November 10, 2026

Request for Proposal
Central America Initiative

The Organization

The Southern United States Trade Association (SUSTA) is a 501(c) non-profit international trade development organization which combines federal, state and industry resources for export market development. SUSTA's member states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

SUSTA partners with its member state Departments of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to increase U.S. agricultural exports. It promotes U.S. agricultural products in over 30 countries through trade exhibitions, trade missions, in-store promotions, export seminars, and point-of-sale promotions. SUSTA also helps small businesses offset export promotion costs.

Background

SUSTA's funding is almost entirely derived from the federal Market Development funds, which is administered by the USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS). The organization is tasked with promoting exports of high-value food and agricultural products of U.S. origin and the funds must be utilized according to federal regulations outlined by USDA.

SUSTA supports international product promotion through two programs: Branded (50% CostShare) and Generic (Global Events):

- SUSTA's 50% CostShare (Branded) program assists individual companies to carry out their own marketing activities internationally by reimbursing them for 50% of eligible promotional expenses. Companies must be small according to the Small Business Administration (SBA) guidelines and their products must be of at least 50% U.S. agricultural origin. Products promoted have been as diverse as rice, seafood, alligator hides, snack foods, hot sauce, and wood. Companies apply for funding on a fiscal year basis, with marketing and promotional activities taking place year-round.

- SUSTA's Global Events (Generic) activities are industry-wide projects managed by SUSTA staff and its member State Departments of Agriculture. Activities typically include trade missions, trade shows, in-store promotions, and trade seminars. Any company or cooperative with products of 50% or more U.S. agricultural origin is welcome to participate in SUSTA's Global Events.

Scope of Work

SUSTA seeks an in-country consultant to support marketing and promotional activities in Central America in coordination with assigned SUSTA Activity Managers.

This RFP seeks trade promotion assistance for food and agricultural products from the southern region. The consultant will help SUSTA and its members build trade relationships, identify import barriers, and increase product awareness and purchasing interest among key retail buyers, importers, and distributors. Responsibilities include pre-show promotion, on-site trade show support, and planning and implementing trade missions to the U.S. and targeted markets. The consultant will also identify market opportunities and recommend marketing and promotional strategies for Central America.

The timeframe for the contract will be 01/01/2027 – 12/31/2027.

Specific responsibilities include:

1. Initiative Structure: The consulting firm will develop a cost-effective, results-oriented program that includes:

2. Inbound Trade Mission: Assist SUSTA with planning and implementing inbound trade missions to the Southern region. SUSTA anticipates one Inbound Trade Mission in 2027. Tentative plans include the following:
    a. Inbound Trade Mission to America's Food & Beverage – September 28, 2027

    Responsibilities include the following:

    b. Recruit 4 to 6 Central American buyers or importers to visit a domestic trade show and a SUSTA state. Before the visit, provide a spreadsheet of importer contact information and recommended participants.
    c. Advise SUSTA on the best time(s) to schedule the trade missions.
    d. Accompany the Central America delegation on each trade mission and assist the buyers with travel arrangements (flights, visa, etc.).
    e. Provide translator services.

f. Document meetings and site visits and submit a post-mission report summarizing the delegation's observations, comments, concerns, perceived trade barriers involving the U.S. and Central American buyers, importers, and distributors, mission feedback, and recommendations to address identified barriers.

3. Implementation: Carry out planned activities, assess results, and adjust unsuccessful strategies. Follow up with retailers, wholesalers, and importers to track sales and other measures of success. At the end of the period, submit a final report to SUSTA and applicable state Activity Managers using SUSTA's format.

4. Evaluation: Support evaluation of U.S. company participants, evaluate foreign buyers after each activity, and assist with feedback for the 6-month follow-up evaluation.

5. Success Stories: Submit success stories at the conclusion of each event to communicate promotional results to SUSTA's constituents.

   Following each promotional event, a report should be completed for each project to include performance measures dictated by Foreign Agriculture Services (FAS). This report will follow a format that SUSTA will provide.

6. The consultant should work closely with FAS post to utilize their expertise and knowledge and include them in planned events for the market.

7. In addition to promoting southern region products, the consultant should connect Central American buyers with appropriate U.S. suppliers and ensure follow-up between both parties. Consistent follow-up is essential to addressing a recurring gap in promotional activities.

Activity Background:

The trade show promotions will specifically target Central America to promote and generate interest in Southern agriculture and food products.

Budget:

Funding for this project is provided through the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP) and is subject to the appropriate regulations and policies.

Sufficiency of Response

Proposals will be scored on the following criteria:

- Description of proposed activities and relevancy
- Measurable results of previous, similar programs managed by the respondent
- Approach to managing the activity
- Cost
- References (minimum of 3)

Proposals should address this RFP concisely. Elaborate attachments are unnecessary.

Acceptance of Proposal

The successful bidder's proposal will form the basis of a contract with SUSTA for all services at the proposed costs. SUSTA reserves the right to negotiate before executing the final contract.

Subcontractors

Proposals must identify all subcontractors and their addresses for services performed by anyone other than the contractor's permanent staff. All subcontractors are subject to SUSTA's approval.

Deadline for Proposal

All proposals from bidders must be submitted by **Friday, December 4, 2026, at 5:00 PM (CST)**. The successful bidder will receive notification as soon as the committee has reviewed and assessed all proposals received. The planned commencement of the project will start upon written notification from SUSTA. Proposals may be emailed to the following:

Bernadette Wiltz-Lang
Executive Director
Southern United States Trade Association
701 Poydras St., Suite 3845
New Orleans, Louisiana 70139
Tel. +1 (504) 568-5986 Fax +1 (504) 568-6010
bernadette@susta.org

And

Sandra Lobb
Global Events Director
Southern United States Trade Association
701 Poydras St., Suite 3845
New Orleans, Louisiana 70139
Tel. +1 (504) 568-5986 Fax +1 (504) 568-6010

Sandra@susta.org

Rejection of Proposals

SUSTA retains the right to reject all proposals submitted in response to this RFP. SUSTA does not discriminate in any of its programs and activities against recipients based on age, disability, national origin or ancestry, race, color, religion, creed, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, military status, marital or familial status.