

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
2011 UNITED SORGHUM CHECKOFF PROGRAM
Communications Agency

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) is requesting proposals to perform specific communications activities. The goal of this United Sorghum Checkoff Program communications agency RFP call is to identify an agriculturally-focused communications agency with experience in working with checkoff organizations to work with the USCP external affairs director and communications coordinator on specified communications activities.

These specified communications activities are, but are not limited to:

1. Media scheduling and buying with regular ROI reports.
2. Annual survey measuring producers' attitudes toward USCP.
 - a. Strategic and tactical support for USCP communications team.
 - b. Strategic and tactical support includes, but is not limited to:
 - i. Advisement to the USCP communications staff on communication activities and outreach;
 - ii. Assisting with SorghumCheckoff.com website hosting, maintenance and web design; and
 - iii. Crisis communication assistance.

Maximum funds available for this call: \$100,000

PROPOSALS DUE: Close of business (5:00 p.m. CST) September 30, 2011

USCP seeks a contractor with the following qualifications and skills:

- Background and understanding of agriculture and commodities.
- Understanding of the USCP priorities: Crop Improvement, Renewables and High Value Markets¹, and understanding of the audiences within these three priority areas.
- Proven record in agricultural communications, marketing and related survey research, and the capacity to fulfill a full spectrum of communications services.
- Understanding and demonstration of the use of data in communications and marketing.
- The ability to demonstrate return-on-investment.
- Experience working with small, farmer-led organizations.
- Experience in referenda communications.
- Experience in checkoff organizations and the ability to understand and fulfill the reporting requirements and internal controls. Preference to those showing a record of compliance reporting and budget controls.
- Quality and creativity of communications projects.

¹ See Attachment A

USCP Mission Statement

USCP commits to efficiently investing checkoff dollars to increase producer profitability and enhance the sorghum industry.

TERM OF AGREEMENT

The term of this contract shall be for three (3) years. Funds can only be committed for one year at a time and budgets will be re-evaluated annually.

CRITERIA/REQUIREMENTS

All proposals within this RFP will be judged according to the following criteria:

A. Complete Exhibit A & B

- Exhibit A includes all information on contractor and timelines.
- Exhibit B includes budget request.

B. Proposal Summary Page – *Limit to two pages, single spaced using 12-point font*

- Objectives of Proposal – Concisely describe your agency's objectives in providing media buying services and ROI reporting, an annual producer attitude survey, and strategic and tactical support to USCP communications staff to meet the communications needs of the Sorghum Checkoff.
- Benefit of Project to Industry – Address how the proposal will aid the Sorghum Checkoff in achieving its communications goals to improve the sorghum industry and producer profitability.

C. Goals and Objectives

- Describe in detail your **goals and objectives** for:
 - Effectively reaching the audiences described in Attachment A through your agency's strategic and tactical support to the USCP communications staff AND media buying and scheduling to communicate key messages; and
 - Conducting an annual sorghum producer attitude survey.

D. Timeline

- Provide a detailed **plan** on how your agency will provide support for the USCP communications staff's efforts to reach the identified audiences in Attachment A and to communicate the value of the checkoff back to sorghum producers.
- Include a media **schedule/timeline** for reaching each audience within the program priorities. Ideally, key messages will need to focus heavily on crop improvement, and encouraging proper production practices and the economic benefits of growing sorghum. An effective blend of both paid and earned advertising is desired.

E. Evaluation

- Describe how you plan to measure return on investment (ROI) on media buys and earned media.
- Identify methods, analysis and any third parties that would be involved with the process of conducting a survey to identify current sorghum producers' attitudes toward the Sorghum Checkoff.

F. Education/Outreach

- Describe how the value of the USCP programs can be communicated back to the sorghum producer audience.

G. Capabilities of Communications Agency

- Describe the specific roles and capabilities of the communications company including past experience with similar projects/activities, referenda communications, media relationships, digital media resources and development, etc. Provide single page resume of personnel working on the project.
- Provide billable rates and hours to be worked on the project.
- Provide a minimum of three (3) references for related work.
- Work within the constraints as defined by USCP.

SUBMITTAL AND REVIEW SCHEDULE

Proposal **must be received by close of business (5:00 p.m. CST) September 30, 2011**, by Lindsay Kennedy, USCP external affairs director. Proposals received after the deadline will not be reviewed. Proposals must be emailed in PDF format to Lindsay Kennedy at lindsay@sorghumcheckoff.com. You will receive a verification of receipt within two business days.

USCP communications staff will review the submitted proposals and will select semi-finalists by October 21, 2011. Semi-finalists will then be reviewed by the USCP board of directors communications committee chairman and USCP communications staff to select finalists by November 4, 2011. The finalists will be asked to present in person in November 2011 at a designated time place to both the USCP board of directors communications committee and USCP communications staff. A recommendation will then be made to the USCP board of directors.

Contract with the selected agency will start upon approval of the USCP board of directors and USDA-AMS. The USCP board of directors can entertain individual communications project contracts related to USCP program priorities on an as needed basis.

If you have questions, please contact Lindsay Kennedy at lindsay@sorghumcheckoff.com or (877) 643-8727. For further information on USCP, visit www.sorghumcheckoff.com.

DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

EXHIBIT A

Contracting Entity: _____

Project Title: _____

Principal Investigator (main contact):

Name: _____

College/University or Organization: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____ Fax: _____

Administrative Personnel (main contact):

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____ Fax: _____

Other Investigators:

Name & Affiliation	_____	Mailing Address	_____	Telephone	_____	E-mail	_____
--------------------	-------	-----------------	-------	-----------	-------	--------	-------

Cooperators:

Name & Affiliation	_____	Mailing Address	_____	Telephone	_____	E-mail	_____
--------------------	-------	-----------------	-------	-----------	-------	--------	-------

Projected Start Date: _____

Projected Completion Date: _____

Budget Total: *(Total requested from USCP)* _____

State(s) project would be conducted in: All states relevant to the sorghum industry

Approval Signatures:

Principal Investigator _____

Other Required Signature, if any _____

EXHIBIT B

Budget and Payment Schedule:

<u>Personnel</u>	
	\$0.00
<u>Supplies and Materials</u>	
	\$0.00
<u>Travel</u>	
	\$0.00
<u>Miscellaneous</u>	
	0.00
<u>Total</u>	\$0.00

Contractor will bill USCP monthly with **detailed, itemized** statements.

Attachment A – USCP Program Priorities

2010 USCP REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Communications Agency

Background

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program was established in 2008 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Commodity, Promotion, Research and Information Act of 1996. Sorghum Checkoff collections officially began July 1, 2008. The money collected by the Sorghum Checkoff must be used to enhance the industry through research, information and promotion. The money may not be used for lobbying efforts. In February 2011, a referendum was held for producers to vote on the future of the program. In April 2011, USDA announced the USCP referendum had officially passed and would continue checkoff collections and operations.

In 2011, the United Sorghum Checkoff Program board of directors adopted a program-focused approach to achieve its goal of efficiently investing checkoff dollars to increase producer profitability and enhance the sorghum industry. From a communications perspective, these program priorities allow the Sorghum Checkoff to better identify each unique audience that needs to be targeted, in addition to regularly communicating the value of the checkoff back to sorghum producers.

The USCP board identified the following three program priorities:

- Crop Improvement
- High Value Markets
- Renewables

ICE – Information, Communication and Education

In addition, USCP communications will focus its efforts toward the “ICE component” of each of the three program priorities. ICE involves all Information, Communication and Education activities to reach the wide variety of audiences within these program priorities.

The overall USCP communications plan will be a compilation of the three different ICE plans from each program priority and will include outreach to the different audiences within those priorities. This allows the organization to effectively tailor its communications efforts to the needs of each unique audience within crop improvement, high value markets and renewables.

Program Objectives and MPDs

Within each program priority, there are specific program objectives that identify the opportunities and constraints currently present in the sorghum industry. Each program objective also contains an MPD, or items needing Maintenance or Program Development.

MPDs are items within the industry that are either established or needing maintenance, or are areas showing potential and needing program development.

Program objectives, MPDs and targeted audiences are as follows:

Crop Improvement

- Crop Improvement Offense – Proactive crop improvement projects that provide genetic improvement to sorghum.
 - *Audiences:* Private industry, sorghum producers
- Crop Improvement Defense – Projects aimed at providing preventive measures for producers, i.e, disease resistance, pest control, etc.
 - *Audiences:* Private industry, sorghum producers

High Value Markets

- Domestic Food and Nutrition
 - *Audiences:* Nutritionists, consumers, baking industry
- International
 - *Audiences:* Nutritionists, consumers, international food aid organizations, foreign importers of sorghum
- Dairy
 - *Audiences:* Dairies, feedlots, uses of forage grain sorghum in the dairy industry
- MPDs – Livestock, alcoholic beverages using sorghum, companion animals, meat quality attributes, and respective industry meetings, conferences and trade shows.

Renewables

- Green Chemicals
 - *Audiences* – Industry personnel utilizing grain or sweet sorghum to produce green chemicals
 - MPDs – Exploratory meetings
- Co-Products
 - *Audiences* –Aquaculture producers, feed manufacturers, beef feeding industry, ethanol plants using sorghum
 - MPDs – Respective conferences, meetings and trade shows
- Biofuels
 - *Audiences* – Biofuel manufacturers, selective ethanol plants
 - MPDs – Respective conferences, meetings and trade shows
- Sustainability
 - MPDs – Respective conferences, meetings and trade shows