Objectives

1. Introduce UTRGV SARA
2. Sponsored Programs at SARA
3. SARA’s USDA-RD Programs
4. RD Grant Development Best Practices
5. RD Grant Development Challenges
6. RD Grant Development Do’s and Don’ts
7. Q & A
UTRGV Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Advancement (SARA)

- Launched in September 2017

- Purpose: improve agricultural sustainability and advance rural communities through multidisciplinary approaches that involve the environmental, economic, and social aspects of sustainability

- Center dedicated to research, education, and outreach on sustainable approaches to agriculture and rural development
SARA RD
Service Area
Focus
UTRGV SARA – Integrated Sponsored Programs

**Research**
- Community-based research on issues impacting Sub Tropical producers
- Multi-disciplinary, with focus on non-conventional agricultural production

**Education**
- Experiential learning, research opportunities for students
- Curriculum development & teacher training

**Outreach**
- Events, Training, and Technical Assistance
- Deliver research results to producers and rural communities

*Integrated, multi-disciplinary sponsored programs*
UTRGV SARA—Current USDA Awards

1. Experiential training in use of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) technology for agriculture applications – USDA-NIFA-HSI
2. Building Agriculture Science Education through a Florida-Texas-New Mexico Consortium – USDA-NIFA-HSI
4. Biological Control of Arundo Donax – USDA- Agricultural Research Service
5. Brevipalpus mite species on Rutaceous and non-rutaceous plants in dooryards in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas – USDA-APHIS
7. South-West Texas StrikeForce Initiative for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers – USDA-NIFA
8. StrikeForce Initiative for OASDVFR – USDA-OASDVFR
9. Texas Rural Cooperative Center – USDA-Rural Development-Rural Cooperative Development Grant
10. South Texas Rural Producer Assistance Project – USDA-Rural Development-Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grant
UTRGV SARA—Integrated Projects

Research

Education

Outreach

SOAR Initiative

UAS

BFRDP

Rural Development Projects
UTRGV SARA—Current USDA Rural Development Projects

1. Texas Rural Cooperative Center (TRCC) – Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program

2. South Texas Rural Producer Assistance Project (STRAP) – Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grant

Current RD Projects – TRCC

Texas Rural Cooperative Center – USDA-RD-RCDG

2002-2017

Mission: Improve the economic conditions of rural Texas by assisting with the startup, expansion, and operational improvement of rural cooperatives and mutually-owned businesses.

Goals:

1. **Advocacy**—Increase the awareness of rural cooperatives, the services provided by TRCC, and USDA programs that support cooperative development.

2. **Training**—Increase the capacity of start-up and existing cooperatives and mutually-owned businesses through a broad array of training.

3. **Technical Assistance**—Improve the operating efficiency and sustainability of start-up and existing cooperatives and mutually-owned businesses through technical assistance.
Current RD Projects – SDGG

So. Texas Rural Producer Assistance Project– USDA-RD-SDGG

2014-2017

Goal: Improve livelihoods of Hispanic and Women producers in rural So. Tx. through culturally-appropriate technical assistance

Technical Assistance increases the capacity of producers to:

1. Apply efficient production technologies and techniques
2. Access and serve local multiple direct markets
Current RD Projects – STEEP

South Texas Energy Efficiency Project – USDA-RD-EA/REDA

2015-2017

Purpose: improve energy efficiency and sustainability for agricultural producers throughout South Texas

Activities:

1. Perform Energy audits
2. Liaise with local institutions
3. Involve faculty
RD Grant Development—Best Practices

Pre-proposal

1. Understand local and regional needs – Match program to needs, not other way around
2. Close contact and coordination with clients & communities served
3. Perform needs research prior to release of proposal
Pre-proposal

1. Identify target programs and anticipate RFA release
2. Research Program—understand why it was created and its purpose
3. Develop strong communication with State RD Office
RD Grant Development—Best Practices

Reading Request for Application

1. Understand structure and logic of RD Grant Applications – structure is essential

2. Read NOFA carefully and internalize the language used

3. Focus on Eligibility & Scoring Criteria and refer to prior score cards
Developing the Proposal

1. Start with a Logic Model even if not required

2. Make logical argument: Need → Approach → Outputs → Outcomes

3. Needs Analysis needs to be simple, compelling & fully supported
RD Grant Development—Best Practices

Design Elements

Design elements of proposal

1. Clean, easy to read
2. Use of images, text boxes, charts
3. Numbered lists & bullet points when possible
RD Grant/Program Challenges

1. One-year funding cycles for many programs – Planning challenges
2. Innovate & grow while remaining focused on core mission & customer needs
3. Negotiating needs/systems of USDA-RD with host institution
4. Maintaining responsiveness & flexibility
5. Match requirements, as always
RD Grant Development – Do’s and Don’ts

1. Grant Writer should have TA background – understand both sides of the coin
2. Establish and reinforce eligibility
3. Avoid simple, but critical potholes (certifications, DUNS/SAM code)
4. Explain what makes your situation unique & important – use powerful language and sell it
5. Get feedback early & Iterate until the very end
6. As of September 26th, 2017 – PAPER SUBMISSION!
1. UTRGV familiarity with RD programs has made it regional leader for serving RD clients

2. Significant changes underway at USDA and RD – Pay attention
Questions?

COLIN.CAIN@UTRGV.EDU

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Center for Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Advancement