title
    b) Project Start and End Dates. Projects are expected to start by June 1, 2026, and have a first clear deliverable by Sept 30, 2026

c) List specialty crop(s) that are the focus of the work. If relevant, also list specific produce companies, retailers, or agriculture associations that are engaged in the project or are confirmed to be a partner for a commercialization/pilot project.
d) Is this a technology suitable for a value-add (such as pre-made salads) or fresh-cut products.
e) Identify Track for which this application should be considered (Track 1 – Applied R&D, Track 2 – Technology Accelerator, Track 3 – Pilots)
f) Technology readiness level (TRL)[3]
g) Are you currently a Grantee under a previous Sustainable Packaging Innovation Lab award?
h) Geographic Location(s) (city(ies), state(s), congressional district(s)) where the proposed research or commercialization project will be conducted.
i) Total annual budget request. Please note that indirect cost (IDC) recovery is capped at 10% of the total direct costs.
j) Total optional matching funds

2) Project Executive Summary (no more than one (1) page)
The Executive Summary must include all of the following components:
a) Description of the technology, the type of packaging that is considered, and the type of crops that are targeted.
b) Description of how the solution addresses international regulations on packaging, and which foreign regulations thetechnology applies to.
c) Description of which markets are targeted and the path to scale-up and commercial viability.

3) Project Description (no more than six (6) pages)
Description must include:
a) Short introduction/state of the science review; review of current packaging solutions that pertain to your technology and how they apply to specialty crops.
b) Introduction to your technology / product and how it provides a solution to current needs in the area of specialty crop exports, especially in light of changing regulations.
c) Description of the partnerships that will enable scale-up and commercial viability.
d) Measurable Objectives of the project
e) Project Methods for achieving objectives, including:

[3] www.dst.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/basic_pages/documents/TRL%20Explanations_1.pdf

i. A clear and detailed description of the pilot studies or scale-up operations that will take place during the project lifetime. Materials and their sources must be described with sufficient detail and clarity to allow a meaningful peer review of the application by technical and non-technical experts;
ii. Plans to demonstrate compliance of the packaging or packaging alternative with regulations in the EU, U.K., Canada and/or other markets;
iii. Plans to reach cost objectives and compare to incumbent materials.
iv. A description of possible barriers and approaches for overcoming them.
v. Anticipated Deliverables and Outcomes;
vi. Key performance indicators that describe progress toward completion;

f) Intellectual Property Management Plan.

4) Additional Required Attachments not included in the 7-page limit:
   a) References Cited
   b) Budget Justification (up to 1000 words)
   c) Qualifications and commitment of Key Personnel (no more than 5 pages, CVs can be included, but not to exceed two pages per Key Person)
   d) Organizational Assurances (Excluded from the page limit, and only if applicable):
      i. Research involving human subjects
      ii. Research involving Recombinant DNA
      iii. Research involving national security implications
      iv. Research involving hazardous materials
   e) Budget Form: Optional matching funds
   f) Quarterly Gantt chart of Project Goals, Objectives and Timeline

   For Resubmission applicants Only:
   Resubmission Summary (no more than one (1) page): Must include reviewer comments, followed by a summary response. The summary response must address substantive changes made to the application and cannot exceed one (1) page, excluding the original reviewer comments).

5) Optional attachments to support project description (PDF). This section should not be used to circumvent the page limit for the Project Description Section.
   - Graphics, Figures, Equations, and Tables (no more than five (5) pages)
   - List of individual reviewers with an apparent conflict of interest

Application Submission Guidelines

Full proposals must be submitted by 5 p.m. EST on December 17, 2026, through FFAR's online application Grant Management System. Applications submitted outside of this System will not be considered.

To start a new application, please click here. If you are a new user, register for an account by clicking "Create Account" button located on the bottom right side of the home page. Once you log in, you may begin working on your application. Please be sure to save your work often by clicking on "Save and Finish Later." To access a saved application, please do so through your Grant Management Account.

Only submissions received by the deadline through FFAR's Grant Management System will be accepted and considered eligible for evaluation. To be fair to all applicants, FFAR will not grant extensions to applicants who missed the deadlines posted in the Key Dates section.

Application Review Process

Full Proposal Review

Applications submitted to all three tracks will be reviewed together; however, applications will be scored differently depending on the track. Proposals for Track 1 must clearly focus on the feasibility to enter the pilot phase of development. Proposals for Track 2 and Track 3 will be evaluated based on the commercialization potential of the sustainable packaging or packaging alternative and the likelihood of its adoption by the agriculture industry and packaging manufacturers/distributors.

Proposals will be first screened for the suitability based on the Executive Summary, and those focusing on ineligible activities, crops, or outputs; too early in the development (TRL1-3); exceeding budget or IDC limits; involving materials or formats that are not sustainable or scalable or those that result in packaging or packaging alternatives that are not economical will not be further reviewed.

Selected full proposals will undergo further review using a two-stage review process: (1) External Peer Review (Primary Review), and (2) Program Executive Committee Review (Secondary Review). In the Primary Review stage, applications will be evaluated by an

external peer review panel of scientific experts using the proposal review criteria posted in the RFA. In the Secondary Review stage, the top-ranked proposals identified in the Primary Review stage will be reviewed by the Program Executive Committee.

All reviewers are required to read and acknowledge acceptance of FFAR's Conflict of Interest Policy and Non-Disclosure Agreement. We make reasonable efforts to ensure that proposals are not assigned to reviewers with a real or apparent conflict with the applicant or project personnel. Reviewers with a conflict of interest are recused from evaluating or participating in discussions of proposals with which they have a conflict. Each stage of the review is conducted confidentially. Applicants are invited to identify individual reviewers with an apparent conflict of interest in a separate "Optional Attachment" document.

Review Criteria

Full proposals are evaluated based on scored Primary Review criteria and unscored Secondary Review criteria. The bullets under each criterion may serve as a guideline for applicants when writing their proposals and as a guideline to reviewers on what to consider when evaluating proposals. The bullets are illustrative and not intended to be comprehensive. Reviewers will evaluate and score each primary criterion. The overall assessment will not be an average score of the individual criteria; rather, it will reflect the reviewers' overall impression of the application. Evaluation of the scientific merit of each application is within the sole discretion of the peer reviewers, and they may raise additional factors to consider that are not covered in the bullets for each criterion.

The following criteria are typically used when evaluating RFAs:

- Relevance to export of U.S. specialty crops
- Novelty or innovation
- Project strategy and feasibility to achieve project goals
- Technical or scientific merit
- Commercialization potential
- Feasibility of adoption by U.S. produce industry (growers/handlers/retailers)
- Compliance (or feasibility of compliance) with emergent packaging regulations in the EU, Canada, U.K. and/or Japan
- Source material availability for novel types of packaging and packaging formats, or packaging alternatives
- Likely cost of the final packaging or packaging alternative vs. benefits it provides
- Organizational capacity/research environment

- Qualifications of the research team
- Budget and budget justification, including reasonableness of expenses

During the Secondary Review, the Program Executive Committee will review top-ranked proposals and select those suitable for each of the three tracks based on the availability of seats within each track and the need to balance the portfolio of investment into diverse technologies suitable for floral, fresh, fresh-cut and value-add fresh products.

Award Administration

Selection Notice

Following the full proposal review, the Principal Investigator and the authorized organization representative listed on the project will be officially notified by email whether (1) the proposal has been selected for funding pending contract negotiations, or (2) the proposal has not been selected for funding. Applicants will receive a summary of reviewers' comments via email. If a proposal is selected for funding, Clemson University, FFAR, FFP, and USDA FAS, reserve the right to request additional or clarifying information for any reason deemed necessary, including, but not limited to, additional project contributions, or other budget information.

Award Notice

FFAR notifies applicants of whether they are selected for funding via email. The notice does not constitute an award or obligate funding until there is a fully executed Grant Agreement. Contracts with selected applicants will be negotiated and completed either by Clemson University or by FFP following organizational procedures and in compliance with Part 2 CFR 200 as amended on October 2nd 2024[4], to accomplish overall objectives of the ASCE initiative.

Grant Period

Grantees may only use funds on project expenditures on or after the Start Date (June 1, 2026) of the Grant. Projects are expected to terminate within 12 months of the Start Date, and the first deliverable is expected by September 30, 2026. Charging expenditures to the

[4] https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200

grant prior to the effective date is strictly prohibited. Likewise, grantees may not use funds after the End Date except to satisfy obligations to pay allowable project costs committed on or before that date.

Post-Award Management

Reporting Requirements

After a grant is conferred, the grantee shall provide quarterly (based on the calendar year) technical and financial reports to either Clemson University or to FFP per the terms of the Grant Agreement. Awardees in Track 1 and 3 are required to attend the ASCE Awardee meeting at Clemson University and should budget accordingly for travel.

This will be a reimbursable, not pre-paid award. The grantee shall provide quarterly and annual progress reports showing activities being carried out under the grant, including but not limited to project accomplishments to date, and synthesis of results. The financial report and an invoice reflecting quarterly expenditures should accompany quarterly technical report. Within 90 days of the End Date, the grantee shall provide a final progress report, and the final quarterly payment is conditional upon the receipt of the final technical and final financial report. The final progress report should address the original objectives of the project as identified in the proposal, describe any changes in objectives, describe the final project accomplishments, and include a final project accounting of all grant funds, and a final invoice.

Successful grantees are expected to collaboratively develop KPIs or metrics to track progress toward the following program-wide goals:

- How does the activity advance the goals of maintaining or increasing U.S. exports of specialty crops?
- How does the activity enable U.S. exporters to comply with emerging regulatory requirements (see Footnote 1) for packaging and labeling in other countries?
- How does the activity support the development of packaging materials that are alternatives to single-use plastic packaging?
- How does the activity support the development of reusable packaging systems for the export of specialty crops?
- How does the activity support the export of specialty crops that will be sold at retail without packaging?

- How does the activity reduce economic losses for U.S. exporters from food loss and waste of exported fresh produce?
- How does the activity promote the implementation of novel packaging which meets export market requirements on sustainable packaging at a commercial scale for exports of specialty crops?
- Potential for learning opportunities from piloting retail sales in innovative packaging.

A sample of projects will be selected for review by an external evaluator to assess the effectiveness of the projects.

Scientific Integrity

All funded projects must be conducted with the highest standards of scientific integrity in accordance with institutional or company policies. Organizational scientific and research integrity policies should comply with the USDA Scientific Integrity and Research Misconduct policies and guidelines.[5]

Contact Information

All online application questions (technical support) should be emailed to grants@foundationfar.org. Scientific questions regarding Tracks 1 and 3 should be directed to Dr. James Sternberg (sternbe@g.clemson.edu), for Track 2 contact Vonnie Estes (vestes@freshproduce.com).

Scientific, programmatic and grants inquiries must be submitted by email. We strive to respond to inquiries within three business days, but our response time depends on the volume of questions we receive and the complexity of the questions asked. Please note that we do not monitor mailboxes in the evenings, weekends, or federal holidays.

[5] https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/staff-offices/office-chief-scientist-ocs/scientific-integrity-and-research-misconduct