

How to Write a SARE Farmer Grant Application



**A guide for producers
and their technical advisors**

**Northeast Sustainable Agriculture
Research & Education Program**
www.nesare.org

This guide is meant to be a general resource for eligible applicants and their technical advisors. Please be advised that the SARE grant review process is highly competitive, that funds are limited, and that it is possible for a proposal to have merit and not receive SARE funding. Our goal in developing this booklet is to improve the overall quality of Farmer Grant proposals, clarify how proposals are evaluated, and identify common errors. We offer this material in the hope that it will improve your chances of getting a SARE grant. Individuals requiring accommodations to participate in the Farmer Grant program should contact the regional SARE office at 802/656-0471. E-mail: nesare@uvm.edu.



Northeast SARE

802/656-0471

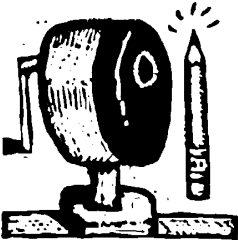
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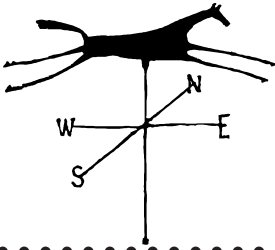
How to use this booklet

This booklet is meant to help you organize your thoughts before writing a SARE Farmer Grant proposal and to help you avoid making common mistakes. As you read, you will probably notice there are a lot of sentences that begin with the words “for example,” and these explain certain points by giving you a specific description. Please keep in mind that the examples and the ideas in this booklet are only illustrations. Your proposal should not try to mimic these examples but instead assume a natural shape of its own. Also keep in mind that the overall purpose of the grant program is to support innovative, interesting projects that are environmentally sound, potentially profitable, and benefit the wider farm community.

After covering a few general points, this booklet will address each section of the Farmer Grant application with samples of good and less good responses to each question. We suggest that you read through this entire booklet at least once before you begin planning your proposal, and then keep it handy as you work out your project details. You should also ask your technical advisor to read this booklet so he or she can give you the best advice possible as you design your project.

This booklet is both a general guide to writing a Farmer Grant and a companion to the Northeast SARE Farmer Grant application. If you don't have an application, you may find some of the material in this booklet somewhat mystifying. To get a sample

application, call or e-mail the SARE office (802/656-0471; nesare@uvm.edu). New applications are released each summer, usually in July, and are available both in print and for downloading from the Northeast SARE web site at www.nesare.org.



Purpose of the grant program

The purpose of the program is to help you try something new and interesting on your farm, particularly something that will potentially benefit other farmers either through adoption or through an improved understanding of the potential of a new technique. The emphasis is on innovation, and not merely adopting practices we already know will work. For example, it is unlikely that we would fund a project where you proposed to grow hydroponic tomatoes, because, even though this is perhaps a good thing to do, it is also a thing that has been done by lots of growers. We already understand a lot about the practice, and other farmers don't get much out of you adopting it.

But let's say you are already growing hydroponic vegetables and have an idea for how your hydroponic system could be integrated into an aquaculture system where shrimp or fish waste can be used to enhance your vegetable production. This might interest us—we sometimes support efforts where different production techniques are brought together and projects where nutrients are recycled. A project like this potentially addresses the things we care about: improved profitability, environmental stewardship, and a more diverse agricultural economy.

Farmer Grant projects have historically addressed a very wide range of production and marketing techniques. We have funded about 700 projects in many different areas—beekeeping, cover crops, erosion control, vegetables, fruits, nuts, livestock, herbs, soil and nutrient management, processing and adding value, marketing, tool and pro-

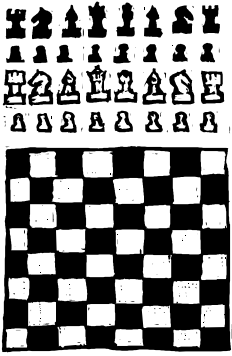
totype development, labor, energy, no-till, aquaculture, agroforestry, and pest management. Any topic that will likely be of interest to other farmers will be considered. If you qualify as a farmer—that is, if you produce a crop or animal product that you sell on a regular basis—then you are eligible to apply. In general, applicants show at least \$1,000 on a Schedule F tax form in a normal year.

Specific criteria

Reviewers specifically look for proposals that address at least one (although two or more is better) of the following:

- ❖ the reduction of environmental and health risks in agriculture
- ❖ the prevention of agricultural pollution
- ❖ improved productivity, the reduction of costs, and the increase of net farm income
- ❖ the conservation of soil, the improvement of water quality, and the protection of natural resources
- ❖ the enhancement of employment in rural areas
- ❖ the improvement of the quality of life for farmers, their employees, and the farm community

Reviewers also ask themselves whether the applicant has the skills needed to see the project to completion, whether the project makes sense and is technically feasible, and whether the objectives are clear. Please note that SARE is not a viable source of funding for new or apprentice farmers. Before you apply, ask yourself if you have the technical knowledge, basic equipment, and hands-on experience to develop and execute a competitive proposal.



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Right from the start

Planning

Successful grant applicants report that it takes a good bit of time—sometimes up to 40 hours—to put together a competitive proposal. This time is spent researching the idea itself, learning about related projects, understanding those results, refining the idea, designing the project, talking with a technical advisor, figuring out what data to gather, how to interpret it, and developing an outreach plan.

Probably the single most common problem with Farmer Grant applications is the absence of this kind of planning, and every year we get proposals that have clearly been put together a few days or even a few hours before the deadline. These efforts rarely have the substance or the level of detail reviewers are looking for. To write a genuinely competitive proposal, you should first talk with a technical advisor—normally an extension agent, crop consultant, or other agricultural service provider—and then show your advisor at least one draft of the proposal so you can get feedback and correct obvious flaws. Successful applicants often write more than one draft and often show it to several different people, just to make sure the proposal is coherent and addresses SARE priorities.

An absence of planning is frankly frustrating for reviewers. Far too often an applicant has an idea that might be interesting to SARE, but it is not put into a clear context or is skimpy on detail. For example, a vegetable grower may want to try a trap crop around the perimeter of his field to control a particular insect pest, but his proposal is

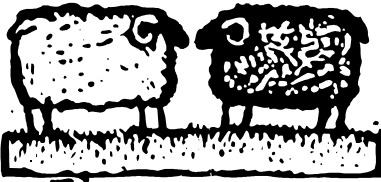
flawed because there is no control block—an area without a trap crop—to compare his results with. He presents his ideas compellingly, and the project is clearly suitable to the SARE mission, but there is a key component missing—the knowledge he is gathering will not be valid without a control block, since some other factor may have been in play during that season that affected the pest or the vegetables.

Another example of inadequate planning would be a marketing proposal where a line of jams and jellies would be launched under a new label by a group of farmers and sold at a local food co-op. Value-added projects like this can be of interest to SARE, but on review of the proposal itself it becomes obvious that this line of jams has not been kitchen, taste, or market tested and that the farmers don't have any experience with making jams. This is a cart-before-the-horse problem. The jam market is very competitive, and an attractive label and a marketing campaign will not make up for an off-tasting product. The proposal, while alluring, has a critical step—a plan for product development and quality control—left out. This will undermine its credibility.

To develop a project that will interest the reviewers, you should educate yourself about similar work and what the results of those projects were. Short summaries of SARE project results are available on line in a searchable data base at www.sare.org. Select the “project reports” tab at the top of the page. This will take you to a search function that allows you to use drop-down menus (set these for the Northeast and Farmer/Rancher Grants), and then type in a keyword (“goats,” “corn,” “marketing,” etc.) to bring up summaries of past projects. You may also want to visit the Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas web site at www.attra.org to see what kinds of resources they have in your production area, or, if you are an organic farmer, the Organic Farming Research Foundation at www.ofrf.org/research/researchreports.html. Web search engines may help you find other valuable information related to your project idea. You will want to demonstrate in your proposal that you have done this research.

Shaping your ideas also means asking yourself challenging questions: How well have I thought this through? Do I have the experience to make the project work? Have I done my homework? If this were someone else's project, what would my reservations

be? As a taxpayer, do I think this is a good use of public money? And, perhaps most importantly, *Is there a potential for benefit that connects with the SARE mission?* Remember: We will only fund projects we believe to be innovative, environmentally sound, potentially profitable, and likely to improve the knowledge and the practices of the wider farm community.



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Capital expenses

The second most common problem with grant proposals is that applicants ask for money for things the Farmer Grant program does not fund. We often see requests for capital expenses like equipment, construction, nursery stock, high tunnels, or livestock. Grant funds are not intended to cover these kinds of costs, and proposals for farm startups and large farm improvements will not be funded. Instead, we are interested in projects by established farmers who already have experience, capacity, and basic equipment in their production area.

For example, a maple producer may have an idea on how to extend the shelf life of maple cream using new processing techniques, but she may not be sure which technique, if any, will really work. She needs time and money to tweak her ideas, experimenting with different ways of making and packaging the product so that it stays fresh longer and improves her profits.

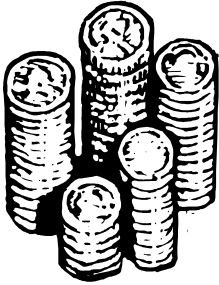
A project like this will be attractive to the SARE reviewers because other maple producers stand to benefit from what she learns—even if her results are mixed or disappointing, she has added to a pool of knowledge. And, because the SARE grant compensated her for her time and for the processing and packaging materials she needed, her

risk has been minimized. In exchange for this support, she shares her results with other maple producers through meetings and a story in a maple producers' newsletter, and also reports back to SARE what happened and whether the practice she explored should be considered for wider adoption.

This is in stark contrast to a proposal to use SARE funds to purchase an evaporator, upgrade a sugar house, or build a new one. SARE sees no benefit here except to an individual farmer, which is not enough benefit to meet our program goals. SARE funds should increase knowledge about sustainable farming techniques and put that knowledge in a form other farmers, researchers, extension staff, and the general public can use. A new evaporator, however useful in itself, is not useful to SARE, and those kinds of business expenses can and should be covered through farm income or bank loans.

That said, SARE will consider allowing a capital cost up to \$1000 if it meets certain criteria. First, it must be essential to the proposed research—for example, if the maple producer mentioned earlier needs a special compressor to finish her product or package it correctly, SARE will certainly look at putting up to \$1000 toward the equipment. And, secondly, the cost must be modest and reasonable. For example, it could be that our maple producer needs specific measuring devices, trays, racks, or specialized handling equipment that she may not have on hand as part of her regular maple operation. Even though these items probably have a useful life beyond the scope of the project, SARE reviewers may allow the expense because the equipment is not extravagant, is not commonly found on similar farms, and the need for it is triggered exclusively by the research proposed. The more specific the equipment is to the research, the more likely SARE reviewers will allow the cost.

There are other restrictions on the use of funds, all of them discussed later on and outlined in the application materials, but this seems to be the one many applicants fail to understand.



Budgeting

There is a later section on writing your budget that will cover each budget segment in more detail, but there are also common, global problems with budgets for SARE projects. Many people find budgets intimidating and seem to put off doing them until the last minute, often making the budget the weakest and most problematic part of the proposal.

When it comes to budgets, the first and most important thing is not to panic—there is no mystery here. Things cost what they really cost, and the purpose of the budget is to write down your best, honest estimate of what your expenses will be, without padding, skimping, or wildly guessing. For example, if your project calls for a roll of black plastic and you haven't bought any recently, look in a catalog or call your farm supplier and find out what a roll of black plastic goes for; if your project calls for four soil tests, call the lab and ask what those soil tests will run you. Your budget should offer a unit cost times the number of units so that reviewers can see the specifics of what you are asking for. Avoid using vague terms like “miscellaneous office supplies.” Instead, tell us what you think you will need—three reams of paper, 200 labels, a box of manilla envelopes, a calculator, etc.—and what these items will cost.

A second general rule about budgets is to make sure there is a close fit between the budget and the project activities. If your narrative says that you will travel twice to the state university, then don't forget to put those two trips in your travel budget; if you say you will be doing an on-farm demonstration, with flyers mailed and signs put up to

direct people to it, then have specific line items in your budget for copies, postage, and signage. Conversely, don't put something in the budget that isn't in the narrative—if your project is to compare different bean cultivars and their resistance to a certain kind of beetle, putting in for fencing or mulch is going to raise eyebrows, doubts, and questions. SARE funds should be used for direct project expenses, not general operating costs that would be there in the absence of the project.

The final rule is that you should try to estimate closely the time you or others will spend on the project and compensate yourself or others accordingly. People often feel squeamish about asking to be paid, but in many cases the proposed project makes real, above-and-beyond demands on your labor. Let's say the bean project mentioned earlier involves comparing evidence of beetle damage among the various test plots, weighing the leaves and the beans themselves, and evaluating the overall profitability of each cultivar. These hours can add up over the course of a growing season. SARE funds can also be used for time spent setting up your control plots, gathering data, working with others on project activities, and following through on your outreach plan.

Some applicants tell us they have found it helpful to create a spreadsheet of project-related tasks with the estimated time and the hourly rate for each person who will perform each task. This is not a document you will make part of your application, but it can be a valuable planning tool; it may also come in handy if the reviewers have questions about your personnel costs. Depending on who does the work, farmers charge labor costs, including fringe if applicable, to the SARE budget at anywhere from \$15 to perhaps \$50 an hour. Hired labor should be budgeted at actual anticipated cost; your labor should be budgeted the same way, and a range from \$25 to \$40 an hour is reasonable. Consultants and cooperating farmers should also be compensated, and should be named in the proposal, have their work described in the narrative, and appear as a line item in the budget.



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Technical advisors

The role of the technical advisor is the final area of general confusion among many applicant farmers. The technical advisor, to SARE reviewers, is an important component to any application.

Technical advisors are involved in a project in a consulting capacity. They look at the project's design, evaluate its overall soundness, and discuss with you the goals, potential results, and outreach plan that are key to making the project viable. They also provide a letter that is uploaded with the proposal outlining their role in the project. Most technical advisors are Cooperative Extension personnel, NRCS staff, crop consultants, veterinarians, or other agricultural service providers. Because of the resources they have or know about, they can often supply you with background information in your topic area. Advisors also review your methods and may be able to help you make course corrections if your project is derailed by extreme weather or unexpected results.

Reviewers look for evidence of an appropriate level of support from your technical advisor. An advisor should be available for proposal review, perhaps a site visit, phone contact as needed, and perhaps support during the outreach phase. An advisor, however, should not actively run the project. If your advisor wants to take the primary role in managing things, then he or she should apply for a SARE Partnership Grant, which is specifically for agricultural service providers who work with farmers. For more about the Partnership Grants, you or your advisor can contact Northeast SARE.

SARE Farmer Grants are very competitive, and if a project is not funded SARE staff

will send you and your technical advisor a summary of reviewer comments addressing what elements in the proposal they thought needed improvement. We actively encourage farmers whose proposals are not funded to go over these comments with their technical advisors and apply again if the project is appropriate—SARE runs out of money long before it runs out of proposals that have merit and potential. Also, if a project is funded, SARE staff may sometimes call or e-mail your advisor, just to touch base about the project.

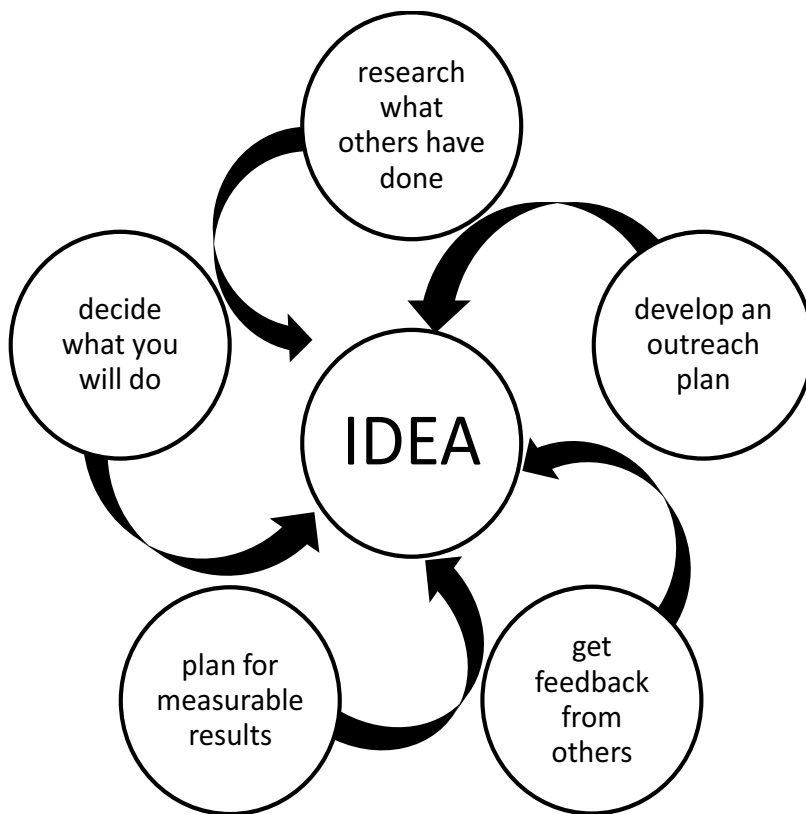
Obviously, it is important to choose your technical advisor carefully. Your advisor should have professional standing and be someone whose knowledge you trust and respect. Technical advisors should not be close friends or family members.

Specific duties of the technical advisor

Minimally, all technical advisors should review the Farmer Grant application and this companion booklet before agreeing to act as an advisor on a SARE Farmer Grant. Advisors should also talk over the topic area with you before you write anything at all. You may find that your advisor can see angles on the project that will enhance its competitiveness and he or she may have ideas or materials that will strengthen your application. It's also a good idea for advisors to be clear with you exactly what their role will be. NRCS and Cooperative Extension staff have full schedules, and you should make an effort to use your advisor's time and expertise appropriately.

Once your proposal is written, your technical advisor should read through your answers, go over the budget, and evaluate the whole application in terms of its feasibility, technical soundness, and general presentation. Technical advisors should always ask for revisions as needed to strengthen the proposal.

When you and your advisor are satisfied with the application, your advisor should get or make a copy of the finished proposal—if the project is funded, this will be an important reference document as the project progresses. And, finally, your technical advisor must give you a letter, preferably as a .pdf or Word file, for you to upload as an attachment to your proposal.



Another way to think about the elements in a strong grant proposal.



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Step by step:

The Farmer Grant application

In this next section, each question in the application is considered and different applications and responses are discussed. The idea is to give you guidelines about what sort of content to put in response to each question and to help you understand what kind of content will impress, or fail to impress, the reviewers.

Keep in mind that these samples are not for you to copy, but to read and learn from—take the time to compare the responses, read the discussion, and put our comments in a context that might be useful for your proposal. We have drawn these various answers from real proposals we’ve received, with minimal editing, and selected them to illustrate some point.

In the first question, you’ll see that both farmers are proposing to produce and sell sheep cheese, a product that occupies an important niche market for farmers with the expertise to make it. We chose these two proposals because, in some ways, they are quite similar. In many important ways, however, they are a long way apart. For one thing, one was funded and the other was not. We hope that, after reading this section, you will understand why.

Question 1: **What is the problem and why is it important?** Briefly state the problem, explain why it matters, and describe what you propose to do about it.

Here is one response:

The Allen Farm has been making and selling high quality sheep cheese since 1983, and we are reaching a point where the demand for the product is exceeding our ability to supply it. Because we do not want to turn the cheese making into a large-scale operation, we propose to build a consortium of farmers who will learn to make cheese on their own farms, using consistent techniques, and then use the Allen Farm facility for ripening. All the cheeses would then be sold under a single label, Heart of Pennsylvania Sheep Cheese.

Past experience with value-added dairy shows that operations spread across several farms often have problems with quality control (LNE04-XXX, Bulletin PA121). One solution that we would like to test is whether dedicated and individualized technical support in the early stages will prevent these problems (ENC05-XXX, Univ. Wisconsin Ctr. for Cooperatives). We seek SARE funds to hire a technical coordinator who will visit the farms, oversee and improve the cheese making methods, conduct milk and cheese bacterial testing, and ensure that all the farms are producing a consistent product.

Currently, two farmers are prepared to make the equipment purchases and operational changes involved, and a third is considering joining. All three farmers have had training in sheep cheese production, both at the Allen Farm and through the Pennsylvania Cheese Consortium's apprentice workshops. The technical assistant will likely serve the consortium for about seven months. After seven months, we anticipate that many of the startup issues will be resolved and only ongoing testing and general supervision will be required.

This is a pretty good response to the question, since the farmer shows us that he grasps clearly what the problem is, understands the practical concerns of making this kind of cheese, has explored what others have tried, and has given thought to the issues that need to be addressed. Also, the response is specific and clear—a reviewer who raises berries or works for an agricultural nonprofit could easily make sense of what he's saying.

Compare the previous response with this second sheep dairy proposal:

Our project is to raise awareness of the importance of sheep as an alternative to cows by establishing a working dairy sheep herd and demonstrating that sheep can be raised successfully in New England. Because of rising land values and encroaching development, many farmers are struggling and must seek ways to farm on smaller acreage. Our project will demonstrate that a sheep dairy can offer a solution to farmers working under these constraints.

Sheep milk is good for making cheese, and we will buy the needed equipment to establish a successful sheep dairy. We will also raise awareness about the sustainability of sheep by offering healthy products in an underdeveloped market, and by selling this delicious and nutritious product to deserving people.

This response tells the reviewer that this farmer is not currently making cheese, is not equipped to do so, and has no awareness of the long and lively history of sheep farming in New England. While it is true that rising land values and encroaching development are serious barriers to agricultural sustainability, the applicant fails to show how a sheep dairy will address those concerns. Instead, he offers a series of assumptions—that starting a sheep dairy will open up new opportunities to farmers, that the market for sheep cheese is underdeveloped, even that the people who buy the cheese are somehow deserving. It’s hard not to feel that the applicant is adopting sustainable rhetoric without offering any sustainable content.

Question 2: What efforts have been made by others to solve the problem? Tell us how your project builds on what is currently known, and how it is different.

It's basically impossible to do a good job on this section if you haven't done any background work. By gathering materials in your subject area, you learn what techniques have been tried and what the results were. For example, the two potato farmers, below, have similar ideas about controlling Colorado potato beetles, a major pest that has developed resistance to pesticides. Some of the alternative control methods include using plastic-lined ditches, scorching, nematodes, beneficial insects, and trap cropping, among others. But let's say that a farmer wants to see if his chickens will eat this pest in enough quantities to also help control them.

By looking at past SARE projects, he finds out that this has actually been tried once before—it didn't get any results because a predator ate all the chickens and the replacement birds came with trimmed beaks and couldn't perform as hoped. After doing this background work, his answer to this question might say:

Past work in this area (see ATTRA bulletin XXX) has shown that it is often a combination of techniques—trap cropping, dusting, the use of beneficial insects and nematodes, scorching, barriers, and planting repellents such as flax—that make acceptable control of this pest possible. By testing the use of chickens in a potato patch against a test patch with no chickens, I hope to quantify how effective these birds can be. This technique was tried once before (see FNC03-XXX), and from that project we know that the chickens must have untrimmed beaks to be effective. That first project failed for other reasons as well, and it seems like it's time to test the idea again. If untrimmed free-range chickens can be effective against potato beetles, the practice may be a valuable addition to the arsenal of control techniques.

That's pretty good, and offers the level of detail that reviewers want. Compare that response to this one:

Since the colonial period, chickens have been used to control weeds and insects, and over the last three years we have been using our Wyandottes in this traditional way to control pests in our gardens. We have observed that the birds are much happier when they are permitted a varied diet, and we would like to see if they will go after potato beetles. We are not aware of anyone who has tried this before, and believe our proposal is innovative.

This answer is inadequate. While it is true that domestic poultry have been used to control garden pests for a long time, there is no detail offered about the pest itself, nor how chickens might actually fare in controlling it. The applicant has not done any homework other than drawing on his own knowledge, and that knowledge is incomplete.

Question 3: How will your project fit in with your farm operation? Tell us about your farm business, its size, what you produce, how long you have been farming, whether you farm full- or part-time, and how your project will affect the sustainability of your operation.

Most applicants answer this question without too much difficulty. Here is how one of the sheep farmers we met earlier answered it:

The Allen Farm is a 140-acre full-time sheep dairy farm, with 165 ewes. We produce about 5500 pounds of cheese each year. The cheese has been recognized regionally and nationally for its quality, and we are now moving into the national gourmet and specialty market.

The Allen Farm also offers workshops for other farmers who want to learn about cheese production, and in 1997 we brought in specialists in cheese making from Europe for an intensive month-long training experience. The public also comes to the farm for tastings, a yearly festival, and shearing demonstrations. The Allen Farm is family owned and operated. Two people work full time, one part time. We bought the farm in 1981.

Here is the response from the other sheep farmer:

Daedalus Farm is 35 acres of pasturage. Our hay is cut at other locations up to twelve miles away, due to the shrinking open land close to home. We are currently farming part-time, and have experience milking cows in a 155-head dairy in Vermont.

This second response is decidedly short on detail. Reviewers would be interested in hearing about the number of livestock, the type, the products sold, and how long the applicant has been farming. In this section, keep in mind that the farm description is your opportunity to show reviewers that you have the background and the direct experience needed to make the project fly.

Note, though, that both farmers seemed to miss the part about how the project will improve the sustainability of their farm. Reviewers look for evidence that the project is appropriate to your operation and will improve stewardship, profitability, and environmental and the wider farm community. It may be useful to look again at page 7, “Purpose of the grant program.” This section describes SARE priorities and, on page 8, the specific components reviewers look for. Your project need not address every component, but proposals that address multiple aspects of sustainability tend to be stronger.

Question 4: **What will your methods be?** Describe what you will do and how.

Many applicants struggle with this question and often leave out essential information. Consider:

We will purchase and install the equipment needed to make the sheep dairy truly viable, sustainable, and healthy, and we will then become licensed to process cheese. Once we are a licensed sheep dairy, we will produce and sell our product, and in the beginning knock on a lot of doors to build a sustainable, loyal customer base. We will also allow our doors to be open to the public for purchases as well as education.

A too-short description like this one signals to reviewers that the project needs scrutiny. Not only is there very little detail (what kind of equipment? what are the licensing requirements? wouldn't it be better to do a market study rather than knock on doors?), but there is no particular method described at all. Compare this response with:

We will offer the consortium members weekly farm visits to offer advice on milking, cheese making, handling, and storage. We will offer models for record keeping, quality control, and analysis, and we will conduct testing. We will also develop a standard protocol for sanitation, transport, and maturation on the Allen Farm.

We will compile a resource guide for the new farms, outlining where things like cloth, cultures, equipment, and other supplies can be purchased, and offer a technical manual on cheese making that will be used by all members of the consortium. This same manual will also be made available to other farmers who are interested in making their own cheese. We will continually assess the cheese quality, organize and oversee maturation, and monitor any problems that arise.

These services will be delivered by the full-time technical assistant. The technical assistant will also develop a troubleshooting guide that will arise from the various problems encountered on different farms, and this guide will be given to consortium members and used to enhance the workshops conducted on the Allen Farm.

This second response gives a satisfactory level of detail and indicates that the farmer has given the problem thought. His methods match up with everything he has told us earlier, and a coherent narrative about what is going to happen if he gets the grant is starting to emerge. The response would have been strengthened even more by references to existing materials or technical manuals that could be learned from and adapted. Use every opportunity to show you have done your homework.

Farmers who are interested in submitting an application dealing with a crop production experiment will benefit from being familiar with the terms *replication* and *randomization* and their role in setting up a valid experiment. Replication means that the treatments will be done in more than one place—a field, row, bed, or farm—at the same time, and randomization means that the placement of the treatments will be randomly assigned within the treatment area.

For example, let's say a grape grower wants to test new varieties that have superior cold hardiness. Her methods section may read, in part, like this:

I will acquire cuttings of six of the most promising super-hardy grape cultivars. Each variety will be planted in four replications, consisting of ten consecutive plants each, in randomized complete blocks containing all six new varieties and four standard varieties.

In this case there will be forty plants of each variety, planted as ten consecutive plants in a row in four different parts of the vineyard. This will allow the grower to gather a fair evaluation, since no one variety will be planted only in the absolute best or absolute worst part of the vineyard. By having four replications, she will be able to analyze the data she gathers statistically, determining if yield or quality differences are real differences caused by the variety, and not differences caused by soil type, microclimate, or localized disease or insect problems. By having multiple sites, randomly chosen, she will be able to conduct a truly fair evaluation of the varieties.

Complete blocks means she has included her control varieties (the four standard varieties) in the same section as the experimental varieties to get that fair evaluation. Within each block the varieties are randomly assigned so they are not planted right beside the same variety in all three blocks—variety A might be beside variety B in one block, variety F in another, and variety H in another. By planting the ten varieties in a block for each replication, they are exposed to relatively equal conditions. If the control varieties were planted elsewhere in the vineyard, it would be more difficult to get an equal evaluation because site variations could make it look like a difference existed when there wasn't one. Farmers interested in setting up experimental field plots as part of their project should be sure to get a copy of the free bulletin, "Put Your Ideas to the

Test: How to Conduct Research on Your Farm or Ranch,” which can be downloaded from <http://www.sare.org/publications/bulletins.htm> or ordered by calling 301/374-9696. Another helpful reference is the “On-Farm Research Guide” available at http://ofrf.org/grants/on-farm_research_guide.pdf.

A last note on the methods section

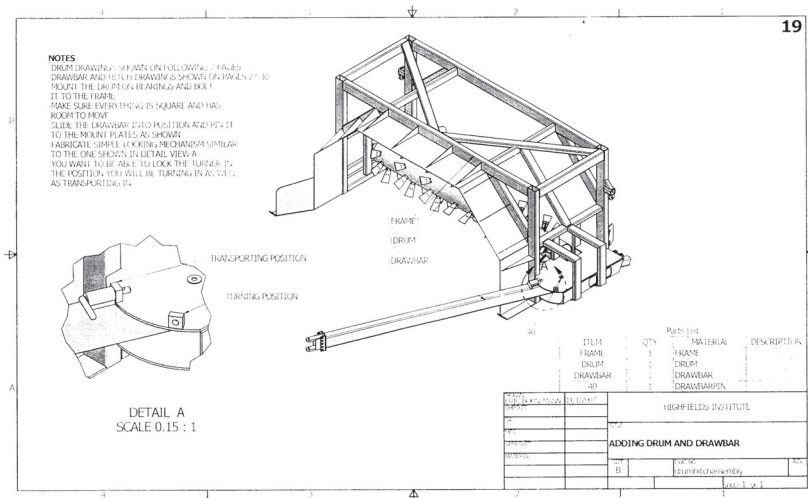
Before you write your response to the methods question, you need to talk over this section with your technical advisor. As you can see, it is important that methods be *methodical*—that events happen in the right order, that you make provisions for controls if you are comparing one technique with another, and that you understand and anticipate any potential problems. Even if you are not setting up a controlled experiment like the grape trial described earlier, you must still develop a valid way of gathering and comparing information. To return to the maple producer we met earlier in this booklet, she will need to describe in this section what anti-spoilage techniques (ultraviolet exposure, processing with calcium carbonate, and head flushing with nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and steam) will be tried and what criteria she will use to decide which are truly promising. But she must also keep in mind that her description will have to be clear to someone who has only eaten, and not made, maple cream.

Writing a clear and sufficiently detailed response to this question can be difficult—this section may take several drafts. SARE also allows you to attach plot plans, tables, charts, photos, and other visual material to your proposal, and you should take advantage of this when you want to convey project information that is otherwise difficult to explain. If you or your technical advisor have doubts about this section, show it to someone who is not familiar with your proposal idea or your operation. If this person finds it confusing, then you need to clarify the wording; if this person has a lot of questions, listen to those questions carefully, since they may be identifying essential things you have left out.

Here is a sample plot plan that might be submitted as part of a proposal, usually as an attachment:

	Block 1		Block 2		Block 3	
0 N/acre	160 N/acre	80 N/acre	160 N/acre	0 N/acre	80 N/acre	80 N/acre
						0 N/Acre
						160 N/acre

Here is a sample drawing that might be submitted:



Drawings don't need to be elaborate—sketches done by hand are perfectly acceptable. You should always consider attaching graphic material if you have a project component that is hard to explain in any other way.

Question 5: **How will you measure your results?** Tell us your techniques for gathering results and determining what those results might mean.

While not as tricky as question 4, this section also presents challenges for some applicants. There is a tendency to write this section assuming that the results will always be good, and the project will turn out exactly as anticipated. Here is one of the sheep farmers' response:

We will measure our results through sales of nutritious sheep cheese and the profitability of our farm. We will measure our results indirectly through the greater education of the general public about agriculture and the overall sustainability of agriculture in our area. This will naturally lead to more open land, which will be both suitable for farming and aid to the local economy through tourism.

This starts out on a promising note—sales figures and resulting profitability are certainly one way of measuring sustainability—but the overreliance on indirect measures (public education, open land, “overall” sustainability) is problematic. Since a single farm is unlikely to have the kinds of impacts stated here, the measurement effort seems at once vague and overstated. Here is the other sheep farmer's response:

We will keep records that reflect both quantity and quality of cheese matured on the Allen Farm, and evaluate production, flavor, shrinkage, spoilage, and total production both per farm and per ewe. Records of milk quality, somatic cell counts, and other relevant information will be kept and correlated, and the technical advisor will report at least monthly on any concerns or trends on individual farms or in overall production. At the end of the year, we will formulate an overview of the consortium startup process, and offer the members an analysis of sales, profitability, and overall function. The members will meet and discuss these results in depth, and will decide what kinds of changes, new investments, or other improvements need to be made.

This measurement of results accepts possible bad outcomes and actively seeks possible negative results. Just as methods need to be methodical, measurements must *measure*—it is always best to count specific things that directly reflect the outcome of your project. For example, the bean farmer who is testing the resistance of certain cultivars to a pest beetle strengthens his proposal by his weighing the plants, scoring the leaves for damage, and evaluating the health, abundance, and market value of the beans from each test row of plants.

Measurements must also have context. When you collect data—whether they be

sales figures, survey responses, yield, inputs, or any other measurement—you need to compare them to some sort of baseline. Without baselines and controls, your results will be questionable or even misleading. Your technical advisor can be very helpful here, guiding you in your decisions about what information to gather and how to decide what it means.

Let's say the project is to test a feeding program that may increase resistance to parasites, and a part of the protocol is to track lamb weight gain. Here is a sample data-gathering tool:

Lamb #	weight	date	comments	weight	date	comments
004						
009						
016						
067						
099						
112						
031						
044						

You don't need to submit data tools with your proposal, but you need to make sure they are right for the project and will collect your data systematically.

Question 6: How will the results of your project help farmers in the Northeast? Identify which aspects of agricultural sustainability pertain to your project and describe how your project addresses them.

Here, the reviewers will look for evidence that your project addresses the stated SARE priorities in a way that benefits farms other than your own. Specifically, reviewers want to see proposals that address at least one (although two or more is better) of the following:

- ❖ the reduction of environmental and health risks in agriculture
- ❖ the prevention of agricultural pollution
- ❖ improved productivity, the reduction of costs, and the increase of net farm income
- ❖ the conservation of soil, the improvement of water quality, and the protection of natural resources
- ❖ the enhancement of employment in rural areas
- ❖ the improvement of quality of life for farmers, their employees, and the farm community

Let's say a bean farmer is testing new cultivars for pest resistance. His response might read:

Since the project is investigating how and whether the different bean types will resist beetle damage, there is a possibility of reducing the use of pesticides. This provides an opportunity to reduce environmental and health risks. At the same time, the project may increase farm income by lowering input costs. Also, the data I will collect on the performance of each cultivar will be presented to other farmers. Even though the beetle population is a serious problem mainly in the warm lowlands of the Itchee River Valley, the more generalized data on performance will still be useful in the colder parts of the region. Using this data, other farmers can make informed decisions about which cultivars will best suit their own operation given the kinds of pests, soil types, microclimates, and other conditions on their farms. This could lead to improved profits on farms besides mine, and a more general improvement in environmental quality and quality of life.

Note that it is not enough to just say that the project has sustainable content—you must go one step further and relate the specifics of your project to something specific in the SARE criteria and then articulate the benefit to people other than yourself, showing

how your results will be applicable to other farms. One common flaw in Farmer Grant proposals is that a project is simply too specific to one farm to have wider applicability. Every farm is different, but your project should address some issue or barrier to sustainability that many others share, and your results should support possible adoption by other farmers.

Question 7: **What is the outreach plan for the project results?** Describe how other farmers will learn about your project.

Outreach plans need not be elaborate, but they must be *targeted*, and some applicants do not give enough thought to who will benefit from knowing about a project and its results. Many production experiments—trying out a new crop, for example, or comparing the production costs and market values of heirloom tomatoes—have a narrow audience of other farmers who grow or raise the same product. Marketing projects tend to have a broader audience of all farmers who may want to explore direct marketing and could benefit from being exposed to a variety of techniques. Some projects—educational efforts and community farm projects—target the general public. A good outreach plan grows naturally from the project itself, the knowledge that comes out of it, and who will benefit from access to that knowledge.

Here is an outreach plan from one of the sheep farmers:

The primary outreach tool will be the existing workshops offered at the Allen Farm, and we will use these workshops to disseminate new knowledge that the startup project brings to light. The resource guide, troubleshooting guide, and other project collateral will also be made available on request to any farmer interested in cheese as a value-added farm product, with the goal of disseminating the knowledge from the effort as widely as possible.

This is perhaps acceptable but more passive than reviewers like to see. The farmer has an outreach mechanism already operating, and potential cheese farmers are already being targeted, but it would be preferable if some amplified effort were part of the project—perhaps a story about the results in a producer newsletter or on an extension web site, or perhaps the technical staff hired for the project could develop a bulletin or speak at a meeting. Reviewers would also want to know how many workshops will be offered and how many farmers will learn that they can get the printed materials on request.

The other sheep farmer's outreach plan is as follows:

We will share the results of our project with other farmers and growers by demonstrating at least one diverse way to sustain healthy and sustainable farming. There are many people with small acreage who would like to farm, but who are unsure how to make their farm successful. By demonstrating that a small operation can

be successful, we will inspire others to establish sustainable farms of their own.

This is also passive, in that the outreach plan seems to consist of staying on the home farm and “demonstrating” that they are, indeed, farming. This is unacceptable.

A common shortcoming is that outreach occurs only in a small area—a county, a two- or three-town region, or perhaps within the circulation of a single newsletter or newspaper. But an apple grower in Maine who has had success using beneficial insects to control orchard pests now possesses information that will be useful to apple growers in the entire northeast region. Reviewers want to see a plan that goes beyond the merely local and finds the widest possible appropriate audience.

Outreach is an area where your technical advisor can be invaluable. Many technical advisors are extension agents, crop advisors, consultants, and other service providers, and these people often have a firm grip on how to find an audience, get them interested, and deliver information in a format people like and understand. Technical advisors will also likely have ideas on how to reach farmers in other states or across the region. Not enough applicants ask their technical advisors for specific help with outreach, relying on only the advisory portion of their talent and expertise.

Here is a sample outreach plan that a reviewer would likely give full points for:

The results of the project will be summarized in a bulletin that will be posted on the Cooperative Extension web site and will be handed out at a conference of pork producers scheduled for the winter after the experiment ends. I will attend this conference and offer a poster on the project for review at two separate sessions, and I will have copies of the bulletin available for free distribution. I will also develop a narrative about the project for inclusion in “Pig Heaven,” the newsletter for the regional pork producers’ consortium. My technical advisor has agreed to create and disseminate the necessary electronic files; he will also send out an e-mail to extension staff statewide alerting them to the availability of these publications.

In general, your outreach plan should find your audience not once, but two or three times, using different mediums—in this example, the farmer chose a poster presentation, a one-page summary on paper and on the World Wide Web, and a newsletter story. He also made good use of his technical advisor’s e-mail access to his colleagues, assuring that farm educators and consultants found out that something had happened. When you plan your outreach component, try to build in more than one way to find

and inform your audience.

Remember—*your outreach plan is an essential part of your project.* Allow time to do a good job with it and complete all the outreach components described in the proposal. If your project is funded, SARE will not consider your project complete until all outreach is done.

2nd annual ALL THINGS

POULTRY

ISLAND GROWN INITIATIVE
PRESENTS

POULTRY WORKSHOPS

Workshops on coops, feed, choosing breeds, composting, manure resources, predator protection, humane slaughter and processing, differences between commodity vs. local meat.

9am - 10am Breakfast provided by the Scottish Bakehouse	11:15am - 12pm Local humane poultry processing, IGI
10am - 10:30am Welcome by Flat Point Poultry, Doug Brush and Jeff Monroe	12pm - 12:30pm Lunch provided by Zachrus. Getting more out of your chicken in the kitchen by Chef Robert Lionette.
10:30 - 11:15am Katherine Long, Upland Eggs and Rebecca Gilbert, Native Earth Teaching Farm. Chicken breeds: Heritags for your needs.	1pm - 2pm Panel discussions with local poultry growers.

Saturday, April 11th, 2009
New Ag Hall, West Tisbury
9am - 2pm

for more information contact: DOUG BRUSH
flatpointpoultry@gmail.com
508.692.2327 | www.islandgrown.org

NORTHEAST SARE Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

FARMING LOCAL

ISLAND GROWN

SUPPORTED BY A GRANT FROM NESARE

A sample outreach poster for a SARE-sponsored event.



The project summary

Once your project narrative is written, you should write a brief summary. This is the first thing that the reviewers read, and it's important to take some time to make sure the summary really summarizes, giving the reviewer a feel for the overall shape of your project in a single paragraph. For example, the summary for one of the sheep cheese projects reads as follows:

This project will explore a new growth model for a farmstead sheep cheese operation. Instead of expanding the current operation on a single farm, we propose to grow by including other sheep farmers and developing a consortium, and the project will focus primarily on training, technical support, and quality control for the entering consortium farmers. The overall goal is to meet a growing marketing demand by pooling our efforts, sharing expertise, and spreading profits among the consortium members. We will then share our data with other farmers who are learning to make specialty farmstead cheese.

This is clear and straightforward and accurately summarizes the proposal; the reviewer will have an idea, going in, what the overall shape of the effort will likely be. The project summary for the other sheep dairy project is as follows:

Our project is to raise awareness of the importance of sheep as an alternative to cows by establishing a working dairy sheep herd and demonstrating that sheep can be raised successfully in New England. Because of rising land values and encroaching development, many farmers are struggling, and must seek ways to farm on smaller acreage. Our project will demonstrate that a sheep dairy can offer a solution to farmers working under these constraints.

You may have noticed that this is exactly the same wording that was offered in the

first paragraph under question 1, *What is the problem and why is it important?* Which is too bad, since the applicant has missed an opportunity to give the reviewer an overview of the entire project. We include this example to discourage you from repeating yourself in this way, and to help you see that the project summary is an encapsulation of the overall intent of your proposal.

Here are three examples of acceptable project summaries:

Many farmers apply substantial insurance nitrogen to ensure a good corn crop, which leads to over-application, higher costs, and leaching. We will use aerial photography to monitor test strips in the fields of our farm and the fields of the cooperating farmers to see if we can safely eliminate the insurance application practice. Nitrogen will be applied at different rates, and the resulting color photos will indicate which strips, if any, are deficient. If needed, more nitrogen will be applied to prevent losses, and the results of the project will be presented at a field day, two farmer meetings, and through extension presentations to certified crop advisors.

As farmers in the Northeast become more culturally diverse, certain barriers to sustainability are starting to emerge. In this project, the handling and use of pesticides among the Hmong will be addressed. I currently lease land to a group of Hmong farmers, and I propose to educate these growers about appropriate and reduced pesticide use by exploring with them their traditional techniques and using what these farmers already know to convey information about sustainable pest control. We will work together to develop a demonstration plot, and the concepts will be reinforced in a series of workshops for the wider Hmong community.

There is demand for local late-season berries, and I have been experimenting with using high tunnels to extend the berry season. The goal of this project is to assess the productivity of several different cultivars, and to test how these cultivars perform in different cultivation schemes that will include the use of ground covers and row covers. Production results and late-season sales will be monitored, and outreach will be through two open houses, a newsletter, a web site, extension, and a regional berry growers' meeting.



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Writing your budget

Personnel

As mentioned on page 14, there are often extra labor costs associated with doing a SARE project, and in this section you should make your best estimate of the time you and your employees will likely commit to project activities. This commitment should then be multiplied by an hourly rate. If you are not sure what a reasonable hourly rate might be, look at your farm income records and make a defensible educated guess. Entries in this section should follow a rate-times-hours format so the reviewers can see how you arrived at your labor costs. For example:

<i>Ethan Farmer, project leader, 60 hours at \$22/hour</i>	<i>\$1,320</i>
<i>Willie Cowmaster, herdsman, 30 hours at \$12/hour</i>	<i>\$ 360</i>
<i>Mary Farmer, farm accounts, 10 hours at \$12/hour</i>	<i>\$ 120</i>

This personnel section should have entries only for you and your farm employees. Advisors, consultants, and collaborating farmers are entered later on under direct costs.

Materials and supplies

This section is for items that are specific to the project. As already mentioned, SARE Farmer Grant money cannot be used for large capital expenses (for exceptions, see page 12), or for equipment like computers, digital cameras, copiers, machinery, or other costly items that have a wide range of uses outside the project. SARE *does* fund project-specific, nondurable materials that will be used in the course of the project. Here are the materials for a project that compares weed suppression techniques in organic asparagus beds:

2 4' x 100' rolls of landscape cloth @ \$36 each	\$ 72
anchor pins, one box	\$ 42
4 pounds Dutch clover @ \$12/lb	\$ 48
4 pounds crimson clover @ \$8/lb	\$ 32
2 bales mulch hay @ \$1 each	\$ 2

These expenses, and others of the same sort, are perfectly acceptable, and reviewers like to see this level of detail. If you have doubts about what some item might cost, call your farm supplier and get specific prices.

Travel

Most travel will likely be by car, and the mileage rate changes when the federal rate is adjusted. New rates are in the application materials; the example below uses 50 cents a mile. For travel costs, indicate the destination, the number of trips, and the total anticipated mileage. Here are some sample budget lines:

Four trips to cooperating farm, 14 miles each trip, 56 miles @ 50¢/mi.	\$ 28.00
Three trips to soil lab @ 26 miles, 78 miles @ 50¢/mi.	\$ 39.00
One trip to growers' meeting, 104 miles @ 50¢/mi.	\$ 52.00

Other modes of travel—by airplane or by train—may draw extra scrutiny, since the northeast region is relatively small. If you really need to fly to attend a meeting or participate in a training workshop, make sure you price your request with the least expensive carrier. In general, long-distance junkets are discouraged unless you pay for them yourself.

Publications/printing

This budget item is specific to any publication development costs (editing, design, and printing) that you might incur. It does not include photocopying, which comes in the next section under direct costs. Show a per-piece cost for any publications you plan to develop, and a line item for any services you might get from a vendor. For example:

<i>Resource directory design at \$30/hr, five hours</i>	\$ 150
<i>Printing at \$1.12 each, 1000 pieces</i>	\$1,120

Documents intended for the World Wide Web are also understood to be publications, and typical entries for web development would look something like this:

<i>HTML markup of 12-page bulletin @ \$22/hr, two hours</i>	\$ 44
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Please note, though, that SARE will not pay for general farm web site hosting, only the development of web documents that relate to the project.

Other direct costs

This budget category is for expenses that relate to communications like phone calls, postage, photocopying, any subcontracts, any money paid to cooperating farmers, consultants, or trainers, and miscellaneous expenses, including the cost of leasing land or hosting a field day. These are a lot of different expense categories, so we'll look at them one at a time.

Communications

Communications costs typically include postage, fax, and telephone expenses specific to the project. If you plan to mail 350 flyers to announce a field day, then your line item would read:

<i>Postage, 350 flyers @ .41 each</i>	\$143.50
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If you plan to have ongoing telephone contact with cooperating farmers, your technical advisor, or perhaps a consultant, make an educated guess what these will cost you. For example:

<i>Four hours in-state evening long distance to cooperating farmers@\$9/hr.</i>	\$ 32
<i>Two hours in-state daytime long distance to technical advisor@\$11/hr.</i>	\$ 22

Photocopying

If you think you will be making copies in the course of the project, estimate how many and the cost per page. For example:

500 copies of the bulletin for distribution at field day @ .05 each \$ 25

Consultants

Consultants are your cooperating farmers, technical advisor, crop advisor, or other people who need to be reimbursed for their participation. SARE feels strongly that farmers need to be paid for their time at a reasonable rate—plan to compensate other farmers at the same rate you pay yourself in the personnel section above. Give names, roles, and an estimate of their time commitment. For example:

Anne Jackson, cooperating farmer for replication, 40 hours @\$18/hr. \$720

Martin Amestoy, technical advisor, 10 hours at \$25/hr. \$250

Jerry Price, crop consultant, five hours at \$45/hr. \$225

Miscellaneous

If your project requires that you lease land in order to do the project, you can include this cost in the budget. Be as specific as you can:

2 acres of pasture for Local Foods Alive, August 4 & 5 @ \$25/acre \$50

1 acre control block B, slope 7%, no amendments, May-Sept @ \$60/acre \$60

Do not charge to the SARE budget any land you would have leased anyway, in the absence of the project. Other miscellaneous costs might include equipment rental, registration or admission fees, or the purchase of project-specific software. Also, if you plan to host a field day or twilight meeting, you should calculate your time and the time your hired help will spend putting on this event, along with any other expenses such as tent, chair, signage, or portable toilet rental. If the event will substantially interrupt farm operations, you can include a facilities fee as an offset, provided you explain how the amount was calculated.

Be aware that all items under “miscellaneous” must be described and assigned a per-item cost as shown above. A budget request of “miscellaneous, \$X” is not acceptable.

Total grant funds

Right now, awards are capped at \$15,000; even if the overall project is going to cost more than the current cap and the farm is planning to cover the rest, the SARE budget cannot exceed the funding limit. If you are funded, then this budget, along with the rest of the proposal, will become part of SARE's agreement with you and will define the expenses SARE agrees to reimburse.

Always check the math for each requested item, and make sure the justification matches the budget, line for line, showing how the budget lines were arrived at. The justification total should also match the overall budget total. Finally, confirm that the “total grant funds requested” figure here matches the “SARE request” figure on the application cover page. Below is a sample budget with justifications so you can see how one might fit together.

Personnel

Mary Greene, project leader: \$28.50/hr. for 55 hrs.	\$	1,567.50
Jack Smith, farm worker: \$12/hr. for 40 hrs.		480.00

Materials and supplies

Seed: 120 pounds at \$4 per pound		480.00
Insect traps: 110 at \$4.45 each		489.50

Travel

To cooperating farms: 460 miles at 50 cents/mile		230.00
To Experiment Station: 62 miles at 50 cents/mile		31.00

Printing & Publications

300 flyers at .25 each		75.00
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Other direct costs

Lab tissue analysis: four at \$125 each		500.00
Jerry Gray, subcontractor: fee for custom treatments		200.00
Insect specialist/consultant: \$30/hr for 10 hrs.		300.00
Katherine Dodge, collaborator: \$20/hr for 20 hrs.		400.00
Cost of signage materials for field day		50.00

TOTAL grant funds requested (rounded to nearest dollar)	\$	4,803
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Submitting your proposal

Starting in 2010, all Farmer Grant applications are submitted on line, and instructions on how to do this are in the application instructions posted to the Northeast SARE website. These instructions also give the word-count limits for each section and explain how to register with and use the online submission template. This template is straightforward, but if you need support submitting on line, ask your technical advisor if he or she can assist you.

Help with your proposal

Northeast SARE has a Farmer Grant specialist who can talk through your preliminary ideas with you, clarify what SARE is all about, and answer specific questions about the application process. You can send e-mail to Carol.Delaney@uvm.edu or call 802/656-0697.

Keep in mind, though, that the Farmer Grant specialist is not a substitute for a technical advisor, and any in-depth discussion of how your project might play out on your individual farm is best done with an extension agent or other service provider who understands your operation. SARE staff cannot pre-review an application, so please do not send us drafts to comment on.

Also, keep in mind that the SARE database, mentioned on page 10, has a wealth of information on past projects, as does the National Agricultural Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, or AFSIC. You can contact AFSIC at 301/504-

6559 or send e-mail to afsic@nal.usda.gov.

Other useful resources are the previously mentioned free bulletins, “How to Conduct Research on Your Farm or Ranch,” which can be downloaded from www.sare.org/pubs/ or ordered by calling 301/374-9696, and the “On-Farm Research Guide” available at www.ofrf.org/research/. These address project design and are particularly useful if you are setting up a controlled experiment for the first time.

Time lines and the release of funds

Grant awards are offered once a year and the Farmer Grant deadline is usually in December. Award announcements are made in March, contracts are sent out in April, and grant money normally becomes available in May.

It’s important to understand that all grant funds are released on a reimbursement basis—you need to prepare and send invoices, monthly or perhaps quarterly, that have documentation attached showing how money was spent. These documents are usually copies of receipts and paid invoices and other proof of project expenses. Also, keep in mind that you can only be reimbursed for expenses incurred after the project was funded; do not ask to be reimbursed for items you may have bought before the award notification.

Your invoiced expenses should also be consistent with the budget you sent in with your proposal, using the same budget categories; if you need to make changes in your budget after the project has been funded, contact the Farmer Grant specialist at Carol.Delaney@uvm.edu or 802/656-0697.

SARE will release up to 80 percent of the grant in reimbursements, and will hold 20 percent until an acceptable final report is received. We place a high value on reports and good recordkeeping, and, if your proposal is funded, you should take time to set up a reliable and manageable tracking system for expenses, project data, and project results. Plan to keep these records for at least three years, just in case there’s an audit of your award.

If your project is funded, you will get a copy of the Grant Management Handbook, which explains SARE recordkeeping and reporting requirements in more detail.

Checklists for applicants and technical advisors

Checklist for farmers

- ❑ **Make sure you understand** the purpose of the SARE program, with its emphasis on innovation, profitability, good stewardship, and widespread benefit.

- ❑ **Talk the project over** with your technical advisor to make sure you have addressed any obvious problems with your project's concept or design. You should also give your advisor a copy of this booklet so he or she understands how proposals are evaluated.

- ❑ **Do the necessary background work** by investigating past SARE Farmer Grant projects and learning what is available through other sources. Be proactive about gathering the knowledge you will need to make your proposal interesting and well informed.

- ❑ **Show your proposal to other people** and listen carefully to any comments they may have. Minimally, your technical advisor must read and approve your application, but other farmers or family members may have valuable comments as well.

- ❑ **Verify that you are not asking for money for things SARE does not fund.** Farmer Grants cannot be used to start a farm, buy equipment, finance construction, or pay other capital expenses. Requests should be limited to direct project expenses.

- ❑ **Check your budget** against your narrative to make sure that there is a very close fit between the project description and the items you are asking SARE to fund. Double-check your totals and then, as a last step, round your request to the nearest dollar.

- ❑ **Submit your proposal on line**, and make sure you attach the required letter from your technical advisor.

Checklist for technical advisors

- ❑ **Read the application instructions and this companion booklet**, making note of SARE priorities and requirements.
- ❑ **Talk over the project with the applicant farmer.** Do you and the farmer have a clear understanding of the objectives? Does it meet SARE criteria? Has the farmer looked at what others have done to address the problem? Is the project innovative and useful to other farmers?
- ❑ **Talk over your advisory role and make sure you both understand what it will be.** Will you be helping with experimental design? Will you be running statistical analyses? Will you be helping with outreach?
- ❑ **Read the proposal, taking care to look for technical issues, errors, or problems with feasibility.** If you do not know how to determine if there are technical or feasibility issues, talk with someone who does.
- ❑ **Go over the budget**, making sure that the items requested for funding are consistent with the SARE guidelines outlined in this booklet.
- ❑ **Request a second draft** of the proposal, especially if you need to make sure technical problems are addressed and weak sections are strengthened.
- ❑ **Make a copy for your records** and for reference if the project is funded.
- ❑ **Write a letter** outlining your commitment to the project, preferably in an electronic format, that can be uploaded with the proposal.



Northeast SARE

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