

Thank you for joining us today for our webinar on how to become an approved vendor with USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Commodity Procurement Program. My name is Andrea and I am the New Vendor Coordinator with USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Commodity Procurement Program. Today I am going to be walking you through the steps on how to become an approved vendor for almonds. First I'd like to provide a bit of background on who Commodity Procurement is and what we purchase.



## What Do We Buy?

Each year, we purchase over \$3 billion in American-grown food. These purchases support American agriculture and feed millions of school children, families, and other qualified individuals through USDA's nutrition assistance programs and international food aid programs.

AMS purchases over **300 different products** including:

- Beef, pork, turkey, chicken, fish, and eggs
- Fruits, vegetables, beans, and tree nuts
- Dairy, grain, and oilseed products, including peanut butter



AMS purchases over \$3 billion of American-grown food in various forms and pack sizes such as livestock, poultry, fruits, vegetables, dairy, grain and oilseed. These purchases not only support American agriculture but feed millions of school children, families, and other qualified individuals through USDA's nutrition assistance and international food aid programs.

All the products we purchase must be 100% domestically produced and processed. Supporting American agriculture is central to our program mission, so AMS will only purchase products which can be sourced domestically. We purchase truckload quantities for delivery to destinations. The commodities we purchase must be available in sufficient volume to meet the needs of national programs. I highly recommend you visit the Commodity Procurement website to see what specific commodities we purchase and in what pack sizes. Now, let's jump into learning the process of becoming an approved vendor.



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## Get Started: 6 Steps

1. Review **AMS Master Solicitation** - contract clauses, provisions and requirements
2. Review **Product Specifications** to determine what you can supply
3. Get Approved: Review **Qualification Requirements**, Submit Application Package
4. Receive Solicitation and “Sharpen Your Pencil”
5. Submit Offer in WBSCM
6. Get Awarded, Perform, Get Paid



The new vendor process can be broken down into 6 steps. I will briefly go over the AMS Master Solicitation, review Product Specifications, and what happens after you become an approved vendor. Our focus; however, will be on Step 3 and what AMS requires of our new and potential vendors and exactly what you need to do to get your vendor application approved.



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## Step 1. Review Master Solicitation

**Resource:** AMS Master Solicitation  
**Link:** <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/solicitations>

The Master Solicitation for Commodity Procurements contains things like:

- Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) Clauses & Provisions
  - e.g., (<https://sam.gov/portal/SAM/#1>), Small Business Subcontracting Plans, Prompt Payment Act
- Ag. Acquisition Regulations (AGAR) Clauses & Provisions
  - e.g., Domestic Origin/Traceability
- AMS Policies
  - Plant Surveys; GHP/GAP; Food Defense Plans/Audits
  - Grading/Inspection/Certification
  - Use of the Web-Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM) System
  - Transportation and Delivery Requirements
  - Invoicing, etc.



The “AMS Master Solicitation for Commodity Procurements” is the main body of every contract awarded by AMS. It details the Federal Acquisition Regulation commonly referred to as FAR, clauses and provisions governing federal procurements, including financial capabilities, small business subcontracting, pre-bid certifications, product traceability, and more. This is the contract document, know what it says and be aware that by submitting an offer to AMS you are confirming that you meet all the requirements laid out in this Master Solicitation- read it, understand it, and if you have questions, please contact the Contracting Officer to receive clarification.

You will notice throughout this presentation that we list in red the FAR clauses that support why we request certain items for your vendor application package.



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## Step 2. Review Product Specifications

Resource: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/product-specs>

Specifications are referred to as “Commodity Specifications” or “Commodity Requirements Documents” or “Technical Requirement Supplements”  
(All are linked to on the above “Product Specs” page)

- USDA Specifications include things like:
  - Product Descriptions
  - Grades/Standards; Commercial Item Descriptions (CIDS)
  - Harvest/pack season – current production
  - Formulation/Fabrication requirements (fat, sodium, sugar)
  - Packaging/packing/labeling
  - USDA inspection, grading, and/or auditing requirements
  - Food Safety Requirements for Suppliers; Good Agricultural Practice/Good Handling Practice Audits
  - Review any amendments to the specification

Before you get into bidding, take some time to thoroughly review the USDA Commodity Specifications. These are located on our website. It is critical that you understand the technical requirements before you are awarded a contract. USDA takes product integrity very seriously, and we expect that our vendors supply product that consistently meet the quality and safety expectations of our customers.

The specifications detail technical requirements for the product and production, including raw materials, formulation, packaging and packing, inspection and certification requirements, and much more. These detailed specifications ensure USDA gets the same quality end product under every contract, regardless of which supplier is awarded. Sometimes, we make changes to our technical requirements for our products, these are called amendments which we link under the specification. Please take the time to review any associated amendments included with the product specification.



## Qualification Requirement Checklist

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System for Award Management (SAM) <a href="http://www.sam.gov">www.sam.gov</a></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Business Status.</b> As indicated in SAM, business status is one of the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Large Business</li> <li>○ Small Business</li> <li>○ Small Disadvantaged Business</li> <li>○ Women-Owned Business</li> <li>○ Veteran-Owned Business</li> <li>○ Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business</li> <li>○ HUBZone Business</li> <li>○ 8(a) Small Business Development Concern</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed <a href="#">WBSCM Vendor Registration Form</a></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Company Letter-</b> certifying capability to perform</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Three (3) Letters of Reference</b> from customers your company sold the same or similar products to</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Business Type.</b> Check one: <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturer <input type="checkbox"/> Non-manufacturer</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check one or more as applicable.</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Grower <input type="checkbox"/> Grower/Packer/Shipper <input type="checkbox"/> Processor <input type="checkbox"/> Distributor/Wholesaler <input type="checkbox"/> Broker</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Non-manufacturer.</b> The following requirements apply:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Letter from manufacturer/supplier certifying its willingness to provide product that meets the USDA commodity specifications</li> <li>○ Complaint and Dispute Resolution Proposal</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Most Recent Audited Financial Statements</b></li> </ul>	

Found on our New Vendor Qualification Requirements PDF located on our New Vendor Website:  
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/becoming-approved>



On our New Vendor website we have a “Vendor Qualification Requirements” document. The “Vendor Qualifications Requirements” document lists the information AMS needs to approve you as a vendor in our purchase programs. Again, this is a document you’ll want to read and fully understand before submitting an offer to AMS. The Qualifications document includes a handy checklist to help you gather the necessary information and documentation.



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**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

**“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors”-  
Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR 9.104-1  
and FAR 9.104-3)**

- ✓ System for Award Management Registration (<https://sam.gov/portal/SAM/#1>), in accordance with FAR Part 4.11
  - ✓ Notarized Letter
  - ✓ SAM HelpDesk: 1-866-606-8220 Option 1
  - ✓ Business Status-[www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)
  - ✓ Help Tab on SAM
- ✓ WBSCM Vendor Registration Form
- ✓ Company Letter certifying capability to perform

System for Award Management or SAM is a Federal government owned and operated free website. Every vendor who wants to participate in a federal government procurement must be registered in SAM. This is a onetime registration used to provide basic information about your company that is relevant to government procurement and financial transactions. You can also register your company in SAM as a small business, service disabled veteran owned small business, HubZone or 8(a). Please note that if you are interested in receiving Small Disadvantaged Business, HUBZone, or 8(a) certifications, you will need to refer separately to the Small Business Administration to complete that process.

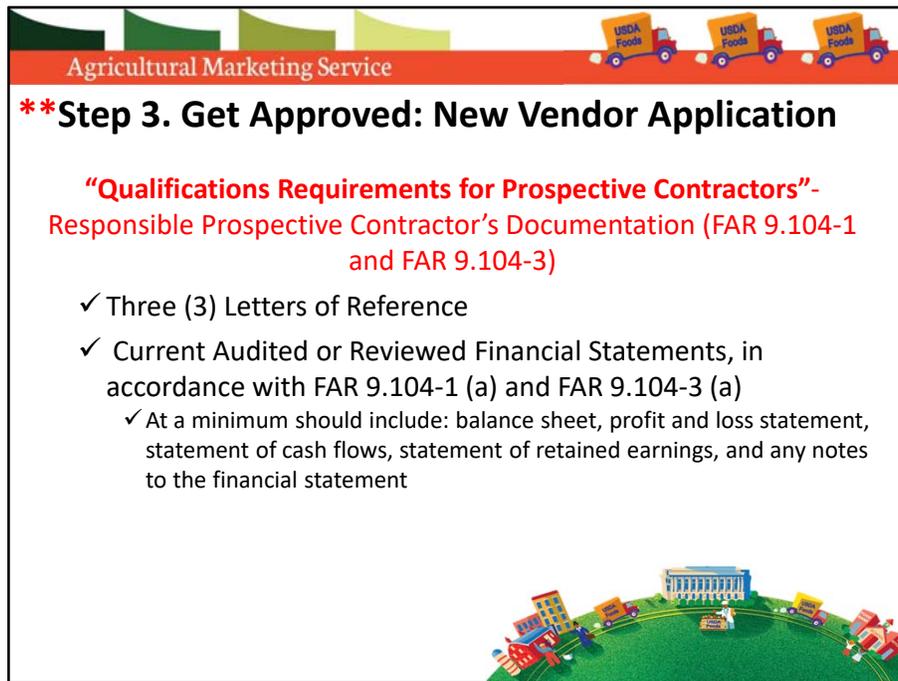
SAM will validate the vendor’s information and electronically share pertinent information from your vendor account, including your company’s banking information to provide paperless payments through electronic funds transfer. For example, SAM is linked up to our Web Based Supply Chain Management System or WBSCM, which is where you would submit bids on contracts and submit invoices for payment.

A couple of things to keep in mind, to register your company with SAM, you will need to submit a notarized letter. If you visit the SAM website, there is a link to an instruction page on how to submit your notarized letter. While SAM registration is only needed to be done once, you must update or renew your registration annually. This system is free, please be aware of similar systems that will charge a hefty fee. There is no fee to register your company into SAM.

If you run into some trouble registering in SAM, there is a Help Tab on SAM's main page, which features FAQs, User Guides, and Helpful Hints. You can also contact the SAM HelpDesk: 1-866-606-8220.

Next in your package is the WBSCM vendor registration form, which is needed to create a user-profile and grant access to the WBSCM system once you are approved as a Vendor.

You must also include a company letter certifying the company's performance; tell us about your company and what products you are interested in selling to the USDA. Your letter should include a brief history of the company, mention of satisfactory record of integrity, business ethics and list the material code, pack size, and your company's capacity on the letter. The material and material code can be found on the Commodity Procurement website on the Purchase Programs: Awards and Solicitations webpage. The letter must be signed and on company letterhead.



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**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

**“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors”-  
Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR 9.104-1  
and FAR 9.104-3)**

- ✓ Three (3) Letters of Reference
- ✓ Current Audited or Reviewed Financial Statements, in accordance with FAR 9.104-1 (a) and FAR 9.104-3 (a)
  - ✓ At a minimum should include: balance sheet, profit and loss statement, statement of cash flows, statement of retained earnings, and any notes to the financial statement

We will also need three letters of references from satisfied customers on letterhead, signed with a phone number and address for verification purposes, and a statement mentioning how satisfied your client was with the product(s) or service(s) you sold them.

For assessing financial capabilities, we require the most current financials. The financials must be audited or reviewed by a CPA, in accordance with the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles and at a minimum have a balance sheet, profit and loss statement, statement of cash flows, statement of retained earnings, and any notes to the financial statement.

Remember only the Contracting Officer can determine whether or not the financials provided are acceptable. If you have any questions or concerns with regards to our financial requirements, please contact the Contracting Officer and the New Vendor Coordinator only.

An important reminder that we require the legal company name on every piece of documentation. Your legal company name should match the company name registered with your state. You can verify your company name by visiting your secretary of state’s website.



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**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

- ✓ Application sent to Andrea at [NewVendor@usda.gov](mailto:NewVendor@usda.gov)
- ✓ Financial Statements are sent to financial officer for review
  - ✓ All financials are encrypted
  - ✓ Only viewed by myself, financial officer, and approving Senior Contracting Officer (CO)
- ✓ Application then sent to AMS CO for approval
  - ✓ May require additional information such as: FDA Registration, Food Defense Audit Plan, PDFs of product labels

Once you've gone down the list and checked each item off, please send in the complete package via email at [NewVendor@usda.gov](mailto:NewVendor@usda.gov). We process all new vendor applications and work with the approving Contracting Officer in reviewing the vendor qualifications.

Your financials will be sent to our financial officer for review. We consider your financials to be proprietary information. They are encrypted, and password protected and ONLY seen by the person handling your vendor application, the financial officer, and the approving contracting officer.

We will also communicate with you, the prospective vendor, during this process. If any documents are missing or incomplete we will inform you via email or phone. So please make sure your contact information is current and correct.



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**\*\*Step 3. Get Approved: New Vendor Application**

- ✓ Please make sure your company has passed the necessary inspections, food defense audits, and plant surveys prior to submitting a bid
  - ✓ Contact information for AMS Auditing Services, AMS Inspection Services, and links to our product specifications, etc. can be found on our New Vendor Qualification Requirement PDF on our New Vendor webpage: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/becoming-approved>
- ✓ Please review AMS Commodity Procurement Food Specifications and Master Solicitation prior to bidding

Once your application has been submitted , you will receive an email from the Senior Contracting Officer. The email will detail who you need to contact to complete your AMS audits and inspections.

For almonds, you will need a plant survey audit and a food defense plan. You MUST have your audits and inspections approved prior to bidding. I recommend that while you are submitting your paperwork, you begin scheduling your audits. Please email the Specialty Crops Audit Branch at [SCAudits@usda.gov](mailto:SCAudits@usda.gov) and the Specialty Crops Inspection Branch at [SCInspectionoperations@usda.gov](mailto:SCInspectionoperations@usda.gov). AMS Auditing and Inspection point of contacts are also listed in the email you will receive from the Contracting Officer.

Again, I cannot stress the importance of reading over the Master Solicitation and Product Specifications. If your vendor application package is approved by our Contracting Officer but you do not meet the product requirements, then you will not be able to submit a bid.



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## Next Steps

- ✓ Your WBSCM Vendor Registration form will be uploaded
- ✓ Receive an email from the WBSCM Support Branch
  - ✓ Fill out excel user registration
  - ✓ Please review the “WBSCM CVA-Roles and Responsibilities” document
  - ✓ Links to WBSCM training on how to submit a bid
  - ✓ WBSCM HelpDesk: [WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@usda.gov](mailto:WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@usda.gov)
- ✓ Sign up for GovDelivery in order to receive notifications on upcoming solicitations, etc.
- ✓ Read over Master Solicitation and Commodity Specifications



You’ve just received an email from our contracting officer stating that you are now an approved vendor subject to completing all food safety and sanitation requirements, such as plant surveys, food defense audits, and your technical proposal as applicable to your commodity.

Next, we will have the WBSCM team upload your form into the system, once that occurs you will receive an email from the WBSCM HelpDesk, asking for additional information to be filled out and submitted. PLEASE READ THIS EMAIL! It is your lifeline into our system and if the information requested by our WBSCM team is not submitted in a timely manner, it may hold up the process for you to submit bids.

Once you have access to WBSCM, you must enter your plant and shipping information before you can bid. Please read and follow the instructions and be sure to email the WBSCM team members once this is completed for approval. You can visit the website to the section titled “Step-by-Step Procedures” to review the “Corporate Vendor Administrative Roles and

Responsibilities,” this will also be attached to the email sent to you by the WBSCM team.

If you have any WBSCM questions or need assistance, feel free to contact the WBSCM HelpDesk: [WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@usda.gov](mailto:WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@usda.gov). Once our WBSCM team has the company information entered in the system (which can take a few days), then you can begin submitting offers on future solicitations.

In the handy email the WBSCM team sends you there is a description on how to sign up for “GovDelivery.” Gov Delivery is our emailing list, and by subscribing to our email updates, you will receive information on solicitations, any specification changes we’ve made, and so on. It is the best way to stay up to date on our contracts.

Once again, I cannot stress enough the importance of reading the product specifications and master solicitation. If you have more technical questions or questions on the contract itself, please refer to the appropriate contracting specialist which can be found on the bid invitation.



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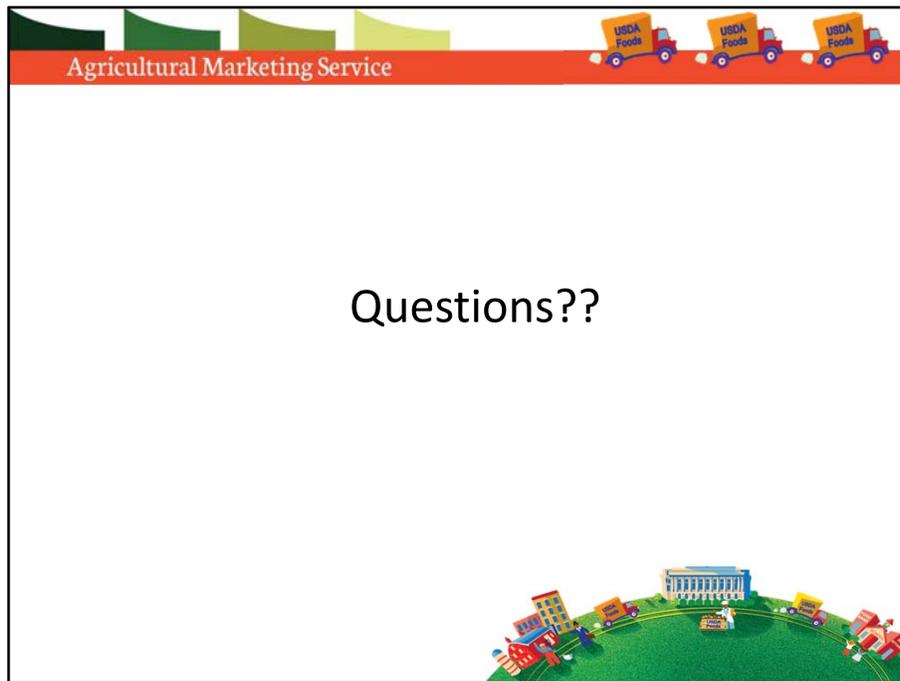
## **Points of Contact**

**Andrea Lang, New Vendor Coordinator**  
**NewVendor@usda.gov**

<b>Sheila Tucker, Contract Specialist</b>	<b>Kyla Stoufer, Contracting Officer</b>
<b>Sheila.Tucker@usda.gov</b>	<b>Kyla.Stoufer@usda.gov</b>



Please feel free to contact the New Vendor email that is listed should you have any questions on how to become an approved vendor. For questions regarding almond contracts, please contact our Contract Specialist: Sheila Tucker or the Contracting Officer: Kyla Stoufer. Thank you.



Now we are going to open the floor up for any questions that you may have regarding this presentation and how to become a new vendor.