

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Cooperative State Research,
Education, and Extension Service

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION**DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY**

Office of the Secretary

**The United States Rice Genome
Sequencing Project; Interagency
Program Announcement; Request for
Proposals and Request for Input**

AGENCIES: U.S. Department of
Agriculture, National Science
Foundation and U.S. Department of
Energy.

ACTION: Notice of request for proposals
and request for input.

SUMMARY: As a collaborative,
interagency effort, the Cooperative State
Research, Education, and Extension
Service (CSREES) of the Department of
Agriculture, the National Science
Foundation, and the Department of
Energy are soliciting proposals for the
United States Rice Genome Sequencing
Projects. Proposals are hereby requested
from eligible institutions as identified
herein for competitive consideration of
awards. By this notice, the CSREES
additionally solicits stakeholder input
from any interested party regarding the
FY 1999 request for proposals for use in
the development of the next request for
proposals for The United States Rice
Genome Sequencing Project.

DATES: Proposals are due May 4, 1999.
Comments regarding this request for
proposals are requested within six
months from the issuance of this notice.
Comments received after that date will
be considered to the extent practicable.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Dr. Ed Kaleikau; Plant Genome
Program; NRI Competitive Grants
Program; Cooperative State Research,
Education, and Extension Service; U.S.
Department of Agriculture; STOP 2241;
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.;
Washington, D.C. 20250-2241;
Telephone: 202-401-1901; Fax: 202-
401-6488; E-mail:
ekaleikau@reeusda.gov; or Dr. David
Meinke; Plant Genome Research
Program; Division of Biological
Infrastructure; National Science
Foundation; 4201 Wilson Blvd;
Arlington, VA 22230; Telephone: 703-
306-1470; Fax: 703-306-0339; E-mail:
dmeinke@nsf.gov; or Gregory L.
Dilworth; Division of Energy
Biosciences, ER-17; U.S. Department of
Energy; 19901 Germantown Road;
Germantown, MD 20874; Telephone:

301-903-2873; Fax: 301-903-1003; E-
mail: Greg.dilworth@oer.doe.gov.

Written comments should be
submitted by first-class mail to: Office of
Extramural Programs; Competitive
Research Grants and Awards
Management; USDA-CSREES; STOP
2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.;
Washington, D.C. 20250-2299, or via e-
mail to: RFP-OEP@reeusda.gov. In your
comments, please include the name of
the program and the fiscal year request
for proposals to which you are
responding.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Table of Contents**

Purpose
Background
Introduction
Authority
Applicant Eligibility
Principal Investigator and Other Senior Staff
Award Information and Available Funding
How to Obtain Application Materials
Proposal Format
Proposal Submission
 What to Submit
 When and Where to Submit Proposals
Proposal Evaluation
Award Administration
 Awards
 Use of Funds; Changes
Applicable Regulations
Additional Information
 Confidential Aspects of Proposals and
 Awards
 Stakeholder Input

Purpose

The purpose of this interagency
program announcement is to solicit
proposals to initiate systematic
sequencing of the genome of rice in the
United States as part of an international
effort that includes the Rice Genome
Program of Japan. The ultimate goal of
this project is to sequence the entire rice
genome as a model monocot (grass)
species. The target date for completion
is before the year 2008. Initially, it is
anticipated that up to three 3-year
awards will be made through this
program in fiscal year (FY) 1999
contingent upon the quality of proposals
received and the availability of funds.

Background

The National Science and Technology
Council (NSTC), in response to a request
of Congress, established an Interagency
Working Group on Plant Genomes
(IWGPG) in May 1997. The IWGPG
consisted of representatives from the
Department of Agriculture (USDA),
National Science Foundation (NSF),
Department of Energy (DOE), National
Institutes of Health (NIH), the Office of
Science and Technology Policy (OSTP)
and the Office of Management and
Budget (OMB). The IWGPG was created

to identify science-based priorities for a
national plant genome initiative and to
plan for a collaborative interagency
approach to address these priorities. In
January 1998, the IWGPG provided a
report describing a five-year plan and
rationale for a National Plant Genome
Initiative. One of the Initiative's goals is
to participate in an international effort
to sequence the rice genome in
collaboration with the Rice Genome
Program of Japan, other countries and
the private sector where appropriate. It
is expected that through these efforts the
resulting information, data, software,
germplasm, and other research tools and
biological materials can be made readily
and openly available to the scientific
community at large.

Grasses are one of the most diverse
groups of plants and include the world's
major food crops such as rice, corn,
wheat, rye, barley, sorghum, sugarcane,
and millet. While the genome size
among grass species varies greatly, they
share common sets of genes. There has
been a strong interest among many plant
biologists to sequence the rice genome,
as a representative monocot to
complement and extend advances made
with the *Arabidopsis thaliana* (dicot)
genome project. The rapid advances in
sequencing technologies have now
made it a feasible undertaking given the
relatively small size of the rice genome
(~ 430 million base pairs).

Scientists interested in the genome
sequencing of rice participated in a
workshop held in September 1997. An
ad hoc international working group,
nominated in Singapore, met in
February 1998 in Tsukuba, Japan to
develop a long-range plan for the
International Rice Genome Sequencing
Project. A follow up Workshop on Rice
Genome Sequencing was held, with the
support of USDA, NSF, and DOE, in
Washington, D.C., April 1998, to
address the U.S. response to this
initiative. This program announcement
is an outcome of that workshop.

Introduction

Recognizing the potential of a rice
genome sequencing effort to contribute
to their mission, NSF and DOE have
joined with USDA to initiate a U.S. Rice
Genome Sequencing Project. This
project will be coordinated with other
ongoing U.S. genome projects including
the human genome research project
supported by NIH and DOE, the
microbial genome project supported by
DOE, the NSF Plant Genome Research
Program, and the USDA Plant Genome
Program in order to minimize
duplication of effort and to maximize
efficient use of available resources. It is
intended that the U.S. efforts to

complete the sequence of rice will be coordinated on an international level with other national and transnational programs.

As a member of the *Gramineae* and a crop plant, a wealth of fundamental information about important aspects of plant biology, including economically important characteristics, can be learned from the genome sequence of rice. Because it shares collinear genomes, rice is a key to knowledge of the genome organization of the other grasses. Comparison of the sequence of the dicot, *Arabidopsis thaliana*, with that of rice, a model monocot, will reveal what genome structures these two different groups of angiosperms have in common and how they differ.

While the goals of the International Rice Genome Project must be focused, the information provided by the International Project can be exploited by the entire research community to learn: the functions and relative map locations of all cereal genes; the use of map-based sequence information to identify and provide markers for agronomically significant genes; the molecular basis of plant growth and development so that fundamental questions in plant physiology, biochemistry, cell biology, and pathology can be addressed and; the relationship of genome structure to gene expression.

Authority

The authority for the USDA participation in this program is found in 7 U.S.C. 450i(b). The authority for NSF participation in this program is found in the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 1861, *et seq.* The authority for DOE participation in this program is found in the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended, Sec. 31, Pub. L. 83-703, 68 Stat. 919, (42 U.S.C. 2051); Energy Reorganization Act of 1974, Title I, Sec. 107, Pub. L. 93-438, 88 Stat. 1240, (42 U.S.C. 5817); Federal Nonnuclear Energy Research and Development Act of 1974, Pub. L. 93-577; Department of Energy Organization Act of 1977, as amended, Pub. L. 95-91, (U.S.C. 7101).

Applicant Eligibility

Proposals are solicited from a broad community of scientists at U.S. institutions, including any State agricultural experiment station, college, university, other research institution or organization, Federal agency, national laboratory, private organization, corporation, or individual. Consortia of eligible individuals or organizations may apply, but a single organization or individual must accept overall management responsibility.

Involvement of international collaborators is encouraged, although primary support for foreign participants/activities must be secured through their own national programs.

Principal Investigator and Other Senior Staff

The Principal Investigator (PI) and other senior staff responsible for the project are expected to have expertise and experience in large-scale, high-through-put genomic DNA sequencing. If the application is submitted by a consortium of several groups from one or more institutions, the consortium must make a convincing case that it can function in an effective, efficient, timely and cost-conscious manner.

Award Information and Available Funding

The participating agencies currently have a total of approximately \$4 million available for this Program in FY 1999. Subject to the availability of funds, the participating agencies anticipate that an additional \$4 million in funding will be available for this program in each FY 2000 and FY 2001, for an anticipated total level of support for this Program of \$12 million over three years. The program anticipates initially supporting up to three 3-year awards. These awards will be made in the form of grants and cooperative agreements which will be determined at the time of the award. The exact amount of the award will depend on the advice of reviewers and on the availability of funds. Each participating agency will obligate funds separately. However, a proposal may be funded by one or more of the participating agencies.

How To Obtain Application Materials

All participating agencies have agreed to use the USDA guidelines for proposal format (see below) and application kit. Other material may be required at the time of funding to facilitate the implementation of the award. The guidelines and application kit are available on the USDA web site at the URL: <http://www.reeusda.gov/crgam/nri/howto/applkit/applkitdoc.htm>.

Paper copies of these application materials may be obtained by sending an e-mail with your name, complete mailing address (not e-mail address), phone number, and materials that you are requesting to psb@reeusda.gov. Materials will be mailed to you (not e-mailed) as quickly as possible. Alternatively, paper copies may be obtained by writing or calling the Proposal Services Unit, Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension

Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; STOP 2245; 1400 Independence Ave., S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-2245. Telephone: (202) 401-5048.

Proposal Format

The proposals should be prepared following the guidelines and the instructions below.

Each proposal must contain the following elements in the order indicated:

1. *Application For Funding Cover Page (Form CSREES-661)*. All proposals must contain an Application for Funding (Form CSREES-661), which must be signed by the proposed principal investigator(s) and by the cognizant Authorized Organizational Representative who possesses the necessary authority to commit the applicant's time and other relevant resources. Principal investigators who do not sign the proposal cover sheet will not be listed on the award document in the event an award is made. The title of the proposal must be brief (80-character maximum), yet represent the major emphasis of the project. Because this title will be used to provide information to those who may not be familiar with the proposed project, highly technical words or phraseology should be avoided where possible. In addition, phrases such as "investigation of" or "research on" should not be used.

2. *Table of Contents*. For ease in locating information, each proposal must contain a detailed table of contents just after the proposal cover page. The Table of Contents should include page numbers for each component of the proposal. Pagination should begin immediately following the Project Summary (see next section).

3. *Project Summary (Form CSREES-1232)*. The proposal must contain a Project Summary form (Form CSREES-1232). This form must be assembled as the third page of the proposal (immediately after the Table of Contents) and should not be numbered. The names and institutions of all principal and co-investigators should be listed on this form (if space is insufficient, please enter "see attached" in this space and provide this information on a separate sheet immediately following the Project Summary form in the proposal). The project summary itself MUST fit within the space indicated (approximately 250 words). The summary is not intended for the general reader; consequently, it may contain technical language comprehensible by persons in disciplines relating to the food and agricultural sciences. The project summary should be a self-contained,

specific description of the activity to be undertaken and should focus on:

Overall project goal(s) and supporting objectives; plans to accomplish project goal(s); and relevance of the project to the systematic sequencing of the genome of rice in the United States.

4. *Project Description.* A description of the project must not exceed 20 pages inclusive of tables, diagrams and other visual material. The project description should be numbered and single-spaced with text on one side of the page using a 12 point (10 cpi) type font size and one-inch margins. The following points must be addressed in this section.

A. *Sequencing Strategies*—The proposal should include descriptions of:

1. DNA substrates to be sequenced: Include source of the DNA (clones), map of the chromosomal region involved, rationale for choosing the region, method of substrate preparation and all other pertinent information. The strategies proposed must be scalable and applicable to efforts to sequence the entire rice genome.

2. Sequence quality and quantity: This section should include the level of accuracy to be sought and how that will be measured, the number of bases to be sequenced per unit time, and a discussion of the finishing process and how that will be defined. Plans to fill sequence gaps and coordinate sequencing efforts within the rice community must be discussed in detail.

3. Genome sequencing technologies and strategies: Technologies/strategies that will be used should be described as well as plans for incorporating new developments and/or improvements in sequencing protocols, strategies and technologies as they become available.

4. Costs of production sequencing in relation to the product proposed: The cost-effectiveness of the sequences generated will be a very important issue. An estimate of the dollars required to produce a specific number of bases (which should include the costs of generating clones, assembly and annotation) should be given. If investigators are proposing a strategy that will yield less than the complete genome sequence, they must provide an overall vision of how this strategy will contribute to the cost-effective completion of the entire rice genome.

B. *Project Management*—The proposal should include descriptions of:

1. Plans for establishing coordination with the Rice Genome Program of Japan and other existing or planned rice sequencing projects, both nationally and internationally.

2. Plans for establishing a close linkage to the plant biology research community at large in order to ensure a

close collaboration between the sequencing project and the ultimate user community of the sequence information.

3. Ways to assess progress of the project, including establishing milestones and measuring progress toward them. A common advisory committee will be appointed based upon suggestions from all of the participants, including the agencies, which will serve as a means of advising all participants of problems or solutions which will benefit all of the participants. Describe how such an advisory committee can be incorporated into the management strategies of the proposed project.

4. Available facilities and equipment including a statement of institutional commitment for the successful completion of the project.

C. *Information Management*—The proposal should include:

1. Data management plan should address both internal and external data management issues, including: (1) Mechanisms to assess validity and accuracy of data obtained which will augment or complement procedures to monitor accuracy which may be mandated by the agencies; (2) mechanisms for annotation of data and release of both raw and finished data into public databases—creative, cost-effective strategies for annotating sequences are encouraged; and (3) community access to data mechanisms of data distribution and interactions with other community databases.

2. Data release policies including how rapidly sequence data will be publicly released after production. The sponsoring agencies require the rapid release of sequence data as described in the most recent International Strategy Meeting on Human Genome Sequencing held in 1997 in Bermuda. The National Human Genome Research Institute has set forth these principles on the NIH web site at the following URL: http://www.nhgri.nih.gov/Grant_info/Funding/Statements/RFA/data_release.html

3. A statement signed by an authorized institutional official should be included which clearly describes the institutional policy for sharing information materials resulting from this work with other researchers of the community of scientists.

5. *References to Project Description.* All references cited should be complete, including titles and co-authors, and should conform to an accepted journal format.

6. *Facilities and Equipment.* All facilities and major items of equipment that are available for use or assignment to the proposed research project during

the requested period of support should be described. In addition, items of nonexpendable equipment necessary to conduct and successfully complete the proposed project and for which support is requested under this program should be listed in the budget narrative with the amount and justification for each item.

7. *Collaborative Arrangements.* If the nature of the proposed project requires collaboration or subcontractual arrangements with other research scientists, corporations, organizations, agencies, or entities, the applicant must identify the collaborator(s) and provide a full explanation of the nature of the collaboration. Funding contributions by collaborators that will be used to accomplish the stated objectives should be identified. Evidence (i.e., letters of intent) should be provided to assure peer reviewers that the collaborators involved have agreed to render this service. Note, however, that the contributions of collaborators will not be a direct factor in the awarding of any award. In addition, the proposal must indicate whether or not such a collaborative arrangement(s) has the potential for conflict(s) of interest.

8. *Vitae and Publication List(s).* (A) *Curriculum vitae.* The curriculum vitae should be limited to a presentation of academic and research credentials, or commodity production knowledge or experience with that commodity (e.g., educational, employment and professional history, and honors and awards). Unless pertinent to the project, to personal status, or to the status of the organization, meetings attended, seminars given, or personal data such as birth date, marital status, or community activities should not be included. Each vitae shall be no more than two pages in length, excluding the publication lists; and

- (B) *Publication List(s).* A chronological list of all publications in refereed journals during the past four years, including those in press, must be provided for each professional project member for whom a curriculum vitae is provided. Authors should be listed in the same order as they appear on each paper cited, along with the title and complete reference as these items usually appear in journals.

9. *Conflict of Interest List (Form CSREES-1233).* A separate Conflict of Interest List Form (Form CSREES-1233) must be submitted for each investigator for whom a curriculum vitae is required (see above). This form is necessary to assist program staff in excluding from proposal review those individuals who have conflicts of interest with the project personnel in the proposal.

CSREES must be informed of additional conflicts of interest that arise after the proposal has been submitted. Instructions below are reiterated on Form CSREES-1233.

For each investigator (and other personnel as described in the program description), list ALPHABETICALLY the full names of only the individuals for each category. Other investigators working in the applicant's specific research area are deemed not to be a conflict of interest for the applicant unless those investigators fall within one of the categories listed below. Additional pages may be used as necessary. A conflict of interest list must be submitted before a proposal is considered complete. Inclusion of a curriculum vitae or publication list in lieu of Form CSREES-1233 is not sufficient.

- All collaborators on research projects within the past four years, including current and planned collaborations;
- All co-authors on publications within the past four years, including pending publications and submissions;
- All persons in your field with whom you have had a consulting, financial arrangement, or other arrangement that might give rise to a conflict of interest within the past four years; and
- All thesis or postdoctoral advisees/advisors within the past four years.

10. Budget (Form CSREES-55). A detailed budget is required for each year of requested support. In addition, a summary budget is required detailing requested support for the overall project period. A copy of the form which must be used for this purpose (Form CSREES-55), along with instructions for completion, is included in the Application Kit and may be reproduced as needed by applicants. Funds may be requested under any of the categories listed, provided that the item or service for which support is requested may be identified as necessary for successful conduct of the proposed project, is allowable under applicable Federal cost principles, and is not prohibited under any applicable Federal statute.

11. Budget Narrative. A budget narrative should be included which discusses how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. It should explain how each budget item (such as salaries and wages for professional and technical staff, student workers, travel, equipment, etc.) is essential to achieving project objectives. Funds may be requested under any of the categories listed on the budget form, provided that the item or service for which support is sought is allowable

under the enabling legislation and the applicable Federal cost principles.

The following guidelines should be used in developing your proposal budget(s):

1. *Salaries and Wages.* Salaries and wages are allowable charges and may be requested for personnel who will be working on the project in proportion to the time such personnel will devote to the project. If salary funds are requested, the number of Senior and Other Personnel and the number of Funded Work Months must be shown in the spaces provided. Award funds may not be used to augment the total salary or rate of salary of project personnel or to reimburse them for time in addition to a regular full-time salary covering the same general period of employment. Salary funds requested must be consistent with the normal policies of the institution. Administrative and Clerical salaries are normally classified as indirect costs. (See Item 9. below.) However, if requested under A.2.e., they must be fully justified.

2. *Fringe Benefits.* Funds may be requested for fringe benefit costs if the usual accounting practices of your institution provide that institutional contributions to employee benefits (social security, retirement, etc.) be treated as direct costs. Fringe benefit costs may be included only for those personnel whose salaries are charged as a direct cost to the project.

3. *Nonexpendable Equipment.* Nonexpendable equipment means tangible nonexpendable personal property including exempt property charged directly to the award having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit. Items of necessary instrumentation or other nonexpendable equipment should be listed individually by description and estimated cost. This applies to revised budgets, as the equipment item(s) and amount(s) may change. NOTE: If the organization has established a lower threshold, amounts less than \$5,000 may be included in this category.

No funds will be awarded for the purchase or installation of fixed equipment. In the case of any equipment or product that may be authorized to be purchased with funds provided under this program, entities receiving such funds are encouraged to use such funds to purchase only American-made equipment or products.

4. *Materials and Supplies.* The types of expendable materials and supplies which are required to carry out the project should be indicated in general terms with estimated costs.

5. *Travel.* The type and extent of travel and its relationship to project objectives should be described briefly and justified. Provide the purpose of the trip, destination, mode of transportation, number of people, number of days, and cost per trip. Airfare allowances normally should not exceed round-trip jet economy air accommodations. U.S. flag carriers must be used when available. See 7 CFR Part 3015.205(b)(4) for further guidance.

6. *Publication Costs/Page Charges.* Anticipated costs of preparing and publishing results of the research being proposed (including page charges, necessary illustrations, and the cost of a reasonable number of coverless reprints) may be estimated and charged against the award.

7. *Computer (ADPE) Costs.* Reimbursement for the costs of using specialized facilities (such as a university- or department-controlled computer mainframe or data processing center) may be requested if such services are required for completion of the work.

8. *All Other Direct Costs.* Anticipated direct project charges not included in other budget categories must be itemized with estimated costs and justified on a separate sheet of paper attached to Form CSREES-55. This applies to revised budgets, as the item(s) and dollar amount(s) may change. Examples may include space rental at remote locations, subcontractual costs, charges for consulting services, and fees for necessary laboratory analyses. You are encouraged to consult the "Instructions for Completing Form CSREES-55, Budget," of the Application Kit for detailed guidance relating to this budget category.

9. *Indirect Costs.* When submitting a proposal, institutions should use their current Federal negotiated rate for indirect costs. Please note that indirect costs for proposals funded by USDA will be capped at 14% of total Federal funds provided under that award. Congress, in section 711 of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY 1999, Sec. 101(a) of Pub. L. No. 105-277, prohibits CSREES from using the funds available for this Program for FY 1999 to pay indirect costs exceeding 14 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award on competitively awarded research grants.

(Note: The FY 1999 Appropriations Act supercedes the limitation on indirect costs of 19 percent of the total Federal funds provided for competitively-awarded research grants in Section 230(a) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform

Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 3310). Therefore, awards made by CSREES are limited to this 14 percent indirect costs limitation. This limitation also applies to the recovery of indirect costs by any subawardee or subcontractor, and should be reflected in the subrecipient budget.)

To accommodate the differences in allowable indirect costs between USDA, NSF and DOE, the applicant may be required at the time of award to submit a separate budget with indirect cost rates appropriate to each agency.

10. *Cost-sharing.* Cost-sharing is encouraged; however, cost-sharing is not required nor will it be a direct factor in the awarding of any award.

12. *Current and Pending Support* (Form CSREES-663). All proposals must contain Form CSREES-663 listing this proposal and any other current public or private research support (including in-house support) to which key personnel identified in the proposal have committed portions of their time, whether or not salary support for the person(s) involved is included in the budget. Analogous information must be provided for any pending proposals that are being considered by, or that will be submitted in the near future to other possible sponsors, including other USDA programs or agencies. Concurrent submission of identical or similar proposals to other possible sponsors will not prejudice proposal review or evaluation by the participating agency for this purpose. However, a proposal that duplicates or overlaps substantially with a proposal already reviewed and funded (or that will be funded) by another organization or agency will not be funded under this program.

13. *Assurance Statements* (Form CSREES-662) (Research Involving Special Considerations). If it is anticipated that the research project will involve recombinant DNA or RNA research, experimental vertebrate animals, or human subjects, an Assurance Statement, Form CSREES-662, must be completed and included in the proposal. Please note that funds will not be released until the awarding agency receives and approves documentation indicating approval by the appropriate institutional committee(s) regarding DNA or RNA research, animal care, or the protection of human subjects, as applicable.

14. *Certifications Regarding Debarment and Suspension, Drug-Free Work Place, and Lobbying.* By signing the Application For Funding cover page (Form CSREES-661), applicants are providing the required certifications set forth in 7 CFR Part 3017, as amended, regarding Debarment and Suspension and Drug-Free Workplace; and 7 CFR

Part 3018 regarding Lobbying. Submission of the individual forms found in the application kit is not required (Forms AD-1047, -1049, -1050, and the Certification Regarding Lobbying). For additional information, refer to the certification at the bottom of Form CSREES-661.

Form AD-1048 must be completed by a subcontractor or consultant and retained by the awardee.

Questions specifically related to the completion of the above certifications should be directed to the CSREES Office of Extramural Programs, Grants Management Branch at (202) 401-5050.

15. *National Environmental Policy Act Exclusions Form* (Form CSREES-1234). As outlined in 7 CFR Part 3407 (CSREES's implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.)), the environmental data or documentation for any proposed project is to be provided to CSREES in order to assist CSREES in carrying out its responsibilities under NEPA. In some cases, however, the preparation of environmental data or documentation may not be required. Certain categories of actions are excluded from the requirements of NEPA. The USDA and CSREES exclusions are listed in 7 CFR 1b.3 and 7 CFR 3407.6, respectively.

In order for CSREES to determine whether any further action is needed with respect to NEPA (e.g., preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS)), pertinent information regarding the possible environmental impacts of a proposed project is necessary; therefore, the National Environmental Policy Act Exclusions Form (Form CSREES-1234) provided in the Application Kit must be included in the proposal indicating whether the applicant is of the opinion that the project falls within one or more of the categorical exclusions. Form CSREES-1234 should follow Form CSREES-661, Application for Funding, in the proposal.

Even though a project may fall within the categorical exclusions, CSREES may determine that an EA or an EIS is necessary for an activity if substantial controversy on environmental grounds exists or if other extraordinary conditions or circumstances are present that may cause such activity to have a significant environmental effect.

16. *Additions to Project Description.* The participating agencies expect each project description to be complete while meeting the page limit established in this section (Proposal Format). However, if the inclusion of additional information is necessary to ensure the equitable evaluation of the proposal

(e.g., photographs that do not reproduce well, reprints, and other pertinent materials that are deemed to be unsuitable for inclusion in the text of the proposal), then 14 copies of the materials should be submitted. Each set of such materials must be identified with the name of the submitting organization, and the name(s) of the principal investigator(s). Information may not be appended to a proposal to circumvent page limitations prescribed for the project description. Extraneous materials will not be used during the peer review process.

Proposal Submission

What To Submit

An original and 14 copies of a proposal must be submitted. Each copy must be stapled securely in the upper left-hand corner (DO NOT BIND). All copies of the proposal must be submitted in one package.

When and Where To Submit Proposals

Proposals must be received by May 4, 1999. Proposals sent by First Class mail must be sent to the following address: The United States Rice Genome Sequencing Project; c/o Proposal Services Unit; Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; STOP 2245; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-2245; Telephone: (202) 401-5048.

Proposals that are delivered by express mail, a courier service, or by hand must be submitted to the following address (note that the zip code differs from that shown above): The United States Rice Genome Sequencing Project; c/o Proposal Services Unit; Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Room 303, Aerospace Center; 901 D Street, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20024; Telephone: (202) 401-5048. Facsimile (FAX) copies will not be accepted.

Proposal Evaluation

Selection of awards will be based on merit review by experts using established peer review systems as described in these guidelines. A special emphasis panel will be formed to review the applications and site visits may be used as needed. The following evaluation factors will be used in reviewing applications:

1. *Performance competence:* This criterion addresses the technical merit of the proposed approach, the capabilities of the proposed personnel, including those of the Principal

Investigator and other senior staff as discussed above, the adequacy of the resources available or proposed, and the likelihood that this project will lead to a successful, timely, cost-effective completion of the rice genome sequence.

2. *Project management*: This criterion addresses the overall quality of the technical and managerial aspects of the proposal, including plans for the release of the data and the sharing of the information and resources resulting from the project to the scientific community as noted below, and for management oversight and long-range planning.

3. *Effect of the activity on the scientific and agricultural infrastructure*: This criterion addresses the potential of the proposed activity to contribute to better understanding or improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the Nation's scientific research, education, and human resources capabilities. An important issue is a likelihood of national impact and widespread, appropriate dissemination and use of results in strengthening the scientific and agricultural infrastructure of this nation.

4. *Scientific collaboration and information sharing*: Sequencing of the genome of a model organism is a community activity. As such, a close collaboration among the scientists and organizations involved in sequencing activities and effective dissemination to the users of the information are important components of this criterion.

5. *Scientific merit of the project*: This criterion addresses the conceptual adequacy of the sequencing approach including suitability and feasibility of methodology, clarity and delineation of objectives, demonstration of feasibility through preliminary data, novelty, uniqueness and originality.

6. *Appropriateness of the proposed budget*.

Award Administration

The U.S. Rice Genome Sequencing Project will be administered and managed as an interagency program involving all participating agencies throughout the entire process from the development of the program announcement to the review and selection. USDA, NSF and DOE will fund awards separately. The amount of each award will be determined jointly by USDA/NSF/DOE representatives after the panel review process has been completed. Other material may be required at the time of funding to facilitate the implementation of the award from participating agencies. Awards will be administered as follows:

Awards

1. *General*: Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official shall make awards to those responsible, eligible applicants whose proposals are judged most meritorious in the announced program area by procedures set forth in this request for proposals. The date specified as the effective date of the award shall be no later than September 30, of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the award effective date, but as soon thereafter as practicable so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds awarded under this request for proposals shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are awarded in accordance with the approved application and budget, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the applicable participating agency assistance regulations.

2. *Organizational Management Information*: Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one-time basis as part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of an award if such information has not been provided previously under this or another program for which the sponsoring agency is responsible. Copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling the requirements contained in this section will be provided by the awarding agency as part of the pre-award process.

3. *Award Document*: The award document shall include at a minimum the following:

- a. Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the funding agency has awarded an award under this program;
- b. Title of Project;
- c. Name(s) and address(es) of principal investigator(s) chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- d. Award identification number assigned by the funding agency;
- e. Project period, specifying the amount of time the funding agency intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- f. Total award amount approved by the funding agency during the project period;
- g. Legal authority(ies) under which the award is made;
- h. Approved budget plan for categorizing project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

i. Other information or provisions deemed necessary by the funding agency to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

4. *Notice of Award*: The notice of award, in the form of a letter, will be prepared and will provide pertinent instructions or information to the awardee that is not included in the award document.

5. The awarding agency will make awards as either grants or cooperative agreements to carry out this program.

Use of Funds; Changes

Unless otherwise stipulated in the terms and conditions of the award, the following provisions apply:

1. *Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility*: The awardee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of funds.

2. *Changes in Project Plans*:

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, principal investigator(s), or other key project personnel in the approved research project award shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee and/or the principal investigator(s) are uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination.

b. Changes in approved goals, or objectives, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the awarding official prior to effecting such changes.

d. Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers.

e. *Changes in Project Period*: The project period may be extended by the awarding agency without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project. Any

extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the awardee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of an award.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal costs principles, Departmental regulations, or in the award document.

Applicable Regulations

Several other Federal statutes and regulations apply to proposals considered for review and to projects awarded under this program. These include but are not limited to regulations cited in the section entitled REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES, AND LITERATURE in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) for each of the participating agencies. The CFDA numbers are as follows: USDA—10.206; NSF—47.074; DOE—81.049. The OMB number for NSF is OMB No. 3145-0058. The USDA component of this program is subject to the program regulations at 7 CFR 3411. Note that CSREES, consistent with those regulations, has provided other terms in this RFP to govern proposal format and evaluation.

Additional Information

Confidential Aspects of Proposals and Awards

When a proposal results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of the Agency's transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Administrator determines to be of a privileged nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as privileged should be clearly marked as such and sent in a separate statement, two copies of which should accompany the proposal. The original copy of a proposal that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of one year. Other copies will be destroyed. Proposals that do not receive an award will be released to others only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. If such a request is made, the applicant will be consulted prior to release of the proposal. A proposal may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final selection action thereon.

Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to contact project officers and discuss their plans. Inquiries regarding the announcement can be directed to any one of the agency representatives identified at the beginning of this request for proposals.

Stakeholder Input

CSREES is soliciting comments regarding this request for proposals from

any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next request for proposals for the program as needed. Such comments will be forwarded to the Secretary or his designee for use in meeting the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (Pub. L. 105-185). This section requires the Secretary of Agriculture to solicit and consider input on a current request for proposals from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education, or extension for use in formulating the next request for proposals for an agricultural research program funded on a competitive basis.

In your comments, please include the name of the program and the fiscal year request for proposals to which you are responding. Comments are requested within six months from the issuance of the request for proposals. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

Done at Washington, D.C., on this 27th day of January, 1999.

Colien Hefferan,

Acting Administrator, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.

Mary E. Clutter,

Assistant Director for Biological Sciences, National Science Foundation.

Patricia Dehmer,

Associate Director, Office of Sciences, Department of Energy.

[FR Doc. 99-2538 Filed 2-2-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-22-P