REQUEST FOR CONCEPT NOTES

Strengthening the U.S. Agricultural Research System

Issued: September 14, 2012

Concept Notes Due: October 5, 2012

The U.S. agricultural research, education, and extension system is one of the most successful in the world, responsible for the transformation of American agriculture as well as providing the scientific and educational foundation for millions of researchers, businesses, and agricultural operations internationally. The system has evolved considerably over the last 150 years, but it is now being challenged in new ways, among them, to: deal with the prospect of climate change; address the growing scarcity of essential production resources, such as land and water, while increasing production to sufficiently feed more than nine billion people; strengthen management systems across the supply chain that keep production costs down and improve environmental sustainability from farm to fork; train and recruit food and ag researchers, scientists and other professionals; and respond to consumers’ needs and preferences for safe, tasty, and healthy food.

AGree, a long-term, collaborative initiative seeking to transform U.S. policy affecting the food and agriculture system at home and abroad, is now soliciting best-in-class ideas for innovations in policy and practice regarding ways in which the public agricultural research, education, and extension (REE) system in the United States should be strengthened to improve the productivity and environmental performance of agriculture and effectively address emerging challenges. Through this Request for Concept Notes, AGree hopes to engage members of diverse communities to develop ideas that will make public agricultural research, education, and extension – at both national and state levels – more relevant and more effective.

The following questions have been raised and explored during discussions within AGree about potential strategies for strengthening the U.S. agricultural research, education, and extension system to deliver long-term benefits around the world.

- Are we well served by the current mixture of land grant universities, USDA Agricultural Research Stations, and other public sector institutions conducting food and agricultural research? Do we need more or fewer institutions involved in conducting agricultural research?
- What changes are needed to ensure that our research needs are met and priorities are addressed with the least amount of duplication? Is there currently too much duplicative research?
• Are new mechanisms needed to ensure that publicly funded research results in publicly available information and benefits?
• How do we best attract and train scientists and students from the U.S. and abroad to improve the productivity and environmental performance of agriculture in developing countries where yield gaps are currently high?
• How do we best attract and train U.S. students in disciplines that will enable increases in the agricultural output of U.S. systems while also substantially reducing those systems’ environmental footprint?
• How can we increase rewards for superior teaching and training of students to prepare them for success in a dynamic industry?
• How do we do all of this while driving the most efficient use of resources?

Proposals should consider issues affecting the public sector agricultural REE system including, but not limited to, growing private sector investment in public sector agricultural research institutions and the fact that Congressional earmarks are more limited than in the past. Proposals that focus solely on increasing funding without proposing other changes to strengthen the system will not be considered.

Proposals may be submitted by any individual or institution. Interested authors should submit a two-to-three page abstract that identifies a proposed strategy that will lead to a significant strengthening of the research system and outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the concept, along with brief biographies of the individual/team that would develop a more detailed recommendation, if selected. The abstract should provide sufficient detail for reviewers to assess the nature and feasibility of their idea.

Approximately two to four finalists will be selected by AGree in mid-October for funding of up to $3,000 to complete a short paper (approximately 10 - 15 pages excluding appendices) that describes in greater detail the recommendation outlined in the concept note. These short papers will help inform the development of policy recommendations and may be used as the basis for discussion at future AGree events.

• Proposals must be emailed to AGreeConceptNotes@merid.org
• The deadline for submitting proposals is October 5, 2012.
• Award decisions are expected to be made by October 15, 2012.
• Selected authors will be expected to submit final papers by December 3, 2012.
• For any questions about AGree or concept note submissions, please contact Selena Elmer (selmer@merid.org).