

# **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2014 Progress Report**

The Land Stewardship Project  
June 2015

## **Background**

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) is a competitive grant program that provides organizations and educational institutions resources for training the next generation of farmers and ranchers. While BFRDP was initially authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress added new language and funded the program in the 2008 Farm Bill, with \$75 million in mandatory funding for fiscal years 2009-2012. After a break in funding in 2013, BFRDP was re-authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill and provided \$20 million in funding per fiscal year for 2014-2018.

USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is responsible for administering BFRDP and will continue to manage the program. The Office of Advocacy and Outreach, which has a Small and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers program area, also coordinates between overall USDA beginning farmer initiatives and BFRDP.

At a time when the average age of the American farmer is 58 years old, BFRDP is a critical source of funding for programs that train, mentor and support the success of beginning farmers and ranchers. With a lot of hard work, there is opportunity for the next generation of family farmers to get started. BFRDP is a key way for the nation to invest intelligently and cost-effectively in their success. Over five years of funding, BFRDP has awarded 184 grants and more than \$90 million to help develop the next generation of farmers.

## **Progress Report**

This progress report provides an analysis of BFRDP's administrative and programmatic strengths and weaknesses based on feedback from FY 2014 grant recipients. In addition, it evaluates trends over the past five grant cycles and reviews changes made to the program following the 2014 Farm Bill. The progress report also includes a summary and new recommendations based on historical trends and data from FY 2014.

The progress report will not address the issue of merit or value of granted projects. Though beyond the scope of this report, evaluation of merit and the individual and collective effectiveness of awarded projects is something stakeholders and agency personnel should aim to assess.

We are hopeful this, and previous progress reports, along with NIFA's own program reviews<sup>1,2</sup> will provide helpful insights on the merits of the program and underline needed improvements. BFRDP is the only federal competitive grant program exclusively dedicated to training beginning farmers and ranchers. With program demand the past five cycles far exceeding available resources, understanding the program's true value as well as how to better administer and target available funds is of great importance to the next generation of American agriculture.

## **Key Findings**

Following a break in the funding in FY 2013, in which no new funding was awarded, FY 2014 saw an increase in applications and a shift in the distribution of funding.

The most significant finding is that projects led by universities claimed the majority of the funding (56 percent) in 2014 for the first time since 2009. Funding for projects led by non-governmental and community-based organizations dropped to 44 percent of overall dollars awarded, even while CBO/NGOs were awarded the majority (62 percent) of grants.

In addition, institutions awarded grants in FY 2014 were less likely to form partnerships with other organizations than in past years. Only 19 of 33 respondents reported partnerships this year, compared with 34 of 39 and 32 of 35 in the previous two funding cycles.

In this first year of funding allocated through the 2014 Farm Bill, a new five percent set-aside was created for projects that serve U.S. military veteran farmers. Meanwhile, the statutory set-aside for projects that serve socially disadvantaged farmers (SDA) was reduced from 25 percent to five percent. We estimate that 46 percent of overall funds in FY 2014 will support programming for SDA farmers, down from 58 percent in 2012, and approximately 12 percent will support programming for military veteran farmers.

Regional distribution of grants and funding in FY 2014 was fairly balanced; in fact, compared with past years, FY 2014 stands out as the year in which funds are most evenly distributed across all four regions.

## **Methodology**

Following the announcement of FY 2014 BFRDP grant awardees on February 2, 2015, staff and an intern from the Land Stewardship Project, assisted by an intern from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, conducted the research for this progress report. Data was collected from two sources: project briefs posted on NIFA's website and phone interviews with principal investigators or representatives from the FY 2014 BFRDP grantees. Phone interviews were conducted with 33 of the 39 grantees. Oregon State University, University of Nevada Cooperative

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<sup>1</sup> *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program 2010 Outcomes Report*. Available on NIFA's website at <http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Beginningpercent20Farmerpercent202010percent20Outcomes.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program 2011 Outcomes Report*. Available on NIFA's website at <http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Beginningpercent20Farmerpercent202011percent20Outcomes.pdf>

Extension, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, Rodale Institute, and Growing Power, Inc. did not respond to multiple interview requests. The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota declined to be interviewed. The methodology of data collection is consistent and similar in scope with the reviews published for FY 2009<sup>3</sup>, FY 2010<sup>4</sup>, FY 2011<sup>5</sup> and FY 2012<sup>6</sup>.

**Quantitative Analysis of 2014 BFRDP Awards**

Out of the total 157 applications for funding that were submitted in FY 2014, 39 projects were awarded grants. This means that roughly one out of every four proposals were funded, or 25 percent of total applications. (See Table I)

**Table I: BFRDP Funding and Demand**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Grant Recipients</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Funding Awarded</b>	<b>Success Rate</b>
2009	29	194	\$17,185,504	15%
2010	40	117	\$18,140,803	34%
2011	36	108	\$18,154,513	33%
2012	40	109	\$17,886,643	37%
2014	39	157	\$18,930,733	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>685</b>	<b>\$90,298,196</b>	<b>27%</b>

Approximately 50 percent more applications were submitted in 2014 than in the preceding three cycles, but approximately the same number of projects were ultimately funded, leading to a lower overall success rate for applications. The increase in applications in FY 2014 is likely due to pent-up demand from the gap in funding in 2013.

*For a complete list of 2014 grants see Appendix 1.*

Of the 39 projects that were funded in 2014 (see Table II):

- 24 (62 percent) were led by community-based organizations (CBO) or non-governmental organizations (NGO); and
- 15 (38 percent) were led by universities/colleges or other academic institutions.

<sup>3</sup> *Analysis and Recommendations for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program*, The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

<sup>4</sup> *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2010 Progress Report and Recommendations*, The Land Stewardship Project, February 2011.

<sup>5</sup> *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2011 Progress Report*, The Land Stewardship Project, December 2011

<sup>6</sup> *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2012 Progress Report*, The Land Stewardship Project, December 2012

**Table II: Historical Distribution of Grants by Lead Institution Type\***

<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>FY 2009</b>	<b>FY 2010</b>	<b>FY 2011</b>	<b>FY 2012</b>	<b>FY 2014</b>
CBOs/NGOs	38%	63%	61%	65%	62%
Academic Institutions	59%	37%	36%	35%	38%
Trade Associations	-	-	2%	-	-
Federal Agencies	3%	-	-	-	-

*\*See Appendix 2 for historical pie charts*

Of the \$18,930,733 in awarded grants in 2014 (see Table III):

- \$8,377,653 (44 percent) supported projects led by CBOs/NGOs; and
- \$10,553,080 (56 percent) supported projects led by universities/colleges or other academic institutions.

**Table III: Historical Distribution of Grant Funding by Lead Institution Type \***

<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>FY 2009</b>	<b>FY 2010</b>	<b>FY 2011</b>	<b>FY 2012</b>	<b>FY 2014</b>
CBOs/NGOs	34%	50%	54%	54%	44%
Academic Institutions	57%	50%	42%	46%	56%
Trade Associations	-	-	4%	-	-
Federal Agencies	9%	-	-	-	-

*\*See Appendix 3 for historical pie charts*

The mean CBO/NGO grant is \$349,069 compared with the mean university grant \$703,539—meaning the average amount of funding per CBO/NGO grant is less than half the average funding per university grant.

In light of the fact that the million-dollar clearinghouse grant was awarded for the second time in FY 2014, and did not play a role in grant distribution in FYs 2010-2012, we also looked at funding distribution with the clearinghouse grant removed from the equation. Even without the clearinghouse grant, overall funding still skews in favor of universities. Of the \$17,930,733 awarded to standard, development, and Educational Enhancement Team (EET) grants, 47 percent was awarded to CBOs/NGOs and 53 percent to universities.

Similarly, an analysis of funding distribution for standard, development and EET grants (removing the clearinghouse) reveals that university-led projects were still awarded much larger grants on average. Taking out the clearinghouse grant, universities received an average of \$682,363 per grant compared with CBO/NGO's average \$349,069 per grant. Even without the clearinghouse grant, universities still received on average 95 percent more funding per grant compared with CBOs/NGOs. Notably, the 10 smallest-dollar awards were all one-year development grants (compared with two- to three-year standard grants). All 10 development grants were awarded to CBOs/NGOs.

Further review of the university/college or other academic institutions category found that 14 of the 15 grantees were 1862 land grant institutions (one of these is a private college which is also state-supported and has 1862 land grant status), and one is an 1890 land grant institution. Of the five partnerships reported that included universities/academic institutions, two were partnerships with 1862 land grant institutions, and three with 1890 institutions.

**Table IV: Grant Distribution by Grant Type\***

Institution Type	Development	Standard	Clearinghouse	EET
CBOs/NGOs	10	13	-	1
Academic Institutions	-	14	1	-

*\*See Appendix 4 for pie chart*

As shown in Table IV, the majority of the 39 grant recipients received standard grants, which follows similar trends to prior years. In total, one grantee received an educational enhancement grant, one received a clearinghouse grant, 10 received development grants and 27 received standard grants.

All 10 recipients of development grants were led by CBOs/NGOs. The one educational enhancement (EET) grant was led by an NGO. The one clearinghouse grant was led by a university.

Awarding of development grants increased in FY 2014 compared with previous years. Six development grants were awarded in FY 2012, five in FY 2011, and six in FY 2010. Historically, as in 2014, development grants have been overwhelmingly awarded to CBOs/NGOs.

Institutions do not apply directly for development grants, rather, development grants are awarded to standard grant applications that are “considered meritorious but rank below the funding line in the peer review process.”<sup>7</sup>

For FY 2014, the majority of projects will receive grant funding for three years. Specifically, of the 39 total grants, 26 are three years in duration, one is five years in duration, two are two years in duration, and the 10 development grants are all one year in duration.

Eleven of the 27 standard grants were renewals of projects funded in previous years. Nine standard grants were renewed for an additional three years, one standard grant was renewed for an additional two years, and one development grant recipient from 2012 was awarded a two-year standard grant in 2014. Comparatively more renewals were funded in FY 2014 than in FY 2012, in which seven standard grants were renewed for an additional two to three years and one development grant from 2011 was awarded a standard grant.

In terms of grant size distribution (see Table V below), 22 of the grant projects and nearly 83 percent of total funding (\$15,641,545) was awarded to grants \$500,000 and larger. The clearinghouse grant was awarded \$1,000,000, and was the only grant over \$750,000. This

<sup>7</sup>2014 BFRDP RFA Part II—AWARD INFORMATION

reverses the recent trend towards reducing the amount of funding dedicated to projects in the top percentile. In FY 2012, 74 percent of total funding was awarded to grants larger than \$500,000.

**Table V: FY 2014 Grant Amount Distribution by Range\***

<b>Dollar range</b>	<b># of Grants</b>	<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>% of Funding</b>	<b>CBOs/NGO compared to Univ/Academic</b>
Up to \$100,000	2	\$166,827	0.9%	2 to 0
\$100-\$200,000	9	\$967,942	5.1%	9 to 0
\$200-\$300,000	2	\$516,946	2.7%	2 to 0
\$300-\$400,000	2	\$748,702	4.0%	2 to 0
\$400-\$500,000	2	\$888,771	4.7%	1 to 1
\$500-\$600,000	2	\$1,091,298	5.8%	1 to 1
\$600-\$700,000	6	\$3,954,933	20.9%	1 to 5
\$700-\$750,000	13	\$9,595,254	50.6%	6 to 7
More than \$750,000	1	\$1,000,000	5.3%	0 to 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>\$18,930,733</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>39</b>

*\*See Appendix 5 for chart*

The \$1,000,000 clearinghouse grant alone represents 5.3 percent of the funds awarded in FY 2014. The 10 development grants together received \$966,827 and 5.1 percent of the funds awarded.

Notably, the FY 2014 increase in the percentage of funding awarded to projects in the top percentile cannot be explained by the presence of the million-dollar clearinghouse grant: of the \$17,930,733 awarded to standard, development and EET grants, 82 percent went to grants \$500,000 and larger.

Of the 22 grants awarded in the top percentile (\$500,000-\$1,000,000), 14 were awarded to grants led by academic institutions and eight were awarded to grants led by CBOs/NGOs. Of the seven grants awarded in the middle percentile, one was awarded to a grant led by an academic institution and six were awarded to grants led by CBOs/NGOs. The 10 grants awarded in the bottom percentile were all awarded to CBOs/NGOs. See Appendix 4 for graphic representation of the distribution of grants by size and institution type.

This distribution of resources is a major reversal of the trend in the last three cycles, in which CBOs/NGOs were awarded the majority of the funding. It represents a return to the first year of the program, FY 2009, in which the majority (57 percent) of the funding was directed to projects led by universities.

## **Partnerships and Collaboration:**

Partnerships<sup>8</sup> and collaborations<sup>9</sup> are important elements of BFRDP, and have been since the creation of the program. These related, but different aspects of the program are specifically defined in the FY 2014 RFA. The additional guidance below was also provided in the RFA for determining priority in grant making as it relates to partnerships and collaborations.

***Partnerships and Collaborations:** Priority will be given to partnerships and collaborations that are led by or include NGOs and CBOs with expertise in new agricultural producer training and outreach. Only applications with a minimum of 25 percent of the Federal budget allocated to these partner organizations (i.e., NGOs, CBOs and SAEOs) will be given this priority. In addition, these partner organizations must have been involved and played an important role in the project design and development. Projects must also employ an equitable and appropriate decision-making and oversight process that includes all partners to be given this priority.*

In interviews, grantees were asked a series of questions regarding the partnerships associated with their projects. Questions included: 1) number of partners, 2) names of partners, 3) degree to which partners are participating in the project (low, medium, and high), and 4) percentage of funding each partner will receive while participating in the project.

While these questions were asked of each grant recipient, varied responses and the unique nature of each awarded project makes analysis of the role of partners difficult to quantify and assess. Below is the best characterization of the information gathered.

In review and interviews with 33 grant recipients, we found that approximately half of the projects (19) for which data is available included partnerships with one or more CBO/NGO or university partners. Partners represented a wide range of types of organizations. Table VI shows partnerships by type.

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<sup>8</sup> “Partnership” means a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project. 2014 BFRDP RFA Part VIII – OTHER INFORMATION

<sup>9</sup> “Collaborator” means the person or an organization that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project but is not immediately connected to the management of the project. 2014 BFRDP RFA Part VIII – OTHER INFORMATION

**Table VI: Partnership by Type**

<b>Primary Grantee</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Engagement of Partners</b>
Univ/College	CBO/NGO	7
Univ/College	CBO/NGO and Univ/Coll	2
Univ/College	Univ/Coll	0
Univ/College	none	4
CBO/NGO	CBO/NGO	7
CBO/NGO	CBO/NGO and Univ/Coll	2
CBO/NGO	Univ/Coll	1
CBO/NGO	none	10*
<b>Total</b>		<b>33</b>

*\* 7 of the 10 CBOs/NGOs with no partnerships are recipients of development grants*

Compared with previous years, far fewer projects in FY 2014 included partnerships. In FY 2012, 34 of 39 respondents reported at least one partnership; and 32 of 35 respondents reported partnerships in 2011.

Overall, when universities, colleges or academic institutions were the primary grantees they were most likely to partner with a CBO/NGO. No universities surveyed partnered exclusively with other universities.

The most common type of partnership arrangement in projects led by CBOs/NGOs was with another CBO/NGO, but two CBOs/NGOs simultaneously partnered with other CBO(s)/NGO(s) and university(s). Only one NGO partnered exclusively with a university.

Of the four universities reporting no partnerships, two reported CBO/NGO collaborators. The other two universities indicated their projects involved neither partners nor collaborators. Again, this deviates from the trend set in FY 2011 and FY 2012 in which all universities reported at least one partnership.

Of the 10 CBO/NGO organizations reporting no partners, nearly all reported strong relationships with collaborators. Seven of the 10 CBOs/NGOs reporting no partnerships were recipients of development grants. Only one CBO/NGO indicated their project involved neither collaborators nor partners; in that case, the PI reported the organization dropped partners and collaborators when their application shifted from a standard to a development grant.

As with universities, CBOs/NGOs were far more likely to report no partnerships in FY 2014 than in previous years. Compared with 10 of 20 CBOs/NGOs reporting no partnerships in FY 2014, only three of 22 CBO/NGO grantees reported no partnerships in FY 2012 and only five of 25 in FY 2011.



**Degree of Engagement with Partners**

Of the 19 respondents that spoke to the degree of participation of their partners, 14 rated the participation of their partners as high. Four respondents rated their partnership involvement as medium and one as low (See Table VII).

**Table VII: Degree of Partner Participation**

Degree of Participation	Grantee responses
High	14
Medium	4
Low	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>

Of the 21 respondents that identified their partners as sub-grantees, 11 estimated that their partners in total received at least 25 percent of the grant, while 10 estimated that their partners received less than 25 percent. Our estimation is that in FY 2014, approximately 23 percent of the total funds were disbursed to sub-grantees, which is consistent with previous years (See Table VIII).

**Table VIII: Resource Distribution to Sub-Grantees**

% to sub-grantees	0 to 24%	25 to 49%	50 to 74%	75 to 100%	Total sub-grantee
<b>Number of grants</b>	10	5	4	2	21

The role of collaborators was even more difficult to assess and ranged so significantly that we were unable to make any coherent conclusions from the data. Under the “Qualitative Aspects” section of this report, we do provide some additional feedback regarding partnerships and collaborations that grant recipients articulated during interviews.

**Socially Disadvantaged and Limited Resource Farmers**

The authorizing language for BFRDP in the 2014 Farm Bill stipulates that at least five percent of funds must be designated for projects benefiting limited resource and socially disadvantaged beginning farmers (SDA), as well as farm workers desiring to become farmers or ranchers.<sup>10</sup> This is a major reduction in the historic statutory set-aside of 25 percent authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill. Interviews quantified how many grants assisted these targeted populations and the degree of focus these projects had with socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers.

<sup>10</sup> Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79, Section 7409

Of the 33 awards for which we have data, 23 of the projects targeted outreach efforts to socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers. The large majority (15 of 23) focused at least 75 percent of efforts on those constituencies.

Seventy percent of grantees targeted a portion of their outreach and programming to SDA farmers, committing a total of \$8,629,718, or 46 percent of BFRDP funds for 2014. This is a reduction in the percent of funding directed to SDA farmers, down from 58 percent in 2012.

**Table IX: Number of Grants and Resources that Support SDA Groups**

	0-24%	25 to 49%	50 to 74%	75 to 99%	100%	Total
<b>Number of grants</b>	2	3	3	6	9	23
<b>Total Resources</b>	\$24,248	\$695,679	\$1,209,204	\$3,754,415	\$2,946,172	\$8,629,718

Respondents were asked three questions about their work with SDA farmers: 1) what percent of your outreach, programming, or other project activities is targeted to a socially disadvantaged group?; 2) which specific groups does your project target or reach?; and 3) has your organization worked with this community before?

Responses that varied in specificity make data about programming serving SDA farmers somewhat difficult to compare project-to-project. Many projects served more than one socially disadvantaged community, or indicated they served multiple socially disadvantaged groups within one community. For instance, many projects serving immigrants and refugees indicated that they targeted immigrant and refugee women in particular.

Nine projects indicated they targeted programming to women, eight to immigrants and refugees, six to African Americans, five to low-resource farmers, four to Latinos, three to Native Americans and tribal communities, and one to Asian Americans. Four projects indicated they served communities of color, but didn't specify in terms of race/ethnicity.

Of the 14 CBOs/NGOs that targeted programming to SDA farmers, two groups targeted between 15-50 percent of programming to SDA farmers and 12 targeted more than 50 percent of programming to SDA farmers. Eight CBOs/NGOs targeted 100 percent of their programming to SDA farmers.

Nine universities targeted programming to SDA farmers. Of those, four targeted 15-50 percent of programming to SDA farmers, and five targeted more than 50 percent of programming to SDA farmers. One university targeted 100 percent of its programming to SDA farmers.

Responses to the open-ended question "Has your organization worked with this community before? If so, how?" varied greatly. Some groups had staff and/or board members from the SDA communities with which they were working; other institutions developed relationships with new partners and/or collaborators with a history of working in an SDA community. Overall,

community-based organizations were the most likely to have existing relationships with an SDA community, and most likely to engage SDA decision-makers in managing the project as either organizational staff or on a board or advisory committee. Universities and NGOs were more likely to rely on relationships with partners and collaborators with ties to the SDA communities served by their projects; universities also employed advisory boards with representatives of SDA communities and/or staff of partner and collaborator organizations that work in SDA communities.

### **Military Veteran Farmers**

The 2014 Farm Bill created a new set-aside for farmers and ranchers who are veterans of the U.S. military. Statute stipulates that five percent of funds be set aside for projects that address the needs of farmer veterans.<sup>11</sup>

Interviews with grant recipients revealed that 11 projects specifically target a portion of their work to farmer veterans. One project dedicates 100 percent of its outreach and programming to veteran farmers. Overall, \$2,223,797 and nearly 12 percent of funds in FY 2014 are being utilized to support farmer veterans (See Table X).

**Table X: Number of Grants and Resources that Support Military Veteran Farmers**

	<b>0-24%</b>	<b>25 to 49%</b>	<b>50 to 74%</b>	<b>75 to 99%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number of grants</b>	4	3	1	2	1	11
<b>Total Resources</b>	\$386,013	\$689,422	\$362,414	\$685,948	\$100,000	\$2,223,797

As with organizations that work with SDA farmers, organizations that indicated they work with military veteran farmers were asked these questions: 1) what percent of your outreach, programming, or other project activities is targeted to veterans?; and 2) has your organization worked with this community before?

Six universities and five CBOs/NGOs indicated they work with farmer veterans. Of those, four universities target 10-50 percent of their programming to farmer veterans and two target 50-100 percent of their programming to farmer veterans. Three CBOs/NGOs target 10-50 percent of their programming to farmer veterans and two target 90-100 percent to farmer veterans. One CBO/NGO targets 100 percent of their programming to farmer-veterans.

Universities and CBOs/NGOs had varying experience working with veterans. A few CBOs/NGOs, as well as one university, had military veteran staff members. Both universities and CBOs/NGOs were partnering and collaborating with veteran-service organizations. Many of the relationships between lead-organizations and veteran service partners/collaborators were relatively new, and PIs see the development of these relationships as an important part of their project.

<sup>11</sup> Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79, Section 7409

## **Training on Agricultural Production Methods**

Statutorily, BFRDP grants support education, training and outreach in subjects of use to beginning farmers. Projects may focus on business training, agricultural production, mentoring and apprenticeship or a number of other programming areas that serve the needs of beginning farmers.

Many of the projects direct a portion of their efforts to training in agricultural production. Of 33 projects surveyed, 29 included some training in agricultural production. Grantees were asked about training in four methods of production or practices: organic production, integrated pest management, conservation practices, and pasture livestock or poultry production. Most grantees trained in more than one of these methods of production or practices (see Table XI).

**Table XI: Number of Grants That Train in Agricultural Production**

<b>Agricultural Production Method</b>	<b>Number of Grants</b>
Organic Production	25
Integrated Pest Management	24
Conservation Practices	27
Pasture Livestock or Poultry Production	16
<b>Total Grants That Train in Production Methods</b>	<b>29</b>

## **Reflections on the Application Process**

Grant recipients were asked to provide input on the application process itself, including the level of difficulty compared to other grant application processes they've experienced (See Table XII).

**Table XII: Level of Difficulty Compared to Other Grants**

<b>Level of Difficulty</b>	<b>Grantee responses</b>
More	12
Same	19
Less	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

Grantee estimates of the time spent writing the grant application ranged from 50 hours to over 1,000 hours. Ten grantees estimated they spent between 50 and 100 hours putting together their applications. Twenty-two said they spent more than 100 hours on the application process. The amount of time spent developing and submitting the grant varied widely, but in 2014 we estimate an average of 162 hours per grant. That's down slightly from an estimated 170 hours per grant in 2012 and 213 hours per grant in 2011, but up from an estimated 105 hours per grant in 2010.

Many grantees also mentioned the time contributed by partners and collaborators in preparing the application, attachments and budget.

## **Regional Distribution**

The regional balance and distribution of grants in FY 2014 is summarized in Table XIII below. Overall the regional distribution was relatively balanced in FY 2014. The highest concentration of grants are in the Midwest and West, totaling 28 percent of overall awards and 28 percent of overall funding awarded to projects in each of those regions. The region with the lowest concentration of grants was the South, which represents 21 percent of overall grants and 19 percent of overall funding.

**Table XIII: FY 2014 Regional Distribution of Grants and Resources**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of grants</b>	<b>Funding allocation</b>	<b>% of grants</b>	<b>% of funding</b>
<b>South</b>	8	\$3,514,445	21%	19%
<b>Northeast</b>	9	\$4,686,213	23%	25%
<b>West</b>	11	\$5,382,453	28%	28%
<b>Midwest</b>	11	\$5,347,622	28%	28%
<b>Total</b>	39	\$18,930,733	100%	100%

The regional distribution of grants in FY 2014 is well balanced compared with previous years. Funding from 2010-2012 cycled through regions; a region that received the fewest grants and least funding one year could win the most grants and greatest percent of funding the following year. The exception to that historical trend is the Northeast, which never received more than 15-22 percent of overall funding.

Importantly, regional distribution does not necessarily reflect service area. This analysis of regional distribution is based on the location of the lead-organization. Three organizations indicate their service area is national, and six projects serve more than one state. Within a region certain states, counties or metro areas may be considerably better served than others. See Appendix 6 for visual representation of service areas across regions, and Appendix 7 for a historical regional distribution of grants throughout the life of the program to date.

## **Service Area**

Grantees were also asked to define the service area of their projects. While there is substantial variation, service areas generally broke down into six groups, with statewide being the most common service area by far.

**Table XIV: Geographic Service Area of Grants\***

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Number of Grants</b>
Localized regions, including metropolitan areas, cities, or reservations	3
County or numerous counties	6
Statewide	15
Multiple States	6
National	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

\*See Appendix 6 for a map of service areas

### **Qualitative Comments**

Grantees were asked two open-ended questions. First, **“Is there anything you think is particularly strong about BFRDP?”**

Overwhelmingly, the most common answer to this question was support and gratitude for the existence of the program itself.

*“The nature of the grant is that it is a pool of money set aside to help beginning farmers get started. There’s a huge amount of support that’s needed to help people get started—and BFRDP supports programs like ours that can provide that help.”*

Several grantees talked about the significance of a dedicated funding stream for beginning farmer training programs, saying in one case “If this doesn’t exist, I don’t know where else you would get the money [to train beginning farmers].” Another investigator said, “It’s one of the few lifelines we have out there.”

Ten grantees noted that BFRDP supports socially disadvantaged and low-resource farmers who are otherwise underserved by traditional extension and federal farm programs.

*“This allows us to build the capacity of immigrant farmers so they can learn how to make farm businesses work in this country. There’s an openness to integrating the knowledge of farming immigrants already have, which can be very different than the traditional ways of farming in our state, while helping them get the access to the resources and markets they need.”*

*“This program allows people who have financial or other kinds of constraints—like immigrants—to take their still sets and apply them in this community. It helps people who may already have agricultural experience become self-sufficient. Not many programs provide that opportunity!”*

Many of the grantees, both CBOs/NGOs and universities, credited the program for supporting community-based initiatives. “I love that non-profits are able to get funded,” said one university-based investigator, “They’re doing meaningful work and having a strong impact.”

Four grantees thought the emphasis on partnerships was a real strength, particularly making connections between universities and CBOs/NGOs.

*“It strengthens the relationships between the university and non-profits, which isn’t the easiest thing to do, but because it’s a requirement it really pushes these relationships forward.”*

Nine grantees discussed the importance of the three-year funding cycle and relatively large award. “It’s enough money and time to have a real impact.”

A few grantees appreciated the breadth of the objectives and the flexible nature of the grants.

*“That we don’t have to detail exactly what content we’re going to offer all the way through—it makes it so we can be more responsive to what’s needed, what’s working and what we learn.”*

Six grantees found the staff at NIFA helpful and easy to work with.

Grantees were also asked, **“What suggestions for improvements do you have?”**

As in past years, most of the suggestions for improvement were related to the application process.

Nearly all grantees agree that the application process is time consuming, but comparable to other federal grants. Investigators at eight of the 15 of the universities credited their grant-management departments. One university-based investigator commented, “Without help from [our] grant department, I’m not sure I would have gotten it all done. I don’t know how NGOs do it!”

Ten grantees, both CBO/NGO and university investigators, mentioned concerns that the time-consuming and sometimes complicated application process would keep CBOs/NGOs with limited staff time and capacity for administrative work from applying. Additionally, both CBO/NGO and university investigators noted that some of their prospective CBO/NGO partners were written into applications as sub-contracted collaborators instead of partners when it became clear that the prospective partners did not have the capacity to submit all the documentation required for partnership.

Several interviews included a discussion of statutorily required 25 percent cost share. While some grantees think it is an appropriate requirement, some feel that it is high. Three grantees noted that it is particularly challenging for CBOs/NGOs to provide documentation of cost sharing over the life of a three-year grant, noting that the time between the writing of the application and the end of the grant period is 3.5-4 years.

Grantees also mentioned challenges in the timeline of the application process. Six grantees noted the gap between the notification that their project was funded in late 2014 and the USDA

announcement of the awards in February 2015. Grantees involved in agricultural production also noted that June is a difficult time for an application deadline given the intensity of the application process. Several grantees mentioned that the June deadline was even more challenging given the short time between the release of the RFA and the deadline (April 11, 2014-June 12, 2014).

Six grantees expressed concern about the selection of reviewers and their ability to identify effective projects.

*“It seems like so many of the reviewers are academics, or work with grants for a living, and get hung-up on the rules of the application. Reviewers need to see through the formatting to the impact—which applicants have the knowledge and experience to implement the work?”*

*“These projects are alive and thriving! It would be interesting if the reviewers could see online demonstrations. To see the groups—what they do, how they work. See them actually training. Otherwise it’s just boring paper.”*

Three grantees wished the funding period could be longer than three years, noting that the projects themselves do not end after three years and the organizations struggle to find other funding streams to continue successful programs. Two investigators commented that it would be useful to have a no-cost extension option if the work is not complete at the end of the grant period.

Two groups expressed frustration with the structure of the development grant. Groups receiving development grants must either re-apply for funding in the first few months of implementing their project, before they can demonstrate meaningful outcomes, or they may apply for a standard grant after their development grant is complete, leaving them with a year-long gap in funding.

## **Summary**

### **2014 marks a major shift in BFRDP funding and priorities.**

For the first time since 2009, the majority of funding was awarded to projects led by universities and academic institutions. Though CBOs/NGOs were awarded the majority of grants in FY 2014, projects led by CBOs/NGOs received less than half of the funding. This raises a clear concern relative to the Congressional intent to give priority to projects led by CBOs/NGOs. Overall, CBOs/NGOs received significantly less funding per grant.

No single factor in the distribution of grants explains this shift. CBOs/NGOs account for a similar percentage of overall grants awarded as in previous years: 62 percent of awards in FY 2014 compared with 65 percent of grants in FY 2012.

The clearinghouse grant was awarded again in FY 2014 for the first time since 2009, and is the largest grant available (\$1,000,00 over five years).

The ten \$71,080-\$100,000 development grants awarded in FY 2014 represent an increase from six development grants awarded in 2012. That development grants were awarded exclusively to



CBOs/NGOs clearly contributes to the skewed funding distribution between CBO/NGO and university grants.

**Development grantees expressed a number of concerns about their grants.**

One development grantee stated in the interview that they were encouraged by NIFA to partner with a university in the next funding cycle, and to let the university take the lead on the application. Another CBO/NGO grantee noted their organization's historic and continued collaboration on university-led projects that were awarded standard grants in this cycle, while their organization was awarded a development grant.

Development grantees were fairly evenly divided between appreciating the opportunity to start a project as a development grant, and finding the development grant process cumbersome and limiting. Three development grantees expressed frustration with the extra time and effort required to submit a new budget. Two stated their intent to apply again in 2016, noting that timeline would require them to find supplemental funding to cover the gap between the end of their development grant in 2015 and the start of a standard grant in 2016. At least two development grantees submitted applications in response to the 2015 RFA—only three months into the implementation of their development grants.

**Universities and academic institutions were also awarded more of the high-value grants.**

Of the 22 grants awarded for \$500,000-\$1,000,000, 14 were awarded to universities and eight to CBOs/NGOs. This is a divergence from the trend: in FY 2012, 12 of the \$500,000+ grants were awarded to universities and 10 to CBOs/NGOs.

**Another departure from previous years is the decrease in partnerships.**

While all but three grantees continue to work with collaborators, 14 out of 33 grantees interviewed reported no partnerships. Half of those reporting no partnerships were CBOs/NGOs with development grants. As noted above, one CBO/NGO grantee attributed the absence of partners and collaborators in their application to the concentrated timeline and limited funding of the development grant.

**Funding directed to socially disadvantaged farmers was reduced and, for the first time, funding was directed to military veteran farmers.**

While the 2014 Farm Bill significantly reduced the set-aside for socially disadvantaged and limited resource farmers from 25 percent to five percent, our analysis indicates that at least 46 percent of funding in FY 2014 supports programing targeted to SDA farmers. While well over the five percent minimum requirement, this is still a reduction in the funding dedicated to serve SDA farmers, down from 58 percent in FY 2012.

FY 2014 was the first year for a new five percent set-aside for projects serving military veteran farmers. NIFA more than met this five percent requirement by directing 12 percent of funding to serve farmer veterans.

**As in past years, the interviews highlight a number of difficulties in the application process.**

Suggestions for improvements in the application process echo concerns of previous years. Given the limited capacity of many community-based organizations for complex grant writing and navigating unclear awards processes, these concerns are magnified in light of skewed funding distribution that favors universities.

In sum, BFRDP is a program intended to support community-based and non-governmental organizations in particular in providing training, outreach and education to beginning farmers and ranchers. It is greatly concerning to see universities and academic institutions claiming the vast majority of the large awards and the majority of overall funding, and to observe a concerning trend towards a lower priority on partnerships.

### **Recommendations**

BFRDP is essential to establishing the next generation of American farmers. The projects supported by BFRDP train, educate, mentor and otherwise assist beginning farmers and ranchers in launching successful farming operations. The following recommendations were developed with the intent to inform and assist USDA personnel, congressional leaders and others who are invested in the continued success of BFRDP. Based on the above analysis of the 2014 awards, in the context of historic trends in the program, these recommendations aim to keep BFRDP accountable to statutory intent, to underline existing strengths and to make needed improvements.

- 1. *As directed in statute, give priority to projects led by community-based and non-governmental organizations, and to partnerships and collaborations with community-based and non-governmental organizations.*** Many of the recommendations that follow will address various ways to correct the problem of underfunding community-based projects and partnerships, but the bottom line is that the majority of funds should be awarded to projects led by community-based organizations. We therefore recommend that future funding cycles:
  - ***Award the majority of funds (greater than 50 percent) to projects led by CBOs and NGOs, as was the funding trend in recent years.***
  - ***Award at least 65 percent of total grants to CBOs and NGOs.***
  - ***More evenly distribute larger grants among universities and CBOs and NGOs.***
  - ***Renew the priority for partnerships and collaborations with CBOs and NGOs.***

**2. Improve the application process so that it is more accessible to CBO/NGO applicants.**

- **Offer more support to first-time and less-experienced applicants.** The application process is time-consuming and challenging for many applicants, in particular for community-based organizations. Both CBO/NGO and university investigators identified this as a barrier to successfully competing for funding. Existing webinars are useful and appreciated. NIFA should explore building additional tools, trainings and support for less administratively experienced applicants. For example, several applicants suggested an application check-list.
- **Convene a taskforce composed of representatives of CBOs/NGOs who run programs for beginning farmers for the purpose of reviewing the BFRDP RFA and application process.** Year after year, the application process continues to be a significant challenge for CBOs/NGOs—especially for those applying for the first time. This also raises a question about the application process as a barrier to entry—while we don't have data on organizations that start but don't complete the application process, the level of difficulty reported by CBOs applying for the first time suggests that some CBOs find the process too onerous to complete, and thus don't submit applications at all.

A taskforce would be charged with conducting a thorough review of the application process and producing a set of recommendations to help NIFA make needed changes to make the entire application process more accessible and equitable for CBOs/NGOs.

**3. Strengthen the engagement and better utilize the expertise of NGOs and CBOs in peer review panels, including in the selection of the panel manager.** Panelists with more experience working with community-based organizations will be better equipped than academic reviewers to select applications for programming capacity, not grant-writing experience and proposal production capacity. Continue the practice of selecting one-third CBO/NGO panelists, one-third farmers and one-third universities. NIFA should ensure that at least one reviewer from a CBO/NGO and one reviewer with farm experience be assigned to each proposal reviewed in the peer review panel. Additionally, panel managers play an important role in facilitating application reviews and selection, and more panel managers should come from NGOs and CBOs, not just academic institutions.

Training for panelists in reading applications for content, not administrative skill, is also recommended. Panelists of all backgrounds would benefit from guidance in reading applications for projects that seek to serve farmers across the country with diverse backgrounds, skills, geographic settings, and production goals and methods.

**4. Keep the overall number of awards that primarily target socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers at no less than 25 percent.** It was encouraging to see that FY 2014 grants continued to fund programming serving SDA farmers at nearly 50 percent, even though the statutory set-aside was reduced in the 2014 Farm Bill. And while the most recent round of funding exceeds the 25 percent threshold, we are concerned that the focus

on serving socially disadvantaged farmers not be diluted with the new focus on veteran farmers. BFRDP funding should be maintained at recent levels for projects that serve SDA farmers.

- 5. *Reassess the distribution across grant types: standard, educational enhancement, development and clearinghouse.*** Development grants can be an important tool in supporting organizations that have the potential but don't yet have the capacity to be awarded a standard grant. That said, it is concerning that the shorter-term, smaller-dollar development grants are overwhelmingly awarded to CBOs/NGOs. While we're not necessarily recommending that more development grants be awarded to academic institutions, we note the concentration of development grants in CBO-led projects as an indicator that the review panels lack clear understanding, or clear direction, for the purpose and best use of development grants.

Development grants should give organizations that need it the opportunity to develop programmatic capacity, but should not be necessary for programmatically capable organizations to develop successful standard grant applications (see recommendation related to review panels above).

The standard grant RFA and awarding process timeline is particularly challenging for recipients of development grants. NIFA should consider how to best structure timelines so that development grantees truly have the opportunity to turn their development projects into successful standard grant projects. Development grantees should not be eligible to apply for standard grants until they can demonstrate outcomes in their development grant projects (at least nine months into the award). Nor should development grantees have to go a year without BFRDP funding between their year of development grant funding and the next standard grant cycle. There are a number of possible ways to address this problem: development grantees could compete in a separate RFA process, set 9-10 months into the grant period. NIFA could offer extensions for development grantees, or set the development grant period longer than the current 12-month timeframe.

Until an equitable and effective development grant purpose and process is established, NIFA should reduce the awarding of development grants from FY 2014 levels.

- 6. *Extend the application timeline: provide more time between the publication of the RFA and the application deadline.*** Especially in years like 2014 when the deadline fell at a difficult time of year for individuals and institutions involved in agricultural production, providing more time between the release of the RFA and the deadline will make it possible for more limited-capacity organizations to submit successful applications.
- 7. *Improve the awarding process and timeline.*** Once awards are decided, applicants should be notified promptly and awards should be announced promptly. Long delays between awards decisions and announcements leave grantees in limbo while they wait to receive funding and launch their programs.

- 8. Establish a consistent process and expectations for supplementary information needed from grant recipients once they have been notified of grant awards.** This recommendation is a carry-over from 2011 and 2012. Grantees are quick to note the difference between great working relationships with and support from NIFA staff and difficult, unclear communication from the Grants Administration office. Several grantees suggested training for the Grant staff to enable them to work better and communicate more clearly with non-academic recipients.

### **Credits**

This report was compiled and developed by the Land Stewardship Project. The Land Stewardship Project is membership-based organization in the Upper Midwest that focuses on family farm and sustainable agriculture issues. Core program areas concentrate on policy and organizing efforts, supporting beginning farmers and strengthening community based food systems and economic development.

Additional review and support for was provided by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). NSAC is an alliance of grassroots organizations that advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities

Special thanks to Katie Merritt, Master of Public Health student at the George Washington University and policy intern at National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and Adam Keibler, student at Macalester College and intern with the Land Stewardship Project.

### **Contact**

For additional information on the findings or recommendations included in this report, please contact:

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## Appendix 1

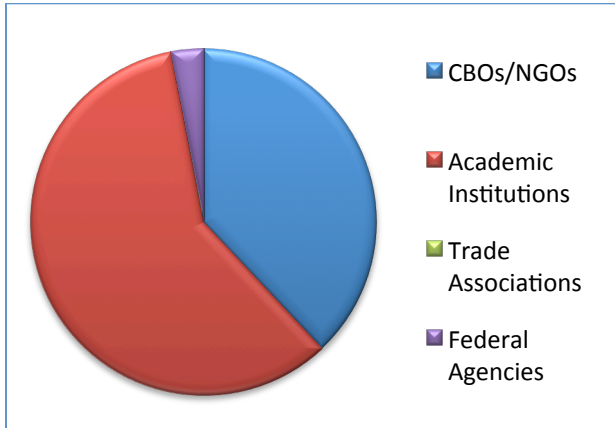
### 2014 BFRDP Grants

State	Awarded Institution	Project Title
AK	Tyonek Tribal Conservation District	Education, Outreach, and Training to Alaska Native Beginning Farmers and Ranchers
AR	University of Arkansas	Armed to Farm: Soldiering the Success of Military Veterans in New Poultry, Livestock and Agroforestry Enterprises
AZ	Arizona Board of Regents, University of Arizona	Growing the Management Skills of Native Americans and Limited-Resource Beginning Farmers in the Southwest
CA	Farmer Veteran Coalition	The National Farmer Veteran Project: Utilizing Existing Relationships and Networks to Expand Impact and Reach Among Veteran Farmers
CA	The Regents of the University of California	Growing Roots: Deepening Support for Diverse New Farmers and Ranchers in California
FL	Veterans Farm, LLC	Enhancing Veterans Farm Fellows Program
GA	The University of Georgia	Developing the Next Generation of Sustainable Farmers in Georgia: A Comprehensive Training Program
HI	University of Hawaii	University of Hawaii's GoFarm Hawaii: A regional new farmer development initiative
IA	NFO Inc.	Training, Developing, and Mentoring Beginning Organic and Conventional Dairy and Feed Producers
IL	Global Garden Refugee Training Farm	Global Garden Farm Chicago: Preparing Displaced Refugee Farmers for Vegetable Production in the Midwest
IN	Purdue University	Infrastructure, Access, and Community: A Plan To Support Beginning Farmers in Indiana
LA	Recirculating Farms Coalition, Inc.	Recirculating Farms Coalition: Growing Local - Training New and Beginning Sustainable Urban Farmers In New Orleans, Louisiana
MA	World Farmers Inc.	Conduct Farmer to Farmer Mentoring to Beginning, Immigrant, & Refugee Farmers in Crop Production & Marketing
MA	Third Sector New England	Educational Tools and Methods for Beginning Refugee & Immigrant Farmers
ME	Cultivating Community	Growing Together: Building the Capacity and Skills of Low-Resource Beginning Farmers and Agricultural Service Providers in Maine
MI	Michigan State University	Michigan's Emerging Farmers Strategies and Tools to Enhance Success
MN	Regents of the University of Minnesota	Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Clearinghouse
MN	Hmong American Partnership	Sustainable Farms for Urban Markets
MN	Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota	Deep Roots: Thoughtful, Comprehensive, Community-Based Beginning Farmer Training
MS	Holmes County Food Hub	Farm to School Academy for Beginning Farmers

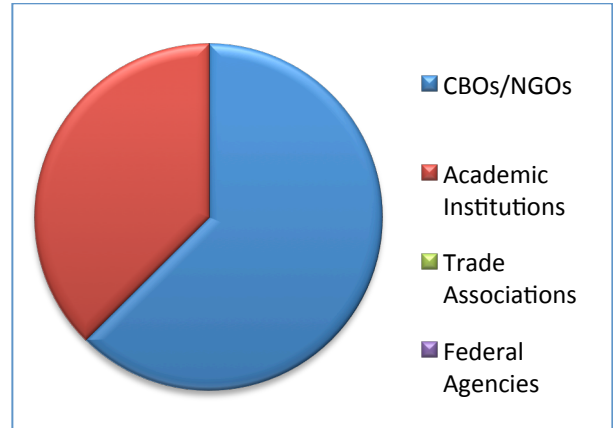
MT	Community Food & Agriculture Coalition	Building On-Farm Success: Resources and Training for Montana`s Beginning Farmers and Ranchers
NC	Whitaker Small Farm Group Inc.	Specialized Hands-on Training for Beginning, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Women and Veteran Farmers in Central and Eastern NC
NC	Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy	Farm Pathways: Access to Land, Livelihood, and Learning
NE	Community CROPS	Addressing the Training Needs of Hispanic and Limited Resource Beginning Farmers in Nebraska
NV	University of Nevada Cooperative Extension	Nevada Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Project
NY	Stone Barns Restoration Corporation	Growing Farmers Initiative: Equipping beginning farmers to create economically and ecologically resilient farm enterprises in NY and beyond
NY	Center for Transformative Action	Groundswell New Farmer Training Programs
NY	Cornell University	Strategic Investments to Ensure Long-Term Success of Veteran-Owned and Advanced Beginning Farms
OR	Oregon State University	Successfully Navigating the First 10 Years: Education Targeting Farm Dev. Stages to Achieve Profitability and Environmental Sustainability
PA	Pennsylvania State University-University Park	Supporting Pennsylvania New Farmers in the Start-up, Re-strategizing and Establishing Years
PA	Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture	Evaluating, Renovating and Strengthening Pennsylvania`s Beginning Farmer Apprenticeship Programs
PA	Rodale Institute	Organic Farming Program
SD	South Dakota State University	Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: A Collaborative Approach To Producer Education on Native American Reservations
TX	Prairie View A&M University	Developing New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Using the Model Farm Concept
VA	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program: A Participatory Beginning Farmer and Rancher Education and Training Initiative
WA	Seattle Tilth Association	Farm Works: Supporting beginning, limited resource farmers, including immigrants and refugees, in the Puget Sound Region
WA	Northwest Natural Resource Group	Empowering New Forest Owners in the Northwest
WI	Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship	Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship: A National Program for Training New Dairy Farmers
WI	Growing Power Inc.	Intensive Farmer Training with a Focus on Socially Disadvantaged Beginning Farmers

## Appendix 2: Historical Distribution of Grants by Institution Type:

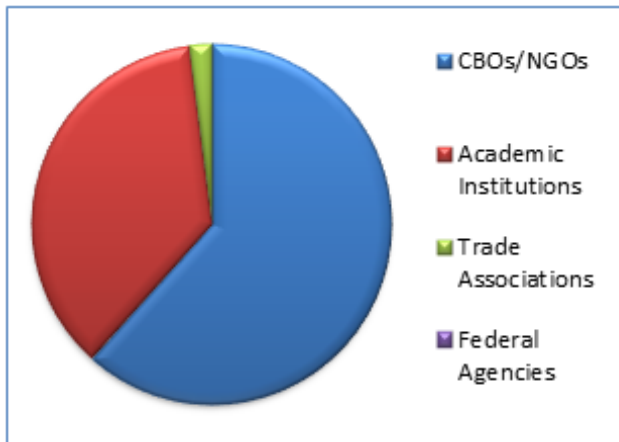
**FY 2009**



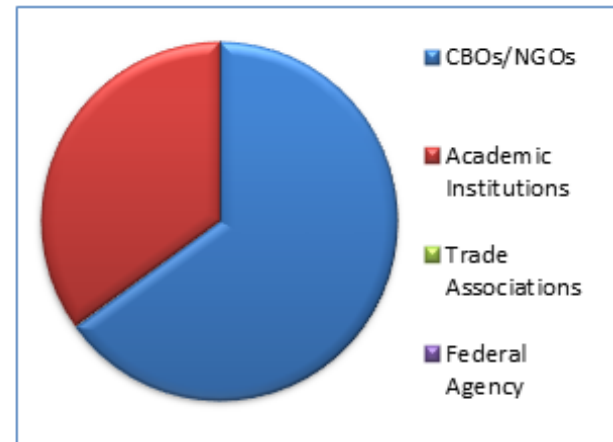
**FY 2010**



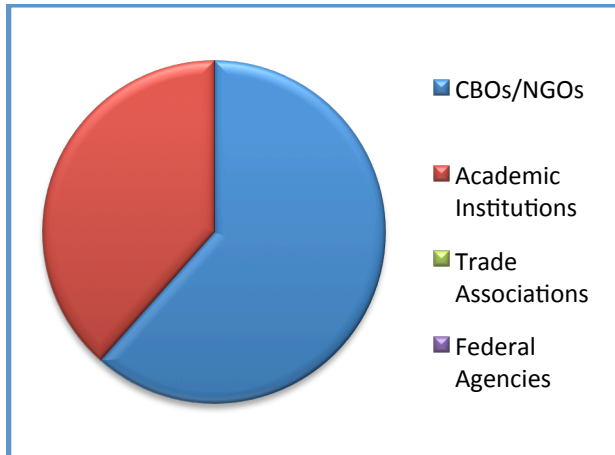
**FY 2011**



**FY 2012**



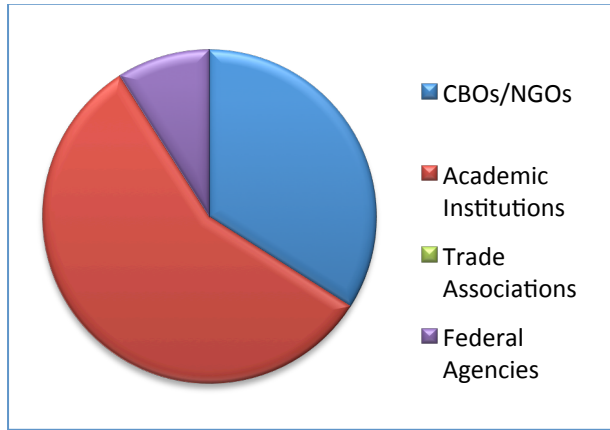
**FY 2014**



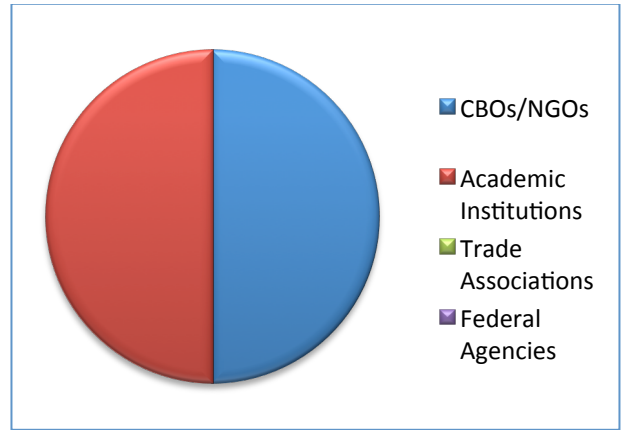


### Appendix 3: Historical Distribution of Grant Funding by Institution Type

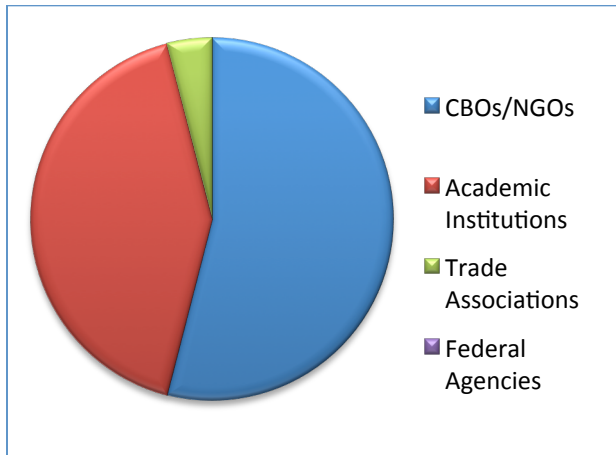
**FY 2009**



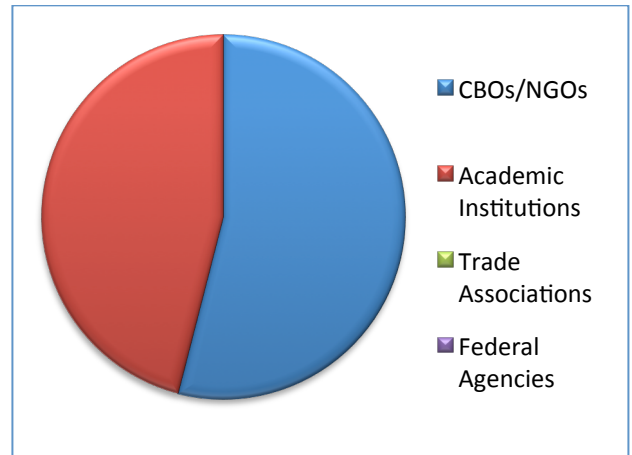
**FY 2010**



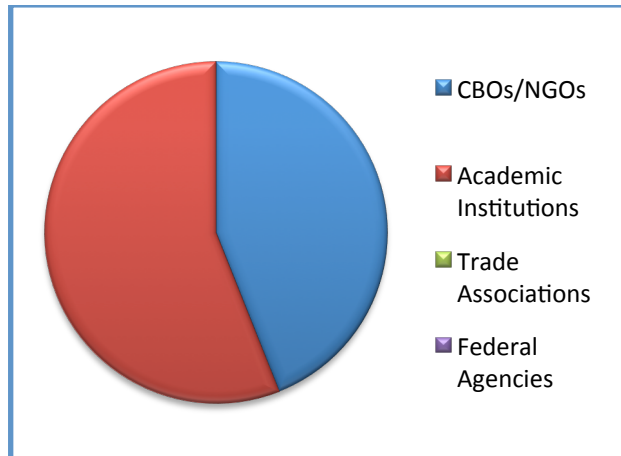
**FY 2011**



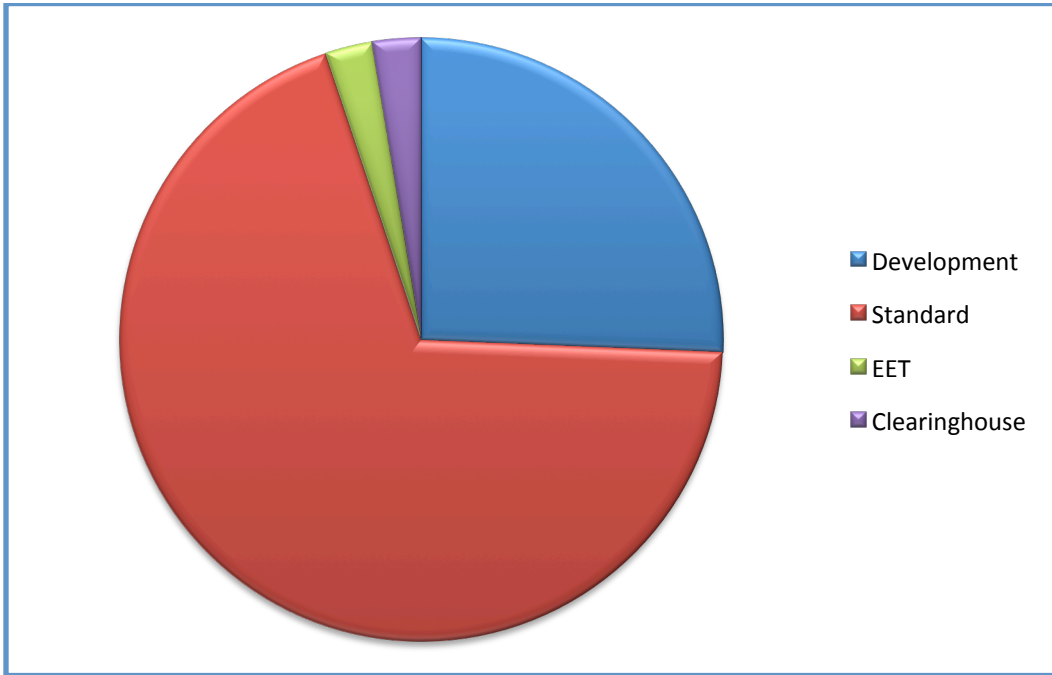
**FY 2012**



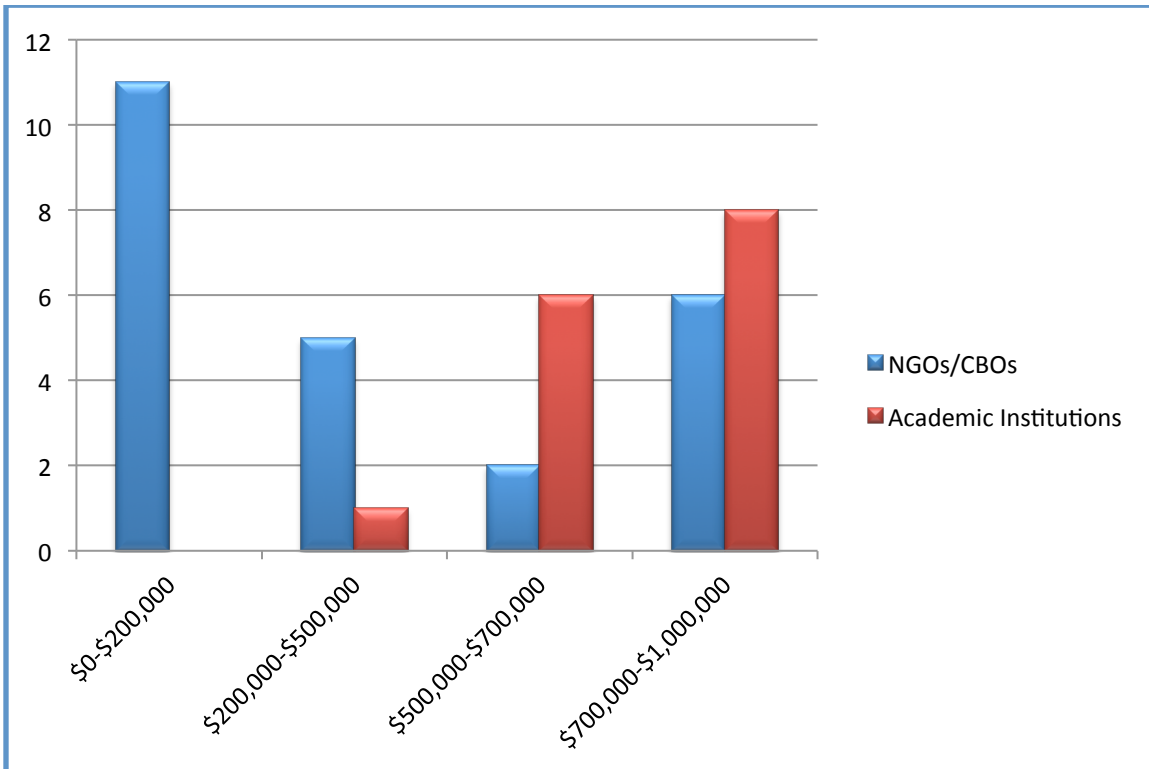
**FY 2014**



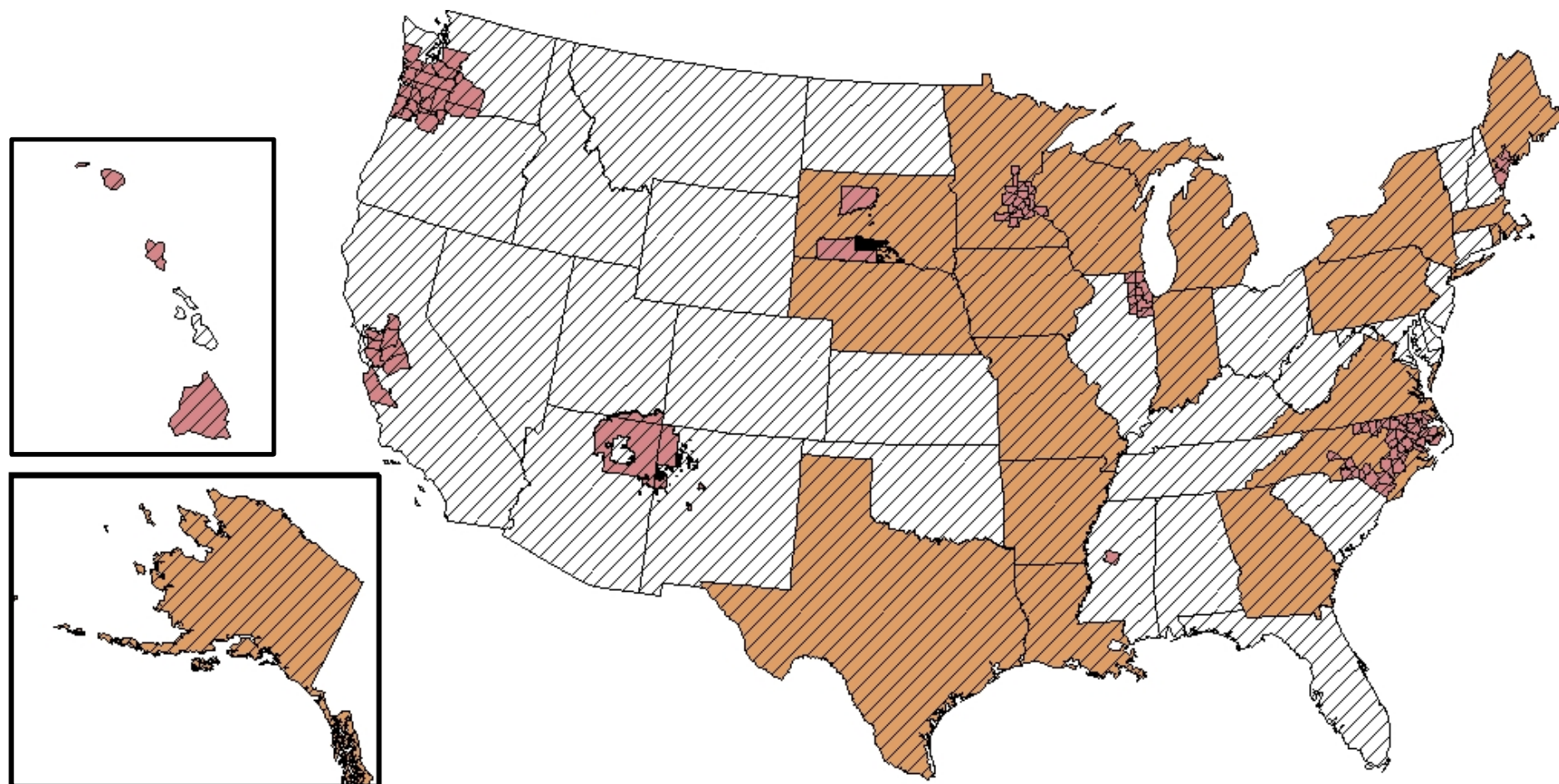
## Appendix 4: Grant Distribution by Grant Type



## Appendix 5: Grant Distribution by Grant Size and Institution Type



## Appendix 6: Service Areas for Surveyed FY 2014 Grantees



**National Programs**



**County- or Reservation-wide Programs**



**Statewide or Regional Programs**

# Appendix 7: Historical Distribution of Grants by State FY 2009-2014

