

# Highlands Council Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program

## BACKGROUND

Agriculture, if it is to remain viable in the New Jersey Highlands, requires a sustainable land base. The Highlands Region contains over 859,000 acres, of which over 118,000 acres were categorized as agricultural land in 2002. Agricultural land, in both the Preservation and Planning Areas of the Highlands, is an important resource, providing essential value to the residents of New Jersey with locally available agricultural products, economic benefits of agricultural production, and rural character associated with agricultural land.

To preserve and sustain agricultural resources and enhance the viability of the agricultural industry, programs are needed that focus more on the practices farmers can use to achieve sustainable profitability, sustainable stewardship practices for natural and agricultural resources, and sustainable coexistence with non-farmers in a densely populated state. This grant program seeks to encourage the implementation of projects that will assist agricultural operations in the Highlands region including value-added facilities, technical assistance, new farmer programs, sustainable land management practices and other sustainable agricultural activity.

## OVERVIEW

With funding from the Regional Master Plan (RMP) Implementation Fund, the Highlands Water Protection & Planning Council (Highlands Council) is offering grants to nonprofit organizations and public institutions of higher education for projects that advance innovative/alternative sustainable agriculture.

### Eligible Applicants

- Any nonprofit organization as defined at IRC Section 501(c)(3),
- Any public institutions of higher education as defined at N.J.S.A. 18A:64J-30

Verification of nonprofit status is required.

### Eligible Projects

Eligible projects include any initiative that will assist agricultural operations in the Highlands region including value-added facilities, technical assistance, new farmer programs, sustainable land management practices and other sustainable agricultural activity.

Projects may include the direct implementation of sustainable agricultural and marketing practices. Examples of Sustainable Agriculture Conservation and Marketing Practices may be found in the [Highlands Council Sustainable Agriculture Technical Report \(2008\)](#), pages 25 and 26. However, other innovative projects will also be considered.

Ideal proposals in this grant program will be innovative in nature, replicable, and aligned with goals, policies, and objectives of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP).

**Award Amount and Timeframe**

- The maximum award amount is \$100k per year, for a maximum of three years (state fiscal year: July 1 – June 30).
- There is no minimum award amount.
- Projects will be reviewed annually to ascertain status, effectiveness, overall implementation, and management of the grant award.
- Each funding year is subject to funding availability.
- Matching funds are not required, but will be considered during the grant review process.

**Payment**

Grants are reimbursement based. Applicants shall provide a proposed reimbursement plan as part of the application process. Reimbursement will be made following receipt and acceptance by the Highlands Council of agreed work products/deliverables, documentation of costs (and match, if proposed), and upon compliance with all terms of the Grant Agreement.

# APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

## SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

### I. Proposal

Must contain the following:

1. **Title** – Title of the program.
2. **Area** – Describe the geographic area and context of where the program will take place.
3. **Objectives** – Describe the measurable goals of the program.
4. **Procedures** – Explain the methods that will be used to accomplish the program objectives.
5. **Staffing Plan** – Provide a staffing plan which includes the relevant experience and expertise of key program personnel. Describe any partnerships involved.
6. **Beneficiaries** – Identify who will benefit from the project and how (i.e., is it a pass-through grant to private farmers).
7. **Deliverables** – Outline the products that will be provided to the Highlands Council at the conclusion of the program. Data submissions must follow an approved format and meet Highlands Council mapping standards.

### II. Attachments

The following attachments must be provided:

1. **Budget**– Itemize costs for the entire program. Be sure to specify the amount being requested. Include any proposed matching funds and their sources.
2. **Calendar**– Provide a timeline and completion date. The first program timeline shall be submitted with the application and will include year one of the program; additional timelines will follow at each annual review, for up to three years, with extensions solely at the discretion of the Highlands Council.
3. **An IRS letter of determination** stating the organization's nonprofit status.
4. **Samples of past work and/or programs** of a similar nature.
5. **Letters of endorsement** from partners or stakeholders are encouraged and will be considered in the review process.

The Highlands Council will confirm receipt of each proposal.

## EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

All proposals will be reviewed by a Highlands Council technical review committee. Applications will be evaluated based on criteria including but not limited to the following:

1. Applicant's experience with sustainable agriculture.
2. Applicant's overall experience, staffing experience and operational ability.
3. Ability to complete the project on time and within budget.
4. Relationship of the project to the RMP.
5. Project replicability.

## NOTIFICATION OF AWARD

Successful applicants will have 30 days from the award notification date to submit a signed Resolution by their governing body authorizing the organization to enter into a grant agreement with the New Jersey Highlands Council.

All grantees must be registered vendors with the State of New Jersey. Please visit [NJSTART.gov](https://NJSTART.gov) to register or to check your organization's status.

Grant Agreements will be created with successful applicants to formalize the award amount, Scope of Work, program period (not to exceed three years), and work products/deliverables to be submitted by the conclusion of the program.

**For more information, contact:**

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