

**2008 RIDGE Program**  
(Formerly the Food Assistance and Nutrition Research  
Innovation Grants Program)



***Exploring Food Assistance and Nutrition Issues  
Among the South's Vulnerable Populations***

**Deadline Date: Postmarked by June 20, 2008**

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) is pleased to announce its continued support for food and nutrition-related research focusing on the South under the new banner of the RIDGE Program (RIDGE refers to Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics). As in past years, the program is designed to support innovative research that advances our knowledge and understanding of food assistance and nutrition issues impacting vulnerable populations in the South. The Economic Research Service remains a valuable partner with the SRDC in supporting this important work.

The maximum amount allowed for any proposal is \$35,000. Individuals submitting proposals will be allowed to include up to 10% indirect cost rate in their budget request. However, the total cost of the project must not exceed the \$35,000 level. ***Please note that new topics have been added to this year's list of research areas.***

This document provides specific guidelines for individuals wishing to submit a formal proposal to the SRDC. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at any time.

**KEY INFORMATION**

<b>PROGRAM TITLE:</b>	<i>Exploring Food Assistance and Nutrition Issues among the South's Vulnerable Populations: The RIDGE Program</i>
<b>FUNDING AGENCY:</b>	Southern Rural Development Center, in partnership with the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture
<b>GRANT AMOUNT AND TYPE OF RESEARCH:</b>	Seed funding, in an amount not to exceed \$35,000 per project, will be awarded to projects of scientific merit that address important aspects of food assistance issues in the South. Indirect costs of up to 10 percent will be allowed.
<b>DEADLINE:</b>	Proposals must be postmarked no later than June 20, 2008
<b>AWARD NOTIFICATION:</b>	August 15, 2008

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Southern Rural Development Center's 2008 RIDGE Program is committed to maintaining its focus on the host of food assistance-related issues that have bearing on the region's vulnerable populations and communities including the persistently poor, children and youth, single parent families, elderly and racial/ethnic minorities. Moreover, the Center is interested in understanding the unique challenges facing individuals and families embedded in various spatial localities, be they in nonmetropolitan counties, rural places or low-wealth areas of the South.

## RESEARCH THEMES/TOPICS:

The SRDC is seeking proposals that address any one (or more) of the following research themes or topics. If appropriate, grantees are encouraged to tap existing secondary data sources to explore their research questions.

### 1. HIGH POVERTY AREAS

- Exploring patterns and/or outcomes of food/nutrition assistance programs among individuals and families living in “persistently poor” or “high poverty” counties of the South, especially those living in the Black Belt, Mid South Delta, Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley and/or Appalachian regions of the South.

### 2. IMPACT OF IMMIGRANTS ON NUTRITION PROGRAMS

- Examining the extent to which the influx of new immigrants (legal and illegal) into metro and non-metro areas of the South has impacted participation in WIC and other child nutrition programs.
- Exploring the food assistance challenges, including levels of food insecurity, among immigrant populations in the South

### 3. OBESITY AND NUTRITION ISSUES

- Exploring the prevalence of, and factors associated with, obesity among rural residents of the South. This may include efforts to understand the links between participation in food assistance/nutrition programs and key outcomes such as overweight/obesity status, food insecurity, diet quality and/or overall health.
- Identifying and documenting the impact of efforts to expand access to healthy food offerings in schools (including the elimination of vending machines) on students’ overall health status, absenteeism and school performance.

### 4. USE OF FOOD/NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- Assessing the current use of food assistance programs across metropolitan, micropolitan and noncore-based populations, and documenting key factors that have altered the use of such programs over time.
- Assessing the impact of major economic shocks (such as the loss of major employers, family financial hardships linked to the mortgage crisis, increasing energy costs, and/or natural disasters, i.e., floods, tornados, etc.) on the need and demand for food and nutrition assistance programs by key participations.
- Assessing what happens to those leaving the Food Stamp program in terms of food costs, food choices, level of food insecurity, and/or nutritional status.

### 5. FACTORS AFFECTING FOOD CHOICES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

- Examining how place-based factors may affect the nutritional health of local residents such as the availability of a variety of healthy food products by type of stores, the cost of healthy diets, the use of nutritional or dietary supplements, diet quality and access to healthy foods across rural/urban places or metro/non-metro counties.

## 6. COMMUNITY-BASED FOOD PROCUREMENT OPTIONS

- Examining the costs and benefits of alternative food procurement, distribution and delivery systems to support food assistance programs such as: (1) farm to school contracts to purchase locally produced foods for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs; (2) the purchasing of locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables on the part of Food Stamp or WIC participants; or (3) community gardens or buying coops that help expand local access to healthy foods on the part of low-income individuals/families.

## 7. POLICY CHOICES

- Examining how new policy options or strategies (either ones that recently have been implemented or ones that are now under discussion) might improve or seriously alter the effectiveness and integrity of food assistance-related programs in the South, such as the Local School Wellness Policy launched in 2006 (i.e., efforts that encourage healthy eating and physical activity on the part of students), or changes being debated or proposed in the Food Stamp Program, the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, other Child Nutrition programs (after school, summer feeding, day care, Headstart, etc.), or the WIC Program.

## APPLICATION GUIDELINES:

All proposals must be organized in the following manner.

- **Title of the proposal**
- **The specific research topic(s) being addressed:** Indicate with which of the seven major themes/topics listed under the heading “RESEARCH THEMES/TOPICS” your proposal is most closely aligned.
- **Principal Investigator(s) and Collaborators:** List the name and institutional affiliation of each research team member. Provide the telephone number, fax number, mailing address and e-mail address of the Principal Investigator(s).
- **Project Summary:** Provide a 250-word summary of your proposal.
- **Project Description:** This represents the most critical part of your proposal. It should be 6-10 pages in length and should be single-spaced. Please use a 12-point font to ensure easy readability. The “Project Description” should include the following:
  1. ***Introduction and Problem Statement:*** Provide an overview of the current state of knowledge regarding the research problem of interest in your study. In addition, specify what your research proposal will do to further advance our understanding of this specific food assistance or nutrition related issue in the South.
  2. ***Objectives:*** Identify the specific research objectives to be pursued in your project.
  3. ***Research Methods:*** Describe the research methodology to be undertaken for each objective. If sampling is being proposed, provide a strong rationale as to the relevance of the site(s) selected for your research investigation. If an existing data set is being utilized, discuss the quality and relevance of this data source in addressing the subject of your proposal.
  4. ***Data Analysis:*** Indicate the statistical procedures that you anticipate using for your data analysis.

5. Application of the Research Results: Provide an assessment of the relevance your research might have in terms of its contribution to the scientific literature and/or its relevance to policy and/or practice (that is, what does it imply with regard to policy or program shifts that may be needed to further strengthen food assistance or nutrition efforts in the South?).
6. Project Timeline: Provide a timeline of activities to be completed over the course of the project.

**PLEASE NOTE** that grantees will have approximately 15 months (October 2008 through December 2009) to complete their projects. A “no cost” extension beyond the 15-month period will not be allowed since all projects **MUST BE** completed by mid-December 2009.

7. Proposed Budget: Specify the anticipated budget expenditures for your project and include a brief justification for these budget expenditures. As noted earlier, only a 10 percent indirect cost is allowed.

**PLEASE NOTE** that the budget must include funds for ONE person (typically the project PI) to participate in a two-day research conference being organized by the Economic Research Service. This conference, to be held in Washington, D.C., in the Fall of 2009, will provide a forum for awardees to share the findings of their food assistance and nutrition research projects.

- **Relevant Experiences of Researcher(s) and Curriculum Vita**: Briefly highlight the type of past activities in which the applicant(s) has been engaged that are relevant to the proposed research project. This could include a listing of relevant publications, reports and contributed papers. An abbreviated curriculum vita (of approximately 3-4 pages) of the Principal Investigator(s) should be included with the project proposal packet.

## **PROJECT DURATION:**

All awardees will have 15 months to complete the proposed project (October 2008 through December 2009). Projects will begin no later than October 1, 2008, and will terminate on December 31, 2009.

## **REVIEW PROCESS:**

The SRDC's *Rural South RIDGE Food Assistance Research Advisory Committee* will be involved in reviewing all grant proposals. An Economic Research Service research team will offer input as well. All proposals will be judged using the following criteria:

1. The scientific merit of the proposed research (25 percent).
2. Its relevance to food assistance/nutrition issues, particularly in the South (20 percent).
3. The soundness of the methodology being proposed (20 percent).
4. The potential contribution of the research in informing policy discussions at federal, regional, state and/or local level and/or in refining program outreach/delivery activities (20 percent).
5. The qualifications of the individual or team who will provide leadership to the research effort (15 percent).

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Feel free to contact Bo Beaulieu ([ljb@srdc.msstate.edu](mailto:ljb@srdc.msstate.edu)) or Vicki Vaughn ([vickiv@srdc.msstate.edu](mailto:vickiv@srdc.msstate.edu)) by email or by calling the SRDC office (662-325-3207).

### **MAILING OF COMPLETED PROPOSALS:**

Please send three copies of your proposal to the SRDC. If you plan to mail your proposal by regular mail, please use the following address:

Southern Rural Development Center  
Box 9656  
Mississippi State University  
Mississippi State, MS 39762-9656

If you will be sending your proposal by overnight delivery, please use the following address:

Southern Rural Development Center  
190 Bost North, Room 410  
Mississippi State University  
Mississippi State, MS 39762  
Telephone: 662-325-3207

No faxed or emailed copies of the proposals will be accepted.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR DOCUMENT MUST BE POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN  
JUNE 20, 2008**