

Request for Proposals

MOD&CO Project Baseline Evaluation Services RFP

Issue Date:	March 13, 2025
Closing Date for Proposals:	April 3, 2025
Closing Time:	5:00 pm Eastern Time
Project Title:	Baseline Evaluation Services – Sri Lanka
RFP Reference Number:	SRI241-RFP-001-2025

1. Disclaimer

The information contained in this request for proposals (hereinafter referred to as RFP) document is provided to the Offeror(s) by Improving Economies for Stronger Communities (IESC). IESC is the prime implementer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food for Progress (FFPr) funded Market-Oriented Dairy and Coconut (MOD&CO) Project in Sri Lanka which commenced its activities on September 25th, 2024, and will be implemented through September 30, 2029. IESC is seeking a third-party contractor (firm) to conduct the Baseline Evaluation (Study) for the MOD&CO project.

The purpose of this RFP document is to provide Offeror(s) with information to assist them in the preparation of their proposal/s for the services that IESC seeks to source. This RFP document does not claim to contain all the information each Offeror may require. Each Offeror should conduct their own assessment and should check the accuracy, reliability, and completeness of the information in this RFP document, and where necessary, obtain independent advice from appropriate sources.

IESC may cancel this RFP and is under no obligation to make an award as a result of this RFP, although IESC fully anticipates doing so.

Note that IESC determines proposal notification, award, and start dates, and that such proposal notification, award, and start dates are subject to change at IESC’s discretion, or as directed by USDA.

Any activities under a final agreement are subject to and must be carried out in accordance with the regulations promulgated by the donor under the Office of Management and Budget guidance at 2 CFR part 200, as supplemented by 2 CFR part 400 and 7 CFR part 1499, other regulations that are generally applicable to grants and cooperative agreements of USDA, including the applicable regulations set forth in 2 CFR chapter I, II, and IV, and any other subsequently published rule or regulation governing the project.

IESC may, at its own discretion, but without being under any obligation to do so, update, amend, or supplement the information in this RFP document.

Interested offerors are responsible for all costs associated with the preparation and submission of proposals and will not be reimbursed by IESC.

Any contract resulting from this RFP will be a cost-plus fixed fee contract. The estimated total cost for the contract issued as a result of this RFP is between US\$ 125,000 and US\$ 150,000.

2. MOD&CO Background

IESC is a leading U.S. nonprofit organization that fosters private sector development in the economically developing world. Since 1964, we have delivered lasting solutions that have resulted in more than 1.5 million jobs in 139 countries. We partner with businesses, cooperatives, entrepreneurs, jobseekers, and governments to sustainably build capacity, create jobs, and grow enterprises, sharing proven skills and experience that improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities around the world. One of our major funders today is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), among others.

IESC is the prime implementer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food for Progress funded Market-Oriented Dairy and Coconut (MOD&CO) Project. The goal of MOD&CO is to address food insecurity and improve climate resilience by utilizing climate-smart agriculture techniques and enhancing market linkages in Sri Lanka's dairy and coconut sectors.

The MOD&CO Project will support 50,000 direct beneficiaries and 175,000 indirect beneficiaries by achieving the following objectives:

- Increased productivity and quality in the dairy and coconut sectors by strengthening a robust, multipronged extension system and building public and private sector capacity for improved milk quality in line with national standards.
- Increasing the adoption of climate-smart and regenerative agriculture practices and the diversification of farmer household income in the dairy and coconut sectors by supporting locally driven knowledge transfer of research-backed production models for climate-smart agriculture, regenerative agriculture, and the circular economy.
- Enhancing market linkages within the dairy and coconut value chains by strengthening farmer relationships with buyers, input suppliers, and finance providers.

With an estimated value of \$16.1 million in technical and management funds, the project will run for five years from September 2024 through September 2029. The MOD&CO Project identified six key activities to address food insecurity and improve climate resilience in Sri Lanka.

These activities are summarized as follows:

Activity 1 - Capacity Building: Producer Groups/Cooperatives and Trade Associations

The MOD&CO project will establish public-private partnerships (PPPs) for achieving the 100 liters/day production target in the dairy sector and 100 nuts/tree/year in the coconut sector. In the dairy sector, the MOD&CO Project will work with the Department of Animal Production and Health (DAPH) and the All-Island Dairy Association (AIDA) to develop a public-private roadmap for scaling nationally the 100L/day climate-smart dairy (CSD) model. In the coconut sector, the MOD&CO Project will collaborate with the Coconut Research Institute (CRI), Coconut Cultivation Board (CCB), the Coconut Growers

Association (CGA) and National Chamber of Coconut Industry (NCCI) to promote research-backed production models for achieving the 100 nuts/tree/year production target. The MOD&CO Project will galvanize PPPs around common productivity targets, build a pluralistic, sustainable extension ecosystem, and facilitate the development of and compliance with national milk quality standards.

Activity 2 - Capacity Building: Agricultural Extension Agents/Services

The MOD&CO Project will leverage and strengthen a multi-pronged extension ecosystem, including public, private, ICT-based, and peer-to-peer extension modalities. The MOD&CO Project will work with public extension services for the dairy and coconut sectors to develop a results-based extension curricula aligned with production models and targets. The MOD&CO Project will build the capacity of both private and public extension agents by training them on climate-smart and regenerative agriculture practices. These trained extension agents will then conduct training themselves to their farmers and provide results-based extension services to increase farm productivity.

Activity 3 - Applied Research: Climate-smart Agriculture, Regenerative Agriculture, and Intercropping Practices

The MOD&CO Project will work with US and Sri Lankan research institutions to develop production models for coconut farms, dairies, and commercial breeder farms on coconut land that incorporate climate-smart agriculture (CSA), regenerative agriculture, and intercropping practices and are tailored to different farm sizes, locations, and agro-ecological zones. The project will assess ongoing activities related to CSA and regenerative agriculture and global best practices and localize them through applied research efforts.

Activity 4 - Market Access: Facilitate Buyer-Seller Relation

The MOD&CO Project will develop and pilot models for aggregating supply between farmers and processors in both the dairy and coconut sectors and will collaborate with processing companies to strengthen relationships between processors, collectors, and farmers where appropriate to improve opportunities for farmers. The MOD&CO Project will pursue and facilitate mutually beneficial supplier relationships where farmers benefit, as do other actors within the value chain. The MOD&CO Project will also assess upstream challenges farmers face in accessing markets, giving the MOD&CO Project an opportunity to develop results-oriented interventions to enhance market access for coconut and dairy farmers.

Activity 5 - Inputs: Develop Agro-dealers and/or Other Input Suppliers port

The MOD&CO Project will develop input and service provision enterprises tied to the dairy and coconut sectors. In the dairy sector, the MOD&CO Project will expand the number of commercial fodder producers and village-level silage entrepreneurs and expand delivery of Artificial Insemination and pregnancy detection services. In the coconut sector, the MOD&CO Project will collaborate with processors and collectors to identify entrepreneurs to establish coconut seedling nurseries in locations based on industry needs and entrepreneurial interest, such as the two coconut triangles. For both sectors, the MOD&CO Project will provide technical assistance and business training for input entrepreneurs, with a focus on women, youth, and minority leaders.

Activity 6 - Financial Services: Leverage Private and/or Public Investment

The MOD&CO Project will work with financial institutions and insurance providers to develop customized loan and insurance products for dairy and coconut farmers, collaborating with the Development Finance Corporation of Ceylon (DFCC). The MOD&CO Project will also collaborate with ICT providers to expand digital financing and leverage data to assess borrower risk and refine loan and insurance products tailored to the dairy and coconut sectors. The MOD&CO Project will facilitate technical assistance to improve farmers' bankability and financial literacy. The MOD&CO Project will also implement a matching grant fund to catalyze critical investments in climate-smart, resilient, and regenerative agricultural practices.

Theory of Change

The project's theory of change states:

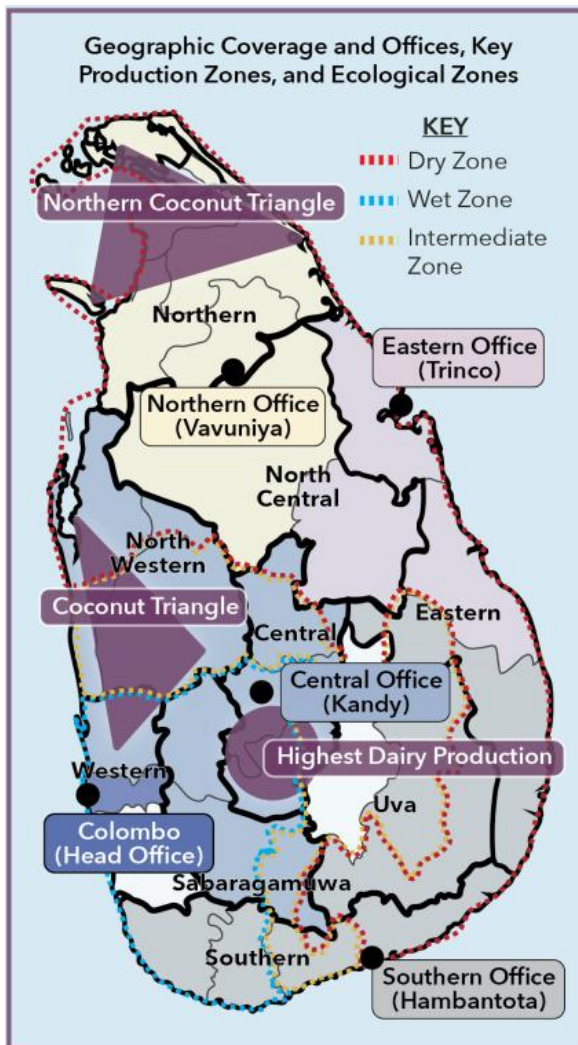
IF entrepreneurial dairy and coconut farmers are empowered with the knowledge and technical support services to sustainably increase the quality and quantity of production in response to market demand; **AND IF** linkages between research and farmers and industry are strengthened to promote the adoption of climate-smart, regenerative, and circular economy practices that diversify incomes while improving adaptation to the effects of climate change; **AND IF** farmer access to extension technology, and finance is strengthened through market-based linkages; **THEN** the dairy and coconut sectors will better meet the needs of domestic consumers and export industries; **AND THEN** climate-smart, regenerative dairy and coconut sectors will increase farmer incomes and reduce waste; **AND THEN** food security of Sri Lankan households will increase through better access to and availability of affordable, safe, and nutritious foods; **AND** a more climate-smart, regenerative, and circular agricultural sector will increase climate resilience of farmers and the nation.

Target Beneficiaries and Geographical Areas

The MOD&CO Project will target six beneficiary groups: entrepreneurial dairy farmers, entrepreneurial coconut farmers, smallholder dairy farmers, smallholder coconut farmers, input providers, downstream buyers, and the public sector. A description of target beneficiaries to be included in the baseline study is detailed in Section 6.7 Activities; Task One: Baseline Study.

The MOD&CO Project will carry out activities in all nine provinces of Sri Lanka with a specific focus on the North, Northwest, and Central Provinces. Dairy activities will expand the activities supported under the MOD Project to all nine provinces based on farmer and private sector interest and demand. Coconut activities will be centered in the Northwestern Coconut Triangle (Kurunegala, Puttalam, and Gampaha districts) and the Northern Coconut Triangle (Jaffna, Mannar, and Mullaitivu districts) but will reach farmers in all nine provinces based on interest and demand.

Figure 1: Map illustrating priority geographical areas and value chains



3. Project Beneficiaries

IESC will carry out activities under MOD&CO Cooperative Agreement in all nine provinces of Sri Lanka with a specific focus on the North, Northwest, and Central Provinces. Dairy activities will expand the activities supported under the MOD Project, a seven-year USDA Food for Progress project that catalyzed sustainable growth and increased milk production in Sri Lanka's dairy sector, to all nine provinces based on farmer and private sector interest and demand. Coconut activities will be centered in the Northwestern Coconut Triangle (Kurunegala, Puttalam, and Gampaha districts) and the Northern Coconut Triangle (Jaffna, Mannar, and Mullaitivu districts) but will reach project beneficiaries in all nine provinces based on interest and demand.

IESC will target a total of 50,000 beneficiaries. Project beneficiaries will be selected in all nine provinces using a locally-led, market-driven strategy with a focus on market clusters tied to processing facilities. IESC will work collaboratively with private sector processing partners and public sector partners to set criteria and identify and select entrepreneurial dairy and coconut farmers while meeting USDA and project priorities.

4. Period of Performance

The contractor (firm) will perform the MOD&CO baseline study over the period of April 15, 2025 to June 15, 2025. The anticipated due date for the baseline study is June 15, 2025, with the study conducted between April and May 2025.

The period of performance of any contract resulting from this solicitation is anticipated to begin on or about April 15, 2025. The duration of the contract is until the baseline study is approved by USDA, anticipated in June 2025.

The baseline study should be designed to accomplish the following:

- Propose, design, implement and manage data collection methodologies and approach to data analysis;
- Establish baseline data (and trendline, as applicable) for five standard performance indicators prior to the start of project activities.
- Provide baseline data for two context indicators prior to the start of activities.

- Identify unanticipated contextual or other challenges that may be encountered by each activity, along with potential mitigation strategies;
- Verify realism of proposed targets and providing revised targets across all indicators as appropriate;
- Thoroughly document fit-for-purpose data collection methods for relevant indicators to ensure the same can be applied throughout the life of the project to the extent possible, increasing the likelihood of data reliability;
- Provide recommendations relevant to activities and indicators based on the findings to strengthen implementation and results of activities; and
- Highlight learning as a key focus for the project and demonstrate how the project will build evidence to help answer at least three key learning questions determined by IESC with input from USDA from the FFPr Learning Agenda.

5. Scope Statement

MOD&CO Project is seeking a third-party contractor (firm) to conduct the project's baseline study. All quotations must be valid for sixty (60) days.

6. Statement of Work

6.1. Schedule of Authorities

The contractor will report to the MOD&CO Chief of Party and the IESC Home Office Program Manager, Associate Vice President, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Director.

6.2. Evaluation Services Objectives and Scope

In compliance with USDA's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy, the project's contractor will conduct a baseline study. The overall objective of the project's baseline study is to establish and impartially evaluate the project performance plan indicator baselines and targets.

The evaluation team will include various positions, all of which will have a detailed scope of work. The positions and relevant qualifications for each are described below under Section 8. Qualifications and Eligibility Requirements.

Third-party, per USDA Food and Agricultural Services Food Assistance Division (FAD) Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (Page 7, February 2019) is described below:

- Is financially and legally separate from the participant's organization;
- Has staff with demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills and experience in conducting evaluations of development programs involving agriculture, trade, education, and nutrition, preferably with demonstrated knowledge of the dairy and/or coconut value chains;

- Uses acceptable analytical frameworks such as comparison with non-project areas, surveys, involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation, and statistical analyses;
- Uses local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct portions of the evaluation; and
- Provides a detailed outline of the evaluation, major tasks, and specific schedules prior to initiating the evaluation.

The evaluation team, including enumerators, must ensure that the evaluation adheres to ethical guidelines as cited in the FAD Monitoring and Evaluation Policy Page 8 of that policy states the following:

“Monitoring and evaluation activities should appropriately balance the desired creation of evidence with the protection of human subjects, including safeguarding the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants. Evaluators are responsible for applying ethical principles in all stages of the evaluation, and for raising and clarifying ethical matters with stakeholders during the course of the evaluation.”

Evaluation activities must not threaten the safety of evaluators, project stakeholders/staff, and the general public. The evaluator must comply with local law and health ordinances when implementing the evaluation.

6.3. Key Audience

The key audience for the baseline study includes the project staff, USDA, the private sector, GoSL, dairy and coconut sector partners, and others as appropriate as identified by USDA.

The final version of the baseline study will be made publicly available. IESC will ensure public copies of the baseline study are free of personally identifiable information (PII) and proprietary information. Additionally, the final version of the baseline study will also be made accessible to persons with disabilities.

6.4. Methodology for Baseline Study

The evaluation team will operate according to the approved evaluation plan. The evaluations will be performance evaluations (i.e., with no comparison groups). The evaluations will employ a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods (surveys, focus group discussions with direct observation of target beneficiaries, and key informant interviews with government officials and relevant public/private stakeholders, as well as the project staff and USDA representatives). The details around survey design and interview questions will be finalized in conjunction with the selected contractor. An overview and the proposed methodology for the evaluations are provided in this section.

6.5. Evaluation Management and Coordination

The baseline study will be supported by the home-office MEL director, who leads IESC’s MEL unit based in Washington, DC in collaboration with the CoP and the project’s MEL director in conjunction with the IESC home-office program team. The project staff will assist the evaluator by providing logistical support during the baseline study. Roles and responsibilities for IESC staff and partners are outlined below.

STAFF	ROLE
Chief of Party	Providing necessary project documents. Introducing the team to stakeholders (government and private sector) Getting government approvals for government site visits
The project MEL Director	Logistical support to evaluation team. Identification of the required stakeholders. Setting up required stakeholder meetings and site visits.
Home Office MEL Director	Ensuring independence of the evaluator. Ensuring agreed methodologies are followed. Evaluation quality assurance.
Home Office project Team (Associate Vice President and Program Manager)	Providing project information. Liaison between the project team and evaluator. Submission of evaluation reports. Evaluation contract management.
Partners	Providing site visits facilitation

6.6. Ethical Guidelines

Every member of the evaluation team must adhere to ethical guidelines as outlined in the American Evaluation Association’s Guiding Principles for Evaluators. A summary of these guidelines is provided below.

- **Systematic Inquiry:** Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries.
- **Competence:** The evaluation team possesses the education, abilities, skills, and experience appropriate to undertake the tasks proposed in the evaluation. Evaluators practice within the limits of their professional training and competence and decline to conduct evaluations that fall substantially outside those limits. The evaluation team collectively demonstrates cultural competence.
- **Integrity/Honesty:** Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
- **Respect for People:** Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, project participants, clients, and other evaluation stakeholders. Evaluators regard informed consent for participation in evaluation and inform participants and clients about the scope and limits of confidentiality.

- Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and consider the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation.

Evaluation activities must not endanger the evaluation team, project stakeholders /staff, and public health. The evaluator must comply with local law and health ordinances when implementing the evaluation

6.7. Activities

The contractor is expected to undertake the following tasks:

1. Task One: Baseline Study

The baseline study will provide baseline information for indicator data that will be used for performance monitoring to annually track actual results against planned targets, validate and revisit assumptions that were made in the project design, monitor the assumptions during the project implementation and identify potential threats to project success. The baseline study will obtain data for the following five performance indicators:

INDICATOR NO.	INDICATOR NAME
Ind 1 - FFPr #1	Yield of targeted agricultural commodities among program participants with USDA assistance
Ind 2 – FFPr #18	Value of annual sales of farms and firms receiving USDA assistance
Ind 3 - FFPR #19	Volume of commodities sold by farms and firms receiving USDA assistance
Ind 4 - FFPr #3	Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with USDA assistance
Ind 5 - FFPr #4	Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USDA assistance

Data for these indicators will be collected from two groups of farmers who are the main focus of the project: smallholder dairy farmers and smallholder coconut farmers. The proposed methodology for collecting data from these two groups should demonstrate a clear understanding that they may be concentrated in different areas of the country. Public sector beneficiaries, input suppliers, and downstream buyers will not be directly included in data collection for this study. Project activities in both coconut and dairy will be implemented in all nine provinces of Sri Lanka, but it is worth noting that coconut interventions, in particular, will be focused in the Northern and Northwestern Coconut Triangles as shown in Figure 1. The proposed data collection and sampling methodology should account for the need to reach all areas of the country and to draw proportionate samples based on region/agroclimatic zone to most efficiently utilize resources.

The proposed methodology for collecting baseline information for the standard FFPr performance indicators 1, 3, 4, 18, and 19 will be confirmed with the evaluation contractor before the baseline study starts but will align with the standard definitions and data collection and management guidance in the USD Food Assistance Indicators Handbook (February 2019) and updated guidance. The methodology will be a combination

of qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions of a sample of pre-identified individual producers/farmers, processors, input suppliers, financial institutions, trade associations, collectors, coconut exporters. Any primary data collection methods involving in-person interaction will adhere to public health protocols to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 or other communicable disease spread.

It is worth noting here that the final evaluation will seek to assess impact by establishing plausible association through contribution analysis rather than scientific attribution through randomized impact evaluations. Thus, baseline data will be important to determine project impact as there will be no impact evaluation with counterfactual due to the extensive reach of MOD&CO activities.

The evaluators will ensure that they are familiar with the standard definitions, MOD&CO-required disaggregates and disaggregate tree structure, and will ensure that all the required data points are available following the baseline. The evaluators will further ensure that the methodology and tools applied to the baseline can be used for (1) ongoing data reporting at semi-annual (only for relevant indicators) and annual reporting (all indicators) periods, and (2) the midterm evaluation and final evaluation to ensure comparability of results.

The evaluators should consider that data collection methodologies may need to be revised from the approach specified in the TOR. The data collection methods should be communicated to IESC, and the evaluator should clearly describe in the evaluation report how they collected data as well as any potential limitations and/or implications for interpreting evaluation findings.

Baseline data is central to measuring progress on performance indicators and assessing project outcomes and impacts using evaluation methods. The baseline study lays the groundwork for all future monitoring and evaluation activities by:

- Establishing baseline data (and trendline, as applicable) for five standard performance indicators prior to the start of project activities.
- Providing baseline data for two context indicators prior to the start of activities.
- Identifying unanticipated contextual or other challenges that may be encountered by each activity, along with potential mitigation strategies;
- Verifying realism of proposed targets and providing revised targets across all indicators as appropriate;
- Thoroughly documenting fit-for-purpose data collection methods for relevant indicators to ensure the same can be applied throughout the life of the project to the extent possible, increasing the likelihood of data reliability, and
- Providing recommendations relevant to activities and indicators based on the findings to strengthen implementation and results of activities.
- Reviewing the 3 proposed special studies and providing recommendations as to their contribution to the Food for Progress Learning agenda or recommending alternative studies that the project would be well positioned to focus on.
 - Effectiveness of Different Extension Service Modules and Incentives for Their Adoption

- Determinants of Farmer Adoption of Climate Smart Practices and Regenerative, and Intercropping Practices in Sri Lanka's Coconut Sector
- Drivers of Climate Smart Practices within Sri Lanka's Dairy Sector

The baseline will help the project answer the following questions:

- What are the baseline values for the five indicators (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) that require a baseline?
- Do the indicators or operationalized indicator definitions in the approved PMP need revision or adjustments?
- Do the targets need revision or adjustments, based on more current data and/or decisions by public or private sector stakeholders that would positively or negatively affect current and future production and sales of value chains crops/products?
- Does the project theory of change still hold? Are the assumptions still valid? Do the assumptions consider potential impacts of loss of labor for production, harvesting, and packing horticultural crops; national elections; climate stress, e.g., draughts; natural disasters; and plant plagues?
- Political changes: Reduction of percent in some indicators might be affected. Which indicators are most likely to be affected if political changes are held dramatically?
- Natural disasters: What are the impacts of natural disasters in reaching the targets?
- Major plague or infestation: which targets of the project will be affected with a major plague or infestation spread?

6.8. Deliverables

1. Baseline Study

The baseline study's deliverables include but are not limited to the following:

- Write a baseline study work plan, which includes the following:
 - A demonstrated understanding of the MOD&CO Project based on desk review and kick-off meeting;
 - Baseline study methodology including detailed sampling plan, field work plan, research matrix, and any limitations of the proposed approach;
 - Planned quality control measures;
 - Communication protocol with interview subjects related to purpose of interview, the project, and consent for participation and/or inclusion of subject in photograph captured during the study;
 - Final timeline; and
 - A Gantt chart reflective of the narrative that includes action, timeline by week, output, team owner, and IESC support if required.
- A two to three-page stand-alone brief describing the evaluation design, key findings and other relevant considerations. It will serve to inform any interested

stakeholders of the evaluation and should be written in language easy to understand by non-evaluators and with appropriate graphics and tables.

- Provide the electronic copies of all clean and final versions of data collection tools in English;
- Provide clean and final versions of quantitative datasets (one complete and one with all PII removed) and qualitative transcripts in agreed upon format;
- Provide electronic draft baseline study report in English, addressing all Study objectives and questions. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard **USDA report template**. The report is estimated to range from 50 - 70 pages excluding relevant annexes. It must include the following:
 - List of acronyms/abbreviations;
 - Table of contents;
 - Executive summary (not to exceed 4 pages);
 - Introduction and Purpose;
 - Evaluation Design and Methodology;
 - Baseline Data Findings;
 - Baseline Data Conclusions;
 - Recommendations for any modifications to indicators (including definition, targets, proposed data management, etc)
 - Annexed bibliography;
 - Annexed Table of indicator data with Baseline and recommended targets;
 - Annexed Results Framework (If not present in body of report)
 - Annexed IESC response to findings;
 - Annexed cleaned raw data and all analyses;
 - Annexed data collection instruments;
 - Annexed Conflict of interest forms; and
 - Annexed photographs from meetings.
- Deliver an oral presentation supported by PowerPoint slides and any applicable electronic handouts of the evaluation findings in the IESC template. The presentation should be at least an hour and include 20 to 25 slides. An initial review shall be completed in-country at the completion of the field assignment, the final, informal virtual presentation shall be delivered at the completion of the report to USDA stakeholders and IESC;
- Produce 15 to 20 high-quality pictures of the process, which are date and time stamped;
- Produce electronic English version of the baseline study report in PDF and MS Word.

The final version of the baseline study report will be made publicly available (including to those with disabilities), therefore the contractor is expected to produce two copies of which one version of the report should not release the following:

- Proprietary information owned by third parties; and information that could put individual safety at risk or personally identifiable information (PII). PII is information that can be used to reasonably infer the identity of an individual, directly or indirectly.

- Final versions of evaluation reports ready for publication should be accessible to persons with disabilities. For guidance on creating documents accessible to persons with disabilities, please see the following resources:
 - <https://www.section508.gov/create/documents>
 - <https://www.section508.gov/create/pdfs>

USDA reserves the right to any data produced (including the evaluation report) per 2 CFR 200.315 Intangible Property

7. Contract Type

The contract is anticipated to be a cost-plus fixed fee service contract, to be paid in stages based on deliverables. Specific deliverables are included in Section 6.8. Due dates will be determined following award.

8. Instructions to Offerors

Offerors must submit both a technical and cost proposal, as described below.

8.1. Submission

- 1) Offers received after the closing date may not be considered.
- 2) Offers must be in U.S. dollars.
- 3) Technical and cost proposals must be submitted as two separate documents. Cost information must not be included in the technical proposal.

Offerors must submit their proposals by the closing date and time, as listed on page one, to the following: globalawards@iesc.org.

8.2. Clarification and Amendments

Offerors may request clarification questions via email to globalawards@iesc.org no later than **5:00 p.m., Washington DC Eastern Standard Time (EST), on March 20, 2025**. IESC will provide answers to these questions and requests for clarification simultaneously via email and posted on the IESC website with the RFP before the close of business on/or **before March 24, 2025**. IESC will not answer questions before the proposal submission deadline outside of the allotted response period for clarifications. No questions will be answered over the phone or in person. Any amendments to the RFP will be posted on the website and simultaneously emailed to Offerors who have expressed interest.

8.3. Cover Page and Markings

In addition to the required proposal documents listed in sections 11 and 12 below, please include a cover page with your submission for the technical and cost proposals (separate cover pages). The cover page should be on company letterhead and should contain the following information:

- 1) Project or Title (from the front page of this RFP document)
- 2) Offer Reference Number (from the front page of this RFP document)
- 3) Company Name
- 4) Company Address
- 5) Name of the Company's authorized representative

- 6) Contact person if different from the Company's representative
- 7) Telephone #, Cellular/Mobile Phone #, Email address
- 8) Duration of Validity of proposal
- 9) Payment terms
- 10) UEI # (Applies to companies, not to individuals)
- 11) Total Proposed Price (**cover page of cost proposal only**)
- 12) Signature, date, and time

8.4. Technical Proposal

The technical proposal must be within the 16-page limit (see section page limits in section 11) and must include the following:

- A cover letter summarizing the applicant's interest and capacity to implement the CSAFS Baseline Study,
- A thorough description of the proposed sample and evaluation methodologies that demonstrates an understanding of MOD&CO expected impact and implementation approach and USDA indicators and their calculation;
- Research Matrix that includes research questions, question objectives, data collection strategy, data source and potential data analysis methods;
- A demonstrated understanding of and experience in USDA Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning policies, guidelines, and practices, including details on the proposed approach to:
 - Gathering, validating, and analyzing data;
 - Drafting and finalizing reports, considering the need for infographics;
- Experience in evaluating the agriculture sector, specifically coconut, dairy, and their value chains;
- Experience in similar geographic and cultural settings;
- Strong experience in applying different quantitative and qualitative methodologies (provide some details of specific assignments, challenges encountered, and how the challenges were mitigated);
- List of three references for offeror's firm and at least two references for each proposed team member who can attest to your experience and expertise in evaluation. Include contact information (daytime phone numbers and email contacts), and
- Past Performance: List of the three most recent relevant assignments that you have undertaken, including a description of why these are relevant to this RFP and what learnings were drawn from that assignment.

Appendices (not included in the page limit):

- CVs of the contractor team, outlining previous evaluation experience and accomplishments as they relate to demonstrating the skills and knowledge needed to fulfill the requirements of the RFP (CVs must be in English);
- Demonstrated financial and administrative capacity to manage a contract of this size; and,
- Optional: one example of a baseline/evaluation/assessment report recently completed or any other document that demonstrates strong writing ability. These documents will be handled with the utmost confidentiality.

8.5. Cost Proposal

The cost proposal must include a detailed budget for completion of the baseline assessment. Offerors are strongly encouraged to keep this project budget constraint for MEL services in mind as they determine costs. Offerors must complete the budget template found in Attachment A, posted on the IESC website as Attachment A – Assessment Budget Template. Costs should be broken out to include labor, supplies, travel, subcontracts (if any), indirect costs (if any), fee/profit (if any), and total cost. Offerors must include detailed narrative justifications for each cost in order for IESC to determine cost reasonableness.

Should an offeror propose any subcontractors to perform any portion of the work, such subcontract costs must be proposed separately (on a separate tab of Attachment A), demonstrating clear delineation between prime and subcontractor costs. Offerors must include a detailed budget for any subcontract proposed; this budget and narrative must adhere to the same budgeting format requirements (per Attachment A – Assessment Budget Template) herein for prime offerors, including cost narratives.

For indirect costs proposed, please include a copy of your organization’s U.S. Government approved Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA), if applicable. Otherwise, should your organization or consulting company not have a NICRA and you are proposing indirect costs, you have the option of proposing a 10 percent de minimis rate, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.414(f). Only incorporated businesses (501(c)(3), LLC, etc.) are eligible to charge and be reimbursed for indirect costs.

9. Qualifications and Eligibility Requirements

Offeror may be required to present a business license and must have experience in conducting evaluations for trade and agricultural projects. Offerors may need to obtain a SAM.gov generated Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) Number and an eligibility notice prior to receiving any award. Award may be contingent upon USDA final approval.

All interested parties will be assessed based on the following:

- Demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills, and prior experience conducting evaluations of development projects involving agriculture and trade development projects;
- Proven ability to use quantitative, qualitative and participatory evaluation methods, with examples and references that can speak to this experience;
- Experience using of acceptable analytical frameworks such as surveys, stakeholder engagement, and statistical analyses;
- Experience using advanced quantitative and qualitative methodologies;
- Clarity of thought process and writing style, as evidenced in technical proposal;
- Can effectively navigate the required data collection methods considering COVID-19 or other communicable disease;
- Use local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct portions of the assessment;
- Fluency in English and local languages (Tamil and Sinhala) required;
- Experience with USDA Food for Progress projects preferred; and,

- Experience in similar or comparable geographic and/or cultural settings. Previous experience in Sri Lanka preferred, but not required.

IESC envisions the following team composition; however, the offerors may propose an alternative team composition with justification and rationale. IESC encourages offerors to include no more than three key team members in addition to any field support staff consultants:

- **Team Leader.** An experienced international evaluation expert with at least seven years of experience working on market assessments and market/trade analysis, and three of those years of successfully leading a team; with a Master's degree in economics, agricultural economics, agribusiness, or related field; experience working in the coconut and dairy sector research preferred, analytic, and writing skills; with experience leading and conducting evaluations/assessment of international development projects and in preparing high-quality assessment reports for same with USDA Food for Progress projects preferred; experience in Sri Lanka or the region highly preferred; ability to travel when in country.
- **Coconut Specialist.** An experienced international or a Sri Lankan with at least five years of relevant experience working in the coconut sector with a focus on productivity improvements, market driven development projects, and an agriculture and economics/statistical background with a minimum Bachelor's degree and ability to support team leader technically; fluent in written and spoken English; fluency in Sinhala and/or Tamil an advantage.
- **Dairy Specialist.** An experienced international or a Sri Lankan with at least five years of relevant experience working in the dairy sector with a focus on productivity improvements, market driven development projects and an agriculture and economics/statistical background with a minimum Bachelor's degree and ability to support team leader technically; fluent in written and spoken English; fluency in Sinhala and/or Tamil an advantage.
- **Enumerators.** The contractor will have the option to hire local consultants to facilitate the fieldwork and translations. Local enumerators could assist with data collection and translation on a short-term, as needed basis and should have at least two years' relevant work experience as an enumerator or in conducting/supporting assessments; strong attention to detail; IESC may support recruitment of local enumerators, but the hiring decision will be the responsibility of the contractor.

Note: The applicant may propose a different team composition with a clear justification of how the team composition will benefit the performance of this scope of work.

10. Basis for Award

IESC anticipates that the award will be based on best-value principles. Accordingly, an award will be made to the technically acceptable Offeror whose proposal provides the greatest overall value to IESC and the USDA FFPr project, price, and other factors considered. Should two or more offers be technically equivalent, IESC may use cost as the determining factor for the award. The winning proposal must conform to all solicitation requirements.

To determine the best value, proposals will be evaluated on the criteria below. The number of points assigned, totaling 100 points, indicates the relative importance of each individual criterion. Offerors should note that these criteria serve to: (a) identify the significant factors that Offerors should address in their proposals; and (b) set the standard against which all proposals will be evaluated.

11. Technical Proposal Evaluation

Please read carefully, the following are instructions for preparing proposals. Proposals must be organized into sections corresponding to the sections presented below and numbered accordingly. Only include the requested information and avoid submitting extra content. Any pages exceeding the page limitation for each section of the proposal may not be evaluated.

The successful offeror must demonstrate its ability to validate the existing baseline values and/or recommend appropriate ones with justification.

Proposals shall be written in English with each page numbered consecutively.

11.1. Technical and Management Approach: 10-page limit; possible points: 50

Proposals will be scored on their effectiveness to meet the requirements of the MOD&CO Project, as outlined in Sections 4, 5, and 6 of this RFP. The technical and management approach is scored based on the following:

- Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the project, and the target value chains (coconut and dairy) in Sri Lanka.
- Demonstrated understanding of the required indicators and their mandated collection and calculation methods
- Logical and coherent Research Matrix that includes research questions, question objectives, data collection strategy, data source and potential data analysis methods;
- Clear approach to undertaking the requirements of the assessment, including detailed sample and data collection and analysis methodologies.
- A detailed description of the approach to undertaking the tasks outlined in **Section 6.8 Deliverables**.

11.2. Offeror's past performance and references: 3-page limit. Does not include samples of previous work and references, which are submitted as attachments; possible points: 20

Past performance is scored based on the following:

- Offeror's record in implementing similar activities to those outlined in Section 6.8 Deliverables, with emphasis on evaluations related to agriculture (including dairy and coconut production where possible) and in geographic and/or cultural settings similar to Sri Lanka.
- Experience conducting research per the requirements of Sections 4, 5, and 6 of this RFP.
- Demonstrated knowledge and application of USDA M&E guidelines and related ethics as demonstrated in the applicant's proposal and based on the three provided professional reference checks.

Offerors should provide as an attachment, **not part of the page limit for past performance**, the following:

- A minimum of three references for past and present work, to include the contact information of three prior or current employers or clients for which the Offeror has completed a similar task. References must include contact information and a summary of the relevant work undertaken.
- Samples of previous work.

11.3. Offeror's personnel experience and capacities: 3-page limit. Does not include resumes or CVs, which are submitted as attachments; possible points: 30

The Offeror must include a description (biographical sketch acceptable) of each of the proposed team members who would directly work on the activities in the contract. Offerors must submit resumes or CVs as attachments for individuals submitted in this section and **do not count within the page limitations of this section but should be limited to 3 pages per CV**. Additional roles must be identified and described as part of the application, but no CVs are required. Required CVs must be in English. The level of effort to complete the tasks outlined in Sections 4, 5, and 6 of this proposal shall be determined by the Offeror.

Personnel experience and capacities are scored on the following:

- The extent to which the Offeror or its personnel have the knowledge and skills suitable for the evaluation needs identified in Sections 4, 5, and 6 of this RFP.
- Team Leader's ability to effectively manage small teams and manage complex research logistics to produce outcomes in geographic and/or cultural settings similar to Sri Lanka.
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively with a project team.
- Excellent demonstrated analytical, interpersonal communication, and English writing skills.
- Each proposed individual's ability to work both remotely and in-person with stakeholders. Presentation of the appropriate skills possessed by the team as referenced in Section 9. Qualifications and Eligibility Requirements

IESC reserves the right to award the contract to the firm whose proposal is deemed to be in the best interest of IESC and USDA. The specifics of the scope are subject to change in accordance with potential additional input from USDA and the initial agreement with the selected organization discussed and modified accordingly. IESC reserves the right to cancel the contract in full or in part.

The independent firm with the winning proposal will be notified in writing. Applicants who are not selected will also be notified.

12. Cost Proposal Evaluation Criteria: Must consist of an executive summary (1-page limit); a budget narrative (3-page limit); and a budget using the IESC budget template (Attachment A – Evaluation Budget Template).

The Offeror will submit a separate cost proposal that complies in full with the budget template at Attachment A and the budget narrative template Attachment A.1.

All proposed costs must be in accordance with the U.S. Government Cost Principles under 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (found at: [2 CFR 200 Subpart E](#)) for nonprofit entities and under Part 31 of the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) for for-profit entities (found at [Part 31 - Contract Cost Principles and Procedures | Acquisition.GOV](#)).

The cost proposal must include a detailed budget for completion of the baseline study work plan and implementing the baseline study. Costs should be broken out to include labor, supplies, travel, subcontracts (if any), indirect costs (if any), fee/profit (if any), and total cost.

Offerors must include detailed narrative justifications for each cost in order for IESC to determine cost reasonableness. Should an offeror propose any subcontractors to perform any portion of the work, such subcontract costs must be proposed separately, demonstrating clear delineation between prime and subcontractor costs. Offerors must include a detailed budget for any subcontract proposed, including cost narratives.

For indirect costs proposed, please include a copy of your organization's Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA), if applicable. Otherwise, should your organization not have a NICRA and you are proposing indirect costs, you have the option of proposing a 10 percent de minimis rate, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.414(f). Note that should an offeror propose an indirect cost rate other than a NICRA or de minimis rate, such rates must be supported by an independent auditor's indirect cost rate audit (standard financial statements will not suffice). Only incorporated businesses (501(c)(3), LLC, etc.) are eligible to charge and be reimbursed for indirect rates.

All quotations must be valid for sixty (60) days from the date of final submission.

13. Deviations

IESC reserves the right to waive any deviations by offerors from the requirements of this solicitation that in IESC's opinion are considered not to be material defects requiring rejection or disqualification; or where such a waiver will promote increased competition.

14. Discrepancies

Please read the instructions carefully before submitting your proposal. Any discrepancy in following the instructions or contract provisions may disqualify your proposal without recourse or an appeal for reconsideration at any stage.

15. Conflict of Interest Declaration for the IESC MOD&CO Baseline Assessment Services

The following steps outline IESC's contract selection process and should be understood by all Offerors to ensure the transparency of awards and avoid conflict of interest.

- 1) Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are posted on IESC's website. The offer is open to all qualified Offerors;
- 2) Clarifications will be emailed to all Offerors submitting questions, as well as posted on IESC's website, simultaneously;
- 3) Once the proposals are received, an evaluation committee scores them;

- 4) Cost proposals are evaluated for reasonableness, accuracy, and completeness;
- 5) The best value proposal is selected based on a combination of the technical score and the cost;
- 6) No activity can be started until both IESC and the awardee have signed a formal contract; and,
- 7) IESC policy against fraud and code of business ethics exists throughout the life of the subcontract and beyond. Even if the contract is closed, if any party is found guilty of fraud, IESC will make a full report to the USDA Office of Inspector General, which may choose to investigate and prosecute guilty parties to the fullest extent of the law.

Any contracts awarded will be required to comply with all administrative standards and provisions required by USDA.

-END-