FoodAPS Research Initiative: Understanding SNAP, Food Security, and Geographic Factors in Food Purchase and Acquisition Decisions

2016 Request for Proposals

Date of RFP Announcement: January 12, 2016

Due Date for Requested Letter of Intent: February 12, 2016

Due Date for Applications: March 31, 2016

Executive Summary: The University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research (UKCPR), in cooperation with the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and the Economic Research Service (ERS), will competitively award grants to qualified individuals and institutions to provide rigorous research that utilizes the FoodAPS National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey to expand our understanding of household food behaviors and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program including (1) the issues of benefit adequacy, diet quality, cost of a healthy diet, and food security, and (2) the role of the local food environment and other geographic factors. In addition to the FoodAPS data, geographically linked data on the local food environment and food prices compiled as part of the FoodAPS Geography Component (FoodAPS-GC) are available for awardees. It is anticipated that about 3 grants of up to $50,000 each will be awarded.

I.   Background and Purpose

A.   FoodAPS Data

Background:

USDA's National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS) is a nationally representative survey of American households that collects comprehensive data about household food purchases and acquisitions during a 7-day survey week between April 2012 and January 2013. Detailed information was collected about foods purchased or otherwise acquired for consumption at home and away from home, including foods acquired through food and nutrition assistance programs. In addition, the survey collects a wide array of demographic and other information about the households including information on food security status and SNAP participation. The survey includes nationally representative data from over 4,800 households, including SNAP households and low-income households not participating in SNAP—both of which are oversampled in the survey, as well as households income-ineligible for SNAP. FoodAPS provides information about household size and composition, available resources (including food and nutrition assistance program benefits), and acquired food items (and, in most cases, their prices). As such, this is a unique dataset for research studies that support the design and implementation of policies and regulations affecting America's food and nutrition assistance programs. For a more detailed description of the survey, see http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/foodaps-national-household-food-acquisition-and-purchase-survey.aspx.

FoodAPS survey data are linked with data from the FoodAPS-GC. These are extant data on the local food environment of the sampled households based originally on Nielsen TDLinx and FNS Store Tracking and Redemption System (STARS) sources. The FoodAPS-GC contains information about measures of access to food stores, farmers' market and restaurants; area-level socio-economic characteristics; and some food policy information, such as state and local tax policies. Geographic data on price and the food environment of sampled households are available at different levels of geography, including counties or groups of counties that are the survey's Primary Sampling Units (PSUs), census tracts and census block groups within those PSUs. In addition, a composite price index based on data from IRI for stores in the PSUs and nearby PSUs of the FoodAPS has been created and can be linked to the FoodAPS.

Data access and confidentiality requirements:

Because FoodAPS data include confidential information about households and retail food outlets, ERS has a legal obligation to prevent accidental or willful disclosure of information that might identify a survey respondent and/or information about a retail food outlet. FoodAPS has invoked the protections and regulations of the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) of 2002. CIPSEA requires that the collected data be used strictly for statistical purposes and promises respondents high levels of data protection against disclosure of identifying information. Penalties for a violation of CIPSEA procedures can result in a fine of up to $250,000 and/or five years in prison.

All researchers, including awarded grantees and ERS staff, must be CIPSEA-trained and sign a pledge of confidentiality before being granted access to restricted data.

IRI requires that awardees with access to their data sign the attached Third Party Agreement (TPA) with them. ERS will help the awardees with the process of submitting the TPAs.

Once formal agreements have been signed, access to the restricted-use FoodAPS data will be obtained via a secure data enclave managed by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). Researchers with approved research proposals will need to lease special thin-client devices from NORC that permit access only to the data enclave. The annual cost for one (lead) researcher to access the data at NORC is $5,200 per year, and must be included as part of the budget request herein (along with the pro-rated amount beyond 12 months up to 18 months of the grant). One machine can be shared among collaborators. For each additional researcher listed on the Project Agreement as a collaborator who requires their own thin client to access the data, the annual cost of an additional thin client machine ($850 per machine) should be included in the project budget. More information is available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/foodaps-national-household-food-acquisition-and-purchase-survey/data-access.aspx.

B.   Topics

In fiscal year 2014, UKCPR in cooperation with ERS and the University of Illinois, awarded 12 grants for research utilizing FoodAPS. A list of those projects and grantees can be found here: http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/foodaps-national-household-food-acquisition-and-purchase-survey/grant-awards.aspx . In addition to these 12 projects, there are 18 other ongoing projects by independent contractors, along with extensive internal research by ERS using the FoodAPS data, which can be found here http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/foodaps-national-household-food-acquisition-and-purchase-survey/research-topics.aspx .

We seek high priority research that builds on the current projects using FoodAPS with a particular emphasis on topics pertaining to SNAP, which is the cornerstone of USDA's food and nutrition assistance programs, accounting for almost three-quarters of all Federal domestic food and nutrition assistance spending in fiscal year 2015. The program provides monthly benefits for eligible participants to purchase food items at authorized food stores. SNAP benefits are based on an assessment of need that takes into account household size, income, adjustments to income, assets, and the cost of a nutritious diet. FoodAPS

differs from other surveys insofar as it provides detailed information on food purchases (e.g., quantities, prices, and nutrients), demographic characteristics, food security, and the local food environment. FoodAPS is composed of SNAP participants, eligible nonparticipant households, and households ineligible for SNAP. We seek proposals using the best approaches to address a myriad of issues related to SNAP. Topics of interest include, but are not restricted to,

- How does the impact of SNAP on food insecurity from FoodAPS differ from results from other studies, after correcting for selection bias?
- Within the subpopulation of SNAP recipients, how do food insecurity rates differ by benefit level? Of particular interest is the potential for non-linearities in the effect of SNAP benefits.

A key advantage to FoodAPS is that SNAP participation and benefit amount are provided both from survey reports and from direct administrative matched records. Thus comparing estimates using both survey and administrative reports is of interest.

We also seek high priority research on local food environmental factors that affect food purchase and acquisition decisions, and which may also interact with SNAP. These projects are required to use (a) the household-based FoodAPS data and (b) food environment data which may include either the FoodAPS GC data, the basket price estimates from IRI data discussed above, or other data. Among other topics, we are interested in research on

- How do SNAP households differ from non-SNAP households (both SNAP-eligible and ineligible) in terms of the cost of food acquisitions versus the costs of available similar baskets using information from the basket prices from the IRI data and FoodAPS?
- Does the value of SNAP households' food acquisitions exceed or fall below the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan? And if so, how does this differ by household size, and across high- and low-cost areas.

A central component of any successful proposal must include a discussion of how the proposed analyses cannot be done using any existing publicly available data sets.

II. Award Information

A. *Award Summary*

We anticipate funding approximately 3 grants at a maximum ceiling of $50,000 per award. Cost reimbursable contracts will be established between the University of Kentucky Research Foundation (UKRF) and the grantee institution, organization, or individual.

Underwriting for awards made under this announcement is provided by a cooperative research agreement between the University of Kentucky Research Foundation with the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (CFDA No. 10.253, Agreement Number 58-5000-3-0066). As per 7 U.S.C. 3318(b), indirect cost recovery and tuition remission are *not* allowable expenses for land grant and state cooperating institutions. For all other organizations, indirect cost recovery is limited to no more than 10 percent of direct costs, and tuition is an allowable expense. See 7 Federal Register, Vol. 73, No. 183/Friday September 19, 2008, CFR Part 550, Section 550.14 for explanation.

For the purposes of this award the budget period will commence on July 1, 2016 and conclude on December 31, 2017. Grant awards do not allow for reimbursement of pre-award costs.

B.   *Eligibility*

Proposed principal investigator(s) for grants must hold a Ph.D. or equivalent academic degree, and be employed at a college, university, or research organization. Members of minority and underrepresented groups are strongly encouraged to apply.

C.   *Disqualification Factors*

Applications that exceed the budget ceiling amount, that do not utilize the FoodAPS data, that do not address the topical domains, or that otherwise disregard RFP application guidelines will be considered non-responsive and not eligible for funding under this mechanism.

III.   **Application Submission Information**

A.   *Letter of Intent to Submit an Application*

If you plan to submit an application, we request, but do not require, a letter of intent to be submitted via email by February 12, 2016. The letter should only contain the names and contact information of any principal investigator and co-investigators, the title of the planned project, and the name of the college/university/organization that will serve as the point of contact for award administration. This letter is not mandatory and is only to be used for planning purposes for grant reviews. Please submit the letter of intent as a Word or PDF document to Program Manager, ukcpr@uky.edu.

B.   *Submission of Full Proposals*

An original plus 5 hard copies of the completed application must be received by 5:00pm EST on March 31, 2016. Submit applications to the University of Kentucky, Center for Poverty Research, Gatton Building Suite 234, 550 South Limestone Street, Lexington, KY 40506-0034. For express mail delivery additional contact information is phone: (859) 257-7641; and email: ukcpr@uky.edu In addition to the paper copies one complete application must be sent electronically as a Word or PDF document to ukcpr@uky.edu by 5:00pm EST on March 31, 2016. Email acknowledgement of receipt of all application materials will be provided on or about the close of business on April 8, 2016.

C.   *Content and Format of Grant Applications*

Applicants must limit their project narrative to no more than 5 pages. For the purposes of this announcement the narrative begins with the Research Question and Policy Relevance section and ends with the Key Staff, Budget Narrative, and Timeline. This page limit excludes appendices and front matter such as cover page, table of contents, and project summary. The narrative must be double spaced, 1 inch margins on all sides, and standard 12 pt font. Front matter and appendices may be single spaced but must adhere to other requirements on font size and margins.

UKCPR seeks applications from institutions who can demonstrate the capacity to undertake rigorous research projects, both administratively and technically. Applicants should specify in the project narrative how they will be able to fulfill the project goals described in the RFP. In addition applicants must specify administrative arrangements that will minimize start-up costs. If funding under this mechanism is to be used in conjunction with funds from other sources then the applicant must specify the sources and duration of those other funds and how the additional resources in this competition will be leveraged to accomplish project goals.

Each application must contain the following components in order

1.   Cover Page
     Each application must contain a cover page with the title of the proposed research; applicant's name and institutional affiliation (if multiple investigators, a PI must be identified); and contact information including full mailing address, email address, phone and fax numbers. The name and contact information of the institutional research representative should also be identified.

2.   Table of Contents
     The table of contents must identify the page location of each major section and subsection, beginning with the Research Question and Policy Relevance.

3.   Project Summary
     A key component of the successful application will be a non-technical one page summary that in parenthetical format contains the objectives, methods, data (FoodAPS and/or FoodAPS-GC), policy implications, budget request, and timeline of the proposed project. The Project Summaries of each awardee will be posted on the UKCPR web page. The header of each page should contain the title of the project and names of the PI(s).

4.   Research Question and Policy Relevance
     The application shall present an analysis of key trends and past research on the focal area of interest in the proposed project. The background motivation should demonstrate the applicant's command over the policy and research significance of trends in the question of interest, as well as the past research on the issue. The section should also demonstrate how the proposed research expands upon the corpus of knowledge on the topic, including those projects funded in prior FoodAPS competitions.

5.   Research Design
     The application shall present a research design for the 18-month performance period. This prospectus should identify key research questions, conceptual and theoretical foundations of the focal hypotheses to be tested, key variables in the FoodAPS data, and statistical methods of analysis. The research design shall also contain a detailed timeline of project goals and deliverables.

     All proposals must contain a timely plan for obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval or exemption from human subjects research. Typically secondary data analysis is eligible for exemption approval. The University of Kentucky Research Foundation will not execute subcontracts without such approval.

6.   Expected Results and Impact
     The applicant shall describe the type of information expected to result from the effort and link it to potential policy and scientific relevance in advancing our understanding of SNAP and/or the role of geographic factors on household food consumption decisions.

7.   Key Staff, Budget Narrative, and Timeline
     The application shall identify all key personnel involved in the project, including principal investigators(s), co-investigators, and senior staff. The applicant's budget and budget narrative must link the research to the funding requested, including the appropriateness of the level and distribution of funds to the successful execution of the project. This narrative includes identifying the distribution of effort of all key personnel to the project. As stipulated in Section I.A of the RFP, each applicant must budget for use of the thin client at $5,200 per year, and pro-rated for any time beyond 12 months up

to $2,600 if a full 18 months access is requested). If additional thin clients are required, they must be budgeted at $850 per year (and pro-rated for time beyond 12 months). Moreover, as stipulated in II.A of the RFP, indirect cost recovery and tuition remission are *not* allowable expenses for land grant and state cooperating institutions. For all other organizations, indirect cost recovery is limited to no more than 10 percent of direct costs, and tuition is an allowable expense. Any cost normally treated as an indirect cost being budgeted as a direct cost, will require budget narrative justification. The availability, or potential availability, of additional funds to be used in conjunction with those requested in this announcement should be made clear here, and the uses of those additional funds identified. All awardees are required to attend and should budget for one trip to Washington, DC for a one-day progress workshop anticipated in September, 2017.

8. Curriculum Vitae
    Curriculum Vitae of principal investigators(s) and co-investigators shall be included in the appendices. The CV should include highest educational degree and institution, current and past employment and professional appointments, concurrent and prior funded grants, and a listing of reports and publications in the past 5 years that are pertinent to the research proposed herein.

IV. Application Review Information

Applications will be initially screened for relevance to the subject areas described above, academic qualifications of the principal investigator, the ability of the applicant institution to administer a grant, inclusion of requested proposal sections, and adherence to RFP guidelines, such as the budget ceiling and page limits. Those proposals not passing the initial screen will be notified to that effect in writing. Those proposals passing the initial screen will undergo a full review by a Technical Review Panel consisting of nationally recognized experts. Technical Review Panel members are not eligible for funding under this mechanism, and extreme care will be taken to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Proposals will be evaluated based upon a 100 point scale across several factors, including:

- **Research Merit** (40 points): Among other criteria, proposals will be scored based on the importance and relevance of the proposed project to research foci identified in this announcement, the clarity of the questions posed, how the research expands on the existing literature, and, most critically, how it assists USDA in meeting its strategic goal of improving the nation's nutrition and health.

- **Methodology** (30 points): Proposals will be judged based upon the appropriateness of the proposed research design for the questions being posed, the feasibility of the methodology given the FoodAPS data, and the applicant's grasp of the significance of past research and the extent to which the proposed methods expand upon prior studies.

- **Personnel** (20 points): Reviewers will judge the proposed key personnel for the necessary skills, experience, and track record to produce an excellent product. Included in this will be the time commitment of senior personnel to the project in relation to the proposed budget and other funded projects.

- **Budget and Workplan** (10 points): Among other criteria, proposals will be judged based on the feasibility of the timeline proposed, the reasonableness of the budget, and the quality of infrastructure at the PI's institution to successfully execute the proposed project.

In addition to the points awarded above, reviewers will weigh proposals based on overlap with ongoing and completed projects, the extent to which the proposal integrates with the other highly scored proposals to form a more cohesive portrait, and potential future research and policy benefits.

V.   Award Administration Information

A.   *Award Notices*

Applicants will be notified of grant award on or about June 15, 2016. Due to the anticipated volume of proposals we cannot guarantee the provision of detailed written comments to applicants who are not funded.

B.   *Contact Information*

Questions relating to this announcement should be directed to the UKCPR Program Manager via E-mail at ukcpr@uky.edu .

C.   *Reporting requirements*

The awardee shall submit no fewer than three reports during the duration of the grant:

(i) a brief progress report no later than January 31, 2017 summarizing progress toward completion, especially highlighting the achievement of key milestones set out in the Workplan. Changes in personnel and in budget allocation across categories, and challenges and how they were overcome should be included in the progress report.
(ii) a draft final report two weeks prior to the conference on or about September 2017 held in Washington, DC.
(iii) a final report due no later than December 31, 2017. The report shall include the following components: Title Page, Acknowledgement, 250-word Abstract, a 3-5 page Executive Summary, Introduction, Research Methods, Data, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion.

Submit progress and final reports as a Word document to UKCPR Program Manager at ukcpr@uky.edu .

D.   *Invoicing*

The Awardee shall submit quarterly invoices to University of Kentucky, Center for Poverty Research, Gatton Building Suite 234, 550 South Limestone St., Lexington, KY 40506-0034. The invoice shall include a brief description of work and expenses incurred, and include the contract number. Final invoices will not be paid until final reports are received.

E.   *Terms and Conditions*

1.   Award Terms

UKCPR reserves the right to negotiate with the project investigators and/or their institutional representatives regarding the scope of work proposed, including funding level and project duration.

2.   Publication

(i)   The report and any attendant work products produced as a result of this award shall contain the following

"This project was supported with a grant from the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research through funding by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service and the Food and Nutrition Service,

Agreement Numbers 58-5000-1-0050 and 58-5000-3-0066. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policies of the sponsoring agencies."

(ii)   UKCPR intends to self publish edited versions of the reports in a collected volume available free of charge to the public at http://www.ukcpr.org/ Grantees retain publication rights to their projects for peer-reviewed outlets.

3.   Rights to Data

Because of the security and confidentiality requirements of FoodAPS data and the proprietary nature of some of the FoodAPS-GC data, they shall remain in the custody of ERS and its designees, and shall not be released to any party.

Awardees that use IRI data will be required to sign a Third Party Agreement with them. Projects that plan to use the basket price measures created from the IRI data do not need a TPA with IRI. The major terms and conditions are:

1.   Awardees must make sure that access to the data will be limited to individuals listed on the TPA.
2.   The shared data must not be re-purposed and used by individuals on the TPA for any other project or activity.
3.   At the conclusion of the research named on the TPA, the shared data (and their derivatives) must be returned to ERS, or deleted with a notice to the ERS that the data have been destroyed.
4.   The shared data must remain secure at awardee's location, and data confidentiality, particularly non-disclosure during the conduct of this research, must be observed.
5.   Awardees must maintain the shared data in an encrypted state and restrict access to authorized individuals on the TPA. Awardees must have monitoring tools and controls sufficient to alert of any unauthorized attempt to access Licensed Materials or breach any controls that have been put in place to insure the confidentiality.
6.   For Security, the expert advice is to store the data on one PC, that is, at a minimum, password protected and locked when not in use. Data should not be transferred to portable media.   If the data are stored on a laptop, the laptop should be encrypted.

F.   Disclaimer

Nothing in this announcement should be construed as to obligate the University of Kentucky, the Economic Research Service, or the University of Illinois to make any awards whatsoever. Awards are contingent upon funding availability and research needs.

The University of Kentucky is an equal opportunity institution.

Applicant Checklist

Full Proposals should include:

1. Cover Page
        a. Title of proposed research
        b. PI name, Organization, & contact information
        c. Topical domain of the proposed research
        d. Authorized representative & contact information

2. Table of Contents

3. Project Summary (1 page, single spaced)

(Note: Sections 4-7 are to be double spaced; 5 pages max)

4. Research Question and Policy Relevance

5. Research Design

6 Expected Results and Impact

7. Key Staff, Budget Narrative, and Timeline

8. Curriculum Vitae

9. Appendices (e.g. bibliography, letters of support)