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USDA Announces Support for Small Businesses Innovators

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture sent this bulletin at 07/05/2017 06:01 PM EDT



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Media contact: Sally Gifford, 202-720-2047

WASHINGTON, D.C. July 5, 2017 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) today announced available funding to test the next generation of small business innovations in agricultural sciences. Funding is made through NIFA’s Small Business Innovation Research Program.

“Small businesses reap many benefits from federal R&D investments,” said NIFA Director Sonny Ramaswamy. “Applicants who receive funding test their concepts for potential commercialization through our rigorous peer-review process and retain intellectual property rights. NIFA federal investments can also spur additional support from commercial venture capitalists.”

The [Small Business Innovation Research Program](#) (SBIR) is coordinated by the Small Business Administration and administered by 11 federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), to encourage domestic small businesses to engage in high-growth research and development that has the potential for commercialization and could lead to significant public benefit.

The NIFA SBIR program offers two phases of investment. Phase I invests in feasibility and proof of concept studies of up to \$100,000. [Phase II provides grants](#) of up to \$600,000 to support project scale up, implementation, and commercialization by grantees who successfully completed Phase I. This funding opportunity supports Phase I projects in topic areas that include forests and related resources; plant production and protection – biology; animal production and protection; air, water, and soils; food science and nutrition; rural and community development; aquaculture; biofuels and biobased products; small and mid-size farms; and plant production

and protection – engineering.

The application deadline is Oct. 5, 2017. See the [request for applications](#) for details.

Since 1990, the SBIR program has awarded more than 3,000 research and development grants to American-owned, independently operated, for-profit businesses with 500 employees or fewer. Among past projects, [Harrisvaccines](#), in Ames, Iowa, created a quick-turnaround vaccine to prevent porcine epidemic diarrhea (PED), a disease that killed 8 million piglets in the United States in 2014. In the past, developing these vaccines took months—sometimes years—making it hard to rescue declining swine herds. Harrisvaccines' patented technology allows it to analyze virus gene sequences; make customized, herd-specific vaccines; and save the data in an information library. The vaccine, called iPED, is administered to sows right before they give birth to a litter, protecting the piglets. The company was the first in the country to gain conditional licensure from USDA. Recently, Merck Animal Health acquired Harrisvaccines, which will likely result in commercial vaccines becoming available soon.

California is the nation's top agricultural producer, responsible for two-thirds of the country's fruits and nuts and more than one third of its vegetables. However, drought is a significant stressor in the state's most productive regions, especially the Central Valley. [Ceres Imaging](#), in Oakland, California, received SBIR funding to develop aerial imagery that helps farmers optimize how they apply water and fertilizer. Ceres hires pilots who fly their aircraft low over the ground to capture images that gauge water stress, chlorophyll content, and biomass—all indicators of health in a crop. Within 24 to 48 hours, growers can view imagery on smartphones or other mobile devices. The company has expanded beyond measuring nut crops in the Central Valley to other crops in California, the Midwest, and Australia.

NIFA invests in and advances agricultural research, education, and extension and promotes transformative discoveries that solve societal challenges. NIFA support for the best and brightest scientists and extension personnel has resulted in user-inspired, groundbreaking discoveries that combat childhood obesity, improve and sustain rural economic growth, address water availability issues, increase food production, find new sources of energy, mitigate climate variability, and ensure food safety. To learn more about NIFA's impact on agricultural science, visit www.nifa.usda.gov/impacts, sign up for [email updates](#) or follow us on Twitter [@USDA_NIFA](#), [#NIFAImpacts](#).

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