Maine's Public Universities
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL #2026-096
SOIL ILMS
RESPONSE ADDENDUM #1
April 24, 2026

QUESTIONS

1. The solicitation references Appendix H as the Scope of Work but provides no narrative operational description (annual sample volumes, number of external clients, instrument types producing raw data, current reporting cadence, or legacy system vendor). Can the University publish a profile of the current Analytical Lab / Maine Soil Testing Service operation (volumes, workflows, current software) so Respondents can size the solution appropriately?

   ANSWER: The University has intentionally defined the Scope of Work through the functional, technical, and compliance requirements set forth in Appendix H (Solution Requirements Matrix), together with the evaluation and implementation questions in Appendices G, I, and J. Respondents are expected to size and propose their solutions based on these stated requirements rather than on current operational volumes or a specific existing system configuration.

   At this time, the University does not plan to publish additional narrative profiles regarding annual sample volumes, number of external clients, instrument inventories, reporting cadence, or details of the current legacy system. Providing such information is not necessary to respond to the stated requirements and could unduly anchor solution design to the current environment rather than the future-state capabilities sought through this RFP.

   Respondents should propose solutions that are:

   - Production-ready and currently deployable (per Section 1.1.5 and Appendix E),
   - Scalable and configurable to support varying volumes and workflows,
   - Capable of supporting future growth and multiple University institutions, as described in the RFP.

   If a Respondent believes certain assumptions are necessary for pricing or implementation planning, those assumptions should be clearly documented in the proposal. The University reserves the right to evaluate proposals based on responsiveness to the stated requirements and the flexibility and scalability of the proposed solution.

2. Does the University currently have an incumbent LIMS, a preferred commercial product, or a shortlist of vendors evaluated prior to issuing this RFP? If so, please identify the incumbent and indicate whether the selected Respondent would be expected to replicate the existing workflow/UI or whether workflow redesign is in scope.

   ANSWER: The University does not identify an incumbent LIMS, a preferred commercial product, or a shortlist of vendors within this solicitation. This RFP was issued as a competitive procurement, and all Respondents are evaluated equally based on their ability to meet the requirements set forth in the RFP and its appendices.

While the Analytical Lab and Maine Soil Testing Service currently utilize internal processes and legacy tools to support their operations, the RFP is not intended to replicate an existing system, workflow, or user interface. Instead, the University is seeking a modern, production-ready, commercially available LIMS that meets the functional, technical, security, accessibility, and scalability requirements defined in:

- Appendix H – Solution Requirements Matrix
- Appendix G – Implementation, Training, Support and Reporting
- Appendices I and J – Compliance and Information Technology Requirements

Workflow configuration, reporting design, and user experience are expected to be supported through the solution's standard configuration capabilities, consistent with Section 1.1.5 (Minimum Eligibility Requirements), which prohibits development-dependent or future-roadmap functionality.
Respondents should propose solutions that:

- Meet the defined requirements out of the box, with configuration rather than custom development;
- Support workflow flexibility and best-practice laboratory operations;
- Do not rely on prior University system designs or UI conventions.

Any assumptions regarding workflow configuration or process alignment should be clearly documented in the proposal. The University will evaluate solutions based on responsiveness to the stated requirements and the demonstrated ability to support current and future operational needs across the University of Maine System.

3. Section 1.1.5 requires the solution be "currently built and deployable" and disqualifies proposals that rely on "significant new development." Please clarify the line between disqualifying "new development" and acceptable "configuration/extension" of a production platform. For example, would a production-ready life-sciences data platform that is configured (not rebuilt) for Soil Testing Service workflows including tenant-specific templates, calculations, and report layouts satisfy this requirement?

ANSWER: Section 1.1.5 (Minimum Eligibility Requirements) and Appendix E distinguish between disqualifying new development and acceptable configuration of an existing, production-ready solution. For purposes of this RFP:

- Disqualifying "new development" includes functionality that:
  - Does not currently exist in the Respondent's production environment at the time of proposal submission;
  - Is dependent on custom code development, beta modules, or features identified only on a future roadmap;
  - Requires material engineering effort to create new core capabilities to meet required requirements; or
  - Is otherwise not deliverable through standard implementation and configuration practices.
- Acceptable configuration or extension is limited to:
  - Use of existing, production-deployed capabilities of the proposed platform;
  - Configuration of tenant-specific templates, business rules, calculations, workflows, and report layouts using tools and features that are already generally available in production;

- No dependency on new feature development, custom coding, or post-award product releases to meet baseline RFP requirements.

By way of clarification, a production-ready life-sciences or laboratory data platform that is:

- Commercially available and generally deployed;
- Marketed publicly as a finished product;
- Configured (not rebuilt) for Soil Testing Service workflows using existing configuration, rules engines, calculation frameworks, and reporting tools; and
- Fully capable of meeting all required RFP requirements at the time of submission may satisfy Section 1.1.5, provided the Respondent clearly demonstrates that:
- All required functionality exists today in production;
- No required requirement relies on development, beta functionality, or future releases; and
- The solution can be deployed using standard implementation practices only.

Respondents bear the burden of clearly documenting, in Appendix E and Appendix H, which requirements are met through existing out-of-the-box functionality versus configuration. Any ambiguity regarding reliance on future development or non-production features may result in a determination of non-responsiveness.

4. With award on May 29 and agreement start July 1 (≈32 days), please confirm whether July 1, 2026 is (a) the contract/effective date with a multi-month implementation period before go-live, or (b) the required production go-live date. If (b), what is the minimum set of functionality the University considers "live" on July 1, and is a phased cutover (read-only legacy access + new sample intake first, full reporting later) acceptable?

ANSWER: The July 1, 2026 date referenced in the RFP represents the anticipated contract/effective date of the Agreement, not a mandatory full production go-live date.

The University recognizes that implementation, configuration, data migration, validation, and training activities will require a post-award implementation period. Respondents should therefore propose a reasonable implementation timeline consistent with their solution and the requirements outlined in Appendix G (Implementation, Training, Support and Reporting).

A phased implementation and cutover approach is acceptable and expected, provided it supports continuity of laboratory operations. This may include, for example:

- Initial deployment focused on new sample intake, submission portals, and core workflow management;
- Continued read-only access to legacy systems during transition, if required;
- Subsequent enablement of advanced reporting, historical data access, and optional functionality, as appropriate.

The University does not require all functionality listed in Appendix H to be live on July 1, 2026. Rather, Respondents should clearly describe:

- Their proposed go-live definition, including the minimum viable production functionality;
- Any proposed phasing or sequencing of capabilities;
- Dependencies, risks, and assumptions related to implementation timing.

These elements will be evaluated as part of the overall assessment of implementation approach, realism, and risk. Respondents remain responsible for proposing a solution and timeline that meets the University's needs while complying with the requirements of the RFP.

5. Of the 38 requirements in Appendix H, the majority are marked "Required." Will the University disqualify a Respondent that answers "No" or "Partial" on a Required item if the Respondent proposes an equivalent or superior approach (for instance, replacing a legacy webhook model with an event-driven API), or is any "No" on a Required item automatically non-responsive?

   ANSWER: Appendix H identifies requirements as Required or Preferred for evaluation and scoring purposes, as described in Section 2.1.2.6 (Appendix H: Solution Requirements Matrix).
   A response of "No" or "Partial" to a Required item does not automatically result in disqualification. Required items are evaluated on a weighted basis, and responses are scored as follows:
   - "Yes" – full points for the requirement
   - "Partial" – half points
   - "No" – zero points

   However, Respondents should note the following important distinctions:
   - Required requirements represent baseline functional and technical expectations of the University. A pattern of "No" or "Partial" responses on Required items may materially impact scoring and could affect the determination of whether a proposal is responsive and offers best value.
   - A Respondent may not substitute a Required requirement with an alternative approach unless the proposed approach demonstrably satisfies the intent of the stated requirement.
   - Assertions of "equivalent" or "superior" capability must be clearly explained in the Comments/Explanation field of Appendix H and must rely on existing, production-ready functionality.

   By way of example, proposing an event-driven API architecture in place of a traditional webhook model may be acceptable if the proposed approach:
   - Fully satisfies the functional intent of the requirement as written;
   - Is currently supported in production;
   - Does not introduce additional dependencies, limitations, or reductions in capability; and
   - Does not require new development to meet the requirement.

   The University reserves the right to determine, during evaluation, whether a proposed alternative truly meets the intent of a Required requirement or constitutes a material deviation. Any ambiguity or lack of clarity may be evaluated adversely.

   Respondents are cautioned that Required items should not be treated as optional, and proposals that fail to adequately address Required requirements may be deemed non-responsive when considered in their entirety.

6. The eligibility criteria require the "product" to be listed on the Respondent's public website as a recognized, available offering. Will the University accept a production platform that is marketed publicly (with datasheets, deployments, and documentation) but is branded as a configurable life-sciences data/LIMS platform rather than a pre-packaged "Soil LIMS" SKU?

   ANSWER: Refer to answer in question 3

7. Will references from adjacent regulated life-sciences deployments (e.g., USDA/agricultural research labs, environmental testing labs, clinical/biotech labs operating under similar QA/QC and audit-trail requirements) satisfy the "higher education and/or government" deployment requirement, or must the two (2) reference deployments be specifically higher-education soil/agricultural LIMS installations?

   ANSWER: References from adjacent regulated life-sciences deployments may satisfy the eligibility requirement, provided they meet the criteria stated in Appendix E (Minimum Eligibility Requirements). Specifically, the RFP requires demonstrated deployments within higher-education institutions and/or government agencies. Accordingly:

   - Deployments within government agencies (including federal, state, or local entities such as USDA-affiliated laboratories, agricultural research labs, or environmental testing labs) do satisfy the requirement, even if they are not higher-education soil testing laboratories.
   - Deployments within higher-education institutions are acceptable regardless of whether the specific use case is soil testing, provided the deployment demonstrates comparable laboratory workflows, data integrity, auditability, and regulatory rigor.

   The University does not require that reference deployments be limited to higher-education soil or agricultural LIMS implementations. Rather, references should demonstrate that the proposed product is:

   - Production-deployed in comparable regulated laboratory environments;
   - Supporting QA/QC controls, audit trails, secured data handling, and compliance-driven workflows; and
   - Used by organizations with operational, governance, or regulatory complexity similar to that anticipated under this RFP.

   Respondents must clearly:

   - Identify whether each reference qualifies as higher education, government, or both;
   - Describe the scope of the deployment and relevance to the requirements of this RFP; and
   - Confirm that the referenced deployments utilize the same production product proposed, not a bespoke or materially different implementation.

   The University reserves the right to assess the relevance and sufficiency of reference deployments during evaluation.

8. For a solution delivered on a production platform hosted on a major cloud provider (e.g., AWS/GCP/Azure), will the University accept the underlying cloud provider's SOC 2 Type II and the Respondent's platform-level SOC 2 (Type I or bridge letter acceptable in first year), along with a HECVAT 3.0 completed against the Respondent's platform or is a Respondent-level SOC 2 Type II for the specific Soil LIMS offering required at time of submission?

   ANSWER: SOC 2 requirement must be provided for the solution offered.

9. Is the University open to solutions that embed modern AI capabilities (e.g., LLM-assisted report narrative generation, anomaly detection on raw instrument output, natural-language query of historical results, agentic QC review), or does the University prefer a conventional rules-based LIMS with no generative-AI components? If AI features are acceptable, are there constraints on model hosting, data residency, or approved providers?

ANSWER: The RFP does not prohibit the inclusion of advanced analytics or AI-enabled capabilities, nor does it express a preference for or against generative or machine-learning–based functionality. Respondents may propose solutions that include modern AI or advanced computational features, provided such features fully comply with the requirements of the RFP.

All proposals—whether rules-based, AI-assisted, or hybrid—must satisfy the following conditions:

- All Required functional, security, accessibility, and compliance requirements are met independently of any AI functionality;
- The solution remains fully operable and compliant without reliance on AI-generated outputs;
- Any AI-enabled features are production-ready, currently deployed (not beta or roadmap-dependent), and consistent with Section 1.1.5 and Appendix E; and
- Core laboratory functions (sample intake, calculations, reporting, QA/QC controls, audit trails) are deterministic, auditable, and explainable, regardless of whether AI features are enabled.

If AI-assisted capabilities are proposed (such as narrative generation, anomaly detection, natural-language querying, or QC assistance), Respondents must clearly document:

- The scope, purpose, and optional nature of the AI functionality;
- Whether AI outputs are advisory versus determinative in laboratory workflows;
- How outputs are reviewable, traceable, and auditable, particularly where regulatory, QA/QC, or reporting integrity is involved; and
- How such features can be disabled or excluded without loss of Required baseline capability.

All AI-enabled components are subject to the RFP's security, privacy, and compliance requirements, including those in Appendix I (Information Security & Accessibility) and Appendix J (Information Technology). Accordingly:

- University data residency, access controls, audit logging, and incident-response obligations must be maintained;
- The hosting environment(s) for any models or AI services must be clearly disclosed;
- Any third-party models, providers, or subprocessors involved must be identified and reflected in the submitted HECVAT 3.0 or higher;
- University data may not be used to train external models unless expressly permitted under the Agreement.

The University has no pre-approved or excluded AI model providers at this time. AI functionality will be evaluated solely in the context of overall solution compliance, security posture, auditability, and risk. The inclusion of AI capabilities does not confer preference, and the absence of AI features will not be evaluated negatively.

10. Please quantify the legacy dataset: approximate number of records, years of history, total storage footprint, and source system(s) (e.g., dBASE/FoxPro, Access, custom). Will the University accept AI-assisted data-migration tooling (LLM-based field mapping, automated schema inference from PDFs), or must migration be performed exclusively via deterministic ETL?

ANSWER: At this time, the University does not intend to publish quantified details regarding the legacy dataset, including record counts, years of historical data, total storage footprint, or specific source system technologies (e.g., dBASE, FoxPro, Access, or custom applications).

The RFP intentionally defines the data-migration requirement at a capability level, rather than prescribing dataset size or source-system characteristics. As stated in Appendix H (Solution Requirements Matrix) and Appendix G (Implementation), Respondents are expected to propose solutions that can:

- Support the migration of legacy data from varied formats, including structured and semi-structured sources (e.g., DBF, Excel, PDFs);
- Ensure historical records remain accessible, auditable, and usable post-migration; and
- Scale appropriately to accommodate typical laboratory data volumes and growth over time.

Respondents should document any assumptions used for migration sizing, timeline, or effort estimation as part of their implementation approach.

With respect to tooling and methodology, the University does not mandate a specific migration technique (e.g., deterministic ETL versus assisted tooling). Accordingly:

- AI-assisted or automated data-migration tools (including LLM-assisted field mapping, schema inference, or document parsing) may be used as part of the migration process, provided they:
  - Are used in a controlled and reviewable manner;
  - Do not compromise data accuracy, integrity, traceability, or auditability; and
  - Comply with all applicable security, privacy, and compliance requirements in the RFP.
- Any AI-assisted approach must ultimately produce deterministic, verifiable results, and final migrated data must be subject to validation, reconciliation, and acceptance by the University.
- University data may not be used to train external models, and any third-party tools or services involved in migration must be disclosed consistent with Appendix I (Information Security) requirements and reflected in the submitted HECVAT 3.0 or higher.

Respondents remain responsible for proposing a migration approach that is low-risk, auditable, and compliant, regardless of whether advanced automation or AI-assisted techniques are employed.

11. Please provide a compendium of testing methods performed by the Forest and Ag Experiment Station, including EPA or Standard Method numbers where applicable.

ANSWER: At this time, the University does not intend to publish a comprehensive compendium of testing methods performed by the Forest and Agricultural Experiment Station, including EPA, ASTM, AOAC, or other Standard Method numbers.
The purpose of this RFP is to procure a laboratory information management platform, not to standardize, prescribe, or disclose the full catalog of analytical methods currently in use. As such, the Scope of Work is intentionally defined at the system capability level, as reflected in Appendix H (Solution Requirements Matrix) and the implementation and reporting requirements in Appendix G.
Respondents are expected to propose solutions that are capable of:

- Configuring and managing multiple test methods and analytes;
- Supporting method-specific calculations, reference ranges, QA/QC, and reporting logic;
- Associating results with recognized standard methods (e.g., EPA, ASTM, AOAC) where applicable; and
- Accommodating the addition or modification of methods over time through configuration rather than custom development.

The absence of a published method catalog should not materially limit a Respondent's ability to respond to this RFP. Solutions should be designed to support a diverse and evolving set of regulated and non-regulated analytical methods typical of soil, agricultural, environmental, and research laboratories.

For general context, examples of laboratory analyses, quality assurance plans, and report outputs are publicly available to clients through University and laboratory portals. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and should not be interpreted as a complete representation of analytical processes, equipment capacity, or required report formats. Moreover, these materials are intended to support general client communication and do not define the technical or functional requirements of this RFP.

Public examples may not reflect the full range of analytical workflows, recommendation logic, or reporting complexity across laboratory processes. Accordingly, Respondents should not assume that the proposed solution must replicate existing reports or be limited to the scope reflected on public websites, but rather demonstrate flexibility to configure and evolve reporting outputs to meet current and future needs.

Any assumptions regarding method complexity, volume, or configuration effort should be clearly stated in the proposal and reflected, where applicable, in the implementation approach and cost response.

12. Please provide a list of analyzers and other devices that will be generating data that will need to be imported back into the LIMS.

ANSWER: At this time, the University does not intend to publish a prescriptive list of analyzers, instruments, or devices that generate data requiring import into the LIMS.
The RFP intentionally defines instrument integration requirements at a capability level, rather than enumerating specific vendors or models. As stated in Appendix H (Solution Requirements Matrix) and Appendix J (Information Technology), Respondents are expected to propose solutions capable of:

- Importing data generated by a variety of laboratory instruments commonly used in soil, agricultural, environmental, and research laboratories;
- Supporting multiple data-ingestion methods (e.g., file-based imports, folder monitoring, secure file transfer, APIs);
- Handling raw instrument output in structured or semi-structured formats (e.g., CSV, TXT, XLS/XLSX, XML, PDF);
- Associating imported results with samples, tests, calculations, and audit trails in a controlled, traceable manner; and
- Accommodating future instrument additions or changes through configuration rather than custom development.

Respondents should describe:

- Their general approach to instrument and analyzer integration;
- Supported data formats and ingestion methods;
- Any limitations or assumptions regarding instrument connectivity; and
- How new instruments can be onboarded over time.

The absence of a published instrument inventory should not materially limit a Respondent's ability to respond. Solutions should be designed to support a heterogeneous and evolving instrument environment, consistent with the mission and operational diversity of the Forest and Agricultural Experiment Station.

Consistent with the response to Question 11, online resources are available to support general client communication and may be used for general reference, but do not define the technical or functional requirements of this RFP.

The University is not providing prescriptive inventories or detailed specifications of current methods, instruments, or report formats. The RFP is intentionally defined at a capability level to ensure that proposed solutions can support a diverse and evolving laboratory environment. Therefore, any assumptions related to instrument types, integration effort, or implementation scope should be clearly documented in the proposal and reflected, where applicable, in the implementation plan and cost response.

13. **Please provide a list of other applications that will need to be integrated with the LIMS and the general category of information exchanged (results, etc.).**

    ANSWER: At this time, the University does not intend to provide a prescriptive list of applications that will be integrated with the LIMS.

    Integration expectations and related functionality are described in Appendix H (Solution Requirements Matrix) and Appendix J (Information Technology). Respondents should refer to these sections for detailed requirements regarding system integration, data exchange, and interoperability.

    The laboratory is actively expanding its analytical and operational capabilities, and not all future systems and applications are currently defined. Accordingly, proposed solutions should demonstrate flexibility to integrate with both existing and future systems and support evolving laboratory needs.

    Respondents should describe their approach to integration, including supported methods (e.g., APIs, secure file transfer), flexibility to accommodate new systems over time, and any assumptions or limitations.

    The absence of a defined integration inventory should not limit a Respondent's ability to propose a solution. Proposed solutions should support a flexible and evolving system environment.

14. **Please provide the names or examples of any standard report formats used by the Forest and Ag Exp. Station. Which, if any of these reports is delivered electronically to outside entities?**

    ANSWER: At this time, the University does not intend to publish a detailed list of standard report formats currently used by the Forest and Agricultural Experiment Station, nor examples of legacy reports.

    The RFP intentionally defines reporting requirements at a capability and outcome level, rather than prescribing existing report names or layouts. As reflected in Appendix H (Solution Requirements Matrix) and Appendix G (Implementation, Training, Support and Reporting), Respondents are expected to propose solutions that can:

    - Produce configurable, structured, and presentation-ready reports suitable for laboratory, research, regulatory, and client-facing use;

- Support reports that include analytical results, calculations, reference ranges, charts, ratings, and explanatory content, as appropriate;
- Generate both recommendation-based reports and research-style reports that present raw data without interpretive narrative; and
- Export or deliver reports in standard electronic formats (e.g., PDF, Excel, CSV).

By way of general guidance, reports may be delivered:

- Electronically to external clients or entities through a secure client portal or other controlled electronic delivery mechanisms; and
- Internally for laboratory operations, research, compliance, or administrative review.

Respondents should not assume a requirement to replicate existing report formats. Instead, proposals should emphasize:

- The solution's flexibility in designing and configuring report templates;
- The ability to support electronic delivery to external stakeholders in a secure and auditable manner; and
- The capacity to evolve report formats over time through configuration rather than custom development.

Consistent with the response to Question 11, online resources are available to support general client communication and may be used for general reference, but do not define the technical or functional requirements of this RFP.

The University is not providing prescriptive inventories or detailed specifications of current methods, instruments, or report formats. The RFP is intentionally defined at a capability level to ensure that proposed solutions can support a diverse and evolving laboratory environment. Therefore, any assumptions regarding report types, complexity, or delivery methods should be clearly documented in the proposal and reflected, where applicable, in the implementation approach.

15. Does any of the testing supported by the LIMS need to occur at field locations (outside of the laboratory)?

ANSWER: At this time, laboratory testing is primarily conducted within controlled laboratory environments and does not require execution at field locations. However, respondents may describe any available capabilities for field data collection or mobile access as optional functionality.

16. Does the Forest and Ag Exp. Station send samples for testing by other laboratories?

ANSWER: No. For clarity, this RFP is issued with the primary scope of implementation focused on the Analytical Laboratory and the Maine Soil Testing Service within the Maine Forest and Agricultural Experiment Station.

The proposed solution should meet the operational needs of these units as described in the RFP, while maintaining flexibility to support potential future expansion. Integration with other laboratories is not currently required but may be viewed favorably for future scalability.

17. **Please confirm that the Forest and Aa Exp. Station consist of one physical location, as opposed to a lab at each U of ME campus.**

ANSWER: The primary implementation for this project is located in Deering Hall in Orono, Maine. While the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station operates more broadly, this RFP is focused on a single physical location.