

Response to reviewers

Reviewer 1

1. The very first sentence in the proposal stated this is a multi-disciplinary research project. However, throughout the proposal, I only found that agricultural economists and extension educators were mentioned. I suggest adding a few sentences to the "Non-Technical Summary" and/or "Statement of Issues and Justification" sections indicating what specific fields of researchers will participate in this project (e.g., agronomy, planetology, agricultural economics, etc.). Also, provide a little bit more detailed explanations about how researchers from each field would contribute to the project in the "Procedure and Activities" section (similar to the language used in describing agricultural economists' duties under Objective 4 in this section).

Response: A list of the disciplines involved has been added to the Non-Technical Summary and a disciplines contributions have been added to the Procedures and Activities section under each objective where appropriate.

2. The first sentence in the Statement of Issues and Justification section mentioned Kentucky and surrounding states. It implies that KY and its neighboring states would be the main focus of this project. However, a few sentences later, the specific states are presented. A few of them are clearly not the neighboring states of KY. For example, WA, UT, DE, and MN. I understand that these states are listed there because researchers and extension educators from those states plan to participate in this project. I do not think that any of the states need to be dropped, but I do think that the language that would imply the project is only focusing on KY and its surrounding states needs to be rewritten to avoid confusion.

Response: Text has been edited to hopefully remove the implication that this is focused outside of the specific region of Ky and surrounding states. This project has had strong participation from states outside the upper Mid-South/lower Midwest.

Reviewer 2

1. The regional project participants have considered how to reach stakeholders who may not have internet access or prefer accessing materials other than through social media, webinars, and other electronic sources. The project includes both production and marketing. However, the non-technical summary could be enhanced by being more specific about investigating marketing and production activities. As of now, it is more heavily focused on production. By reading just the summary, I did not expect marketing and economics to be a part of the project.

Response: The marketing/economics aspect has been added more explicitly to the Npn-Technical Summary

2. Small farms are described: "462,089 small farms that encompass 179 or fewer acres" (page 1). Are small farms in the target states defined only by acreage (and what is the maximum number of acres that would differentiate them from medium-sized farms), or is it also based on other factors such as number of employees, revenue, etc.? It may be beneficial to describe what qualifies potential stakeholders as small farmers.

Response: The small farm orientation is more explicitly outlined in the proposal. Definition by acreage is increasingly less viable with more high tunnel and CEA. The references throughout of "small acreage" is intended only as a broader reference to small business scale, and also the predominant business characteristic of the majority of specialty crop farmers in this region.

3. Farmers markets should be farmers' markets.

Response: We are using the convention proposed by the National Farmers Market Association

4. Check that comma usage is consistent: Over 3000 high tunnels...7,020 high tunnels" (page 1).

Response: Checked and corrected where needed.

5. Should NRCS and FFA be defined along with listing the abbreviation?

Response: Expanded in text

6. What were some of the outcomes of the June 2014 survey? How do the responses support the proposed regional project? What issues were defined that would be priorities/that justify the project?

Response: Expanded results description added.

7. Page 2 suggestion: "These include...(high and low tunnels and greenhouse production of specialty crops (why is only lettuce listed?)...b, organic production methods, and c) small-scale production systems." What is an example of a specific small-scale product system? In the non-technical summary: What are scale-appropriate technologies?

Response: Objective 1 text edited to include other commodities in greenhouses and characteristics of scale-appropriate systems.

8. Check tense and edit the text, for example: "...including a) developing and presenting...b) developing print publications that will also be available electronically...".

Response: reviewed for grammar

9. Suggestion: "Expand the Center for Crop Diversification's activities...." In addition to farm-to-school, would institutions also be potential outlets?

Response: Added institutions in the text

10. Farmers' markets are retail outlets. For the list: farmers' markets....retail – is retail referring to selling to retailers to be resold to consumers? Also, is there a need to provide resources to help farmers sell products through e-commerce platforms?

Response: clarified retail to retail grocery - - intermediated retail in text

11. Should "define" be added to "marketing channels that are most effective...."? This sentence is not entirely clear/specific:

“Identification of appropriate crop varieties is recognized as a key area for research, but we expect other topics to be identified and addressed as the project unfolds.”

Response: We are not really proposing to define market channels, per se. Rather, this project will conduct market research that hopefully provides insights for producers on changing dynamics that may affect feasibility and/or strategic marketing direction.

12. Will objective 4 include both a consumer and a stakeholder survey? Is that what “marketing channel” is referring to?

Response: Market research would be primarily consumer-oriented. Market channels would include all those indicated in object #3 above.

13. Page 2: “How do I make those crops profitable?” Does that refer to producing specialty products using certified organic methods and obtaining a price premium compared to growing the product using conventional methods? “How do I engage those markets?” Should this be: What are the requirements for selling products through various retail, institutional, etc. markets?

Response: Identifying strategies for capturing organic premiums can be part of that. The profitability question would be integrated into the corresponding publication across each of the types of production. Added revision language.

14. Objective 3. Perhaps describe what the Center’s price reports consist of now and what the expansion consists of.

Response: Intent is to expand overall number of reports and geographic representation of markets. Added revised language.

15. Only three citations are listed. The proposal could be strengthened by evidence such as data/statistics about consumer interest in locally grown, certified organic, purchasing directly from the producer, specialty products of greatest interest, growers obtaining a higher profit margin through diversifying, etc.

Response: literature on local food demand and market channel assessment has been added.

Reviewer 3

This was a strongly positive review that required no response or modifications.

Reviewer 4

1. Not all objectives require a scientific approach, please refer to objective two on coordination, so my comments do not apply to them. However objectives 1 and 4 that have a research component could be strengthened. The authors could include previous work and existing work from project participants to demonstrate outcomes and expertise of the participants as well as methods used in past work and how they build, deviate or expand on them.

Response: Good suggestions. Obj 1, while having a research dimension, is not a research objective per se - rather a coordinating function being pursued in an effort to better coordinate research initiatives. Obj 4 has been expanded for research detail.

2. Also, documentation of other projects that are complementing the committee's efforts should be stated (see S1088, SERA47). Though these projects do not necessarily address small farms and specialty crops, food supply and local foods are areas of synergies with the proposed objectives. Further documentation of existing studies and better communication of the approach is necessary for this reviewer to judge the full merit of the stated objectives.

Response: A great observation - links and differences with respect to these Multistate committees is included in the narrative. Literature is expanded. Methods for the research elements are also expanded, although the emphasis remains on coordinating research between state-level partners regionally.

3. This part can be strengthened by documenting past successes of the group and how it has assisted in forming the new objectives. Current projects also could complement this piece. Moreover, this reviewer comments on the involvement of the University of Kentucky Center for Crop Diversification website. Why this center was selected, documentation of the center's successes and resources that would be allocated for the committee's work could assist in evaluating the objectives feasibility.

Response: Discussion around shared high tunnel work under the previous project has been expanded and the role of the CCD is more fully described in the edits made in Issues and Justification.

4. This reviewer is concerned of duplication of efforts with existing programs, particularly the sustainable agriculture research and education programs in the collaborating states.

Response: We agree regarding concern for duplicated efforts. Specialty crops covers a wide range of agronomic and economic issues across many crops and production systems. It is the specific goal of this committee to minimize duplication and redundant effort through better coordination, as well as through replication where appropriate.

5. This part can be strengthened by a proposed list of activities and timeline.

Response: More specific outcomes and impacts are identified in the revisions. A more explicit statement of the timeline corresponding to this project is added as well.