



NCBA CLUSA International

Safe Agriculture/Food Export (SAFE)

FY2021 Merit Extension Evaluation

Request for Proposal (RFP)

January 6, 2023

I. Statement of work

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is soliciting proposals from qualified firms/organizations interested in conducting the FY21 Merit Extension performance evaluation for the “Safe Agriculture/Food Export (SAFE) Project”. The project is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food for Progress (FFPr) program and implemented by NCBA CLUSA. This request calls for a technical firm with demonstrated abilities to design and implement project evaluation and research studies and collect data from multiple stakeholders along the Dominican beef and dairy value chains.

The Merit Extension Evaluation has three main objectives: 1) assess performance, i.e. whether the project has achieved the expected results for the extension period, 2) in-depth analysis of the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) equivalence process and SAFE’s contribution to FSIS equivalence being reinstated in the DR, and 3) assess to what extent the recommendations from the Final Evaluation were incorporated in the extension period and are associated with the results obtained.

As per USDA FAS guidelines, the Merit Extension performance evaluation will include the following areas:

- *Relevance* of project activities to the needs of participants, country’s priorities, economic, cultural, and political context, existing interventions, FAS and USDA goals and objectives.
- *Effectiveness* of project activities in terms of coverage and value to the direct participants and project stakeholders.
- *Efficiency* of project resource use to achieve results.
- *Impact*, if any, of activities both short- and long-term and intended and unintended on participants.
- *Sustainability* of changes brought about by project activities.

The Merit Extension evaluation will need to identify key learning applied and achieved based on the final evaluation that may be relevant for future programming and highlight opportunities and challenges faced by the Merit Extension period that affected outcomes and performance during the implementation.

General Information:

Activity Title	SAFE FY21 Merit Extension Performance Evaluation
Project Name	USDA Safe Agriculture/Food Export (SAFE) Project
Agreement Number	FCC-517-2015/008-00-G
Donor	USDA Food for Progress (FFPr) program
Project Duration	October 2015-December 2023
Funding	USD \$21,322,901.12 resulting from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funding and the monetization of 22,020 MT of Crude Degummed Soybean Oil (CDSO) and of 3,222 MT of Yellow Grease Tallow
Implementing Organization	National Cooperative Business Association’s (NCBA) Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA)
Partner Organizations	Junta Agroempresarial Dominicana (JAD) Fundación REDDOM (REDDOM) – New for the Merit Extension GENEX Cooperative (GENEX) ASOCARNE – New for the Merit Extension ADHA – New for the Merit Extension
Geographic Coverage during Merit Extension	Puerto Plata, Monte Plata, El Seibo, Hato Mayor, La Altagracia, San Juan, Dajabón, Santiago Rodríguez and Santo Domingo provinces

II. Project background

NCBA CLUSA has been implementing the Safe Agriculture/Food Export (SAFE) over a period of 7 years (2015-2023). SAFE had an initial implementation period between 2015 and 2020 and received a Merit extension for 2021-2023.

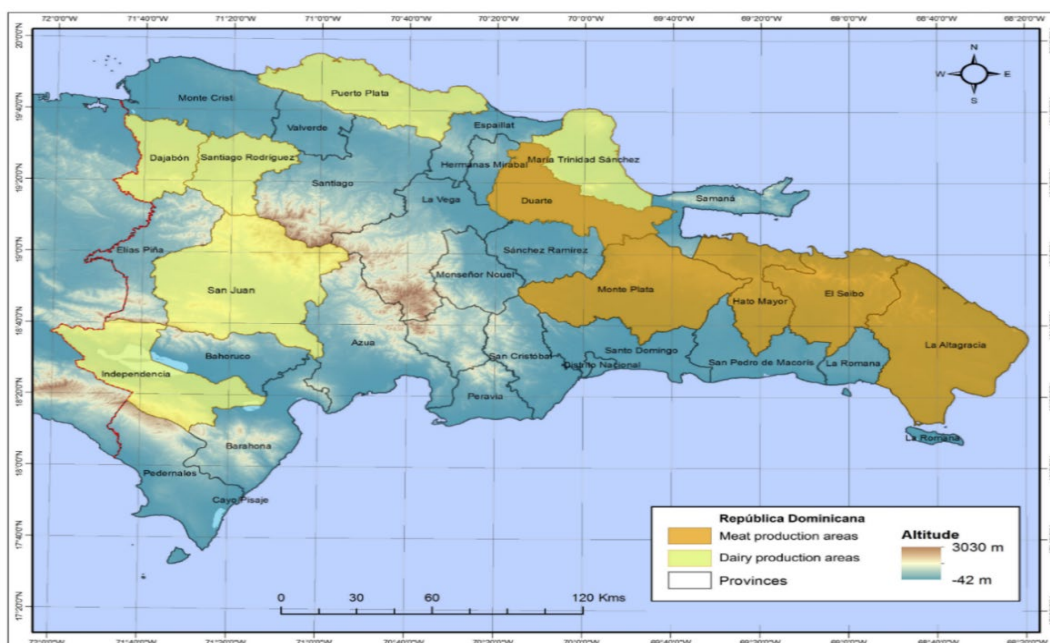
The SAFE project has two main objectives:

- 1. Improve agricultural productivity in the livestock (beef and dairy) value chain.**
- 2. Expand the trade of beef and dairy products.**

To achieve the first goal the SAFE project pursues the following intermediates outcomes: the use of improved techniques and technologies; improving farm management; increasing the availability of improved inputs and use of financial services; strengthening the capacity of government institutions and key groups and increasing the leverage of private sector resources.

To achieve the second goal, the SAFE project pursues the following intermediates outcomes: adding value to post-production; increasing the adoption of established standards; increasing access to markets; building linkages between buyers and sellers; improving post-harvest infrastructure; increasing the use and efficiency of post-production processes; improving the policy and regulatory framework and strengthening the capacity of key organizations in the trade sector.

The results framework of the Project defined a total of 12 key activities to be implemented to achieve the intermediate and final outcomes¹. These activities include 4 activities on capacity building, 3 activities on training, 1 activity on access to finance, 2 activities on market access, 1 activity on infrastructure, and 1 activity on agricultural input. Annex 2 describes the list of activities in more detail. Figure 1 below highlights the provinces where NCBA CLUSA is implementing the SAFE project.



¹ Annex 1 presents the SAFE Results Framework

III. Final Evaluation of SAFE project (2015-2020)

In 2021, as part of evaluations required for projects financed by USDA FAS, SAFE's [Final](#) evaluation was carried out. This was the third evaluation of SAFE's implementation for years 1 to 5. Previously, the SAFE Project also conducted a [Baseline](#) study and a [Midterm](#) evaluation.²

1. SAFE Final Evaluation's Finding

The SAFE final evaluation highlighted two points in the project timeline. In the first two years, SAFE's implementation was slow, and the project faced external challenges, particularly related to recurring droughts, and the COVID-19 pandemic in the final year. In the second part, the SAFE project accelerated significantly and in a short period of time was able to achieve substantial accomplishments. The SAFE's Final Evaluation highlighted three prominent accomplishments:

1. "Progress made towards achieving FSIS Equivalence for beef exports to the US, which most likely would have been achieved had the pandemic not delayed the audit scheduled for March 2020."
2. "Improvements in [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points] HACCP, and sanitary practices and norms and through private co-investments in slaughterhouses participating in the SAFE project."
3. "Proof of concept of the livestock field school methodology, enhanced by the use of private extensionists to provide hands-on training, technical assistance, and accompaniment for livestock producers."³

In addition, the SAFE final evaluation found that the project design was relevant: "the SAFE project provided a comprehensive program design with activities that were relevant to the needs of the livestock sector (dairy and beef)." SAFE achieved a high level of effectiveness in intended activities (90% of key indicators) and lower effectiveness in terms of results (68% of key indicators). Efficiency was low at the beginning of the project but after introducing staffing changes, the SAFE project accelerated implementation and achieved significant progress during the last two years of the project. In terms of impact, the final evaluation identified that *"for those producers who participated in the livestock field schools and associated technical assistance the impact on productivity has been significant."* For sustainability, the final evaluation identified that in the short term, *"the techniques promoted by SAFE continued to be applied after Project implementation,"* but it would be needed for local actors such as JAD and APROLECHE to take the lead to secure long-term sustainability.

2. Recommendations

In terms of design and implementation, SAFE's final evaluation recommended that *"it may have been more beneficial to work with a smaller geographical area at first, reaching proof-of-concept with behavior changes achieved through the livestock field schools and the accompanying productivity and quality improvements, and then expanding to other regions"*⁴

² For reference here are the links to the publicly available versions of the evaluations of the project's implementation years 1-5: [Baseline](#) [Midterm](#) [Final](#)

³ Just results. Safe Agriculture/Food Export (SAFE) project: Final Evaluation. Page 81

⁴ Ibid. Page 81

In addition, SAFE's final evaluation, based on insights from local value change stakeholders, provided general recommendations in 5 areas: "1) Collect data all along the value chain as a baseline for the project and partners. 2) Continue to support livestock field schools and private extension services - with a partner (such as a milk buyer) that provides resources and commits to continue efforts. 3) Continue light support to the beef value chain and other potential exporters. 4) Use grant funds to catalyze specific, project-based investment opportunities in both value chains. Meanwhile, encourage the private sector to offer financial services. 5) Lead a collective visioning process involving all stakeholders."⁵

Regarding specific activities, the SAFE's final evaluation further identified those activities that were successful and those that were not. For each group of activities, the assessment proposed several improvement opportunities for future designs or extensions.

Table 1. Specific evaluation recommendations

Successful activities	Supporting data	Recommendations
Livestock Field Schools	78% of producers surveyed said the livestock field schools were beneficial for them.	Finding sustainable financing sources for this activity (such as buyer contributions), and mainstreaming methodology with MEGALECHE in addition to the private extensionists.
Private Extension	Surveys show a 15% higher productivity for beneficiary producers than the comparison group. This is in line with gains shown by farm visit data. Banks mentioned they considered the presence of high-quality extension services as a factor that reduced their credit risk.	More work with cooperatives to institutionalize the private extension services, and perhaps develop a system whereby cooperatives and/or members who provide/use these extension services can access funds.
Selected grants to local organizations that reinforce the practices taught in livestock field schools.	300+ milking parlors built with project financing. Inputs for producers. Grants supporting international TA (e.g., artificial insemination and breeding) and private extensionists (80%-20% cost sharing with POs)	More discussion with government actors on how to organize extension and ensure the right incentives. See recommendations below on grant and reimbursable funding. Find ways to allocate international TA effectively by responding directly to specific producer needs and supporting the adoption and follow up of new learning with producers.
Developing a Workaround for LAVECEN	Interviews and visits to laboratories; project records.	Possible <i>ad hoc</i> responsive support to encourage continued upgrading of local capacity. Important that this be done without taking on the large institutional issues that still exist.
Support to DIGEMAPS	DIGEMAPS own ability to tell their story is exceptional.	Review support to software for inspectors. A good initiative but appears back-office centric (a common issue with e-government software). Will require testing and iteration to ensure the process for the enterprises is streamlined.
Support to Slaughterhouses (including mock audits, grants, HACCP training)	Two participating slaughterhouses (AGROCARNE and MERCARNE) passed the mock audit for FSIS Equivalence conducted by TAMU.	Network with Dominican Ambassador in Washington (as is being done) to make sure FSIS conducts the official audit soon.
Market Study (Puerto Rico)	Conducted by ASOCARNE President Enrique de Castro and Professor Greg Sullivan of Texas A&M University (TAMU).	Conduct additional market studies, and follow up to what was done.

⁵ Ibid. Pag 90

Activities that were not successful	Supporting data	Recommendations
Access to Finance	Only 41% of producers and 63% of processors we surveyed said they had access to finance after participation in project activities.	Needs to be designed in coordination with CONALECHE, <i>Banco Agrícola</i> , and private financial institutions. One intervention which may have potential would be to pilot financial products with savings and loan cooperatives linked to the associations of producers and buyers of milk. In partnership with private banks or microfinance institutions, technical assistance could be provided to one or two savings and credit cooperatives that want to work on the issue, financing product startup costs until break-even is reached.
Support to LAVECEN	Interview notes and project records.	It may be better not to engage with LAVECEN until the institutional issues have been resolved. Note that IDB is planning comprehensive support to LAVECEN.
Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)	Every interview with project staff referenced the issues with M&E.	Identify possible conflicts and gray areas among multiple project objectives and clarify them. Allow for customization of results frameworks and ground-truthing with external stakeholders. Develop a value chain data framework with indicators that make sense to track from the perspective of local stakeholders; from those derive project-level data points, and only after that develop

IV. SAFE Project Merit Extension: 2021-2023

NCBA CLUSA adjusted the original design after consultation with VC stakeholders (producers, POs, processors, buyers, and government agencies), and the incorporation of recommendations from the Final Evaluation. The new strategy for the Merit Extension phase included the following changes: “1) targeting a narrower geographic area to increase productivity with “anchor” beef and dairy market clusters; 2) shifting beneficiary focus to large and medium-sized producers for further expansion of sustainable private extension, while preparing government agencies to support small farms; 3) continuing SAFE’s innovative matching grants to further reduce production costs (energy), increase efficiency (throughput capacity), crowd-in private investment (cost-share) and raise standards (HACCP and SPS related-infrastructure); and 4) ensuring vertical integration through a proof-of-concept approach.”⁶

Instead of 11 provinces, the Merit extension focused on 9 provinces to “fully maximize the demonstrated impact of the [Livestock Field Schools] LFS model and concentrate productivity gains around anchor beef and dairy clusters (input supplies, producers, POs, buyers, and private and public extension).”⁷

For the extension period, SAFE proposed five components: 1) equivalence and Policy, 2) Markets and Trade, 2) Producer organization, 3) climate resilience extension, and 4) finance and cost recovery.⁸ The following table presents the justification for each component and its relevance to increasing outcomes.

⁶ Merit-Based Extension Concept Note, page 7.

⁷ Ibid, page 7.

⁸ Ibid, page 5-6.

**Table 2. SAFE Project Merit Extension Components with Justification,
and the Relevance of each to Outcomes**

Component	Justification	How Relevant to Increasing Outcomes
(1) Equivalence and Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the trust and ownership established with government and private sector partners, the SAFE team is best positioned to support DR in securing FSIS approval and consolidating gains so the public and private sectors can continue sustainable increases in beef and dairy productivity and trade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once approved, PR beef imports from DR are estimated to reach \$116 million in five years.¹⁴ The Beef Equivalence Table and Dairy Equivalence Table will continue policy reforms and strengthening sector governance, while CES virtual trainings, HACCP, and LFSs drive higher standards and price premiums.
(2) Markets and Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With its established large network of public/private partners, SAFE has the credibility to convene all key actors to formulate a common vision for both VCs. Equivalence will unlock a virtual cycle of investment/growth for producer/processors. SAFE's partnership with local private sector and NCBA CLUSA members like OV and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A common vision for the two sectors will provide a roadmap for greater commercialization and buyer-seller relationships at all levels as well as PPPs that will increase sales, exports, and cost-share. Increased contracting will bring "demand-pull" incentives encouraging certifications, quality upgrades (grade A milk) and dairy sales as well as

Component	Justification	How Relevant to Increasing Outcomes
	GENEX bring world class expertise in genetics, certifications, product quality, and marketing niche products and contracting (Global GAP, Organic, etc.).	safe meat production, premium cuts for the local tourist industry and fresh/chilled beef exports to PR. These will increase overall sales and household incomes.
(3) Producer Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAFE's private sector extension/LFS model have been effective in achieving productivity gains. However, they require stronger PO management and administration capacities for achieving scale and sustainability. Stronger PO business plans are also needed to guide product/pricing strategies; quality improvements; industry standards; access to finance and markets; and the more effective provision of services to members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More professional POs with improved governance will be key to profitability and taking on greater responsibility for SAFE activities, such as private extension, the LFS model, product marketing/development, etc. Business plans will help POs to operate as a business, increase competitiveness, and the market-orientation of beef and dairy producer members so incentives for quality improvements deepen in beef and dairy sectors.
(4) Climate Resilient Extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAFE's technologies such as feed conservation, rotational pasture management and silvo-pastoral systems will improve climate resilience (against drought). POs are more enthusiastic about SAFE's methods compared to traditional adult education methodologies, and both producers and processors view SAFE's technologies as "easy to maintain locally".¹⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Livestock conservation practices will result in higher soil fertility and moisture retention, not only improving yields but also better preparing producers to address shocks from drought that undermine productivity. Producers will increase their knowledge and use of Good Livestock Practices (GLP) resulting in increased beef and dairy quality and productivity (reducing informality).
(5) Finance and Cost-recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to finance remains a major constraint for cold chain infrastructure, storage facilities, purchase of quality inputs, genetic improvements and other basic livestock sector upgrades. Over \$3M generated from public and private partners for VC improvements contributed to POs and producer level productivity gains and private extension. Yet, full cost recovery for extension activities and infrastructure upgrades at the PO/producer-level requires more time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAFE's matching grants will provide critical private extension, inputs, food safety/SPS-related infrastructure and buy down the risk for producers, POs, processors, and input suppliers as they improve profitability, and establish credit and relationships with financial service providers with SAFE technical assistance. In addition to these short-term/one-time grants, they will be coached on their business plans and loan applications, resulting in a total of \$3.6M in loans. An additional \$4.3M will come from private sector cost share (PPPs, match, etc.).

In addition, the Merit Extension included changes in terms of activities. As per recommendations from the 2021 Final Evaluation, Activity 1 “Capacity Building - Develop Public Information Campaign and Improve Marketing and Branding” was eliminated. However, trainings related industry food safety standards and certification from Activity 1 were addressed through Activity 9 “Training- Beef and Dairy Quality Standards” including INDOCAL Seal of Quality compliance training. This activity was designed to publicly promote dairy processor compliance with the GoDR’s Dominican Institute for Quality (INDOCAL) “Seal of Quality” for dairy products and a subsequent public information campaign. Annex 2 describes all the project activities for the Merit Extension.

Finally, for the Merit extension period, the SAFE project proposed specific work with Value Chain Partners. The following table describes the main interventions planned with producers, processors, Coops and PO, input suppliers, buyers-sellers, financial services institutions, and government institutions.

Table 3. Value Chain Partners and Interventions During the Merit Extension Phase

Value Chain Partner	Interventions during the Merit Extension
Producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Training 2,835 dairy and beef producers on improved agricultural techniques and technologies. - Development of 920 small business plans for small farmers. -Assist 80 individuals with African Swine Fever (ASF) biosecurity and alternative livelihood training.
Processors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Training approximately 30 dairy processing staff on milk quality and best manufacturing practices. - Training 154 dairy producer association members on milk collection center management, investments in quality and production improving infrastructure. -Conduct 26 audits of dairy processors for Sanitation Performance Standard (SPS) compliance. -6 audits about SPS measures for slaughterhouses supporting the Equivalence process. -Training 90 beef processors staff on SPS measures.
Coops & POs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Signing of coordination agreements (MOUs). -At least 80 firms trained in accessing financing. - 5 POs applying improved technologies, the development of building strategies for the federations, and diagnostics of the federations. - 24 assessments for cooperatives to determine organizational capacity and sustainability as businesses. -Establish linkages with Peace Corps volunteers, multiple USAID Farmer-to-Farmer Volunteer experts, and exchanges of best practices with U.S. dairy cooperatives such as Organic Valley. -Conduct a Cooperative Law and Regulation Initiative (CLARITY 2.0) evaluation of the existing cooperative law and regulation to inform decision-making for updates of the legislation.
Input Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exchange visits for project partner suppliers with demonstration plots and training on improved inputs including awarding a grant to improve/expand private extension services to CCOAGRO -Establishing 47 demonstration plots.
Buyers - Sellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Facilitating linkages between international buyers and local sellers, sponsoring the participation of local sellers at trade expos, and participating in trade shows. -Supporting 3 beef processing companies and 10 dairy processors with export potential. -Promoting compliance with industry certification standards for final consumers -Trade mission to Puerto Rico to facilitate buyer-seller’s meetings.
Financial Services Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Intermediation workshops between input suppliers, FIs, and producers, -Sponsoring participation at credit fairs. -Creating 920 business plans for producers and processing facilities, -1,620 individuals accessing financial services and providing TA to 80 POs to develop micro-credit programs for their members. - MOUs with BHD Leon, FEDA, Coop Herrera, and others to enabling access to financial services industry.
Government Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Training of government extension agents on the Farmer Field School training methodology. -Training on extension methodology to the government extension service, -Training and provision of M&E tools, - 120 people in govt trained in food security and 128 applying improved farm management practices. -Training newly hired slaughterhouse inspectors from the Ministry of Health (DIGEMAPS) on the necessary measures and controls for an adequate beef inspection system and coordinating ongoing audits for SPS compliance on beef and dairy processing facilities, the FSIS audit of the beef inspection system, and development of a “beef scheme” for a Seal of Quality of beef cuts. -Change at least 2 policies and regulations and establish 12 public-private partnerships through MOUs with the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Health, CONALECHE, DIGEGA, FEDA, IDECOOP, INDOCAL and other governmental agencies. - Partner with the African Swine Fever (ASF) Incident Command Center to coordinate ASF interventions with APHIS and other actors.

V. Merit Extension Evaluation purpose

The Merit Extension evaluation has three main objectives: 1) assess performance, i.e., whether the project has achieved the expected results for the extension period, 2) conduct in-depth analysis of the FSIS equivalence process and SAFE's contribution to FSIS equivalence being reinstated in the DR, and 3) assess to what extent the recommendations from the Final Evaluation were incorporated in the extension period and are associated with the results obtained. More detail on the purpose of each objective is presented below.

The first objective seeks to assess whether SAFE has achieved the expected results and targets outlined in the results framework for the two-year period of the Merit Extension. It seeks to identify opportunities and challenges faced that affected the outcomes and performance in the Merit Extension period. To estimate changes in results indicators, the values from the Final Evaluation will be used as a baseline. In addition, as per USDA FAS guidelines, the evaluation should assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, and stakeholder learning of the SAFE project during the Merit Extension period. To do this, the evaluators will address the following questions:

Table 4: Evaluation Questions

Categories	Evaluation Questions for the Merit Extension
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent has the Merit Extension responded to the actual needs and interests of the target farmers, associations, groups, and other stakeholders?• To what extent did the change in beneficiary focus, from small producers to large a medium size producer, and reducing geographic scope improved project relevance?⁹• To what extent did the Merit Extension integrate or strengthen the national sectoral strategy to improve production and market access?• To what extent does the Merit Extension fit into the strategies of the DR government?• What was the added value of the Merit Extension considering perspectives from key stakeholders such as USDA WA, USDA DR, POs, and implementing partners?• To what extent were the stakeholder value chain envisioning workshops relevant for the merit extension activities?
Effective-ness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent have the expected targets of the Merit Extension been achieved?• What factors have been critical to the achievement or non-achievement of the extension's objectives?• To what extent has the Merit Extension been more effective than the 1–5-year implementation in achieving results indicators?¹⁰• To what extent has the Merit Extension been more effective than the 1-5 years implementation in improving access to finance?• To what extent has the Merit Extension improved grant allocation?¹¹• To what extent did the project's key performance indicators (KPIs) effectively measure changes in the beef and dairy value chains? If not, which KPIs would've improved performance measurement?

⁹ Recommendation from Final Evaluation: Just Results. Safe Agriculture/Food Export (SAFE) project: Final Evaluation. Page 50

¹⁰ Ibid page 10. The Final Evaluation found that 68% of results indicators met at 100% level or more.

¹¹ Ibid page 58.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the SharePoint/PowerBi KPI dashboard development improve the quality of or communication of the data?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the new beneficiary focus and geographic scope generated efficiency gains? • To what extent has the Merit Extension improved data consistency along the value chain and internally? • To what extent, appropriateness, and functionality have the various units/levels of management and coordination (grants, project staff, M&E, local committees, USDA/W, USDA/Santo Domingo, and others) supported the implementation of the project? • To what extent were the size and composition of the extensions' teams appropriate to the strategies? • To what extent do the extension activities support each other? • To what extent has the process of implementation including finance and administration optimized time and resources? • To what extent did the coordinated ASF response by external actors influence the effectiveness of the Merit Extension's ASF interventions? • To what extent did the additional ASF activities have on the effectiveness of the extension's primary value chains and interventions?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the Merit Extension impact, if any, be described in the following areas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Household income ○ agricultural productivity (beef/dairy) ○ market access and expanded trade ○ quality of agricultural products ○ Beef and dairy Food safety ○ small & Medium Agro-Enterprise development ○ public and private extension services ○ Cooperative/Producer organization strengthening. • To what extent was the adoption of improved practices and technologies effective towards contribute to improved agribusiness management, productivity, and quality? • To what extent did the Livestock Farmer Field School methodology contribute to improved agrobusiness management, production and quality compared to traditional adult education methodologies? • How does the participants' perception of the extension's achievements especially the increase in productivity and income, if any, vary across value chains and provinces? • Have agricultural productivity and marketing of agricultural products improved because of the extension and to what extent? • What is the long-term reputation of the project? Organize achievement categories from most significant to least significant. • How has the Merit Extension's activities strengthened local producer organization's governance, member services and equity, as well as incomes? If so, to what extent? • Did the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak support government interest in animal supply chain best practices? • To what extent, did the Merit Extension's ASF interventions have an impact on the targeted groups?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have local actors (JAD, REDDOM, ASOCARNE, ADHA, CCOAGRO, cooperatives and farmers' organizations, MCCs, Slaughterhouses, local government, and civil society groups) been involved in the implementation of the Merit Extension?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which local counterparts have increased their capabilities to continue with the extension's actions, and why? • Which partnerships were the strongest and why? • What is the likelihood these actors will be able to provide succession? • Are the techniques and technologies promoted in the extension easy to maintain locally? To what extent are the conditions for local control of these techniques and technologies guaranteed? Are people facing any additional challenges considering the pandemic? Prioritize activities to continue after the project closes from most likely to least likely. • To what extent do the extension's interventions support and stimulate the local economy? • What impacts, if any, can be sustained for at least the next five years? Examples may include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased household income ○ Increased agricultural productivity ○ Increased market access and trade ○ Increased food safety of products ○ Strengthen PO business capacity • Identify and explain short and mid-term challenges to sustain extension results, and what actions could be taken before the end of the extension to mitigate those challenges, if any. • To what extent are local government actors likely to maintain FSIS equivalence and continue strengthening the food safety inspection system? • To what extent did modifying the traditional training methodology to the methodology in the "Livestock Farmer Field Schools" and "Collective Efficiency Schools" permit improved learning and application of the concepts at the farm and beef processor levels? • To what is the extent that beef equivalency with the US and the opening of markets for beef and beef production continue and improve after the activity ends? What did the extension do to ensure success if anything? • What are the sustainability aspects, if any, for the private extension grants to POs, firms, and processors?
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The second objective seeks to understand, through an in-depth descriptive analysis supported by quantitative and qualitative data, how the process of obtaining the FSIS equivalence was achieved during the implementation of the SAFE project. It seeks to understand the initial conditions of the country regarding FSIS equivalence and to identify which were the main limiting factors for obtaining FSIS equivalence. Likewise, it seeks to identify the actions promoted by the SAFE project that would have contributed to obtaining the FSIS equivalent, as well as actions of other stakeholders that would also have played a contributing role. The analysis must provide the necessary inputs to build a best practice case to serve as a reference for other contexts, provided there is sufficient evidence from the DR experience. The period of the analysis will be 2015-2023.

The third objective of the evaluation seeks to assess to what extent the recommendations from the Final Evaluation were incorporated in the Merit Extension period both in the design and implementation phases. As discussed in Section II, SAFE's final evaluation proposed a series of recommendations, both general and specific, for the improvement of SAFE design and implementation. In SAFE's conceptual proposal for the Merit Extension, several recommendations were incorporated, such as narrowing the geographic focus and eliminating some activities, among others. Some recommendations would have been applied during the implementation of the Merit Extension phase. Thus, this objective seeks to map

the recommendations, their incorporation or not in the Merit Extension, and analyze their potential contribution to improving project implementation and to achieving results compared to the 2015-2020 period. In short, NCBA CLUSA wants to better understand how the learning was incorporated into the SAFE project during the Merit Extension.

VI. Methodology

In adherence to RFP requirements, the FY21 Merit Extension performance evaluation will be conducted by an independent external evaluator that will be selected by a procurement committee. NCBA CLUSA's HQ M&E team will manage the evaluation with appropriate support from the project-level M&E team. However, all project personnel will be expected to contribute to the evaluation. Personnel will provide information, assist wherever feasible, and help to determine any appropriate project corrections to be made and implemented as determined by the evaluator.

The evaluation team will propose a robust study design that will involve both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and synthesize information to achieve the evaluation objectives. The study must provide detailed answers to the specified evaluation questions related to learning, relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and sustainability dimensions. Achievement of key project outcomes will be determined by comparing the target value with the actual accomplishment. Changes in key outcome indicators will be assessed by comparing the final evaluation values with the findings from the FY21 Merit Extension evaluation. Target participants for the Merit Extension were ten (10) dairy processors, three (3) meat processors, five thousand (5,000) beef and ten thousand (10,000) dairy producers in the nine (9) provinces: Monte Plata, San Juan, Dajabón, Santiago Rodríguez, Puerto Plata, La Altagracia, El Seibo and Hato Mayor along with the Gran Santo Domingo. This will be a non-experimental pre-post design.¹²

SAFE's Final Evaluation for years 1- 5 implementation was completed and submitted for USDA approval on November 3, 2021. The final evaluation will be compared to the Merit Extension implementation to assess the extent and direction of change.

Data Collection: Data will be collected from organizational and individual level participants and market participants e.g., producer organizations, individual and organizational level processors, buyers, individual participants, government officials, financial institutions, and so forth. NCBA CLUSA will provide a sampling frame and other necessary support to the evaluation team e.g., literature to be reviewed; project briefing that will include context, activities, and indicators; and briefing on stakeholders and beneficiary groups.

There will be time spent in the SAFE project office in Santo Domingo and the field. The evaluator and SAFE project management staff will develop a more detailed travel schedule based on the evaluator's meeting requirements before arrival in the country, if international. The safety of the evaluation team, participants, and all staff should always be prioritized by complying with the recommendation of health authorities considering the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Sampling:** Individual participants will be selected using multi-stage cluster sampling methods. A proportionate random technique will be used to select males and females from each sub-cluster.

¹² The final study did not include a control group, and therefore it will not be feasible to apply experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Beef and dairy will be the first level cluster. The second and tertiary-level clusters will be determined based on the geographic spread. The sample selected for the FY21 Merit Extension evaluation will closely match the study samples of SAFE baseline, midline, and final evaluation. For the quantitative data collection e.g., focus group discussion and key informant interviews, purposeful/ availability/ snowball sampling methods will be used.

Table 5: Illustrative Sampling and Data Collection Method

Value Chain Actor/Partner	Selection Method	Data Collection Method
Direct and indirect participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the project's beneficiary listing as a sampling frame • Treat each province as a stratum. • Determine the sample size for each region utilizing the appropriate sample size estimation formula. • Select a sample randomly from each stratum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Surveys to capture quantitative information and verify. -M&E report and other project document review
Federations, Associations, Cooperatives, and POs	<p>Quantitative Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the project's associations and POs listing as a sample frame • Treat each province as a stratum • Determine the sample size utilizing the appropriate sample size estimation formula. • Apply stratified random sampling methods to select participants from each region. <p>Qualitative Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of availability and snowball sampling method to select focus group participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Document reviews. -Structured surveys to capture qualitative data. -Focus group discussion to capture qualitative information. -Verify project indicator data.
Agro-dealer and input suppliers	<p>Quantitative Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census instead of the sample as the number of is manageable. <p>Qualitative Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of availability and snowball sampling method to select focus group participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Document reviews and verify project indicator data. -Structured surveys to capture qualitative data. -Focus group discussion to capture qualitative information.
Government officials (local and national)	Purposeful and availability sampling method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Document reviews and verify project indicator data -Key informant interviews
MCCs, Beef & Dairy Processors	<p>Quantitative data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census instead of the sample as the number of is manageable. <p>Qualitative data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Document review and verify project indicator data. -Structured survey to collect quantitative data.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and snowball sampling method to select focus group participants. 	-Focus group discussion to capture qualitative information .
Project staff and partners	<p>Quantitative data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the project's staffing and partner listings as a purposeful and availability sampling frame <p>Qualitative data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and snowball sampling method to select focus group participants. 	<p>-Document reviews.</p> <p>-Structured surveys to capture qualitative data.</p> <p>-Key informant interviews to capture qualitative information.</p>

Data Analysis: Data will be analysed at the provincial and project level. The provincial-level analysis will include an exploration as well as explaining of the emerging themes and concepts within each value chain. The project-level analysis will involve putting the emerging themes and concepts and explanatory factors from all the regions together.

Quantitative data will be analysed using statistical software. The analysis will involve descriptive analysis that will be presented in tabular/chart formats. Within the region and across regions, the analysis will be conducted for each indicator and participant category. The evaluation team will develop a code book that will include codes for location, participant type, questions, and response categories.

Analysis of qualitative data will follow the framework of data reduction, data visualization, and conclusion drawing and verification. The data reduction phase will include selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcripts. All the field notes will be transcribed first in the local language and then will be translated into English. Findings from the document review will be noted in the document summary forms. Data will be presented in a visual format that will help with conclusion drawing and verification. Finally, the team will draw conclusions based on regularities, patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions.

VII. Consulting firm activities

The successful evaluator will lead the entire evaluation process from design to reporting writing. NCBA CLUSA staff will provide logistical and other administrative support. Key activities will include:

- Review previous project evaluations (available here [Baseline](#), [Midterm](#), [Final](#)), documents, and other published and grey literature related to the extension. This includes the extension's internal documents e.g., work-plan and strategies as well as relevant external documents including, but not limited to, national policies and regulations, special studies carried out by other agencies, etc.
- Develop study design and methods that will have a balance of quantitative and qualitative techniques, analysis of secondary data, observations, and document reviews.
- Identify and select study participants from the sampling frame provided by the extension staff. The sampling frame will include participants from the ten (10) dairy processors, three (3) meat processors, five thousand (5,000) beef and ten thousand (10,000) dairy producers in nine (9) provinces including Monte Plata, San Juan, Dajabón, Santiago Rodríguez, Puerto Plata, La Altagracia, El Seibo and Hato Mayor along with the Gran Santo Domingo.
- Develop, edit, and finalize data collection tools e.g., household survey questionnaire, PO survey

questionnaire, and key informant interview and focus group guides.

- Develop a data collection guide specifying data collection and management structure, field schedules, and data quality assurance methodology.
- Train field supervisors, key informant interviewers, and focus-group facilitators on the methods and processes.
- Perform quality assurance during design, testing, fieldwork, data entry, data analysis, and reporting.
- Prepare Merit Extension Evaluation report
- Present findings, conclusions, and recommendations (in both written report and PowerPoint formats).

Merit extension evaluation activities must not threaten the health of the evaluation team, project staff, participants, or the public. Furthermore, evaluators must comply with local health ordinances to protect public health (for example, if necessary, wearing face masks that cover their nose and mouth, practicing social distancing, etc.).

VIII. Addressing Limitations

Due to the complexity of the different components of the project and the geographical location of its activities, opportunities for errors exist. The evaluation team is expected to be aware of such complexity and develop strategies to minimize opportunities for errors. The evaluation team will develop quality control systems, including developing detailed data collection guides and overseeing field data collection.

This evaluation will heavily rely on secondary performance information reported in semi-annual reports to USDA and quarterly reports to USDA. The quality of performance data will affect the accuracy of projected trends. The evaluation team should check the validity and reliability of performance data before analyzing it.

Primary data collected from participants may reflect the opinions of the most dominant groups without capturing the perceptions of less vocal groups. The evaluation team should take this into account and make sure that all parties are freely expressing their views. The evaluation team will mitigate this potential oversight by organizing focus groups based on the need to ensure that participants speak freely during discussions.

IX. Deliverables

- **Inception report** that will include methodology, sampling approach, data analysis, and field procedures.
- **Data quality assurance plan** and method.
- **Data collection and analysis tools:** Set of questionnaires, formats, and Excel spreadsheets used to collect and analyze data, and their implementation guidelines.
- **Data files:** raw field notes, transcribed notes. A structured database of all data collected. In excel format.
- **Weekly Progress Reports** A written and/or electronic report of the evaluation's progress made in the field covering key scheduled activities, completion status, and found constraints regarding data collection.
- **Initial presentation:** A PowerPoint presentation on the results and conclusion of the evaluation. The presentation should not be more than 15 slides.

- **Submission of Draft Evaluation Report:** The team will submit a draft report to the NCBA CLUSA key staff (HQ M&E Team; Project leadership and M&E Specialist) and USDA Analyst, who will provide comments for revision. FAS IFAD has an evaluation template that can be used and will be shared with the successful bidder.
- **Final Report:** A written and electronic document that includes an executive summary, table of contents, methodology, findings, conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendations. The evaluator will collect and report data on all relevant performance indicators. The report will also include annexes that will have all custom and standard indicators with disaggregates and updated values in comparison to baseline values. All the personal identifying information must be scrubbed in the report's final version. The report will be submitted in English with an executive summary in Spanish and should include a database with all collected information and an analytical framework. USDA will publish evaluation reports in the future and final copies of reports should be free of PII and otherwise ready to publish. The evaluator will be asked to sign the attached waiver with the final report.
- **Separate Deliverable:** A 2–3-page stand-alone brief describing the evaluation design, key findings, and other relevant considerations. It will serve to inform any interested stakeholders of the FY21 Merit Extension evaluation and should be written in language easy to understand by non-evaluators and with appropriate graphics and tables.
- **Final presentation in Spanish:** A PowerPoint presentation on definitive results and conclusion of the evaluation to the project staff and select local stakeholders.

X. Evaluation Management and Coordination

Per the requirement of the FAS International Food Assistance Division's policy ([view here](#)), this evaluation will be conducted by independent third-party evaluators. NCBA CLUSA will provide logistical support that will also include inviting stakeholders to the meetings. Evaluators will present methodology and findings to USDA officials and the NCBA CLUSA team. The draft report will be shared with USDA for their review and comments. The report will be finalized after approval from USDA.

Per USDA requirement/guidance: *All final versions of international food assistance evaluation reports will be made publicly available. Evaluators shall provide a copy of the evaluation reports that are free of personally identifiable information (PII) and proprietary information. Final versions of evaluation reports ready for publication should be accessible to persons with disabilities. For guidance on creating documents accessible to persons with disabilities, please see the following resources:* <https://www.section508.gov/create/documents>; <https://www.section508.gov/create/pdfs>

XI. Audience and Intended Use

Performance results, lessons learned, and the success of the supported activities are to be shared with USDA to inform future activity design. The audience will include all key stakeholders e.g., USDA, NCBA CLUSA, partner organizations e.g., Fundación REDDOM, GENEX Cooperative, Dominican Agricultural Business Board (JAD), ASOCARNE, ADHA, project participants, the MEGALECHE extension program from the General Livestock Directorate (DIGEGA) of the Ministry of Agriculture, the General Directorate for Medicines, Food, and Sanitary Products (DIGEMAPS) from the Ministry of Health, and the National Council for the Support of Dairy Production (CONALECHE), CCOAGRO, private sector partners, and other non-governmental organizations working in synergy with the SAFE project. Other audiences may include individuals and groups who are not necessarily engaged in the project activities but may benefit from the findings that may be published and disseminated through the CLUSA website and/or presentation at national and international conferences.

XII. Selection of the Evaluation Team

An outside firm/external evaluator will be selected for the FY21 Merit Extension evaluation. Through this competitive process NCBA, CLUSA will select an evaluation firm with local expertise and experience evaluating agricultural, livestock, and trade initiatives with similar target audiences. Major requirements for the evaluator will include:

- Demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills, and experience in conducting evaluations of development programs and/or projects involving agriculture and ideally livestock, trade, and marketing in DR.
- Technical skills and capacity in the application of analytical frameworks such as conducting qualitative and quantitative surveys, involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation, and statistical analyses.
- Know about US Government projects including either USDA or USAID.
- Demonstrated experience managing or evaluating agricultural value chain projects.
- Ability to travel to rural areas of DR on difficult roads to meet with stakeholder partners.
- Competency to write detailed, concise, and coherent FY21 Merit Extension evaluation reports.
- Budget Competitiveness.
- Fluent in English and Spanish language and writing skills.
- Gender balance and cultural sensitivity.

XIII. Conditions of Application

Consultants and companies wishing to carry out this mission must send the following items (12-point font) in the order specified below to be considered during selection:

1. Technical proposal

The technical proposal (12 pages max.) must reflect how the offeror will carry out the tasks included in the work. Candidate companies will provide a detailed plan of the specific activities, the timetable for carrying out the mission, as well as the data collection and analysis activities. In addition, it will include a proposal for the statistical approach.

2. Financial application

The candidate companies/consultants will propose a realistic estimate of the cost of this mission, including a detailed budget and a justification of the expenditure. The budget will only contain costs that can be directly attributed to the proposed activities, with an explanation of the line items. All training costs, such as rental of premises, transport, etc. must be clearly articulated for each training. Applicants must present adequate administrative and financial systems to manage the funds covered by this agreement. If the candidate companies charge overhead, they will need to provide their NICRA. The maximum amount available is \$120,000.

3. Organization

The candidate companies/consultants must briefly list and describe their history, vision, objectives, legal status, ownership and management structure, current projects/services, current clients/assignors, current geographic scope, and experience.

4. Personnel

The candidate companies/consultants must briefly list and describe the names and qualifications of the key personnel assigned to the assignment (the CVs of the proposed staff must be included in the Annex). The proposed team should preferably be multidisciplinary and include at least (A) a team leader for monitoring and evaluation, with extensive experience designing and implementing evaluations and analyzing the results (ex: a statistician and/or analyst familiar with the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data); Experience in the target regions is desirable; (B) an agricultural economist, a rural development specialist or a person with an equivalent level of competence, specializing in economic development and data collection activities; (C) a database and information system specialist; (d) a data entry team; and (e) enumerators.

5. Proof of Experience

Applicant companies/consultants will have to prove their experience in similar missions by providing a list of all contracts and/or cooperative agreements involving similar or related work during the last two years. Additionally, the applicants must submit a work sample and at least three reference letters from previous consultancies.

6. Legal registration

Candidate companies/consultants' engagement is subject to the consultant obtaining necessary visas and work authorization.

XIV. Criteria for the Evaluation of the Proposal

The following criteria are those under which all proposals will be judged:

1. Quality of technical approach and methodology (30%)
2. Experience in agriculture and/or livestock economics (20%)
3. Past experience of individual and/or company with USDA and/or USAID or other International Development Organizations (10%)
4. Demonstrated experience and technical skills of the team/reference letters (10%)
5. Completeness of proposal, including schedules, total budget, employee CVs, etc. (10%)
6. Cost realism, budget justification, and effectiveness. Given it meets these standards, competitive budgets will receive a higher score (20%)

XV. Application Deadline

Applications must be in English and with single spacing. The pages must be numbered, and each page must contain the name of the company. Proposals must be sent by e-mail with the Subject line "SAFE FY21 Merit Extension Evaluation Proposal" to NCBA CLUSA at the following address: progana@ncbaclusa.net and/or avivanco@ncba.coop.

Please include the name of the person in your organization sending the application, as well as the phone number and e-mail address. **Applications must be submitted by February 10th, 2023 at 5:00 pm EST.**

If you need more details, please contact our offices by email at progana@ncbaclusa.net and/or avivanco@ncba.coop. NCBA CLUSA reserves the right to subsidize all or none of the applications submitted and/or to modify the terms of reference / geographical areas before the project begins.

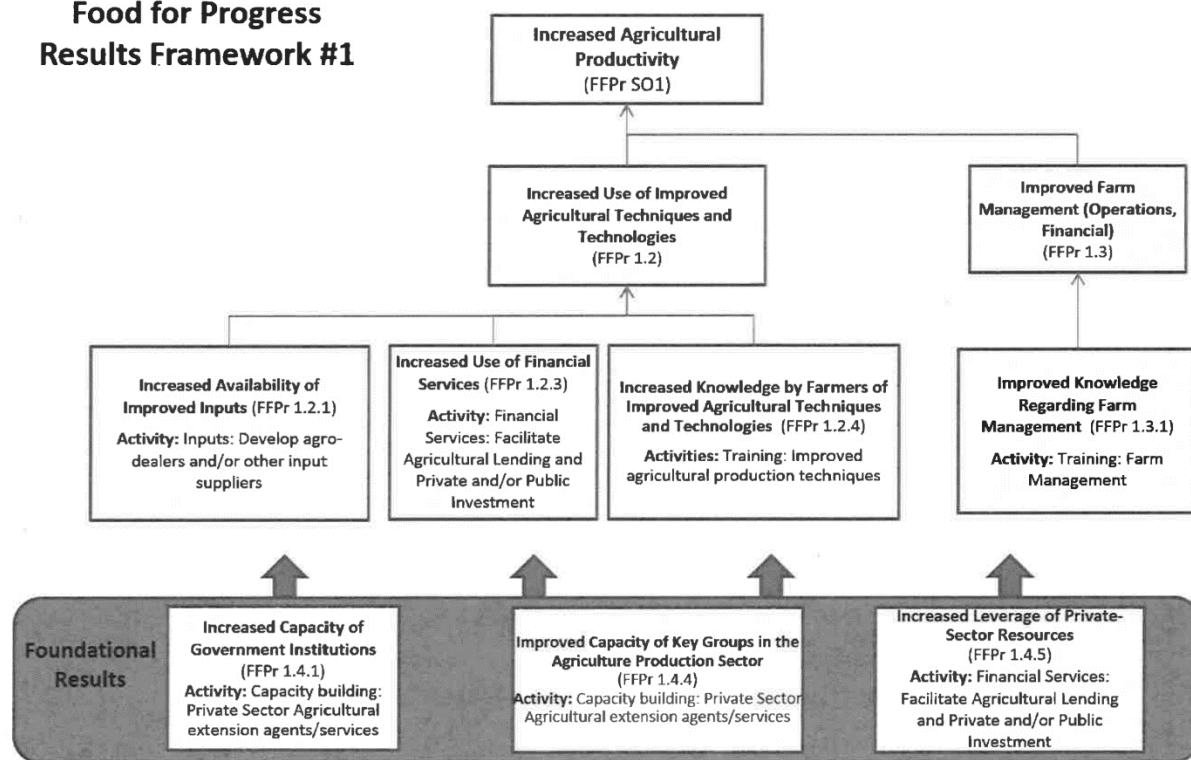
Table 6: Approximate Timeline of Events

Activity	Deadline
Develop a scope of work for the evaluation and list of required qualifications for the external evaluation team, publish a request for proposals	Three months before evaluation (December 2022)
Review applications	One/Two months before evaluation (January/February 2023)
Select external evaluation team/consultants	One/Two months before evaluation (January 2023/February 2023)
Work with the external evaluation team to finalize project evaluation TORs and agree on evaluation methodology	One month before evaluation (February 2023)
Fieldwork – data collection (interview, focus groups)	3-4 weeks in March/April 2023
External evaluators prepare analysis documents and reports	One month after the evaluation activities (May 2023)
NCBA CLUSA's HQ M&E team and Project leadership (COP, M&E Specialist, technical teams where appropriate) review evaluation report and analysis, as well as lessons learned and other documentation	One month after evaluation (May 2023)
Submit FY21 Merit Extension performance evaluation report for USDA review and approval	June 2023
Presentation of findings to stakeholders	One month after evaluation (June 2023)

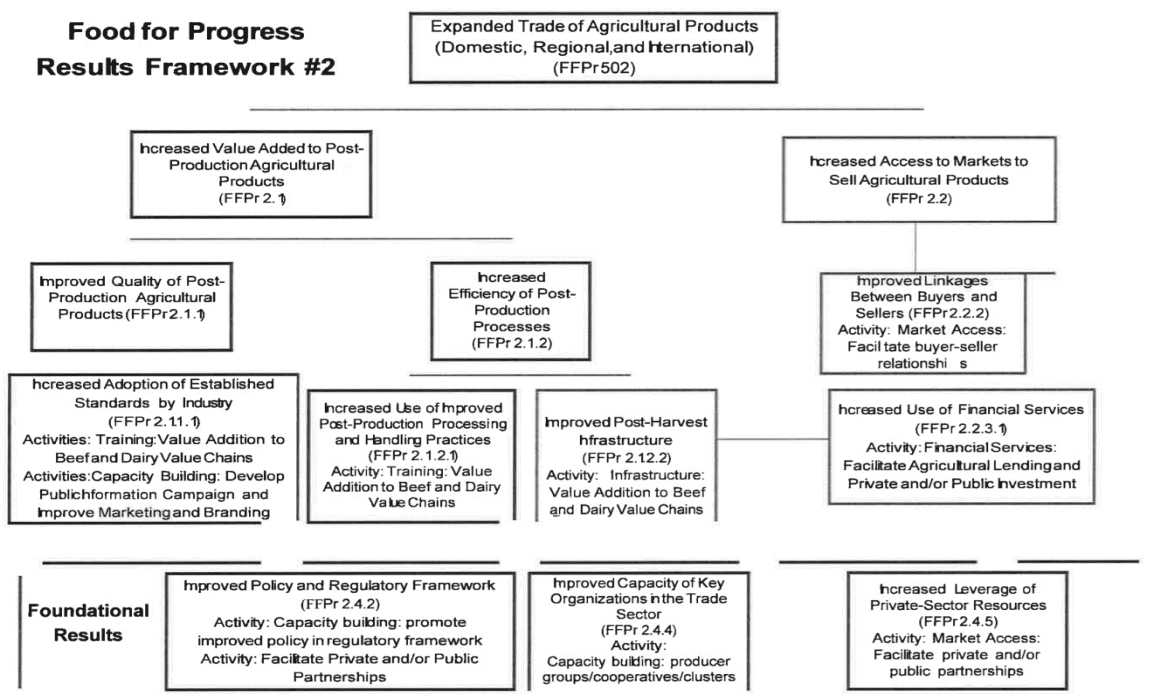
Annex 1

NCBA CLUSA – Dominican Republic
Agreement # FCC-517-2015/008-00

Food for Progress Results Framework #1



Food for Progress Results Framework #2



Annex 2. SAFE's Technical Activities - Description

ACTIVITY 1 - CAPACITY BUILDING - DEVELOP PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN AND IMPROVE MARKETING AND BRANDING – THIS ACTIVITY WAS NOT CONTINUED DURING THE MERIT EXTENSION AND WILL BE OUTSIDE THE FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION.

Although ACTIVITY 1 was eliminated in the Merit Extension, some components were addressed in other activities in particular ACTIVITY 9: TRAINING - BEEF AND DAIRY QUALITY STANDARDS including INDOCAL Seal of Quality compliance training. NCBA CLUSA works with dairy industry stakeholders to establish standards that align with government regulations to improve the quality of dairy products. Regulations with which the industry will need to comply include new regulations requiring that all milk be sold chilled and with no use of hydrogen peroxide. NCBA CLUSA will support industry stakeholders to develop a Seal of Quality (SoQ), which will establish specific standards for each industry partner involved with handling milk. The SoQ will support the Government of the Dominican Republic's (GoDR) efforts to improve standards and quality of milk for consumers. Additionally, NCBA CLUSA will support the Dominican Institute for Quality (INDOCAL) to leverage public/private sector funding for a public education campaign to inform Dominican consumers about the SoQ.

ACTIVITY 2 - Capacity Building: Private Sector Agricultural Extension Agents/Services

NCBA CLUSA trains individual extension agents selected and hired by PO grant recipients that are part of the private sector extension systems established under this activity. Youth and women are prioritized. Training includes the use of demonstration and livestock field school methodologies in the provision of extension services. Dairy extension agents are trained in the following technical areas: animal nutrition & feeds, cross-bred genetics, sanitary milking and milk handling practices, and improved farm management practices. Beef extension agents are trained in animal nutrition and cross-bred genetics to achieve optimal weight and age at the time of slaughter. NCBA CLUSA partner, GENEX, provides certification training to extension agents on reproductive practices including artificial insemination, sales, and cooperative development. All technical training focuses on ensuring compliance with GoDR and industry food safety rules and regulations. The capacity of private sector extension to reach small producers, along with mid to large producers, with higher quality technical assistance, will be improved.

During the merit extension specifically, the NCBA CLUSA works with Junta Agroempresarial Dominicana (JAD), as the main agribusiness trade association in DR, to leverage its network of agribusiness, such as RICA, Nestlé, and Parmalat to co-invest in private extension services. NCBA CLUSA and JAD continue training private sector extension agents (both men and women) on the Livestock Farmer Field School (LFS) methodology and best livestock and manufacturing practices. NCBA CLUSA and JAD include public extension agents (MEGALECHE) in these trainings to increase their effectiveness and coordination with Private extension systems, particularly in the use of the LFS methodology. SAFE also organizes demonstrations between input suppliers and LFSs so producers can continue to access knowledge and inputs such as Genex's genetic improvement inputs and services, and Promethean Power Systems' cold chain equipment.

NCBA CLUSA provides grants to businesses, such as Producer Organizations (PO), dairy processors, and meat processors, inputs suppliers, and service providers to establish and/or strengthen their private

extension systems by hiring full-time extension agents to provide technical assistance to their members and suppliers. Grants are spread out over the period of performance for the extension. NCBA CLUSA identifies applicants through ongoing outreach to the producer and industry associations related to dairy and beef production and processing. NCBA CLUSA evaluates applicants on the amount of proposed matching funds and the number of farmers to be served. NCBA CLUSA educates potential applicants on application requirements and provides technical support in preparing applications. A technical panel, led by NCBA CLUSA, evaluates applications. The panel evaluates the applications meeting the requirements. Grants are provided on a matching and regressive basis.

ACTIVITY 3 - Capacity Building: Producer Groups

NCBA CLUSA trains POs in association governance, management, and the development of business plans to establish or strengthen the management of milk collection centers, sustainable extension systems and/or artificial insemination (AI) routes, and/or other revenue generating activities related to the beef/dairy value chains. NCBA CLUSA works with dairy POs to select qualified specialists to guide their activities, establish and manage milk collection centers, and generate enough value-added income to support the costs associated with staffing the facilities and compliance with industry food safety standards. NCBA CLUSA works with beef POs to select qualified specialists to guide their activities, establish and/or strengthen extension systems and/or AI routes, and generate enough value-added income to support the costs associated with staffing the facilities and compliance with industry food safety standards. NCBA CLUSA also provides training on the rights and responsibilities of PO membership, leadership, governance, financial and business practices, accounting, cash flow analysis, investment planning, and operational management. NCBA CLUSA organizes peer-to-peer learning among large/medium producers and small producers on these topics. NCBA CLUSA also facilitates north-south learning exchanges between Dominican Beef and Dairy stakeholders and U.S. cooperatives such as Organic Valley to provide training and share experiences in governance, business development, management, marketing, production, and other relevant topics to build the capacity of Dominican producers and POs. NCBA CLUSA prioritizes work with youth and women-managed producer organizations to ensure that the project includes and improves the lives of rural women and youth.

ACTIVITY 4 - Capacity Building: Promote Improved Policy and Regulatory Framework

NCBA CLUSA works with Texas A&M University (TAMU) and a team of former USDA specialists consultants to conduct equivalency analyses prior to USDA FSIS audit. As part of the equivalency analyses, NCBA CLUSA will assess progress made to address issues identified by USDA in the latest two evaluations of the DR beef regulatory system. NCBA CLUSA covers the travel and lodging costs for a group of involved government officials and private sector partners to travel to the United States to study the US beef regulation system. While in the United States, the group will identify gaps in obtaining equivalency in the Dominican context. NCBA CLUSA trains government officials and private company representatives in the beef sector in trade policy analysis. NCBA CLUSA also trains private sector representatives in advocacy, to constructively represent private sector interests in the creation of more market-friendly policy and regulations.

NCBA CLUSA presents the findings of the specialists' equivalency analyses at meetings attended by beef industry stakeholders, including government officials and private sector representatives. Stakeholders provide feedback on the equivalency analysis and make recommendations to resolve barriers to reaching equivalency. Based on the assessment and feedback from stakeholders, NCBA CLUSA drafted action plans

identifying changes that remain to be made, key stakeholder responsibilities for making the identified changes, key stakeholder capacity building needs to comply, and any additional training needed to support implementing the changes. NCBA CLUSA facilitated stakeholder meetings to review the action plans and map out changes and roles at the beginning of the extension. Following this initial meeting, NCBA CLUSA organizes quarterly stakeholder meetings to assess progress, update the plan with new targets in the next quarter, and identify responsible parties. These quarterly meetings will be held until the policy and regulatory changes identified in the equivalency analysis and agreed to by the stakeholders are attained. NCBA CLUSA provides a follow-on report each year to industry stakeholders, including government officials, to ensure that resulting policy changes are applied in the regulatory framework.

ACTIVITY 5 - Financial Services: Facilitate Agricultural Lending and Private and Public Investment

NCBA CLUSA through its local partner, Fundación Rural Economic Development (REDDOM), collaborates with financial institutions (FIs) to provide training and access to the financing needs of beef and dairy farmers and processors. REDDOM advances SAFE's finance strategy, including: 1) facilitating Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) with buyers to increase value chain (VC) financing; 2) tailoring financial products that support dairy and beef production and market-driven investments with Banco Agrícola, Banreservas, BHD León, Banco ADOPEM, Banco ADEMI, and credit unions like Cooperativa Mamoncito, and COOPSANO; 3) organizing demonstrations and meetings between FIs and POs, processors, exporters, and input suppliers to educate them on the financial products available; 4) leveraging government programs like Special Agriculture Development Fund (FEDA) for small farmers to access livestock microloans; and 5) training in financial management and coaching on loan applications.

A grant fund is used on a matching and regressive basis to co-finance private extension and infrastructure improvements to comply with food safety and Sanitary Performance Standards (SPS) standards and improve energy and cost-efficiency and other productivity and market expansion activities. Sustainable financing will be prioritized - all grants will involve co-investments by processors, buyers, and producers. POs/processors will have business plans guiding operations toward 100% self-financing and cost-recovery.

NCBA CLUSA and REDDOM train VC stakeholders, and in particular POs, on beef and dairy financial products available. NCBA CLUSA and REDDOM educate POs, producers and other VC actors on financial management, loan applications, and short-term coaching throughout the loan process. NCBA CLUSA and REDDOM ensure FIs regularly update POs and other VC actors on loan products and improvements. NCBA CLUSA also trains POs in establishing internal microlending programs, and basic arbitration to support their members should they encounter problems with the financial system.

NCBA CLUSA also supports processors and POs in accessing finance to upgrade existing infrastructure to comply with beef and dairy industry food safety standards including equivalency and the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and/or improve efficiency through milk collection centers, cold storage, processing equipment, and other upgrades.

ACTIVITY 6 - Infrastructure: Improve Beef and Dairy Value Chains

NCBA CLUSA provides technical assistance, access to finance and when needed provides matching grants for dairy processors and POs to strengthen or establish milk collection centers and infrastructure in compliance with industry food safety standards and improved market access. NCBA CLUSA requires grantees to present business plans including cost/benefit analysis, detailed plans for their facility,

equipment, and financing needs before an established selection committee. Grant requests for improving infrastructure or equipment to comply with industry food safety standards and/or market access will be prioritized. NCBA CLUSA provides training to grant recipient staff in good management and manufacturing practices to ensure that facility upgrades are professionally run and take full advantage of the investment.

NCBA CLUSA identifies manufacturers of low-cost milk collection equipment, including equipment adapted for solar or intermittent grid power. NCBA CLUSA with its partners conducts feasibility studies and cost/benefit analyses with the manufacturers to see how the technology could be used to benefit milk collection centers.

NCBA CLUSA also works with meat processors to invest in SPS control systems that support compliance with US equivalency standards. Meat processors will finance the upgrades mostly through credit and savings but will be eligible to apply for matching grants. NCBA CLUSA will prioritize applications that most directly address challenges identified in the equivalency assessment.

ACTIVITY 7 - Inputs: Facilitate Agrodealers and Other Input Suppliers

NCBA CLUSA establishes links between private sector extension services and agricultural input suppliers to increase the uptake of quality agricultural inputs in the dairy and beef sectors. NCBA CLUSA works with POs and input suppliers to showcase these specific products to dairy and beef farmers through demonstration plots. This activity ensures private sector extension supports increased access to quality inputs for small, medium, and large producers.

NCBA CLUSA, in partnership with JAD and CCOAGRO, an input provider as well as extension grant recipient, provide training to private sector extension agents on specific products sold by input suppliers. NCBA CLUSA and JAD, with private extension agents and CCOAGRO, establish pasture, feed, artificial insemination (AI), and milking demonstrations at each livestock field school supported milk collection center. NCBA CLUSA link milk collection centers and input suppliers. Milk collection centers are established as agents for partner input suppliers, facilitating increased access to improved inputs for dairy farmers. NCBA CLUSA invites partner input suppliers to provide technical support to extension agents in establishing demonstration plots such as CCOAGRO. NCBA CLUSA also invites input suppliers to participate in demonstration trainings for farmers. Costs of inputs for demonstration plots are co-financed by SAFE grants, and where feasible, contributions from dairy and beef processors and agricultural input suppliers.

NCBA CLUSA also invites qualified suppliers of pasture seed, feed, and AI to provide input and technical support for demonstration of their products to beef producers. NCBA CLUSA facilitates linkages between beef processors and input supply companies while engaging GoDR extension agents to recommend veterinary pharmaceutical and AI service suppliers to beef processor extension agents. With U.S. producer cooperative, Organic Valley, NCBA CLUSA and beef POs and large and medium producers with private extension services and livestock field schools, the project seeks to establish grass-fed demonstration farms to contribute to the development of niche markets.

ACTIVITY 8 - Market Access: Facilitate Buyer-Seller Relationships

NCBA CLUSA organizes multi-stakeholder vision workshops – including producers, POs, cooperatives, processors, buyers, and the government – to anchor activities in a stronger VC analysis and consultation with market actors. NCBA CLUSA facilitates peer-to-peer learning exchanges during workshops between

large/medium producers and small producers on meeting industry standards and other key topics relevant to increasing market participation.

NCBA CLUSA organized a beef industry-sponsored outreach trips to Puerto Rico (PR) in November 2022 to facilitate buyer-seller linkages. Agreements between PR buyers and beef exporters were facilitated. PR-based Méndez Company, Quirch, Save Logistics, José Santiago, Inc, Caribbean Produce, Empacadora y Procesadora del Sur, Ballester Hermanos, Inc, and Trafon Group have expressed interest in purchasing DR beef. Negotiations between these buyers and DR slaughterhouses have commenced.

NCBA CLUSA organizes meetings between milk collection centers and processors with nearby independent dairy farmers. In these meetings, milk collection centers and processor representatives train dairy farmers on their pricing structure and required quality standards. They train farmers in how they evaluate standards and communicate financial incentives paid for milk that meets these standards. NCBA CLUSA facilitates negotiations of sales agreement terms between dairy producers and dairy processors to codify pricing, volume, and quality standards. NCBA CLUSA organizes meetings between equipment suppliers and milk collection centers, processors, and dairy POs to facilitate sales of equipment needed to meet GoDR and industry quality and food safety standards.

NCBA CLUSA also assists beef and dairy processors in participating in the annual national livestock fair, Feria Agropecuaria. NCBA CLUSA with its partner, the National Beef Producers Association (ASOCARNE), and other POs organizes beef and dairy sensory quality competitions for the Hotel and Restaurant industry (HRI) and other potential buyers.

ACTIVITY 9 - Market Access: Facilitate Private and Public Partnerships

NCBA CLUSA creates linkages between private sector extension agents and government extension agents. NCBA CLUSA supports these groups to provide extension services in partnership with each other. NCBA CLUSA also works with JAD and its key dairy and beef members to invest in private extension.

NCBA CLUSA also creates linkages between beef trade associations, key private sector actors in the beef value chain, and government actors in each of the target provinces. NCBA CLUSA encourages dialogue among stakeholders in the beef sector to ensure that regulations and policy changes continue to support equivalency. NCBA CLUSA supports private companies in the beef sector to invest in processes and procedures required to meet equivalency standards.

NCBA CLUSA similarly creates linkages between dairy industry associations, key private sector actors in the dairy value chain, and government actors in each of the target provinces. NCBA CLUSA facilitates dialogue among stakeholders in the dairy sector, who develop individual action plans based on these dialogues to meet SPS standards for export of Dominican dairy products to the international markets.

ACTIVITY 10 - Training: Beef and Dairy Quality Standards

NCBA CLUSA trains dairy processors and private sector extension agents on a variety of technical standards and topics to improve milk quality through farmer field school practical and hands-on learning. Training topics include Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), milk handling and storage, SPS control systems; improved measures for transportation from the farm to the collection center; and compliance with GoDR regulations for zero use of hydrogen peroxide in milk as well as compliance with Seal of Quality and other internationally recognized quality certification requirements. Training includes on-farm

assessments to identify SPS violations. NCBA CLUSA facilitates discussions between farmers and dairy processors regarding milk quality requirements, standards, and pricing structure. NCBA CLUSA assists processors and producers to develop standards and formalize the standards in their contracts. NCBA CLUSA with local authorities, DIGEMAPS-dairy, audits dairy processors and monitors compliance with established GMPs. NCBA CLUSA provides sanitation kits and matching in-kind grants for dairy producers and processors that take steps to address SPS violations. Grants assist producers and processors to address violations and improve SPS measures. To be eligible for grants, producers supply milk to an NCBA CLUSA supported milk collection center and have completed SPS dairy training.

NCBA CLUSA organizes training for livestock processor staff on GMP specifically related to SPS gaps compliance with GoDR certifications and other internationally recognized quality certification requirements. NCBA CLUSA provides training to industry stakeholders to develop a beef Seal of Quality and other certifications, which establish specific standards for each industry partner involved with handling beef. NCBA CLUSA provides matching grants for processors that invest in meeting beef equivalency standards required for market access. Grants support utilization of laboratory services as well as upgrades to equipment and systems where needed. NCBA CLUSA evaluates applications based on how directly the upgrades address issues that prevent the export of beef from the DR to the United States.

ACTIVITY 11 - Training: Farm Management

NCBA CLUSA trains public and private sector extension agents, prioritizing youth, and women, in the livestock sectors and facilitates the training of farmers in improved agricultural production techniques, integrated farm management, and business plan development. Farm management training includes Small & Medium Enterprise development services that meet sector needs including financial planning, focusing on evaluating the economic impact of using new technology. Project participants are provided with take home educational materials. NCBA CLUSA distributes record books and encourages participants to maintain their own system of tracking and analyzing farm production data either in print or via commercially available mobile apps such as GENEX's DairyComp Lite. As a result of this training, farmers are able to evaluate the financial impact of adopting new technology, including the ability to evaluate the use of credit in technology adoption. NCBA CLUSA institutionalizes farm management training within the government and private extension systems. NCBA CLUSA works with livestock processors to develop, strengthen, and operationalize their business plans including strengthening their supply chains. Where necessary, NCBA CLUSA trains them in loan application and credit management.

ACTIVITY 12 - Training: Improved Agricultural Production Techniques

NCBA CLUSA works with public and private extension agents to provide training to beef and dairy producers (including small, medium, and large producers) in improved production and quality techniques. In the dairy sector, NCBA CLUSA organizes biweekly training sessions for 10-20 producers that supply partner milk collection centers and/or dairy processors. NCBA CLUSA arranges for extension agents to train dairy producers in pasture management, animal feed and nutrition & health, agrobusiness management, and sanitary milking and milk handling practices. NCBA CLUSA, where needed, undertakes activities to mitigate livestock disease outbreak as part of a coordinated effort, which would be routed through FAS prior to implementation including contributing to the emergency response to the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak detected in July 2021 through training on biosecurity and the distribution of kits that support it as well as alternative livelihoods to swine producers in the surrounding areas of Moca in the provinces of Espaillat and La Vega. NBCA CLUSA ensures that extension agents establish

demonstration sites, with farmer field schools organized around demonstration cows, to demonstrate the impact of new production techniques. NCBA CLUSA ensures extension agents share data from the demonstration at milk collection centers, encouraging uptake of new production techniques. NCBA CLUSA audits extension agent training to ensure accuracy and consistency of technical information. Training emphasizes the inclusion of women and youth producers and women-managed producer organizations, to ensure that the project includes and improves the lives of rural women and youth aged 18-30 years old.

In the beef sector, NCBA CLUSA trained public and private extension agents provide training to beef farmers that supply partner beef processors and beef farmers associated with milk collection centers. NCBA CLUSA ensures that extension agents establish demonstration sites, with farm field school style training organized biweekly. NCBA CLUSA arranges for extension agents to train beef producers in improved pasture seed and feed, artificial insemination, agrobusiness management, nutrition, and the use of veterinary pharmaceuticals. NCBA CLUSA ensures extension agents record data quarterly on expenses, feed, and weight gain and motivate farmers to improve recordkeeping, either print or digital via commercially available mobile apps, to illustrate the results of improved production techniques. Farmers participating in Farmer Field Schools are a package of yield and quality improving inputs based on attendance and presenting their progress improving record keeping.

Demonstrations are co-located with dairy demonstrations and at leading beef producer and supplier facilities identified by beef processors. NCBA CLUSA presents a cost/benefit analysis to farmers so that they can accurately evaluate the economic benefit of the technology and the potential use of credit.