

Northeast SARE Farmer Grants

A Guide for
Cooperative Extension Agents



Connecticut ❖ Delaware ❖ Maine ❖ Maryland ❖ Massachusetts
New Hampshire ❖ New Jersey ❖ New York ❖ Pennsylvania
Rhode Island ❖ Vermont ❖ West Virginia ❖ Washington D.C.

Grants for innovative farmers

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has a Farmer Grant program for eligible full- and part-time commercial farmers. This program works on the assumption that farmers, with the right kind of support, can conduct on-farm experiments that will make interesting, important contributions to the sustainability of farms across the Northeast. These grants allow farmers to put time and money into testing new ideas, and their results add to the pool of practical knowledge about sustainable agricultural techniques.

This tip sheet will give you answers to some basic questions about the program so that you can support your farmer clients in their efforts to find sustainable solutions to issues on their farms. To be sustainable, a project must improve profits, advance environmental stewardship, and benefit the wider farm community.



Whats involved in applying for a grant?

Farmers develop their ideas and write the grant application, but SARE also requires that a technical advisor review each proposal. Typically, this is an extension agent, a crop consultant, or other professional. Being a technical advisor involves talking with farmers as they develop a viable plan, reading the proposal, checking in periodically once a project is up and running, and perhaps helping a farmer tell others about the project, often through a flyer, extension newsletter, or a web summary of the results.

How does the Farmer Grant program benefit me?

Grant funds can be used to pay you for the time spent on the project, and the farmer, outside consultants, and other collaborators can also be compensated. And, since the SARE emphasis is on profitability, good stewardship, and strengthening the wider farm community, your support for your farmer furthers these goals. The grants also act as a lubricant for the general farm community and put new ideas into circulation, potentially enhancing the sustainability of all the farms you serve. Helping farmers get these grants is also a good way to achieve your educational programming goals, and they can be an effective multiplier.

Whats my role as an extension agent?

Your work with farmers makes you a good judge of who is most likely to be a strong applicant and allows you to deliver SARE program dollars to farmers with experience, imagination, and farming skills. Your experience with farming systems and applied research can improve a farmer's chances of getting a grant, and your role in the project puts you in an excellent position to plan a workshop for your farmers on how to write a successful Farmer Grant application.

What kind of time commitment is involved?

Your farmer client will consult with you in developing the grant application, and you should allow time to read it carefully, comment on it, and sign the final proposal. After that, the farmer should substantially run the project.

Some farmers without internet access may need your help in sending in reports, and it's not uncommon for an agent to write up project results for a newsletter or a web site posting as part of an outreach plan. Farmer-run projects often result in fresh, interesting copy for regional and statewide publications.

How long do these projects run?

Most Farmer Grants happen over the course of one growing season, although some run longer. Since the awards are capped at \$10,000, there is a natural limit on how much effort the award can support. If a project shows continued promise or raises new, interesting questions, the farmer can continue the work by applying for another grant.

What kinds of projects get funded?

We have funded projects that explore new marketing and production techniques, pest management, cover crops, composting, agroforestry, new crop trials, bee health and alternative pollinators, new tool development—you name it. Projects must test a genuinely new idea, or give a new twist on an old one, and show evidence of good planning. We won't fund projects that allow farmers to merely adopt a proven sustainable technique—SARE money is reserved for innovation and exploration.

Past projects, with brief descriptions, are posted to the Northeast SARE web site. Go to www.uvm.edu/~nesare/ and click on "Project Reports" at the top of the page. Then set your search for "Northeast" and "Farmer Grants." There are more than 500 summaries and descriptions posted, so you may want to narrow your search by using a keyword or looking at projects only in your state.

What if the project doesn't go as planned?

Some projects don't—this is the price of innovation. SARE accepts that new ideas are risky and not all new ideas work out. But keep in mind that what others might see as failure we tend to see as useful information, and we ask that problems and unexpected results be reported to us frankly so that others can learn from them. Farmers who come up with a different approach to the original problem are encouraged to apply again.

Please note that technical advisors are *not* responsible for farmers who fail to follow through on their projects—managing the grant is the farmer's responsibility. We do hope you will let us know if your farmer's project is not progressing or is in difficulty.



Is the application complicated?

No—successful proposals consist of ten to twelve well-written paragraphs; the application format is straightforward and should be easy for farmers to understand. Each section is a question (“What do you want to do?” “How will you measure your results?” etc.), and there is also a how-to booklet that gives advice and examples and explains how budgets work. Encourage your farmers who are thinking about applying to read this booklet, which is posted to the Northeast SARE web site and available in print.

What if I have a great idea and would like to test or demonstrate it with some of my farmers?

You should apply for a SARE Partnership Grant. These awards allow you to work with one or more farmers, with you as the project manager, on their farms. You would be in charge of writing the application, running the project, collecting the data, and doing the reporting, and the funds would flow through your organization rather than their farm. Partnership Grants are also useful for those times when a farmer has an interesting idea but no time to manage a controlled test of it. Partnership Grants are specifically for extension and other agricultural professionals who are uniquely positioned to do on-farm research, marketing, and demonstration projects with farmers as cooperators.

I have a farmer who has an interesting idea for a grant. Is there someone he can talk to?

Dale Riggs, the Farmer Grant specialist, can be reached at 518/733-0602, and her e-mail is farmergrants@taconic.net. She can answer questions, arrange for the mailing of printed materials, or direct your farmer to the web site where the application and the how-to booklet are posted. She is also available to lead workshops on how to write a Farmer Grant.

I have questions about the different SARE grant programs or SARE in general. Who do I talk to?

The main Northeast SARE office is in Burlington, Vermont. You can call 802/656-0471 or send e-mail to nesare@uvm.edu. The web site is at www.uvm.edu/~nesare.



To read and download Farmer Grant application materials, go to the Northeast SARE web site at www.uvm.edu/~nesare. In the left-hand column, select “information for farmers and growers,” and, under “what are you interested in?” select “Farmer Grants.”

The Farmer Grant application is a Word file. The 36-page booklet, “How to Write a Farmer Grant,” is a .pdf file, and Adobe Reader is required for viewing.

To request printed copies of Farmer Grant materials, call 802/656-0471.



Northeast SARE
802/656-0471
www.uvm.edu/~nesare
nesare@uvm.edu