

NATIONAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES TEACHING, EXTENSION, AND RESEARCH AWARDS (TERA) PROGRAM

TEACHING AWARD NOMINATION GUIDELINES

Section I. Program Description and Purpose.....	1
Section II. Nomination Preparation, Submission, and Review	2
Section III. Examples of How to Present Supporting Documentation for Teaching, Awards and Recognitions, Publications, Grants, and Presentations	4
For More Information.....	5

Section I. Program Description and Purpose

Launched in 1992, the National Food and Agricultural Sciences Teaching, Extension, and Research Awards (TERA) Program focuses national attention on the role of teaching, Extension, and research in recruiting and retaining the scientific and professional expertise essential to the future growth and progress of our Nation's food and agricultural system.

Through a partnership with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), the TERA program funds annual awards to recognize faculty from a college or university who exhibit sustained, meritorious, and exceptional teaching at the postsecondary level within the agriculture, natural resources, veterinary, and human sciences.

Legislative Authority

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (Public Law No. 95- 113; 7 U.S.C. 3152), as amended, designates USDA as the lead Federal agency for teaching, Extension, and research programs in the food and agricultural sciences. Section 1417(i)(1) of this law further authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a National Food and Agricultural Sciences Teaching Awards program.

Funding Source

Section 1417(i)(2) states the Secretary of Agriculture may use funds appropriated for the conduct of any agricultural research, Extension, or teaching program for the purpose of conducting the awards program. USDA, through NIFA, will support:

- Management of the awards program
- Monetary and physical awards
- Travel for two National Award and two Teaching and Student Engagement Award winners to participate in an awards ceremony
- Preparation of certificates of merit

Institutions employing recipients of either the Regional or Early Career awards will be expected to provide expense support for their travel to the national awards ceremony.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Conditions for Re-Nomination

Individuals who did not receive an award in any given year are eligible for re-nomination. However, a new Nomination Packet must be submitted as nominations are not retained for reconsideration.

National Award recipients:

- Are not eligible for re-nomination for the Regional or National Award
- May be nominated for the Teaching and Student Engagement Award no sooner than 7 years following receipt of the National Award

Regional Award recipients:

- May be re-nominated to receive the National Award no sooner than 3 years following receipt of the Regional Award
- May be nominated for the Teaching and Student Engagement Award no sooner than 7 years following receipt of the Regional Award

Early Career Award recipients:

- May be nominated to receive the Regional or National Award no sooner than 3 years following receipt of the Early Career Teacher Award

Teaching and Student Engagement recipients:

- May apply for a Regional or National Award no sooner than 7 years following receipt of the Teaching and Student Engagement Award

Awards Program Schedule

The 2026 schedule for the Awards Program will be as follows.

Step in Process	Timeline
Request for Nominations	March 19, 2026
Electronic Nomination Submission Deadline	5 p.m. Eastern, May 19, 2026
Merit Evaluation of Nominations	June-August
Notification	After merit review
National Awards Ceremony	Fall/Winter (Visit aplu.org for more information.)

Section II. Nomination Preparation, Submission, and Review

All nominations must be submitted electronically to TeachAward@usda.gov in one PDF document and arrive no later than 5 p.m. Eastern on May 19, 2026. Full or partial submissions after the deadline will not be considered.

Preparation

Determine institutional and teacher/nominee eligibility by reviewing [definitions](#) and [eligibility requirements](#) on the NIFA website. Noncompliant nominations will not be accepted for review.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Submit only the materials requested. All submitted documents should use Times New Roman 12-point font (or equivalent; narrow fonts are not acceptable), have 1-inch margins, and be single spaced. The page limit for the entire packet is 13 pages according to the guidelines below. Please be mindful to write a cohesive narrative and pay attention to formatting throughout the application. The formatting should be easy to follow and evaluate. Documents not adhering to this format may not be accepted for review.

Nomination Submission

Submit each nomination to TeachAward@usda.gov.

Paper copies of nominations, nominations submitted via fax, nominations submitted in multiple mailings or multiple attachments, incomplete submissions, submissions over the page limit, or submissions received after the posted deadline will not be accepted for review.

A submitted Nomination Packet must contain the following items in a single PDF.

1. NIFA-supplied Information Cover Sheet and Personal Data Page (pages 1-2 of the Nomination Packet)
2. Answers and supporting evidence for [Criteria 1-5](#) (pages 3-9 of the Nomination Packet)
3. Endorsement and nomination letter from an Administrator (pages 10-11 of the Nomination Packet)
4. Two endorsement letters (single page each) from another source (alum or current student and a colleague) (pages 12-13 of the Nomination Packet)

The PDF document should be named using the full first name and full last name of the nominee, followed by the year and institutional acronym. For example, the PDF name for Dr. Jane Smith would be *JaneSmith2026XYZ.pdf*.

Acknowledgment of Receipt of Nomination Packet

NIFA will attempt to acknowledge receipt of all emailed nominations within 2 business days (excluding weekends and Federal holidays). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the nominator to submit a nomination ahead of the deadline to ensure it has been received in time for review. This NIFA acknowledgment of receipt of a nomination does not constitute review of the packet to ensure accuracy and completeness for panel evaluation.

Review of the Nomination Packet for completeness is the responsibility of the nominator/submitter. If the submitter recognizes a deficiency in the Nomination Packet prior to the submission deadline, a complete and revised Nomination Packet may be submitted to the indicated email box by the deadline. NIFA will submit for panel review only the **last** Nomination Packet received from the nominee.

Nomination Review and Evaluation Criteria

The Awards Program evaluation process includes both USDA internal staff review and an external merit evaluation by a panel of experts. In any given year, the peer-review panel may include a combination of university faculty and administrators, public school teachers or administrators, representatives from professional associations, and personnel from other Federal agencies.

Reviewers adhere to [published evaluation criteria](#) and follow strict rules governing conflict of interest.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Section III. Examples of How to Present Supporting Documentation for Teaching, Awards and Recognitions, Publications, Grants, and Presentations

Example: Teaching Evaluation

Table 1: Student Teaching Evaluation Summary. Scale is 1-5 (poor - excellent) for “Overall assessment of instructor.” Bold indicates candidate score is above departmental and college averages. Use N/A if score is not available.

Course	Sem/Yr	# Stud.	Req'd Yes/No	Candidate Average	Dept. Average*	College Average*
Principles of XYZ	FA24	55	Yes	5.00	4.58	4.46
Principles of XYZ	SP24	116	Yes	4.83	4.66	4.5
Principles of XYZ	SU24	31	Yes	5.00	4.81	4.51
Foundations of ABC	FA23	55	Yes	4.84	4.81	4.47
Foundations of ABC	SP23	81	Yes	4.88	4.88	4.81
Foundations of ABC	FA22	74	Yes	4.94	4.68	4.44
Developing LMNOP	FA24	45	No	4.83	4.67	4.31
Developing LMNOP	SP24	77	No	4.85	4.45	4.36
Study Abroad Q	SU23	68	No	4.75	4.66	4.57
Study Abroad Q	SU22	13	No	4.75	4.81	4.51
Practicum in Something	SP23	111	Yes	4.88	4.66	4.57
Practicum in Something	FA22	59	Yes	4.54	4.81	4.51

* If available

Example: Teaching Awards and Recognition

- Year, name of award, (level at which award is given). Follow with one to two sentences describing the significance of the award and its selection.
- Year, Advising Excellence Award, Any State University, The Best College Ever (College). This honor is awarded to a faculty member in the college who demonstrates excellence in advising. It is determined by a committee of faculty and students.
- Year, Distinguished Teaching Award, Professional Association, (National). This award recognizes individuals whose efforts represent the very best in this discipline’s higher education, is a criterion award, and applicants are reviewed by a committee of the association’s members.
- Year, Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Award, [Name of University]. This is [name] University’s highest honor, which recognizes up to five recipients each year.
- Year, International Achievement Award, International Organization (International). This award honors instructors who inspire excitement, inquiry, and promote global understanding.
- Year, Awesome Foundation Teaching Award, (University). This award recognizes faculty and staff at [name] University that develop innovative ideas, programs, and efforts, and work to improve the University.
- Year, Distinguished Alumni Award, University of State, Incredible Department, (Department). Department faculty nominate alumni who have gone on to distinguish themselves in the discipline.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Example: Teaching Publications, bibliographic style

- Nominee Name. Year. Teaching techniques to the new generation in this discipline. Year. *The Professional Society Journal*. Volume: pages.
- Other author(s), Nominee Name, other author(s). Year. Doing something unique in the classroom. *The Professional Society Journal*. Volume: pages.
- Nominee Name, other authors. Year. Finding teachable moments. *The Professional Society Journal*. Volume: pages.

Example: Grant Funding to Support Instruction Innovation and Teaching Excellence

- Educational Program to Improve Innovation and Entrepreneurial Thinking in Discipline X. (Principal Investigator with Other Person, University of Y College of Z, Funded in Year by Federal Agency Grant Number - \$\$,\$\$\$)
- University of Y Students of Excellence Program in Discipline Q. (Co-Principal Investigator with Other Person, University of Y, Funded in Year by the Federal Agency Program – \$\$\$,\$\$\$)
- Multi-Institutional Leadership Graduate Course. (Principal Investigator, with Other Person, Other University; Cool Award funded in Year by Private Foundation, \$\$,\$\$\$)

Example: Teaching Presentations

- Training Aids for Judging Panels. Year. University of State, Location.
- Innovative Techniques to Engage Students. Year. International Judging Coaches.
- Introduction to Judging and Benefits. Year. Other State University, Location.
- Syllabus Swap Session. Year. State University, Location.
- Interpretation of Teaching Evaluations. Year. University of Territory, Location.

For More Information

Questions for the Program team can be directed via email to TeachAward@usda.gov.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.