

# RIDGE

Research Innovation  
and Development  
Grants in Economics  
at ERS



**Food Assistance & Nutrition  
Research Program**

*Economic Research that Informs Food  
and Nutrition Assistance Policy*

## Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics Program

The Economic Research Service (ERS) created the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Program as part of the Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP) in 1998. RIDGE encourages new and innovative research on food and nutrition assistance issues and broadens the involvement of social science scholars in this research area. RIDGE awards support both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore economic, nutrition, and health outcomes of participation in USDA's food and nutrition assistance programs. Since its inception, RIDGE (known as the Small Grants Program during 1998-2006) has provided more than 220 grants to economists, sociologists, nutritionists, anthropologists, and public health professionals at over 100 educational and research institutions across the Nation. In many cases, RIDGE awardees publish scholarly journal articles from their research or receive additional funding from other sources that builds on their initial projects. The RIDGE Program's multidisciplinary approach and wide distribution of awards expands research participation and perspective and subsequently strengthens the research base.

### How To Apply for a RIDGE Grant

Each year, the RIDGE Research Centers release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for projects that examine relevant food and nutrition assistance issues. The release date of the RFP and guidelines for submitting proposals vary between the two RIDGE Centers. Researchers apply directly to the RIDGE Centers during their competition and may submit proposals to both Centers, but the researchers can receive only one annual grant. For further information about the RIDGE awards, visit the RIDGE Research Center websites.

## RIDGE Program Partners

RIDGE is funded by ERS and administered in partnership with

- The RIDGE Center for National Food and Nutrition Assistance on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and
- The RIDGE Center for Targeted Food and Nutrition Assistance Development Center, Mississippi State University.

The RIDGE Centers oversee the application, peer review, and funding provided through the RIDGE Program. The Centers serve as a hub for food and nutrition assistance issues and provide a source of timely information.

The RIDGE Centers typically announce and invite research projects determined after completion of a competitive review process. Grants range from \$20,000 to \$40,000. Awardees typically have 1 year to conduct their research in Washington, DC, to present and discuss their findings at conferences in their announcements.

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### ***The RIDGE Center for National Food and Nutrition Assistance at the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP), University of Wisconsin-Madison***

The RIDGE Center at IRP directs research related to food and nutrition assistance. IRP—one of three Area Poverty Research Centers—maintains a strong focus on the generation of poverty scholars, and broadly disseminating information. The Center, an important component of IRP's focus relates to determining the effects of participation and the effects of participation on food security, food access, and food quality.

Judith Bartfeld, a professor with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Food Science and a food insecurity researcher, serves as the RIDGE Center Director. For more information on the RIDGE Program at IRP, see: [www.irp.wisc.edu/irp](http://www.irp.wisc.edu/irp)

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### ***The RIDGE Center for Targeted Food and Nutrition Assistance at the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), Mississippi State University***

The RIDGE Center at SRDC devotes special attention to the needs of rural and ethnic minorities, persistently poor children and adults serving as “food deserts” because of the lack of affordable and nutritious food. The SRDC, given its strong network of ties with land-grant universities and Extension Development Centers, is ideally positioned to support targeted research and programs that experience significant economic, social, and demographic challenges to the food and nutritional health of their residents.

Lionel “Bo” Beaulieu, the SRDC Director and a professor of Agricultural Economics at Mississippi State University's Agricultural Economics Department, serves as the RIDGE Center at the SRDC. For further details about the RIDGE Program at the SRDC, see: [msstate.edu/opportunities/ridge/](http://www.msstate.edu/opportunities/ridge/)

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Assistance Research at the Institute for Research

Assistance Research at the Southern Rural

ward, and performance processes of the research grants provide an opportunity for mentoring and training researchers interested in food and nutrition assistance and accessible information on new research findings.

Proposals are due in late winter or early spring, with awards determined by a review process. Grants are designed to last for 12-15 months and range from \$50,000 to \$250,000. Researchers are expected to present their research after which they convene at ERS headquarters. The RIDGE Centers provide specific terms of the grants.

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### ***Assistance Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison***

The University of Wisconsin-Madison focuses on nutrition assistance issues that affect the entire Nation. The Center has an extensive network of research and policy colleagues who are engaged in research, training and mentoring the next generation of researchers. As a RIDGE Center, the University of Wisconsin-Madison is a significant determinant of food assistance program outcomes, including obesity, and other outcomes.

For more information, contact the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of Consumer, Food and Nutrition Center director. For more information, visit <http://www.ers.usda.gov/initiatives/funding/usdasgp.htm>



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### ***Assistance Research at the Mississippi State University***

The Mississippi State University focuses on the food and nutrition challenges of rural America's racial and ethnic populations, including those struggling with obesity, and residents living in areas called food deserts where nutritious food is not readily available. The RIDGE Center at Mississippi State University works with other universities across the South and to the Nation's Regional Rural Extension Centers to conduct research and studies in areas across the country to address the food and nutrition challenges that may impact the rural population.

For more information, contact the University of Mississippi's Department of Rural Sociology with Mississippi State University as the director of the RIDGE Center program at SRDC, see: <http://srdc.msstate.edu>



## Annual RIDGE Conference

ERS and the RIDGE Centers host the annual Food and Nutrition Assistance RIDGE Conference in the fall at ERS headquarters in Washington, DC. All RIDGE grantees present the findings of their research and respond to questions from other researchers, policy officials, and representatives of public interest groups in a dynamic and interactive forum.

## Summaries of Previously Funded RIDGE Projects

The RIDGE Program annually summarizes research findings of projects that were awarded grants through its partner institutions. In addition to projects funded by the current RIDGE Centers, many of the research projects were conducted through previous RIDGE partners at the American Indian Studies Program, University of Arizona; the Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago; the Department of Nutrition, University of California, Davis; and the Joint Center for Poverty Research, the University of Chicago and Northwestern University.

The RIDGE project summaries are available in an electronic database and an annual report on the ERS website. The electronic database allows users to perform customized searches of RIDGE project summaries by keyword(s), project, research center, investigator, or year.

For more information about the RIDGE Program, annual conference, and searchable project database, visit the RIDGE Briefing Room on the ERS website at: [www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodNutritionAssistance/Funding/ridge.htm](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodNutritionAssistance/Funding/ridge.htm)



## Selected Research Themes of the RIDGE Program

- Food Insecurity and Hunger
- Food Assistance Program Participation
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation
- National School Lunch Program Participation
- WIC Participation
- Nutrition Education Evaluation
- Food Assistance and Obesity
- Food Assistance, Nutrition, and Health Status
- Food Spending by Food Assistance Participants
- Role of Private-Sector Organizations in Food Assistance
- Food Assistance Needs of Vulnerable Populations

The Economic Research Service (ERS) is a primary source of economic information and research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The mission of ERS is to inform and enhance public and private decisionmaking on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, natural resources, and rural development.

For more information on ERS publications and ongoing research, visit our website at [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov). Sign up to receive e-mail updates on new publications, conferences, and funding opportunities. Go to [www.ers.usda.gov/updates](http://www.ers.usda.gov/updates) and then select "Food and Nutrition Assistance" as a subject of interest.

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