

USDA AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE

SOLICITATION FOR PURCHASE OF FRESH APPLES IN 600 LB BINS
UNDER SECTION 32

Solicitation: 12-3J14-24-B-0601/2000010312

Important Dates:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) invites offers to sell fresh apples pursuant to the AMS Master Solicitation for use in the National School Lunch Program and other Federal Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs. Acceptances will be announced by midnight, September 18, 2024. Deliveries are to be made between October 14, 2024 and February 26, 2025.

Questions:

Questions on this solicitation must be submitted to the contract specialist and contracting officer identified below; no later than, August 26, 2024 1:00 pm CT. Questions received after the deadline will not be addressed. Answers to questions submitted will be answered via an amendment by August 30, 2024.

Bids are to be submitted by September 4, 2024 at 1:00 pm CT through WBSCM. If you may have trouble submitting your bid, please reach out to the WBSCM help desk at WBSCM.servicedesk@caci.com or call 877-927-2648.

Contact Information:

The Contract Specialist handling this purchase will be Nick Wiber at Nick.Wiber@usda.gov. The Contact Officer handling this purchase will be Samantha Klagenberg at Samantha.Klagenberg@usda.gov. Please contact the specialist first.

Note:

*****Bidders are responsible for understanding if suppliers listed on their required USDA GAP-GHP verification form meet GAP-GHP scope requirements for this solicitation prior to bid open. A misunderstanding of requirements will not be an allowance for a change to the verification form. If your company is going to be an intended supplier, they must be listed as well on the form. Bidders are urged to check what scopes their suppliers meet on the following website prior to submitting their bid: <https://apps.ams.usda.gov/GAPGHP/reportG01.aspx>

Required Scopes:

GAP - Farm Review AND Field Harvesting & Field Packing Activities

GHP - House Packing Facility AND Storage & Transportation *****

Set Asides:

This solicitation is a 100% set aside for small business under NAICS code 311991 with a size standard of 700 employees or less; and material code (111810)-APPLES FRESH VARIOUS TYPE BIN - 600 LB.

Additional requirements to the Commodity specification:

*****The USDA and its recipients are not responsible for the returning of bins after delivery.*****

(111810) - APPLES FRESH VARIOUS TYPE BIN - 600 LB

Vendors or subcontractors who are supplying fresh fruit crops to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) must ensure that each of their suppliers/subcontractors who grow, harvest, pack, hold, and handle product have approved and current SCI food safety verification audits PRIOR to the bid opening date of this solicitation. SCI Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) scopes which are necessary to meet the minimum requirement to be deemed responsive are as follows: (see below).

Inspection and certification must take place at shipping point, during or after the final packaging but, prior to shipping. If SCI inspection/certification at shipping point/origin meets all requirements of the “Tendering Text”, SCI Fresh Fruit specification, and solicitation, it does not guarantee acceptance at destination. Product at destination must still meet all applicable tendering text, SCI Fresh Fruit specification and solicitation requirements with no additional tolerances allowed. Failure to meet these requirements may result in rejection of the load at destination. It is the vendor’s responsibility to ensure the delivery of acceptable product and the replacement of any failed deliveries with acceptable product.

All apples must be inspected and certified by SCI Federal or Federal/State inspectors. Inspections under the Partners in Quality (PIQ) and Customer Assisted Inspection Program (CAIP) programs are not accepted for USDA Commodity Procurement purchases.

The 600-pound apple bins must have a Positive Lot Identification (PLI) sticker applied in accordance with SCI procedures once the product has met solicitation requirements.

Apples purchased in clean 600-pound tri-walled corrugated fiber bins with lids (apple bins), must meet all the relevant requirements (including packing, packaging, and labeling) of the Commodity Specification for Fresh Fruit July 2019 with the following changes and additional requirements:

****Please be advised that the material for this solicitation must be from the 2024 crop year.****

Grade: Apples must meet the requirements of U.S. Fancy (State grades will be acceptable provided the apples meet the requirements of the U.S. Fancy Grade) as stated in the United States Standards for Grades of Apples Effective October 31, 2019.

The following changes and exceptions to the U.S. Grade Standards and Commodity Specification for Fresh Fruit are permitted per Tendering Text:

Serious Damage Allowed: Not more than 10 percent shall be allowed for apples which are seriously damaged. Decay and internal breakdown is limited to 1 percent.

Shape: May be “Slightly deformed”. This means the fruit may be more irregular in shape than “fairly well formed”. but the appearance is not seriously affected.

Firmness: not more than an average of five percent in any lot and ten percent in individual containers may be further advanced in maturity than firm ripe.

Apple Sizes: Minimum size 2 inches in diameter, no maximum size.

Varieties: Yorks, Ida Reds, Pink Lady, Gold Rush, Autumn Crisp, Cameo, Crimson Crisp, Ginger Gold, Golden Supreme, McIntosh, Stayman, Winesap, Romes, Golden Delicious, Cortland, and Enterprise.

All apples within a single apple bin must be the same variety. Intermingling of varieties in the truckload is permitted, but not within a single apple bin.

All apples must be cleaned, sorted, and washed at a SCI approved packing house (possesses acceptable SCI GAP/GHP audit) prior to inspection/certification at shipping point. If this requirement is not met, then SCI cannot inspect and certify product.

After apples are processed by sorting, cleaning, and washing they will be re-packed into clean 600-pound tri-walled corrugated fiber bins with lids (apple bins) that meet the FDA requirements for packaging that is safe for food contact.

Net Weight: The apple bins must be filled to a minimum net weight of 600 pounds plus or minus 12 pounds (2% by weight). Vendors will not be credited for shipments bins weighing over 600 pounds. Shipping weights of apple bins over 600 pounds will be considered as “donated” product.

Must be loaded into a refrigerated trailer capable of holding air temperature not to exceed 38° degrees Fahrenheit (F) air temperature. Refrigerated shipment to final destination required at 32 degrees F to 38 degrees F, air temperature. The contractor must contact and allow the USDA Inspector at least 72 advance notice when scheduling inspection service. The Apple bins must reach destination within 10 calendar days of the SCI inspection/certification date, with day one being the inspection/certification date. When needed, adherence to this requirement will be determined by reviewing the SCI certificate and the shipping and receiving documents.

This purchase must meet all relevant requirements such as packing, packaging, labeling, inspection and shipping temperatures of the Commodity Specification for Fresh Fruit July 2019. Refer to the Commodity Specification for Fresh Fruit July 2019, Master Solicitation dated February 13, 2024, and this solicitations instruction to offers/tendering text for all material and delivery requirements.

Every bidder must include a letter of support with their bid from all current and approved supplier(s). The templates for the letter of support are attached to the solicitation with the required elements. Each letter of support is only good for one solicitation. A new letter of support will be required for every solicitation, from every supplier. The supplier must include the quantity in cases they are committing to the bidder. USDA will not award a quantity that exceeds the sum of all supplier's committed quantities to a particular bidder.

For a new-to-USDA contractor and existing contractors who are bidding on new products, a probationary period may be implemented in which awards are limited to 10 truckloads per product. Contractor must demonstrate successful delivery of at least five (5) truckloads of product in order to be removed from probationary status on future solicitations. For the purposes of this rule, successful delivery is defined as product delivered on-time and in acceptable condition according to the terms and conditions of the contract. Any delivery problems directly attributable to the Government will not be held against the contractor.

Vendors or subcontractors who are supplying fresh fruit crops to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) must ensure that each of their suppliers/subcontractors who grow, harvest, pack, hold, and handle product have approved and current food safety verification audits PRIOR to the bid opening date of this solicitation. Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) scopes which are necessary to meet the minimum requirement to be deemed responsive are as follows:

GAP - Farm Review AND Field Harvesting & Field Packing Activities

GHP - House Packing Facility AND Storage & Transportation

All these requirements shall be met PRIOR to the bid opening date.

Brokers are exempt from the USDA GAP/GHP requirements themselves, HOWEVER suppliers/subcontractors performing under the contract shall have the applicable USDA GAP/GHP certification(s).

Verification audits shall be performed by the USDA, AMS, SCP-SCID representatives only.

In order to be found responsive the contractor and/or its subcontractors/suppliers must be in compliance with USDA GAP/GHP certification. Offerors must include in their bid the GAP and GHP Audit Verification attachment, which is found in the attachments section of this solicitation. Offerors who do not complete this form in its entirety, do not include the form as an attachment to their bid, or are missing the required USDA GAP/GHP scopes listed above shall be deemed nonresponsive.

All audits are valid for one year after the date the audit was conducted. More information on USDA GAP/GHP audits can be found here: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp> or by reaching out to scaudits@usda.gov.

Awardees may ship and supply from any location found here: <https://apps.ams.usda.gov/GAPGHP/reportG01.aspx>

If USDA/AMS finds that suppliers used by the contractor are not in compliance with AMS GAP/GHP certification requirements after the product is delivered, the following courses of action will apply:

1. A cure notice shall be issued informing the contractor of their failure to comply with the required elements of this solicitation. The USDA will then deduct a 50% discount from the invoice for all noncompliant deliveries shipped or invoiced prior to the date listed on the cure notice.
2. If the contractor ships noncompliant product after the date of the cure notice:
 - a. USDA/AMS will deduct a 50% discount from the invoice for all noncompliant deliveries;
 - b. The contract will be terminated for cause; and
 - c. The contractor will be suspended from participating in all future USDA/AMS fresh fruit and vegetable solicitations for a period of one year from the date of contract termination.

This solicitation may show multiple stops on some line items; however, the number of stops will be limited to a maximum of three. To determine the number of destinations, review the "Tendering Text" for the lot, which will indicate the City and State for each stop. Bidders may submit different prices for each stop. However, a price is required on all line items within the lot.

For offshore destinations (Puerto Rico, Hawaii, etc.), offerors have the option to choose to enter their bids direct to the offshore destination or to the port. Purchases will be made on an f.o.b. destination basis to cities on this solicitation. Destination quantities listed are estimates and subject to adjustment based on offerings, changes in recipient needs, market conditions, and program operations.

All prime vendors are reminded that they are prohibited from subcontracting with companies or individuals that have been suspended or debarred.

Offers must be submitted electronically via the Web-Based Supply Chain Management System (WBSCM). Offers submitted by any means other than WBSCM will be deemed nonresponsive. Offerors must be active in WBSCM and have the required bidder roles in order to submit offers under this solicitation. Once connected, follow the online procedures. A "HELP" button provides detailed instructions or call (202) 720-4517 for assistance.

Offerors are cautioned to bid only quantities they can reasonably expect to produce and deliver. Inquiries about the Master Solicitation dated November 2023; The Commodity Specification for Fresh Fruit; or this solicitation should be directed to the Contracting Officer; USDA, AMS, Room 3522-South; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-0239. Telephone: (202) 720-4517. FAX: (202) 720-2782.

The USDA prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.) To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), or (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).