

**Request for Quotes
USAID CSS RfQ 2019-01**

Subject: Provision of technical assistance in facilitation of Serbian premium food producers to apply for International Taste and Quality Institution's (iTQi) Superior Taste Award in 2019.

Contracting Entity: Cardno Emerging Markets USA Ltd., Washington DC, Belgrade
Representative Office

Location: Serbia, Belgrade

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Cardno Emerging Markets USA, Ltd. (Cardno), the Contractor, acting on behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as implementer of the Competitive Economy Project, is soliciting bids from qualified, legally registered U.S., EU or Serbian, non-profit or for-profit companies and organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) interested in providing the consultancy services as described in Section I. Background and Scope of Work. The successful bidder will be responsible for ensuring achievement of specified tasks/deliverables.

I. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF WORK (SoW)

About the Project

USAID Competitive Economy Project (Project) is a four-year activity with overall goal to establish systemic approaches to strengthening Serbia's food-processing sector in order to generate export-led growth, and greater integration with European and global markets. This will be achieved by strengthening selected value chains (VC) with a focus on aggregate sales, particularly exports. The Project will identify gaps in the current competitiveness system and address them by creating platforms for exchange and knowledge sharing between system actors based on clear, market driven principles, making capacity building an integrated process.

While initially focusing on the fruits and vegetables sector, the Project is expected to result in a model that can eventually be applied more broadly across the industry.

SoW Background

Globally, the specialty food industry continues to grow significantly faster than all other food segments. New food trends, rising opportunities and sales, and constant innovation in the sector continue to serve as key growth drivers for the specialty food industry. In the US alone,

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retail dollar sales for specialty foods grew 12.9 percent, versus 1.4 percent growth for all food segments. Similarly, the expansion and growth of the specialty segment is taking place in developed and developing economies across the world. Internationally, consumers of all ages are embracing specialty foods and making purchases everywhere from convenience stores to national retailers to online web-shops, as well as in traditional gourmet shops and groceries. The ripe and growing opportunities in the specialty segment has led to a boom in new, innovative products and ever greater competition as both large established and new food and beverage companies compete to satisfy new consumer demands and gain a greater share of this market segment.

Due to the increased competition in the specialty market segment, premium food producers are looking for ways to create a competitive advantage for their products. To distinguish their products in this competitive space, specialty food producers are turning to renown, consumer-trusted institutions that certify product quality and taste. One of the world's leading organizations in this field is the International Taste and Quality Institution (iTQi), based in Brussels. Established in 2005, iTQi is the leading independent chef and sommelier-based organization dedicated to certifying the superior taste of food and drink products from all around the world. The jury members are opinion leaders and taste experts who are selected within the 15 most prestigious European culinary and comelier associations. All food and drink products sold in retail stores are eligible to participate. The products are blind tested by the jury solely on their merits, in terms of taste, quality and pleasure. The products do not compete against other products but are independently evaluated by product category. In 2017, iTQi awarded brands from 131 countries and tested 1989 products in 427 food and drink categories. The products that score more than 70% during the tasting are granted the Superior Taste Award.

The unique endorsement from iTQi's jury of chefs and the Superior Taste Award provides many benefits to premium food producers, as consumers purchasing iTQi awarded products know that they are purchasing high-quality products that have been vetted by the best chefs in the world for quality and taste. These benefits include:

- Recipients use the award in marketing communication and on product packaging to increase visibility and brand awareness.
- The award helps companies differentiate products from competition and attract new clients from local and internal market places.
- Companies leverage the award to negotiate better business terms and placement with large retailers.
- The iTQi's sensory analysis report can also be used by food companies as a benchmark with suggestions for potential product improvements.

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- Companies also use the award to increase their internet ranking, presence in social media and in the media and press.

In Serbia, several companies have already recognized the benefits of seeking iTQi awards to certify their products both to both domestic and international consumers. In 2018, these companies included AS Group (Imperian plum brandy), Atlantic Group (Smoki flips with peanut), Bibli (pork cracklings & pig fat), and Foodland (avjar with tomato and strawberry & honey).

Objective of the Request for Quotes

To further assist a greater number of Serbian premium food producers to gain greater domestic and global recognition of their products, the Project is working with export-ready premium food producers to tap into the growing specialty food market segment. Over the past year, the Project has undertaken numerous activities to support Serbian's niche and artisan specialty food producers create new market exposure opportunities, connect with leading domestic and foreign retailers, and exhibit at leading specialty fairs, including the Fancy Food Show in New York and, most recently, the Belgrade Food Show. To further complement these efforts, the Project has recognized that attainment of the iTQi award can support Serbian premium food producers to enhance their competitiveness in domestic and international markets, and lead to increase export and sales of premium products in new markets.

The Project's support to companies will encompass the main activities, as follows:

1. Technical Services provided to companies by the Consultant – Cost will be covered via Service Agreement;
2. Fees for participation at the iTQi award 2019 for the maximum 5 products of selected companies – Cost will be covered by the Project via direct payment to the iTQi 2019 Award organizer

Selected/ participating companies shall bare all costs of preparing and sending their sample products, in compliance with the Serbian and EU customs services regulations, and as required by the iTQi award organizer. In addition, companies shall bare all costs of any and all travel arrangements (e.g. airplane tickets, or other means of transportation, accommodation meals and per diem for their representatives), and cost-share participation fee, in reference with their participation at events and/or promotions at the iTQi award 2019.

The objective of this Request for Quotes is to select a Consultant that will conduct a review of Project-supported Serbian premium producers' food products; identify, select and prepare maximum 5 products with highest likelihood to receive iTQi's Superior Taste Award in 2019.

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The Consultant will be required to meet with company management and evaluate their products for quality, facilitate the application process and sending of samples to iTQi, based in Brussels, for testing, and organize promotional activities to promote awarded products in domestic media outlets.

This Project cross-cutting activity - raising awareness, changing habits and attitudes in consumption, is in accordance with the adopted Project Work Plan, and it is expected to contribute to the designated Outcomes:

- ✓ Increased number of high-value, niche Serbian products in new markets;
- ✓ Increased revenues for Serbian firms;
- ✓ Increased added value for exported Serbian products;
- ✓ Enhanced visibility of Serbian products in domestic and international markets;

Intervention:

I2-12 Promotional platform and plan for joined activities with NTOS established

Output indicators:

T2-5 Visibility of Serbian products in domestic and international markets increased

On the output level it is expected that this activity will support Projects' Sub-Purpose 2: Business Support Systems Coordination Strengthened Sub IR 2.2.2: Economic and Business Development Services Enhanced.

II. Tasks

The selected Consultant shall conduct following tasks:

- Undertake the process of identification of producers; Conduct one -on- one assessment sessions with identified producers;
- Select maximum 5 premium products for iTQi testing; Propose to food producers and the Project a service package(s) to be provided by the iTQi ranging from the following options:
 - 1) Basic testing package;
 - 2) Sensory analysis report;
 - 3) Taste evaluation report;
 - 4) Jury suggestions for improvement and Food pairing.
- Analysis and collection of necessary documentation for submission for the iTQi process, including: Company data, verification of the certificates they possess (i.e. ISO, HACCP, GAP, etc); and collection of food product photographs, product descriptions and other necessary information for the application procedure.
- Open orders for selected producers and their products in iTQi's database and enter data for each product separately.
- Gather and prepare documentation for food exports to the EU.

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- Collect representative samples of all products from each manufacturer along with necessary documentation for export of goods to the EU. (Full documentation is required, regardless that they are test samples of the product).
- Create a media support package for award-winning products and manufacturers.
- Coordinate with iTQi officials and judges in Brussels – to secure timely communication and organization of adequate media promotion (e.g. interviewers for media content and discussions with Serbian producers).
- Travel to Brussels for the Superior Taste Award 2019 ceremony.
- Plan cooperation with correspondents and creation of media material at the ceremony (photo, video material, interviews).
- Organize meeting and working lunch to discuss possibilities of positioning Serbian products on the EU market.
- Provision of media support for iTQi awarded products in Serbia - preparation for guest appearance in domestic media outlets and interviews.
- Evaluation of iTQi 2019 Superior Taste 2019 Award (including evaluation of the preparation phase, participation of Serbian Companies and effects of their participation).

III. Period of Performance

Tentative period of performance of the contracted services **is from February 1, 2019, until July 27, 2019.**

IV. Deliverables

1. Producers identified, and premium products selected (list of companies/producers, methods of identification and selection; summary of one-on-one assessments) - by **February 15, 2019.**
2. Set of iTQi services/packages agreed (meeting minutes, signed agreements with companies – by **February 15, 2019.**
3. “Selected companies registered in iTQi system/database and their orders opened (list of companies with their complete data, excerpts from registration) – by **March 10, 2019.**
4. Documents and samples prepared for export to EU / Brussels – by **March 31, 2019.**
5. Food products’ samples must be delivered to iTQi / Brussels no later than **April 25, 2019**
6. Media and PR support provided to Serbian participants (including interviews and economic and trade advisors to discuss possible future cooperation) by **May 25, 2019.**
7. Organized participation at the Superior Taste Award 2019 ceremony (facilitating cooperation with correspondents and creation of media material at the ceremony (photo, video material, interviews) **by June 10, 2019**
8. Organized meetings and working lunches to discuss possibilities of positioning Serbian products on the EU market by **June 30, 2019.**
9. Provided media promotion of iTQi awarded products in Serbia - preparation for guest appearance in domestic media outlets and interviews **by July 15, 2019.**

- 10. Evaluation report on effects of participation at the iTQi event and awards by July 27, 2019.**

All reporting documents will be prepared in English and Serbian.

V. Requirements for eligible bidders

Legally registered U.S. or Serbian, non-profit or for-profit companies and organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with the following Consultant (s) requirements:

- At least 8 (eight) years of professional experience in event planning, marketing, communication, project management, and delivering consultancy and training services
- Background and practical, hands-on experience in working with international food excellence awards or similar activities/events (e.g. iTQi through participation and/or receiving the iTQi product award);
- Demonstrated knowledge and at least 2(two) year experience in working with Serbian food processing sector;
- Linkages with Serbia's premium food producers;
- Analytical, processing and reporting skills and knowledge.
- Relevant experience working with donors' agencies programs.
- Strong networking, communication and facilitation experience.
- Fluent written and oral knowledge English language.

VI. Award

Cardno/the Project anticipates awarding one Service Agreement under this Request for Quotes. up to **15,000.00 in USD (US Dollars)**, payable in RSD (Serbian dinars), in funding to be allocated over 6-month period. The price of the Service Agreement to be awarded will be an all-inclusive fixed price. No profit, fees, taxes, or additional costs can be added after award. Under a Service Agreement all payments will be a fixed-sum, payable upon completion of deliverables. Deliverables and payment amounts, and dates will be defined in detail during negotiations.

Cardno/the Project will select the bid that offers the best value based upon the following evaluation criteria:

1. Management, Professional Qualifications (30)

The bidder should describe their overall capability to undertake work in this area. A description of proposed Consultancy qualifications and relevant experience to carry out the Scope of Work should be included.

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2. Past Performance and Experience (50)

Bidder's experience and capabilities in undertaking similar activities should be detailed here, including references and certifications (if relevant). If desired, bidders may share website links to relevant examples for consideration.

3. Cost proposal (20 points)

Ensure consistency of the costs with the proposed effort for implementing specified tasks in line with technical approach.

The selection of the Offeror for award will be made by the Cardno/the Project Evaluation Committee based on the evaluation criteria above. The award is to be made based on the best overall (i.e., best value) proposal that is determined to be the most beneficial to USAID's Competitive Economy Project with appropriate consideration given to the three evaluation factors: Qualifications, Experience and Price. The non-price factors, when combined, are significantly more important than the Price factor.

Submission and deadline of bids

The bidders should submit firm fixed price cost proposal broken down per tasks and deliverables. All cost information must be expressed in US Dollars. Bids including CV and references of proposed staff clearly showing adequate technical background and relevant work experience should be sent by e-mail to: konkursi@konkurentno.rs, **by January 31, 2019, 3 p.m.** CET. Bidders can submit any questions concerning this RfQ in writing via email to konkursi@konkurentno.rs.