

## Application Contacts

The Authorized Representative **must** be the individual from the Applicant Entity with signing authority for the Applicant. All VAPG applications must be initiated by the Authorized Representative of the Applicant Entity. The Authorized Representative **must** initiate the new application under their eAuthentication log in. The Authorized Representative does have the option to add Representatives or Collaborators to an application through the "Manage Users" option on the home screen, or the top right corner of the Application Contacts page. The Authorized Representative will not be able to start a new application until the previous one is deleted as there can only be one application per Applicant in a given program cycle.

## Entity Details

**Legal Name of Applicant:** Enter legal entity and/or owner(s) of the legal entity (regardless of ownership percentage), applying to participate in the competition for program funding.

**Employer/Tax Identification Number:** is the legal entity or individual applying for the grant. Should be the same entity and individual TIN used for tax purposes.

**SAM Registration:** Applicant must be pre-registered with the **System of Award Management (SAM)** prior to application submittal. SAM registration is free but can take time to process, so we encourage you to start as soon as possible. If you are already registered with SAM, please ensure registration is active throughout the grant's performance period. You will need your Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number and expiration date for the portal.

**Applicant Address/Congressional District:** Enter the applicant current address. Enter the Congressional District in the format of 001,002, etc. You can look up the congressional district at [govtrack.us](http://govtrack.us) – use the applicant current address.

**Citizenship/Applicant Demographic Information:** The applicant must certify to their citizenship in accordance with [7 CFR 4284.920\(f\)](#). Demographic Information is optional but is encouraged.

**Eligibility Questions:** All eligibility question must be answered, including those related to debarment, suspension, or federal debt. Should you need further clarification please contact the CA VAPG representative at [amy.davis3@usda.gov](mailto:amy.davis3@usda.gov). Ineligible applicants are address in [7 CFR 4284.921](#).

## Application Details

**Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project:** Short description of what VAPG project

**Proved Executive Summary:** This section should be broken down into three parts: 1) Describe your project (4-5 sentence) 2. What are project goals (3-4 goals) and 3.) How do you intend to use the grant and matching funds (outlined in [7 CFR 4284.922](#)). Grant funds cannot be used to produce raw commodities; repair, acquisition, or construction of a building or facility; or to purchase, rent or install farm equipment. VAPG grants require a 1:1 match. Matching funds may include cash or eligible in-kind contributions, such as cash, value of raw commodity, labor or third-party. However, no more than 50% of the matching funds may come from the applicant or family member labor contributions.

**Grant Details:** Remember, VAPG grants require a 1:1 match. What type of VAPG grant are you wanting to apply for:

Planning Grant	Planning grants are intended for agricultural producers who are preparing to develop a new value-added product and introduce it to the market. Funding can be used to create a business plan or conduct a feasibility study through a third-party consultant. The maximum award amount is \$75,000.  Funds may only be used to pay a Qualified Consultant to conduct and develop a Feasibility Study, Business Plan, and/or Marketing Plan associated with the post-harvest processing and/or marketing of a Value-Added Agricultural Product.
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Working Grant	<p>Working capital grants provide funding for operational expenses related processing and marketing a value-added product. The maximum award amount is \$250,000, but any requests exceeding \$50,000 require a feasibility study or business plan.</p> <p>Funds may be used to pay the Project's eligible post-harvest operational costs directly related to the processing and/or marketing of the Value-Added Agricultural Product.</p> <p>Examples: include purchasing a financial accounting system for the Project; paying salaries of employees (excluding owners and Immediate Family) to process and/or market and deliver the Value-Added Agricultural Product to consumers; paying for additional Agricultural Commodity inventory (less than 50 percent of the amount required for the Project) from an unaffiliated third party, necessary to produce the Value-Added Agricultural Product; paying for a marketing campaign for the Value-Added Agricultural Product; paying costs incurred in obtaining post-harvest Food Safety certification; and using up to \$6,500 of the amount of a grant to purchase or upgrade post-harvest Equipment to improve Food Safety. Ineligible use of grant funds are listed <a href="#">§4284.926</a></p>
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**Grant Period:** The proposed grant period should begin no earlier than the anticipated award announcements (usually sometime after Sept) This allows time for scoring, funding and closing. The end date should be no longer than 36 months from start date, depending on the complexity of the project.

**Multiple Grant Submissions/Prior Year VAPG Award/Current VAPG Awards:** 1) Applicant must certify they are submitting one application in response to this solicitation, including separate but related, applicant entities or from a parent, subsidiary or affiliated organization in the “Multiple Grant Submission” section ([7 CFR 4284.920\(g\)](#)). 2) Applicant must also list all “Prior Year VAPG Awards” they have received in the past. 3) All outstanding VAPG award funds must be exhausted and final financial report submitted to the agency by the submission deadline ([7 CFR 4284.920\(h\)](#)).

**Applicant Type**

**Eligible Applicants:** Choose one of the following based on the application is currently operating.

Agricultural Producer	<p>means a for-profit agricultural business, or entity that is 100 percent owned and controlled by an individual, entity or Family Farm that produces an Agricultural Commodity through participation in the day-to-day labor, management, and field operations; or that has the legal right to harvest an Agricultural Commodity that is the subject of the VAPG Project. Agricultural Producer can be an individual or entity operation such as limited liability corporation, corporation, partnership, etc.</p> <p>You will need to complete the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will need to provide description of the applicant’s role in the production of the agricultural commodity by participation in day-to-day labor, management, and field operations.</li> <li>• Determine business is owned by individual or multiple owners through ownership interest of a legal entity governed body. You will need to enter each owner/member of the legal entity and percent of ownership to equal 100%</li> <li>• <b>Harvester:</b> You must disclose if you have harvest rights to a commodity and must be documented. Harvester has legal rights to access and harvest an agricultural commodity that will be used for the VAPG project. (Example: to forestry, logging, seafood harvesters). This does not include the agricultural producer harvesting their own commodity.</li> <li>• <b>Steering Committee</b> You must disclose if they will form a steering committee prior to execution of the Financial Assistance Agreement. A steering committee is unincorporated group comprised wholly of specifically identified Agricultural Producers in the process of organizing one of the program eligible Applicant types. (Not commonly applied for)</li> </ul>
Agricultural Producer Group	<p>means a non-profit membership organization that represents Agricultural Producers and whose mission includes working on behalf of Agricultural Producers and more than 50 percent of whose membership and board of directors is comprised of Agricultural Producers.</p> <p>You will need to complete the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must disclose the number of individuals on the governing board and total numbers who are eligible Agricultural Producers, and the participating member must be disclosed – the majority (more than 50%) of membership and board of directors is made of agricultural producers.</li> <li>• Provide information on the participating owners/members by name or class. By name, all participating owners/members must be identified and meet the agricultural producer definition. By class, describe the role of owners/members in the day-to-day production of the agricultural commodity and whether it meets the definition of agricultural commodity.</li> </ul>

Farmer or Rancher Cooperative	<p>means a business owned and controlled by Agricultural Producers that is incorporated or otherwise identified by the State in which it operates, as a cooperatively operated business. The Agricultural Producers, on whose behalf the value-added work will be done, must be identified by name or class</p> <p>You will need to complete the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You will need to disclose whether applicant is legally incorporated as Farmer or Rancher Cooperative or identified by the state in which it operates as Farmer and Rancher owned cooperatively owned business.</li> <li>The total percentage of ownership shares owned by Agricultural Producers must be disclosed with the number of eligible agricultural producer owners/member who will participate in the VAPG project.</li> <li>Provide information on the participating owners/members by name or class. By name, all participating owners/members must be identified and meet the agricultural producer definition. By class, describe the role of owners/members in the day-to-day production of the agricultural commodity and whether it meets the definition of agricultural commodity.</li> </ul>
Majority-Controlled Producer Based Business	<p>refers to a venture greater than 50 percent of the ownership and control of which is held by—</p> <p>(1) One or more Producers (Agricultural Producers); or</p> <p>(2) One or more entities, 100 percent of the ownership and control of which is held by one or more Producers (Agricultural Producers). The term 'entity' means—</p> <p>(i) A partnership;</p> <p>(ii) A limited liability corporation;</p> <p>(iii) A limited liability partnership; or</p> <p>(iv) A corporation.</p> <p>You will need to complete the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe in detail on how the Majority-Controlled Producer Based Business Venture's work on this project will benefit the participating owners/members.</li> <li>List all owner's name along their percentage of financial ownership and percentage of voting control in the organization. They must meet the definition of agricultural producer.</li> </ul>

**Tribal Entity:** The applicant will need supply the name to the Tribal Entity applying. The agency will determine the Agricultural Producer status of the Tribes or Tribal entities without regard to ownership of the commodity to which value will be added so long as the Tribal member participant, Tribal entity and/or Tribe own and control more than 50% of the agricultural commodity necessary for the project.

### Value-Added Agricultural Product

**Food Related Product/Alcohol and Tabaco TTB/Hemp Related Projects:** You must complete the sections 1) Involving consumption is for reporting purposes and does impact eligibility or scoring. 2) Upon award selection, you will be required to submit a valid TTB permit. 3) Hemp project a copy of valid producer license issued by State, Tribe or USDA and Applicable Food and Drug in accordance to [7 CFR Part 990 \(Mar. 17, 2025\)](#). Administration and Drug Enforcement Administration regulatory requirements must also be met.

**Value-Added Agricultural Products:** List the value-added products that will be produce within the project. All value-added products must be listed separately and must meet the eligibility criteria.

**Raw Agricultura Commodity:** Under each value-added product you must enter the agricultural commodity(s) used to make the value-added product. All applicants for working capital grants must list the quantity of each agricultural commodity that will be used for the Value-Added Agricultural Product. List only those in which you produce more than 50 percent of the amount needed for the project. The quantity of the agricultural product must be in an appropriate unit of measure, such as pounds, bushels, tons, head, etc. (do not use acreage), to demonstrate the scale of the agricultural project.

**Quantity of Ag Commodity Needed for the Project:** Estimated total quantity of each Agricultural Commodity needed for the VAPG Project

**Unit of Measurement:** pounds, bushels, tons, head, etc.

**Quantity Owned and Produced by Applicant:** Estimated quantity Agricultural Commodity that will be produced by Agricultural Producer owners of the applicant organization for the project. Do not include commodities for which you produce less than 50 percent of the required amount.

**Quantity Needed to Purchase from Third-Party:** Estimated quantity of the Agricultural Commodity that will be purchased or donated from third-party sources. Include only the balance of the raw commodity (less than 50 percent)

**Value-Added Methodology:** Choose the best value-added methodology that best fits your proposed value-added product and explain the method or process used for only one value-added methodology type.

<p>Change in Physical State</p>	<p>Definition: means an irreversible processing activity that alters the Agricultural Commodity into a substantially different, marketable Value-Added Agricultural Product. This processing activity must be something other than a post-harvest process that primarily acts to preserve the commodity for later sale.</p> <p>Examples: include, but are not limited to, strawberries into jam, milk into cheese, wheat into flour, wool into clothing or rugs, livestock into packaged meat.</p> <p>Explain: the method or process used to add value to your agricultural product, and how the change in physical state or form of the product enhances its value</p>
<p>Produce in a Manner that Enhance the Value of the Agricultural Commodity</p>	<p>Definition: refers to the use of a recognizably coherent set of agricultural production practices in the growing or raising of the Agricultural Commodity, such that a differentiated market identity is created for the resulting product.</p> <p>Examples: include, but are not limited to, organic carrots, eggs produced from free-range chickens.</p> <p>Explain: the method or process used to add value to your agricultural product, and how a non-standard agricultural production method adds value to the agricultural commodity per unit of production over a standard production method and provide evidence via a quantifiable comparison with products produced in the standard manner.</p>
<p>Physical Segregation</p>	<p>Definition: means separating an Agricultural Commodity or product on the same Farm from other varieties of the same commodity or product on the same Farm during production and harvesting, with assurance of continued separation from similar commodities during processing and marketing in a manner that results in the enhancement of the value of the separated commodity or product.</p> <p>Examples: genetically modified corn that is separated from non-genetically modified corn on the farm during production and harvesting, with continued separation from similar commodities or products during the processing and marketing of the value-added product.</p> <p>Explain: the method or process used to add value to your agricultural product and demonstrate how the physical segregation of the commodity is accomplished and how it enhances the value of the commodity.</p>
<p>Farm-or-Ranch-based Renewable Energy</p> <p>Check out <a href="#">Rural Energy for America Program</a> (REAP) program which may better fit your needs.</p>	<p>Definition: means renewable energy generated by use of an Agricultural Commodity on a Farm or Ranch, owned or leased by an Agricultural Producer, which provides the Agricultural Producer with an expanded customer base and increased revenues.</p> <p>Examples: include, but are not limited to, dairy manure into methane and electricity generated on the farm, or corn into biodiesel generated on the farm. Generation of energy from wind, solar, geothermal or hydro sources are not eligible. Fuel or energy that is not generated on a farm or ranch owned or leased by the Independent Producer applicant is not eligible under this methodology but may be considered under 'change in physical state'.</p> <p>Describe the renewable energy technology that will be used on-farm and explain the process to generate on-farm renewable energy from the agricultural commodity produced by the Independent Producer applicant. Demonstrate that the generated renewable energy will result in expansion of customer base and increased returns to the producer*.</p>

<p>Locally-Produced Agricultural Food Product</p>	<p>Definition: refers to raw, cooked, or processed edible substances, beverages, or ingredients intended for human consumption that are raised, produced, and distributed in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) The locality or region in which the final product is marketed, so that the total distance that the product is transported is less than 400 miles from the origin of the product; or</li> <li>(2) The State in which the product is produced.</li> </ul> <p>Examples: include, but are not limited to, specific local grapes with characteristics attributable to the growing area will be sold to a processor that will produce a locally-marketed wine; or local corn advertised and sold at a premium as a fresher locally-produced alternative to non-local produce. (100 percent of the Agricultural Food Product will be marketed and distributed within 400 miles of the farm that produced the commodity, or within the same state as that farm.)</p> <p>Explain: how value is added to your agricultural product and demonstrate/quantify how local sales and marketing results in added value to the product.</p>
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**Agricultural Commodity Certification:** Self-Certification that raw commodity is not grown under contract for another entity (contract farmer), the applicant grows/raise more than 50% of raw commodity, maintain ownership of raw commodity through the production, marketing and sale of the value-added product and ensure the commodity will be produced in the United States.

**Work Plan and Budget**

**Working Capital Grants Only:** Select the eligible working capital options

<p>Emerging Market</p>	<p>Definition: means a developing, geographic or demographic market that has been supplied by the Applicant or the Applicant's product for two (2) years or less.</p> <p>An Applicant that is an <u>Agricultural Producer Group, a Farmer or Rancher Cooperative, or a Majority-Controlled Producer-Based Business Venture</u> must demonstrate that it is entering into an Emerging Market as a result of the Project. An Agricultural Producer Applicant type that has produced and marketed the Value-Added Agricultural Product for less than two (2) years must also demonstrate that it is entering an Emerging Market.</p> <p>Attachment Required: Must include independent Feasibility Study, and a Business Plan complete specifically for the proposed Value-Added Project. The applicant cannot have supplied the proposed product, either geographic or demographic market for more than two years at the time of application submission.</p> <p>Feasibility Study: Prepared by a Qualified Consultant that was completed for the value-added Project. The name and credentials of the Qualified Consultant must be provided along with the date the Feasibility Study was completed. The Feasibility Study must demonstrate a viable Project with a likelihood of success and be a thorough assessment of the practicality of the Project. The thorough assessment must include an analysis of the proposed Project that discusses its strengths and weaknesses, potential opportunities and threats, and resources required to carry it out. The Agency must concur in the acceptability or adequacy of the Feasibility Study and whether the Qualified Consultant who prepared the Feasibility Study possesses the necessary knowledge, expertise, and experience.</p> <p>Business Plan: Provide a copy of the Business Plan that was completed for the value-added Project. The Agency must concur in the acceptability or adequacy of the Business Plan. A business plan is formal statement of a set of business goals, the reasons why they are believed attainable, and the plan for reaching those goals, including Pro Forma Financial Statements appropriate to the term and scope of the Project and sufficient to evidence the viability of the Project. It may also contain background information about the organization or team attempting to reach those goals.</p> <p><b>Emerging Market applications</b> must include an independent Feasibility Study, and a Business Plan completed specifically for the proposed Value-Added Project. The Applicant cannot have supplied the proposed product, either geographic or demographic market for more than two years at time of application submission.</p>
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<p>Food Safety</p>	<p>Definition: to conditions and practices that preserve the quality of food to prevent contamination and food-borne illnesses.</p> <p>If the Applicant is applying for Food Safety reserved funds, the Applicant must describe the need or requirement for training, certifications, and/or supplies and equipment. This reserve is for Applicants where more than 50 percent of the Project Cost is for post-harvest Food Safety purposes related to the processing and/or marketing of a Value-Added Agricultural Product.</p> <p><b>Food Safety applications</b> that demonstrate they meet the eligibility requirements for Food Safety will automatically be considered for Food Safety reserved funds. Applicants must certify that more than 50 percent of the related budget expenses are for Food Safety related activities. Applicants must describe the need or requirement for Food Safety related training, certifications, and/or supplies and equipment for a post-harvest Value- Added Agricultural Product Applicants must also discuss how their Food Safety related Value-Added Project will reach a new customer base, enter into a new market, or reach new customers through either the Emerging Market or Market Expansion requirements.</p>
<p>Market Expansion</p>	<p>Definition: means a Project in which the Agricultural Producer Applicant seeks to expand the market either geographically or demographically for an existing Value-Added Agricultural Product produced and marketed by the Applicant for at least two (2) years at the time of the application through sales to demonstrably new markets or new customers in existing markets.</p> <p>Agricultural Producers who can demonstrate that their Project meets the definition of Market Expansion, may submit a simplified application. Applicants must submit a Marketing Plan with their simplified application. However, a Business Plan may be submitted in lieu of a Marketing Plan. Agricultural Producer Group, Farmer or Rancher Cooperative, and Majority- Controlled Producer-Based Business Venture applicant types are not eligible for Market Expansion Projects.</p> <p><b>Market Expansion applications (Agricultural Producers only)</b> are for an existing Value-Added Agricultural Product that has been produced and successfully marketed for at least two years by the Applicant at the time of application submission. Market Expansion Applicants must provide a Business and/or Marketing Plan and must summarize their history of producing and marketing the subject Value-added Agricultural Product and summarize the results of their Business or Marketing Plan.</p>
<p>Simplified Application of Less than \$50,000</p>	<p>Applicants that will submit an application where paragraphs (a), (b), and/or (c) of this section apply may submit a simplified application, which means submission of a Feasibility Study or Business Plan for the Project is not required. The waiver of the requirement to submit a Feasibility Study and Business Plan does not change the proposal evaluation or scoring criteria that pertain to issues that might be supported by a Feasibility Study or Business Plan, so Applicants are encouraged to thoroughly document applications with their Project plans and expectations for success. All other eligibility requirements remain the same.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) <b>Working Capital Grant request of less than \$50,000.</b> Applicants requesting less than \$50,000 may submit a Market Expansion or Emerging Market simplified application. These types of applications must provide adequate documentation to demonstrate the expected increases in customer base and revenues resulting from the Project that will benefit the Applicant(s) supplying more than 50 percent of the Agricultural Commodity for the Project.</li> <li>(b) <b>Market Expansion request of \$50,000 or more.</b> Agricultural Producers who can demonstrate that their project meets the definition of Market Expansion, may submit a simplified application. Applicants must submit a Marketing Plan with their simplified application. However, a Business Plan may be submitted in lieu of a Marketing Plan. Agricultural Producer Group, Farmer or Rancher Cooperative, and Majority-Controlled Producer-Based Business Venture applicant types are not eligible for Market Expansion Projects.</li> <li>(c) <b>Food Safety.</b> Applicants that will submit an application where more than 50 percent of the Project Costs will be used for post-harvest Food Safety purposes related to the processing and/or marketing of a Value-Added Agricultural Product may submit a simplified application.</li> </ul> <p><b>Simplified Application of Less Than \$50,000</b> are eligible for all four Applicant types. Applicants must discuss how their Value-Added Project will reach a new customer base, enter into a new market, or reach new customers either through the Emerging Market or Market Expansion requirements. However, Agricultural Producer Groups, Farmer or Rancher Cooperatives and Majority-Controlled Producer Based Business Ventures are not eligible for Market Expansion and must describe how they are entering into an Emerging Market. Applicants for this type of Working Capital Application do not need to provide a Feasibility Study or Business Plan.</p>

Applicants must discuss how their Value-Added Project will meet either the Emerging Market or Market Expansion requirements. Agricultural Producer Groups, Farmer or Rancher Cooperatives and Majority-Controlled Producer Based Business Ventures are not eligible for Market Expansion.

**Work Plan & Budget:** All applicants applying for working capital or planning grants must provide a detailed Work Plan and Budget narrative that shows how the Project's goals will be accomplished, including a narrative description of the eligible activities and the tasks associated with those activities; a detailed budget breakdown of the estimated costs allocated to those activities and tasks; identification of the Key Personnel responsible for each of the activities and tasks; timeframes for completion of the activities and tasks; identification of the sources and uses of grant and matching funds for all activities and tasks; and a Period of Performance that meets start and end date requirements. *Note: Information provided in this section will also be scored as part of the proposal Merit Evaluation criterion 3 Work Plan and Budget.*

The work plan should show how the project's goals will be accomplished per the requirements in [§4284.951\(b\)\(5\)](#), including a narrative description of the eligible activities and the tasks associated with those activities; a detailed budget breakdown of the estimated costs allocated to those activities and tasks; identification of the key personnel responsible for each of the activities and tasks; timeframes for completion of the activities and tasks; identification of the sources and uses of grant and matching funds for all activities and tasks; and a grant period that meets start and end date requirements (See Grant Period Eligibility, below).

**Working Capital Grant Applicants:** must complete a budget to show how the grant and matching funds will be used.

**Budget – Add Expenses:** 1) You will need to add your expense related to your Value-Added project. There is no limit to how many expenses you may add but each expense must be for an eligible purpose and the explanation for each expense must be thoroughly described. 2) You will need to list how it will be paid – grant funds or matching funds. Ensure the expenses align with the grant or matching cost eligibility. *NOTE: Review your budget carefully, as this section will impact both eligibility and scoring. Program staff are available through the **Need Help** icon if you have questions concerning the eligibility of expenses.* 3) For each expense, list the category it will be paid from, the Key Personnel responsible for the task, the start and end date for the activity, and included a thorough description & justification for the expense to include an expense valuation. *Note: If you would like to upload documentation such as estimates, quotes, historical costs, etc. to support your Project expenses, you may do so using the 'Upload Files' tab.*

**Planning Grant Applicants:** Complete the Work Plan and Budget. Ensure your responses are thorough and that you respond to all questions with an asterisk (\*). Applicants must provide a Work Plan & Budget description that outlines how the funds will be used and must be for the development of a Feasibility Study, Business Plan and/or a Marketing Plan. 1) When completing the **'Itemized Expense'** section, Planning Grant Applicants may request funds to pay for the development of a Feasibility Study, Business Plan, or Marketing Plan. The budget can be for one, all, or any combination of these three items. It is most common that Applicants apply for a Feasibility Study and Business Plan. 2) for each expense, list the category it will be paid from, the Key Personnel responsible for the task, the start and end date for the activity, and included a thorough description & justification for the expense to include an expense valuation. 3) you've added adequate expenses to account for the amount listed on the Application Details page for Grant and Matching Funds. You'll receive a red error message if your amounts do not match.

## Matching Funds

*Matching Funds.* Matching Funds must come from eligible sources without a real or apparent conflict of interest and be used for eligible Project expenses during the Period of Performance. Matching Funds must be confirmed and provided in the form of:

- (1) Applicant or third-party cash;
- (2) Applicant loan, or line of credit;

- (3) Non-Federal grant sources (unless otherwise provided by law); or
- (3) Applicant, family member, or third-party in-kind contribution.
  - (i) In-kind contributions must be appropriately valued with an adequate explanation of the basis for the valuation (e.g., reference comparable market values, salary and wage data, expertise or experience of the contributor, per unit costs, industry norms).
  - (ii) Applicant in-kind contributions may include the value of the Agricultural Commodity inventory to be used in the Project and can be used to satisfy up to 100 percent of the Matching Funds requirement. Third-party in-kind contributions of the Agricultural Commodity inventory to be used in the Project can be used to satisfy up to 49 percent of the Matching Funds requirement.
  - (iii) Applicant in-kind contributions may also include Applicant or family time spent on eligible tasks; however, the valuation cannot exceed 50 percent of the Matching Funds required for the Project. Final valuation for Applicant or family member in-kind contributions is at the discretion of the Agency.

### Expansion of Customer Base and Increased Revenue

You must cite one or more relevant sources to support the response statements and data below. Responses must be supported by project-specific analysis, such as a feasibility study, marketing plan, or business plan developed for the project and included with this application; or, for working capital applications that do not require submission of a feasibility study or business plan, responses must identify a relevant authority source or independent basis for the response data provided.

- 1) Discuss the estimated expansion of customer base resulting from the value-added product, including a baseline of current customers for the commodity or value-added product, and an estimated target number of customers that will result from the project:
- 2) Discuss the estimated amount of the increased revenue resulting value-added product that will be available to the applicant's producers of the agricultural commodity, including a baseline of current revenues from the sale of the agricultural commodity or value-added product, and an estimated target number of increased revenues that will result from the project
- 3) Per the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, working capital applicants must include a description of the direct or indirect producer or food business benefits intended by the eligible entity to result from the proposed project within a reasonable period of time after the receipt of a grant.

### Merit Evaluation

**Step 1:** Follow the instructions as provided in the Merit Evaluation section of the Grant Application Portal and complete all Merit Evaluation questions with clear, detailed responses.

**Step 2:** Ensure all elements of each question are addressed. For each criterion, you must demonstrate how the Project has merit and provide rationale for the likelihood of success. Responses that do not address all aspects of the criterion in a meaningful way, or that do not convey relevant Project information will receive lower scores. Please view the Agency's annual notification for a detailed breakdown of the scoring in the Merit Evaluation section.

**Step 3:** Apply for priority points where eligible.

**Note:** *Grayed-out options indicate areas where you are ineligible for the priority point category due to previous answer in the Grant Application Portal.*