



## **Notice of Competitive Funding Opportunity**

### **Urban and Community Forestry Program South Carolina Forestry Commission**

#### **2023 Funding Information and Application Package**

**Application Deadline: Friday, December 8, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.**

Submit to:

Urban and Community SCFC Program  
South Carolina Forestry Commission  
5500 Broad River Road  
Columbia, SC 29212

Electronic submissions are encouraged and accepted. Please send to  
[fwaite@scfc.gov](mailto:fwaite@scfc.gov)

A voluntary informational webinar will be held from 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm on Monday, October 23, 2023. If your organization would like to attend this webinar, please access the following website to register for the webinar: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/2698413074002713436> . The webinar will also be made available after October 23, 2023, on the SCFC website: <https://www.scfc.gov/management/urban-forestry/urban-forestry-grants/>

This Notice of Funding Opportunity is incorporated into any cooperative agreement administered by the South Carolina Forestry Commission under the Urban and Community Forestry Program. Please retain a copy for your records to reference for all aspects of your cooperative agreement, activities, reimbursements, and reporting.

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## I. OVERVIEW

The mission of the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) is to protect, promote, enhance, and nurture the forest lands of South Carolina in a manner consistent with achieving the greatest good for its citizens. Responsibilities extend to all forest lands, both rural and urban, and to all associated forest values and amenities including, but not limited to, timber, wildlife, water quality, air quality, soil protection, recreation, and aesthetics.

The thirteen priority issues identified in South Carolina's 2020-2030 Forest Action Plan are water quality and quantity, stormwater management, prescribed burning, emerging markets, wildfire risk, forest regulation, forest health threats, air quality, fragmentation and parcelization, population growth, climate change, public perceptions about forestry, and community forests in South Carolina. Urban Forestry is incorporated to some extent in these priority areas.

As part of the South Carolina Forestry Commission 2020-2030 Strategic Plan, SCFC established the goal of providing technical, educational, and financial assistance in urban and community forestry to local governments and organized groups living and working within established developing and populated areas. **To further this goal during this funding period, SCFC will only be funding projects that will establish new Food Forests or improve existing ones.**

### **Program Authority**

Federal support to the South Carolina Urban and Community Forestry Program is authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-313) as amended. The program operates as a cooperative partnership between SCFC and USDA Forest Service, Southern Region.

### **Eligible Applicants**

SCFC funds may be awarded to any unit of local or state government, public educational institutions, IRS-approved non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations and other tax-exempt organizations.

### **Eligible Projects for this Funding Opportunity**

The mission of SCFC is to protect, promote, enhance, and nurture the forest lands of South Carolina in a manner consistent with achieving the greatest good for its citizens. Responsibilities extend to all forest lands, both rural and urban, and to all associated forest values and amenities including, but not limited to, timber, wildlife, water quality, air quality, soil protection, recreation, and aesthetics.

The Urban and Community Forestry program aims to create a network of food forests in urban environments. Food forests are edible landscapes arranged in a way that mimics a healthy natural forest ecosystem, which is arranged in layers - Canopy Tree Layer, Low Tree Layer, Shrub Layer, Herbaceous Layer, Soil Surface Layer, and Root Layer. These layers allow food forests to be well suited to urban environments because more life can be sustained in a condensed area, while each layer fulfills complex needs. The points below are provided as information to assist organizations during project development for the grant application. This is only meant to provide background guidance on food forests. All elements do not have to be present in your project for it to be fundable.

- The Canopy layer is a multipurpose layer with a mix of tall trees - some that are productive, some that provide shelter and shade, and some nitrogen fixing trees.

- The next layer is the Low Tree Layer where you will find the most common fruit and nut trees. This layer not only provides food for people, but also attracts wildlife.
- Beneath the Low Tree Layer is the Shrub Layer, consisting of mainly berry bushes. Although the Shrub Layer provides flavorful fruit snacks, it is another layer that has nitrogen fixing properties.
- The Herbaceous Layer is the next layer, which cycles nutrients back into the soil each winter when unharvested plants die back into the soil. Along with the herbs in the Herbaceous Layer you will also find garlic and nutrient rich food like kale and other leafy greens. The herbs in this layer can serve as pest control.
- The Soil Layer, also known as the ground cover, protects soil from erosion and helps it retain its moisture, like mulch. The plants helping to serve this function in the Soil Layer include sprawling plants like strawberries, clover, and thyme.
- Beneath all of those lies the Root Layer, consisting of shallow root vegetables such as onions, potatoes, turnips, and radishes. Vegetation in the Root Layer should be those that can make their way through often very hard ground that you find in most urban environments.
- Among the benefits listed above, food forests also provide opportunities for community engagement and education, pollinator habitats, a carbon negative food source, and a connection to nature that humans innately need.

## II. AVAILABLE FUNDS, MATCHING CONTRIBUTION REQUIREMENTS, AND TIMELINE

### Available Funds

SCFC has approximately \$200,000 available to fund eligible projects. **Projects will be awarded through subaward grant agreements.** SCFC is encouraging substantive projects. Requests for assistance will be considered for projects requesting a minimum of \$15,000 in Federal funds. There is no upper limit on funding requests. SCFC will fund projects based on the criteria in this announcement. We may fund one or multiple projects until funding is exhausted. Funding is for programs, projects, or activities not currently being funded and cannot be used to substitute for existing funds. Funds may be used within existing programs to initiate new program development or program expansion. **Entertainment, food and beverages, computers, tree maintenance, or construction and landscape supplies/equipment are unallowable costs under the SCFC program and may not be used for match funding.**

### Matching Contributions

SCFC requires a twenty percent (20%) match from participating communities from non-federal funds. Match may be in the form of *cash purchase* or *in-kind contributions*, and all such contributions must come from non-federal sources. Matching funds for this project may not be used as a match for any other federal cost-share project. All matching funds must be specifically related to the proposed project. All projects must adhere to the requirements of 2 CFR 200.306 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/section-200.306>).

Documentation of all matching support must be maintained and submitted with reimbursement.

**Cash Purchases** are direct, out-of-pocket expenditures for eligible project activities that are supported by paid invoices, cancelled checks, signed receipts or official payroll records. Cash match must be associated with a specific project budget cost.

**In-Kind Contributions** are third party donations of services, supplies or equipment, including the value of time (including fringe benefits) and equipment spent by volunteers on eligible project activities. Rates for volunteers performing tasks the same as their normal line of work are calculated at their current job rate. Rates for volunteers performing activities that are not the same as their normal line of work shall value the work as established below.

Assistance provided by federal employees or South Carolina Forestry Commission employees **may not** be claimed as part of the organization's match.

#### In-Kind Matching Guidelines

Values for applicant contributions of services and property must be established in accordance with the Cost Principles of 2 CFR 200 Subpart E. Applicants may use the following valuations:

- Adult volunteers - \$28.11/hour (based on methodology provided by Independent Sector for South Carolina, <https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/#:~:text=The%20Current%20Estimated%20National%20Value%20of%20Each%20Volunteer,States%20hold%20up%20the%20foundation%20of%20civil%20society> .
- Youth volunteers - \$7.25/hour (federal minimum wage)
- Donated professional services – use customary rates for services provided
- Current personnel/staff of third-party employees – use hourly wage rates (may also include fringe benefits) supported by documentation
- Donations of materials – use customary, fair market value rates, supported by documentation
- Equipment – use established rates per hour, per mile, or other reasonable methodology
- Vehicle mileage – 65.5 cents per mile (current state standard mileage rate, business use)

#### **Ownership of Equipment and Supplies Purchased with Program or Match Funds**

Unless otherwise specified, title and ownership of all equipment and supplies vests with the subrecipient throughout their useful life span, to be used *exclusively* for activities related to the project or for other activities consistent with the goals and objectives of the Urban and Community Forestry Program. If these conditions cannot be met, the subrecipient must contact SCFC to discuss options on use (subrecipients may be approved to use equipment or supplies on other Federally-funded projects in compliance with 2 CFR 200.313, or reimburse SCFC the fair market value equivalent to SCFC percentage contribution to the project).

#### **Ineligible Expenses for Reimbursement or Match**

All costs and activities funded under this program must be allowable, allocable, reasonable, and necessary as guided by 2 CFR 200, Subpart E (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E?toc=1>). SCFC will make the final determination on the allowability of all costs included in your budget.

Unallowable costs for this program include, but are not limited to:

- Expenses incurred *before or after* the agreement period.
- Any expense that is not part of an *approved* budget.
- Food, drinks, and refreshments for meetings, volunteers, etc. (also cannot count as match).
- Costs associated with *preparing* the application.
- Salaries of current staff, although they **may** qualify as a match if they are working on direct project activities – SCFC will evaluate this match on a case-by-case basis.
- Expenses not supported by proper documentation (such as paid receipts, invoices, etc.).
- Purchase of computers.

#### **Program Income**

Program income is allowable. Program income from agreement-supported activities must be included in the budget and applied to achievement of the project (i.e., spent to support a budget cost).

In cases where a program income is realized from an agreement-supported activity, subrecipients must report to SCFC the amount of program income and apply it directly to the

SCFC-funded project, reducing the overall amount, or toward another SCFC-eligible activity. Should this situation occur, contact the administrator to discuss options.

Please consult 2 CFR 200.307 for further guidance on program income.

### **Timeline**

SCFC subrecipients will be given **12 months** to complete their project. Approved projects may begin only after agreement forms are signed and submitted by the subrecipient and a fully executed agreement is returned to the subrecipient by SCFC.

**Application Deadline.** Proposals must be **received** at SCFC's office, 5500 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC, 29212, **by 5:00 P.M on Friday, December 8, 2023**, or via email to [fwaite@scfc.gov](mailto:fwaite@scfc.gov)

**Approximate Notification Date – February 5, 2024.** All applicants will be formally notified of the outcome of their application. Following notification, agreements will be developed and sent to those organizations selected for funding. Agreements are to be signed and returned **within 20 days**.

**Project Commencement – March 2024 (approximate).** Agreement Period scheduled to begin. **Reporting Schedule.** Reports cover agreement activities from the beginning of subrecipient award period through project completion.

- 1st Quarter (10/1-12/31, due 1/30)
- 2nd Quarter (1/30-3/31, due 4/30)
- 3rd Quarter (4/1-6/30, due 7/30)
- 4th Quarter (7/1-9/30, due 10/30)

**End Project - all projects will have an end date no later than 9/30/2025. The period of performance ends at the date specified in the agreement.** No further work can be carried out on the project unless a time extension has been approved. Submissions of the Final Accomplishment Report and the Final Request for Reimbursement are due **within 30 days** of the agreement end date, or approved time extension deadline.

### **III. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

Project applications must have clearly stated goals, realistic budgets, and well-planned scheduling that utilizes volunteers, creates local partnerships, promotes development of local food forest projects and programs. SCFC funding will support innovative initiatives that would not occur without SCFC funds. It is not intended to substitute for current funding levels.

When you are developing your project narrative, budget, and budget narrative, please be sure to present accurate, realistic estimates for personnel time and effort, and other budget line items. This is not meant for you to be conservative in your estimates, but for you to review your request for inclusion of sufficient resource allocations for your project to be successful.

Applications narratives must include a project plan that considers the following:

- Identification of suitable public lands that contain safe access for establishing a food forest. Please search the for the proposed site on South Carolina's Department of Environmental Control's (DHEC) public search website at <https://apps.dhec.sc.gov/Environment/PublicRecord/>, and include a screenshot or printout demonstrating that the site is not listed as a brownfield or does not have other

known contamination or environmental issues as identified by DHEC. Please include a statement in your narrative certifying there are no known contamination issues on the proposed site.

- Proposed acreage for the Food Forest
- Plan for safety and accessibility, including securing the site both during and after hours, providing safe access, and full accessibility according to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. More information about these requirements may be found at <https://www.access-board.gov/ada/>.
- Species planned for planting in the Food Forest, including detail on suitability for soils and climate for the planting site, and identifying plants of various sizes and with various attributes, occupying different layers in the design.
- Plan for consultation with an ISA Certified Arborist regarding the tree plan and planting.
- Inclusion of plants that are predominately perennials.
- All plants are food producing, and/or will sequester carbon in their woody parts or in the soil and will have useful functions within the ecosystem.
- Plan in place to provide regular and frequent irrigation to the plantings.
- If plants require pesticides, plan for application by a licensed applicator.
- A design that meets the needs of the population it is planning to serve, including details on how the produce will be distributed and how the resource will be made available to the community.
- Detailed plan for ongoing care and maintenance, including who will be responsible and how it will be funded after the funding period of performance.
- Details on availability of adequate and suitable storage for the produce.
- Plan for education and outreach, including educational programs, workshops, and other efforts to promote food forest awareness and utilization.

Applicants may wish to utilize the information and services available at Clemson Cooperative Extension when developing the application: <https://hgic.clemson.edu/category/tree-fruits/>.

Applicants will be evaluated and scored on the following criteria:

Criteria	Possible Points
Clear, measurable, and achievable goals and objectives that align with SCFC agency and program priorities. SCFC requires applicants to include in their project measurable outcomes and impact. Applicants must provide specific metrics and targets for success and a plan for tracking and reporting progress.	20
Budget and Financial Sustainability: Applicants will be assessed on the feasibility of their budget and financial plans. Reviewers will look for a clear and realistic budget, as well as evidence of financial sustainability beyond the funding period of performance.	20
Equity and Inclusivity: Consistent with USDA Forest Service participation in the Justice40 initiative, SCFC will prioritize projects that promote equity, inclusivity, and social justice, such as addressing food access disparities or involving marginalized communities in census tracts that are overburdened and underserved as identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: <a href="https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5">https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5</a>	10
Community Engagement, demonstrated through partnerships with local organizations, outreach efforts, and involvement of diverse community members.	10
Potential environmental impact, including considerations such as habitat creation, biodiversity enhancement, soil health	



improvement, and sustainable land management practices.	10
Sustainability and Long-Term Viability: SCFC will prioritize projects that are designed for long-term sustainability. Projects should present a plan for ongoing maintenance, funding, and community stewardship after the period of performance ends. Plantings must be demonstrated to be suitable for the soil and climate of the project location.	10
Education and Outreach: Applicants will be evaluated on their plans for educational programs, workshops, and outreach efforts to promote food forest awareness and utilization.	10
Innovation and Creativity: Creative approaches to food forest design, implementation, or community involvement will receive higher scores from reviewers. This could involve unique planting schemes, water management techniques, or innovative stakeholder partnerships.	10
<b>Total Possible Points</b>	<b>100</b>

Funds will be allocated on a competitive basis, using the points system described above. Proposals will be evaluated by a panel of SCFC and industry professionals. At least three reviewers will review and score each application. Proposals with the highest mean scores will be recommended for awards until funding is exhausted. Applications must reach an average score of 60 points to be considered fundable.

SCFC may ask for clarification from the applicant and negotiate the scope or budget before offering the applicant an award.

**SCFC may fund applications based on geographic area to distribute funding around the state. Fundable applications may be pulled out of rank scoring order to achieve statewide distribution of funding.**

#### IV. PROPOSAL FORMAT

The proposal includes 4 parts: 1. Application Form, 2. Budget Proposal, 3. Project Schedule, and 4. Proposal Narrative, plus any additional supplements required. *All proposals and copies should minimize or eliminate use of non-recyclable or non-reusable materials such as plastic report covers, plastic dividers, vinyl sleeves, and GBC binding.* Binder clips, paper clips, and staples are acceptable. Applications may also be sent via email to [fwate@scfc.gov](mailto:fwate@scfc.gov). Email submission is encouraged. This Notice of Funding Opportunity, the Application Form, and the Grant Budget Worksheet form are available on the SCFC website at <https://www.scfc.gov/management/urban-forestry/urban-forestry-grants/>.

1. **Application Form** Complete the Application Form and be sure that the authorizing signatures are in blue ink. Also be sure to fill in your organization’s federal Employer Identification Number (EIN), your organization’s Fiscal Year End date (month and day), and your organization’s Unique Entity Identifier from the SAM.gov system.
2. **Budget Proposal** Provide an itemized budget of all SCFC expenditures requested **and** for the match – indicate amounts for cash and in-kind contribution values, as well as what they will provide. Each major project component from the proposal narrative **must** have a corresponding budget component and include a detailed budget narrative description for each budget line item. Please follow the Grant Budget Worksheet template.



Budget estimates and match values must be reasonable and directly related to accomplishing the project objective. Refer to the sample budget for guidance, use multiple pages if needed. All expenditures must occur within the approved project period whether funded by the SCFC or with matching funds and should be represented in the timeline. Indirect costs may be included in compliance with 2 CFR 200.414 - <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E/subject-group-ECFRd93f2a98b1f6455/section-200.414> .

3. **Project Schedule/Timeline** Provide a project outline, with the project steps: what will be done, who will do it, when it will be done, and accomplishments upon completion of each step (that is, significant events, deadlines, responsible parties, and measurement of success). All major activities listed must occur within the approved project period whether funded by the SCFC or with matching funds and should be represented in the budget.
4. **Proposal Narrative** The narrative section is limited to **a maximum of 6 pages, double-spaced pages**, not including supplements and additional information. The narrative should be specific and to the point. Departures from the format described below may result in automatic rejection.

## V. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

**A voluntary informational webinar will be held from 12:00 pm–1:00 pm on Monday, October 23, 2023. If your organization would like to attend this webinar, please access the following website to register: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/2698413074002713436>. The webinar will also be made available after October 23, 2023, on the SCFC website, <https://www.scfc.gov/management/urban-forestry/urban-forestry-grants/>,**

### **Subaward Agreement Requirements**

The awards are made with funding from SCFC's agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-313) as amended. Subrecipients must comply with all applicable state and federal regulations, including the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards – 2 CFR 200. Project records must: (1) comply with generally accepted accounting principles; (2) document allowable costs; (3) be supported by source documentation such as canceled checks, paid bills, payrolls, time and attendance records, general ledgers, project ledgers, and contracts; and be **maintained for 3 years** following the end of the agreement period.

Each organization selected for funds will undergo a risk assessment evaluation. In accordance with 2 CFR 200.331, SCFC must determine the ability of the subrecipient to comply with federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the sub-award agreement. Some factors to be considered by SCFC during this risk assessment include:

1. SCFC prior experience with subrecipient (i.e., on-time reports, accurate invoicing, communication)
2. Results of previous site visits or audits
3. New or frequently changing personnel and/or substantially changed internal control systems.
4. Extent and results of any prior federal awarding agency monitoring, debarment, suspension, or delinquency on federal debt.

Organizations deemed at-risk by SCFC may still receive funding. However, SCFC is authorized to impose special conditions on high-risk sub-recipients as listed in 2 CFR 200.207. Examples of special conditions may include additional measures for project monitoring, requiring the recipient to obtain technical assistance, and/or more detailed or frequent financial reporting.

### **Unique Entity Identifier Requirement and SAM.gov Registration**

All subrecipients are required to have a Unique Entity Identifier number to receive SCFC funds. Information on registration and obtaining this number can be obtained at <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>.

### **Payment Process**

SCFC payments are made on a **reimbursement basis**. Subrecipients must file a request for reimbursement; submit documentation/records for all SCFC-funded expenditures, all cash and all in-kind matches prior to payment, including salary and time reports. The funds being requested for reimbursement must be accompanied an equal match amount. Up to four reimbursements may be claimed throughout the award period. SCFC will withhold payment until adequate documentation has been submitted to support SCFC and match expenditures.

### **Program Income**

Program income generated from this award during the period of performance must be used to provide additional services or finished products in line with the recipient's approved activities. Program income may also be used to meet the match requirement. Anticipated program income must be included in the application budget. Any program income not used for eligible purposes must be returned to SCFC. SCFC's requirements for program income are compliant under 2 CFR 200.307.

Program income is gross income directly generated by the SCFC-supported activity or earned only because of the SCFC funding during this period of performance. Program income includes, but is not limited to, income from fees for services performed; the sale of commodities or items fabricated under an award (this includes items sold at cost if the cost of producing the item was funded in whole or partially with SCFC funds); registration fees for conferences.

### **Publications**

All publications, videos or CDs created for distribution to the public for informational or educational purposes must be submitted to SCFC for approval *prior* to reproducing (excluding announcement flyers) and include a statement of non-discrimination. Given that the funds provided are federally sourced, SCFC does not limit usage of materials or data by the Subrecipient in the post-award period. This includes and permits university faculty to publish scholarly works for publication in peer review journals and students to publish or defend a thesis or dissertation. However, all above materials produced because of this SCFC funding (including announcement flyers, scholarly works, and theses) **must** recognize the funding support of this program by including the following statement, or alternate acknowledgement **pre-approved** by SCFC:

**“Funding for this project was provided in part through Urban & Community Forestry from the South Carolina Forestry Commission, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, Southern Region.”**

### **Copyright**

Subrecipients are permitted to copyright documents developed as part of a SCFC project, however, the USDA Forest Service and SCFC shall reserve a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and

irrevocable right to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use, and to authorize others to use, the work for government purposes.

### **Acknowledgement Letters**

All approved subrecipients will be required to compose and send a letter to their respective US Representative and both South Carolina Senators. The letter should acknowledge receipt of the SCFC funds as part of the Farm Bill from the US Forest Service, administered by SCFC, and stress the importance of the funds in helping local communities develop or expand their urban forestry programs and managing their urban forests in a sustainable, productive manner.

The names and addresses of current US Representatives can be found at the web site – <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/> and current Senators can be found at the web site – <http://www.senate.gov/>.

## **VI. CONTACT INFORMATION AND SUBMISSIONS**

### **For additional information about this program, contact:**

Frances Waite  
Urban Forestry Program Coordinator  
South Carolina Forestry Commission  
5500 Broad River Road  
Columbia, SC 29212  
E-mail: [fwaite@scfc.gov](mailto:fwaite@scfc.gov)  
Office Phone: 803-896-8894

SCFC staff can give general information about the process but cannot answer individual questions over the phone. All questions pertaining to the application or specific projects must be emailed to Frances Waite at [fwaite@scfc.gov](mailto:fwaite@scfc.gov). All questions must be submitted by Monday, November 20, 2023. Answers to all questions submitted in writing will be published on the SCFC website (<https://www.scfc.gov/management/urban-forestry/urban-forestry-grants/>) by November 30, 2023. Any amendments to the process or application timeline will also be published by this date on the website.

Visit our website to obtain copies of this document and appropriate forms: <https://www.scfc.gov/management/urban-forestry/urban-forestry-grants/>

**All applications should be signed by the authorized representative of the agency or organization applying. Applications may be submitted electronically to [fwaite@scfc.gov](mailto:fwaite@scfc.gov). Electronic submission is encouraged. Paper applications are also accepted. Paper applications, one (1) original and five (5) copies of the complete proposal package, must be sent to:**

**Urban and Community Forestry Program  
South Carolina Forestry Commission  
5500 Broad River Road  
Columbia, SC 29212**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE 5:00 pm, December 8, 2023**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternate means of communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-A, Whitten Building, 14<sup>th</sup> and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.