



OFFICE OF TRAVIS COUNTY JUDGE SARAH ECKHARDT

22 September 2015

Mr. Brent Elrod
NPL for SBIR Rural Development
USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Stop 2201
Washington, DC 20250-2201

Dear Mr. Brent Elrod,

This letter is in support of a Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program grant application by Sunergie entitled: "Climate Change Resilient Green Infrastructure Creates New Innovative Markets for Rural Communities."

Sunerjie's project involves the development of a concept they have called Travis IDEA (Innovation District for Environmental Advancement). The project intends to create climate change resilient green infrastructure financed by homeowners. This project represents an innovative way to improve the environment and farmland while allowing appropriate residential development in rural communities.

There are several reasons why Travis IDEA is a positive effort from the County's perspective:

- The project is aligned with the goals of the Travis County Land Water & Transportation Plan, the City of Austin's "Imagine Austin" plan, Envision Central Texas, and Travis County's Conservation Development Ordinance.
- The farm concept integrates multiple species of livestock with perennial food forests and annual vegetable crops to create an environmentally sensitive polyculture.
- The project could demonstrate the added value to residential markets associated with environmental and agricultural easements on large properties.
- The project is expected to collect and store rainwater on-site to provide for residential and farm needs even during lengthy droughts.
- The perennial polyculture farm serves as a model to help combat climate change by sequestering significant amounts of carbon in the soil, which also increases soil organic matter and water-holding capacity.
- The farm concept is intended to provide jobs to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers through the innovative financing, acquisition and improvement of land located near urban centers.

The application is for funding to carry out market studies in support of the Travis IDEA concept. As Travis County Judge, I support this research and urge you to fund this innovative project.

Sincerely,



Sarah Eckhardt
Travis County Judge