



Request for Proposals: Development of a Kernza® Stewards Alliance

Project Overview:

Introduction

The University of Minnesota (UMN) Forever Green Initiative (FGI) and The Land Institute are seeking proposals for a firm or individual to facilitate the development of a multi-stakeholder association that will advance the collective interests, needs, and activities of market partners for Kernza® perennial grain. The primary stakeholders will include Kernza growers, processors, and end user businesses, with additional representation as necessary of consumers, policymakers, NGOs, and researchers/institutions heavily involved in or affected by early commercial Kernza activity. Models of Steward Ownership are particularly of interest and Kernza stakeholders have provided general support to move toward a Steward Ownership model.

Background

Transforming US agricultural systems from annual to perennial crops and cropping systems has the potential to provide novel, sustainable solutions to some pressing global challenges including soil degradation, greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, and the absence of just social and economic systems for growers and other stakeholders. The domestication of the world's first commercially-viable perennial grain crop (Intermediate wheatgrass) is underway in the US, and the product is trade named "Kernza®". This perennial crop can provide a healthy grain for direct human consumption, multiple ecosystem services for enhanced environmental quality, and new economic opportunities for growers and rural communities. This perennial grain offers a next level of potential to reduce tillage and agrochemical inputs, sequester carbon, improve the soil resource and climate resiliency, reduce nitrate leaching, improve drinking water quality, and deliver unparalleled alignment with emerging consumer values of sustainability, transparency, and impact.

In 2020, the USDA funded a Sustainable Agricultural Systems Coordinated Agricultural Project to strengthen research around Kernza and expand a perennial grain crop enterprise in the US, which will have positive near-term impacts on rural livelihoods and wellbeing, carbon sequestration, water quality, and local economies. This project, called [Kernza@CAP](#), has objectives ranging from plant breeding to education and commercialization. The funding for this RFP is embedded as the first Activity of the Supply Chains & Economics (SC&E) Objective Group of this USDA-supported project.

This RFP is soliciting proposals to develop and launch a multi-stakeholder organization that will meet the critical need for efficient, collaborative decision-making among market partners as



Kernza production, supply chains, markets, policy, and consumer base scales. The resulting entity (i.e. Kernza® Stewards Alliance) will be the main vehicle through which subsequent SC&E activities such as market research and communications are advanced, and be a sustainable vehicle for industry collaboration into the future beyond the end of the Kernza CAP grant. This entity will serve as the foundation for production, supply chain, and market partners and their foundational institutional partners to:

- Advocate their collective interests in a competitive market and policy environment
- Advance collaborative consumer research and market analysis
- Develop shared marketing and communications strategy
- Identify and overcome bottlenecks for the success of the Kernza industry.
- If deemed appropriate, own and manage the Kernza trademark

This will be a next-generation stewardship association in which market partners engage with relevant researchers, governments, advocates, and consumers, and that ensures Kernza delivers on economic, environmental, and social value propositions. The broad model of **Steward Ownership** is particularly of interest, has been introduced to Kernza stakeholders, and was well-received. This ownership and governance model will expand on the range of actors, values, and strategies relevant to a traditional business association or crop-specific industry associations, and protect the shared vision/mission of Kernza as market activity to grow, process, and market Kernza progresses. If deemed appropriate, the resulting entity could come to own and manage the Kernza trademark, thereby putting control of Kernza directly in the hands of those growing, processing, buying, marketing, and consuming Kernza.

It is imperative that through the development of this entity the process is documented and can be used to identify elements of a replicable model for how businesses strategically partner to advance crops with value propositions similar to Kernza, thereby contributing to a replicable model for rapid sustainable commercialization of similar crops.

UMN and TLI's expectation is for work to begin in mid-2021 and to conclude in early/mid-winter of 2022, with the project window being roughly 6-9 months in duration.

Expectations for consultant activities:

- Review substantial amount of documentation to-date in written documents, white papers, web-based resources (i.e. kernza.org), and UMN and TLI Kernza CAP SC&E leads
- Collect and synthesize stakeholder input at multiple stages of the project
- Efficiently facilitate diverse stakeholders to surface and cohere shared values
- Identify governance structures that fit the needs of Kernza; explore options for entity legal structures, and steward governance, equity, and revenue models for near to medium term stability of the entity
- Guide development of bylaws or equivalent for an organization centering mission and values through steward ownership



- Work with the team to launch Kernza multi-stakeholder organization (identify initial leadership, file articles of incorporation or equivalent, develop a year 1-3 working business plan and work plan)

Preferred qualifications:

- Experience developing organizations with a broad group of stakeholders
- Experience working with and building shared values and understanding among groups with different areas of expertise
- Experience incorporating mission and values into organizational charters, culture and operations
- Commitment to transparency and accountability
- Understanding of agricultural supply chains including interdependency and tensions between producers, aggregators, processors, marketers, CPGs, consumers, and civil society
- Experience working with agricultural organizations, including farmers
- Experience effectively facilitating groups through tension to shared goals
- Detailed knowledge of multiple organizational legal structures, and experience incorporating new entities, especially knowledge of steward owned legal structures and ownership models; familiarity with democratic economy
- Demonstrated track record of working with highly collaborative teams and centering diversity and equity
- Ability to provide guidance on short and long-term revenue models and financing options for sustaining Steward Ownership entities

Submission requirements:

- Scope of work
- Timeline
- Budget (up to \$30,000 is available for this project)
- Resume/CV/list of past clients of project team
- References (up to three)
- Willingness to engage the scope of work as part of a larger research project
- Indication of interest in working with the Kernza@CAP coordinating and project management teams

Proposals will be accepted until June 3, 2021.

Submissions & Questions

For questions, please contact: Tessa Peters, The Land Institute, peters@landinstitute.org

Please submit proposals to: Colin Cureton, University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative, cure0012@umn.edu

Questions? Contact Tessa Peters, Director of Crop Stewardship, The Land Institute, peters@landinstitute.org