

Request for Proposals

For professional services to evaluate threatened agricultural lands in Ventura County and develop strategies for protection of these lands

I. Invitation

The Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office (hereafter the "County") is requesting proposals from qualified consultants to provide professional services to evaluate Ventura County's most important and critically threatened agricultural lands and develop strategies that can guide the protection of these lands.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) may result in a single award for all tasks included in the Scope of Work (see Section V, subsection 1). The anticipated contract period is October 4, 2021, through Sept. 1, 2022.

II. Timeline and Sequence of Events

The County will make every effort to adhere to the following schedule.

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| 1. Issue RFP: | Aug. 2, 2021 |
| 2. County-hosted Zoom RFP question/answer meeting: | Aug. 16, 2021 |
| 3. Proposal submittal deadline: | Aug. 31, 2021 |
| 4. Proposal evaluation selection and notification
(interviews, if required): | Sept. 13, 2021 |
| 5. Contract award: | Oct. 4, 2021 |

III. Point of Contact

The County’s Point of Contact for this RFP is Chief Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Korinne Bell.

IV. Background

On July 28, 2020, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution approving the application for a grant from the California Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program to fund the preparation of a Ventura County Agricultural Conservation Planning Strategy (“Strategy”). On Dec. 17, 2020, the California Strategic Growth Council, which oversees the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation program on behalf of the Department of Conservation, approved the County’s application for a \$250,000 planning grant.

Funding for the SALC Program originates from the State's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. The intent of the program is to protect and maintain existing agricultural lands to avoid conversion to urban development and concomitant increases in greenhouse gas emissions.

Development of the Strategy will involve three major elements: (1) an economic analysis and risk assessment of Ventura County agriculture; (2) mapping and prioritizing threatened agricultural land for conservation and developing an incentive structure for landowners; and (3) creation of an education and awareness strategy to communicate the value of working landscapes in Ventura County to the general public and to policymakers. Preparation of the Strategy will entail extensive outreach to community stakeholders.

Per the Work Plan and Budget accepted by the State, (see pages 7-15 of Attachment A – Executed DOC - SALC Agreement) completion of the Strategy will occur over a two-year period. According to the contract between the County and State for the grant funding, the project period commenced April 1, 2021, and will be completed by March 31, 2023.

V. Project Description and Requirements

a. Scope of Work

The County intends to execute a contract with one prime consultant to provide the services and deliverables needed to complete the Strategy. As several of the services and deliverables requested may require work by different subconsultants, it is anticipated that the Scope of Work will be completed by a consultant team that is managed and represented by one prime consultant working under contract with the County. It is also expected that the prime consultant will also serve as the project manager, directing and overseeing all aspects of Strategy preparation, reporting, and liaising with County staff and the stakeholder advisory committee, assisting with outreach and facilitation, and ensuring that all applicable State grant requirements are fulfilled.

As outlined in the Work Plan accepted by the State, preparation of the Strategy will involve seven tasks:

- Task 1 — Stakeholder and community outreach
- Task 2 — Economic analysis
- Task 3 — Risk assessment
- Task 4 — Criteria for prioritizing agricultural land
- Task 5 — Incentive structure for landowners
- Task 6 — Education and awareness strategy
- Task 7 — Plan Completion

The specific services and work products to be completed by the Consultant/Consultant team are described below. The required format and process for Consultant deliverables,

(e.g., Word documents, pdf documents, GIS files, SharePoint folders, etc.) will be discussed in detail after Consultant selection has concluded and before work commences.

Task 1-Outreach

The Consultant/Consultant team will conduct meetings with the Ventura County stakeholder group overseeing the project, as well as community groups, to solicit input about Strategy goals and objectives. This will include reaching out to farmworkers and members of underserved communities, as well as agricultural landowners, environmental groups, and community-based organizations. The Consultant/Consultant team will prepare a Stakeholder Input Report.

Task 2 — Economic analysis

The Consultant/Consultant team will conduct an economic analysis of Ventura County agriculture, including its direct, indirect, and induced contributions to the overall Ventura County economy; the employment base; trends in on-farm income and expenditures; and tax receipts paid to local government; and subsequently prepare a Ventura County Agricultural Economic Impact Report.

Task 3 — Risk assessment

The Consultant/Consultant team will conduct a risk assessment to quantify the potential for agricultural land to be converted based on such factors as pressure to fallow it induced by reduced water availability related to Sustainable Groundwater Management Act implementation; increasing production costs and market pressures; ownership structure (investor-owned vs. farmer-owned); vulnerability to pests and disease; factors affecting availability and stability of the local labor force, including housing supply and affordability; and local policies or regulations that potentially affect the economic viability of agricultural operations. Prepare a Ventura County Agricultural Risk Assessment Report that includes a map spatially depicting the results.

Task 4 — Develop criteria to prioritize agricultural land

Working with County staff from both the Planning Division and the Agricultural Commissioner's Office, the Consultant/Consultant team will develop criteria for identifying and prioritizing agricultural land for its potential to be farmed or temporarily fallowed; permanently fallowed; converted to production of low-value or noncommercial crops that enhance soil quality and sequester carbon; retired and restored to a natural ecosystem; or permanently protected through easements, transfers of development rights or other strategies. Greenhouse gas emissions associated with each of these agricultural land use options will be estimated as part of this task. Criteria developed will be applied to land with agricultural zoning to create a map showing the results spatially.

Task 5 — Incentive structure

The Consultant/Consultant team will research and select appropriate incentives for agricultural landowners, which are consistent with the County's General Plan goals of preserving the long-term viability of agriculture, to rest, retire, restore, convert, or

permanently protect their land via various types of conservation easements, or to convert to production of lower-value or noncommercial crops. The Consultant/Consultant team will present the results as an Incentivized Agricultural Land Protection Implementation Program.

Task 6 — Education and awareness strategy

The Consultant/Consultant team will develop a Community Education and Awareness strategy intended to communicate to the general public, elected officials and community leaders, the value of working landscapes in Ventura County and their connection to ecological and economic resilience. The Consultant/Consultant team will conduct community meetings to solicit input on the results of Tasks 2-5 and present the results in a Community Input Summary.

Task 7 — Completion of Draft Ventura County Agriculture Conservation Planning Strategy

The Consultant/Consultant team will assemble the results of Tasks 2-6 into a draft Ventura County Agricultural Conservation Planning Strategy for submission to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors for final approval. The County will work with the Consultant/Consultant team to schedule and organize the presentation and if necessary, revise the Strategy based on direction from the Board of Supervisors. The Strategy will include the following components:

- **Background** - This section shall summarize the mapping and analysis conducted under Tasks 2-5, synthesizing spatial and quantitative analysis regarding agricultural lands, the farming industry, greenhouse gas emissions, identifying risks, threats, and potential consequences from ongoing agricultural land conversion. The Background section will incorporate prioritization criteria and assessment mapping.
- **Action Plan** - This section shall include an introduction, vision and goals, strategic implementation tools and funding mechanisms, and policy recommendations for creating a Strategy for preserving agricultural lands and the farming industry in Ventura County, and communicating that Strategy to the general public and policymakers.
- **Implementation and Next Steps** - This section shall detail which specific steps are needed to accomplish the Action Plan, including policies, tools, programs, and a comprehensive and coordinated implementation program for agricultural preservation, to be adopted by the County.

b. Skills Desired for Prime Consultant and Subconsultants, as applicable

- **Knowledge of the farming Industry:** Experience working with the agricultural community and knowledge of issues and factors that are of key concern to maintaining a viable and sustainable farming industry, including farm labor, water, economics, soils, regulations, or other key criteria.

- Experience working with the State’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, a component of the Department of Conservation’s Strategic Growth Council.
- Knowledge of agricultural preservation policies, tools, mechanisms: Experience working on agricultural preservation programs, and knowledge and familiarity with a wide variety of agricultural preservation policies and tools, such as conservation easement programs, agricultural zoning, mitigation, and transfer of development right programs.
- Land Use Planning: Familiarity with land use planning within California, including knowledge and experience working on General Plans, zoning, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) polices, and programs such as the Land Conservation Act.
- Economics: Experience with economic and risk analysis, related to agriculture, real estate finance, labor, and housing.
- Public Engagement: Experience, knowledge, and ability to conduct public outreach, including presentations, design charrettes, and community engagement with the public and key stakeholders. This should include experience specifically conducting outreach with interest groups and individuals associated with the farming industry and agriculture. The desired consultant team will have experience in devising successful public education and marketing campaigns utilizing a wide variety of communications and social media.

VI. Proposal Content

Responding consultants shall prepare and submit a technical qualifications proposal, a workplan, and a cost proposal by Aug. 31, 2021, as specified below.

a. Technical Qualifications Proposal

The technical qualifications proposal must include the following:

1. A detailed description of the degrees, certifications, qualifications, and experience of all individuals—including those of any subconsultants—who will be performing the work;
2. A detailed description of the consultant’s related work experience, familiarity with the types of projects listed in Section V – Scope of Work; and
3. A list of references.

The consultant shall submit four copies of the technical qualifications proposal via United States Postal Service in a sealed envelope.

b. Cost Proposal

Materials, any anticipated travel costs, and any/all other costs/associated fees must be detailed in the cost proposal, including required insurances. The cost proposal shall include a breakdown of the staffing levels and costs for each task, and the hourly billing rate(s) for the various levels of staff to be assigned to the project.

The consultant shall submit one copy of the cost proposal in a sealed envelope

c. Workplan Proposal

The workplan proposal must identify the tasks to be performed and detailed descriptions of the components of each task. The workplan proposal shall identify the anticipated schedule for completing the Scope of Work. Schedule shall be based on anticipated task durations. (For example, the workplan shall specify that the consultant anticipates that “Task 1 is anticipated to take X hours of staff time and X hours of a management review time.)

d. Insurances

The County of Ventura requires that contract service providers be able to verify that they maintain the appropriate insurances. For professional contracting services, vendors must maintain the minimum General Liability, Automobile, and Worker’s Compensation coverage as indicated in Section 9 of the Standard Contract (see Attachment B). Professional Liability coverage is also required in the amounts listed. If your insurance coverage does not meet these requirements, please provide proof of your actual insurance coverage in order for County staff to consider a request for reducing insurance requirements. This may or may not be granted.

VII. Submittal Procedures

A complete submittal is composed of the following:

- Four copies of the sealed technical qualifications proposal;
- One copy of the sealed cost proposal;
- A proposed workplan and schedule;
- The required insurance certifications; and
- The completed and signed “County of Ventura Resource Management Agency, Planning Division Consultant Services Acknowledgement” form.

The complete proposal package shall be mailed and postmarked no later than August 31, 2021 and submitted to:

Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office
Attn: Korinne Bell
P.O. Box 889
Santa Paula, CA 93060

VIII. Proposal Evaluation and Selection Procedures

The technical qualification proposals will be evaluated by a panel based on the following criteria:

- A. The consultant's demonstrated professional skills, experience, and the credentials (e.g., degrees and certifications) of all staff that will be responsible for performing the work;
- B. Development of a thorough workplan which adequately addresses the Scope of Work Requested Services, including a detailed description of the components of each task to be performed;
- C. The consultant's inclusion of insurance coverage documentation; and
- D. The general quality of the proposal package (e.g., timeliness of submittal, organization, use of charts and graphs; legibility).

The consultants will be ranked according to the evaluation criteria provided above. The cost proposals will not be opened until the technical qualifications have been ranked.

The selection of a candidate firm will be based on a combination of the evaluation criteria, references, and costs. The candidate firm with the best qualification requirements will be invited to negotiate a service agreement contract (see Attachment B - Standard Contract). If an agreement is not reached, negotiations with the candidate may be terminated, and the County will commence negotiations with the next most qualified consultant.

The County reserves the right to reject any and/or all proposals. The County also reserves the right to invite any of the candidates to attend an oral interview, and/or request additional clarifying information from any of the candidates if necessary.

IX. Attachments

Attachment A: Executed DOC - SALC Agreement, including Scope of Work and Budget
Attachment B: Standard Contract