

# **Request for Proposals for Feasibility Study on Produce Auction for Lee County, Virginia**

## **Project Overview**

The Lee County Economic Development Authority is seeking expressions of interest from consultants wishing to be considered to conduct a feasibility study exploring the potential for creating a produce auction in Lee County. If the study is favorable, additional work will be conducted on the development of a produce auction.

## **Background**

Lee County, Virginia is a rural county located at the western-tip of the Commonwealth of Virginia with common borders to two counties to the east in Virginia, two counties to the south in Tennessee, and two counties to the north and west in Kentucky. The county consists of 437 square miles ranging from level to rolling valleys to rugged mountainous terrain with a 2018 census estimate of approximately 23,500 people. Historically, the County's economic base was built on agriculture and coal mining and their support businesses. The county was once home to several canneries and a large amount of strawberries were produced for the Knoxville area and coalfields in the 1900s through the 1950s. Lee County's agriculture was dominated by burley tobacco and beef cattle from the 1940s to 2000s. Currently, the county's main agriculture receipts are from beef cattle production.

## **Project Scope**

The project will be conducted in two phases. In Phase I, the consultant will gather data through a combination of surveys, focus groups and comparative analysis with other regions to determine the feasibility for the produce auction. If Phase I is favorable, Phase II will move forward with the consultant creating a market plan, assessing framework options for the produce auction, creating a design, and determining building and start up costs.

The Project will be overseen by a Working Group consisting of members of the Lee County Economic Development Board and key stakeholders from the community and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

## **Deliverables Timetable**

The Scope of Work will span nine months and include the following deliverables and timeline:

1. **Refine the project with established working group:** During month 1, the consultant will refine the Project Plan and meet with the Produce Auction Working Group, which will include agricultural producers and regional stakeholders to provide input into project design, assistance with technical issues, recommendations, and expertise.
2. **Phase I:** Throughout months 2-5, the consultant will work on Phase I with data collection and analysis occurring. Data may include primary data gathered through a combination of surveys, interviews, and focus groups, as well as secondary data on the region's agricultural economy. The consultant will perform a literature review and comparative analysis to identify best practices and locate and learn more about similar facilities and initiatives in other regions. The consultant will conduct interviews with local producers to

gauge desire to participate, potential buyers, and with industry leaders and regional stakeholders as needed to identify potential needs and opportunities for a produce auction and collaborative marketing and distribution efforts.

The consultant will use this data to produce a supply and demand analysis. Supply analysis will include local and regional users and beneficiaries of a potential facility or program. Demand analysis will include larger markets and supplier and consumer networks within and beyond the region.

3. **Phase II:** If findings from Phase I are favorable then the consultant will work on Phase II with the Produce Auction Working Group during months 6-10 through a combination of in-person and online meetings. Tasks that will be completed include narrow strategies, refine needs related to a produce auction and marketing activities, create a marketing plan, assess potential operational frameworks, assess potential facility sites for factors such as access, space, utilities, existing developments and concept use, create a site design (architectural renderings and/or concepts and functions within the spaces), and determine building and start-up costs.
4. **Deliver final report:** In the final month, the consultant will deliver a final written report evaluating and assessing opportunity barriers, potential costs, benefits and other considerations of the produce auction. The consultant will remain available to prepare and present findings at public meetings or other sessions (minimum of 2) to discuss results and recommend a strategy for action.

### **Contract Amount**

This is a locally administered and limited-funds project supported by partial funding from the Virginia Regional Tobacco Revitalization Commission. The maximum amount available for the grant is anticipated to be \$38,000.

The Lee County Economic Development Authority (EDA) reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received as a result of this request, to negotiate with any qualified firm, or to modify or cancel in part or in its entirety the Request for Proposal if it is in the best interest of the EDA to do so. The request does not commit the EDA to provide any payment for costs associated with the preparation of proposals submitted in response to this Request for Proposal.

### **Proposals**

All proposals should address the following specific items:

1. **Experience of the Individual or Firm.** Provide a narrative of the individual or firm's prior experience and qualifications in conducting feasibility studies and economic analysis, leading economic planning processes, managing projects, engaging the public, and facilitating agriculture-related rural economic development. The consultant's experience shall include experience working in the agriculture sector and, in particular, experience related to small-scale agriculture, value-added processing, agricultural supply chains, and marketing strategies. Provide a list of case studies involving similar work within the past five years with an emphasis on rural areas. Please reference the expertise of the individual or firm's personnel in providing these services.

2. **Project Team.** Identify the Project Manager and provide a list of the project team members proposed for use on this project and identify the responsibility and area of expertise of each member. Provide a brief resume for each person listing specific project experience.
3. **Project Timeline.** Provide a timeline that includes major tasks and milestones.
4. **Project Budget** by line item.
5. **Brief Description of the Plan.** Please describe briefly the draft plan to carry out the feasibility study
6. **References.** Provide the name, address, and telephone number of at least three (3) references familiar with the quality of work done by the individual or firm on similar projects.
7. **Other Supporting Information.** Include any additional information relevant to the selection of the firm. The entire Qualifications Statement should not exceed twenty (20) pages, not including pictures.

### **Scoring Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated by a team of Lee County Economic Development staff and local agricultural stakeholders.

<b>Review Criteria</b>	<b>Weight</b>
Credentials of personnel and experience with similar studies	10%
Understanding of the project	30%
Approach for carrying out the study	30%
Clarity of proposal and demonstrated ability to write clearly and in lay language	10%
Fee for completing the project	20%

### **Submission**

Proposals should be submitted via email to [rjohnson@leecova.org](mailto:rjohnson@leecova.org) **no later than 5:00 PM, Tuesday, June 1.** Late proposals will not be considered. Expressions of Interest should be formatted in a single PDF file.

### **Principal Points of Contact**

Questions:  
 Amy Byington  
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Submission:  
Richard Johnson II  
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<http://www.leecova.org/> under Bid Notices

The County of Lee, Virginia is an Equal Employment Opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, age, marital status, or disability. Any and all project consultants must comply with these EEO and discrimination requirements in the employment of all personnel.

The County intends to utilize the competitive negotiation selection process as outlined by Section 2.2-4301, Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended.