

Northeast Region Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

2012 Partnership Grants



For agricultural service providers working directly with farmers

Proposals must be submitted on line by midnight, November 1, 2011

Go to <http://www.ciids.org/nesare/pg>

A single printed copy with authorizing signatures must be postmarked by November 16.

Send to:

Northeast SARE
655 Spear Street
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405-0107

Questions?

802/656-0471
nesare@uvm.edu

Agriculture in the Northeast will be diversified and profitable, providing healthful products to its customers. It will be conducted by farmers who manage resources wisely, who are satisfied with their lifestyles, and have a positive influence on their communities and the environment.

—Northeast SARE outcome statement

Notice to applicants

Copies of these instructions can be downloaded from the Northeast SARE web site at www.nesare.org as a PDF file. If you prefer a printed application, call 802/656-0471.

All Partnership Grant proposals must be submitted on line at <http://www.ciids.org/nesare/pg>. The online application interface has strict word limits, and we strongly suggest you prepare your proposal using a word processing program, edit each response to comply with the word limits, and then copy and paste your proposal section by section into the online template, saving as you go. Once the proposal has been submitted, you can print out the entire file as a PDF for collecting the necessary signatures and for your own records. Send one completed proposal with authorizing signatures to **Northeast SARE, 655 Spear Street, University of Vermont, Burlington VT 05405-0107.**

Overview

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program seeks proposals from agricultural service providers who work directly with farmers. Northeast SARE funds on-farm demonstrations, research, and marketing projects that address key themes in sustainable agriculture.

The purpose of the Partnership Grant is to build knowledge farmers can use, to encourage the understanding and widespread use of sustainable techniques, and to strengthen partnerships between farmers and service providers. Projects must take place on farms or directly involve farm businesses, and the goal is to support well-designed inquiries into how agriculture can enhance the environment, improve the quality of life, or be made more profitable through good stewardship.

All projects must have a direct link to at least one of the key themes in sustainable agriculture, and two or more is better. These themes are incorporated into the Northeast SARE outcome statement on page 2 and specifically encompass:

- ❖ 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

Partnership projects can address a variety of topics, including the development of beneficial insect habitat, alternative crops or animals, practices that make use of biological cycles for improved soil, plant, and pest management, marketing, adding value, grazing, tool or technology development, agroforestry, farm management, farm labor, and water quality. These are only sample topics; the scope of the program is broad. Proposals should be relevant to farming and sustainability issues in the northeast region and should offer both research and outreach components so that results will be available to the wider farm community.

Eligibility

You must be engaged in agricultural research or outreach in an organization such as Cooperative Extension, NRCS, a state department of agriculture, a college or university, an agricultural nonprofit, or a commercial agricultural consulting business operating within the Northeast SARE region. This region is made up of Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

In addition, you must be currently working with farmers in a consulting or educational capacity and the farmers cooperating in this project must each submit a letter with this application that indicates their commitment to the project and outlines the duties they will perform. If the project involves field experiments, trials, or demonstrations, they must take place primarily on working farms, although an added replication on a research farm is acceptable. Preference is given to projects involving two or more farms and to projects with a strong outreach component. There is a limit of one proposal per applicant per year.

The deadline for online submissions is midnight, **November 1, 2011**. Once your online submission is complete, send a single hard copy of the proposal with all the required signatures to Northeast SARE, 655 Spear Street, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0107. You will have 15 days to do this; the **postmark deadline for this single hard copy is November 16, 2011**.

Types of projects funded

Partnership grants are competitive—in 2011, out of 40 applications, 20 were funded. Reviewers rank proposals highly when they describe approaches that are scientifically valid, seek measurable results, and show evidence of good design and planning. All projects should also identify and address barriers to sustainability in the region, and the best projects begin with a key problem that can be analyzed and put within a research frame. For example, one project noted that graziers are often hesitant about renovating pasture because it takes the pasture out of production, and the applicant proposed the on-farm testing of a renovation technique of banding herbicide and no-till drilling into established pasture.

Another proposal noted that the practice of sanding cranberries—adding up to an inch of sand to the production surface every three or four years—is expensive. Sanding is done as a form of pruning, and this led producers and advisors to wonder if mechanical pruning could replace or reduce the need for sanding. By comparing traditional sanding with pruning on a commercial scale, with and without fertilizer, to see how two varieties of cranberry respond, the project leader was able to offer cranberry growers knowledge they could use.

The emphasis is on practical results that can be transmitted to farmers quickly, the development of farmers as research partners and important reservoirs of knowledge, and the strengthening of research and outreach networks among producers, Cooperative Extension, NRCS, and other agricultural organizations. Reviewers look for projects that are innovative, address key themes in sustainable agriculture, offer clear benefits to other farmers (over and above the cooperators), and propose statistically valid research that is clearly described in the proposal. Most projects will run one year, but multiyear projects are not excluded.

Size of awards

The SARE request is capped at \$15,000.

How SARE funds can be used

You can use the SARE grant to compensate yourself and your cooperating farmers for time spent on the project, pay for sampling and sample analysis, buy materials and supplies needed for the project, hire labor, rent required equipment, pay for travel, and cover outreach expenses such as the cost of hosting a field day, developing printed material and signage, and other expenses associated with telling others about the project's results. All grant expenses must be incurred during the contract period. Also, if your institution has a negotiated rate for indirect costs, you can request up to 10 percent of direct costs for indirect cost recovery.

How SARE funds cannot be used

SARE funds cannot be used for capital expenses such as the cost of buying land, tractors, general-use machinery, or for making long-term improvements like additions, barns, or greenhouses. In the same vein, SARE funds cannot be used to start or expand a farm, establish a herd or orchard, or fund any comparable major farm fixture. If a small equipment expenditure is essential, specific to the project, and does not have a wide range of uses outside the project, you may include it in your budget request.

SARE funds cannot be used to pay for things like computers, digital cameras, video equipment, and items with similar usefulness beyond the boundaries of the project, nor can SARE funds cannot be used for meals (except light meals associated with a meeting that assure the participants can reconvene in a timely way), prizes, t-shirts, imprinted items, or other giveaways. And while long-distance land-line phone costs are covered, cell phone expenses are excluded.

How proposals are evaluated

All proposals are evaluated using these criteria:

- 1. Innovation and significance:** Proposals should seek new information and explore new approaches that address a demonstrated need on the part of farmers or the wider agricultural community. The project should avoid replicating existing sustainable practices or confirming known practices and results.
- 2. Clear objectives and an understanding of related work.** The proposal should describe the project goals, previous efforts to address similar problems, and explain how this project would build on that work.
- 3. Sound methods and measurable results:** Proposals should describe what will be done to achieve the project goals and how measurable results will be collected and analyzed.
- 4. Clear and workable timetable.** The proposal has a realistic timetable that describes who will do what and how long each step will take.
- 5. Effective outreach:** How others will learn from the project is a key to long-term impact. A thoughtful outreach plan for sharing project information and results should be provided.
- 6. Credible leadership.** The applicant must have the technical skills and professional experience needed to manage the project and communicate effectively with cooperating farmers, and the applicant's organization has the capacity to provide project support.
- 7. Appropriate partnerships.** Cooperating farmers should have the necessary skill and interest in the project to be willing and effective stakeholders.
- 8. Sensible budget.** It must be clear how the money will be spent, why budget items are needed, and whether the amount of funding requested is appropriate to the scale, scope, and expected results of the project.

Evaluation time line

Online submission deadline.....	November 1, 2011
Postmark deadline for a signed single copy of the proposal.....	November 15, 2011
Project review	December 2011 to February 2012
Final selection	late February 2012
Awards announced.....	March 2012
Grant contracts signed	April 2012
Contracts begin.....	April 2012 or later

How grant funds are paid

Funds are released on a reimbursement basis, and grantees generally send monthly or at least quarterly invoices with documentation of how funds were spent. Invoices should use the same budget categories as the original proposal, and documentation should be in the form of time sheets, receipts, mileage statements, and paid invoices. The release of funds will also be contingent on initial, annual, and final reporting requirements. Please note that SARE will hold the last 10 percent of a grant award until a satisfactory final report has been submitted.

Preparing your application

First, using a word processing program, respond to the questions below. Note that there are strict word limits, and the application interface will not accept text beyond them. Edit your responses carefully.

1. **What is the problem and why is it important?** Describe the problem and how your project will affect sustainability in the region; provide relevant data to the extent possible. *500 words.*
2. **What is your proposed solution?** Explain how you plan to address the problem. Describe previous research or projects relevant to it, how your project is different, and how it builds on what is currently known. *750 words.*
3. **What are your project methods?** Describe what you will measure and how and explain how your research addresses the problem. Your research methods should be rigorous and yield statistically valid results. Tell us your techniques for gathering data, what data you will collect, and how you will determine what the results mean. *1000 words.*
4. **What is the project timetable?** Describe the steps you will take to complete the project and how long each step will take. Be specific when describing who will carry out each step and when each step will be completed. *500 words.*
5. **How will you disseminate your project results?** Describe how you will share the results of your project with others, particularly farmers. Explain the roles of cooperators in making outreach effective, what media you will use, and who your target audience will be. *500 words.*
6. **What are your qualifications?** Describe your own qualifications to carry out this work, and summarize your organization's experience with projects like this one. *500 words.*
7. **Who are the project's cooperating farmers?** Give a brief profile of each cooperator that describes their farming experience and their roles in the project. You will need to collect and digitize letters from these farmers outlining their roles and confirming their commitment to the project. These letters will be uploaded as attachments. *500 words.*
8. **Budget.** Estimate costs in each of the different budget categories—personnel, materials and supplies, travel, printing and publications, and other direct costs. This last category, other direct costs, should include subcontractors, consultants, lab fees, postage, and other allowed costs that aren't covered in other categories. If there aren't any anticipated expenses in a category, enter zero. *No word limit; be as concise as possible.*

Budget Justification. This section shows how you arrived at your final budget, and is normally expressed as the number of units times the cost per unit, or for salaried workers the FTE times full time salary rate. Example: 100 insect traps at \$4.45 each, \$445. Provide narrative explanation for unusual items. *No word limit; be as concise as possible.*

Attachments: Attachments can be uploaded in the proposal interface as .pdf, .doc, or .xls files. The chief required attachments are letters from cooperating farmers. If needed, you can also attach other project-specific support materials such as a budget spreadsheet, drawings, plot plans, diagrams, data, or photos. A letter of commitment from a collaborating organization can also be attached, but only if the organization is truly a working partner, responsible for a part of the plan of work. Do not attach brochures, resumes, or general letters of support.

Submitting your application

Applications are submitted on line; to do this, go to <http://www.ciids.org/nesare/pg>

The online application template requires registration via a user name and password—use the “create account” button to create an identity in the system. This only takes a minute and you will be able to log in right away, but note that this registration is *specific to this grant application*—the submission interface won't recognize existing SARE reporting passwords, passwords from other grant proposals, or passwords from previous years unless you choose to re-use them in this new registration.

Once you are registered and have logged in, the template will ask for the **project title** to begin a new proposal. The online system will then ask for the name of the **project leader**—this should be you, the applicant—and some baseline **contact information**.

Next is a **project summary** page; here, you have 250 words to offer a brief outline of the project content. This summary is the first thing reviewers see, so take some time to make it compelling.

Enter all requested baseline information, and then copy and paste your responses into the interface, saving each section as you go. Once a section is saved, you can leave the online template and come back later. When you are finished with the entire application, press the “submit” button.

Once you have submitted, you will be able to print out the proposal as a .pdf file. Do this, and then collect the necessary signatures from the appropriate official in your organization, usually your sponsored programs office, chief financial officer, or director. List your cooperating farmers (signatures not required) and there is also a place where you need to sign as the project leader.

Return one signed copy of the entire application, including attachments, to:

Northeast SARE
655 Spear Street
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405-0107

This document must be postmarked within 15 days of the online submission deadline, or by **November 16, 2011**.

A note about livestock experiments

If your project involves livestock experiments, it will need to be reviewed and approved in writing by your university Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, or IACUC, before we can issue an award contract. **This will need to be done only if you are funded.**

If your organization is not affiliated with a university, you should include a veterinarian as a participant and contact Northeast SARE to arrange for a University of Vermont IACUC review. Contact Northeast SARE if you have any questions about this.

SAMPLE BUDGET

Before you prepare your own budget you may want to look at a sample to see how one fits together. Remember that every budget is different—yours should reflect how your project is designed and what you plan to do.

Personnel		\$4123.00
Associate director	\$ 940.00	
Student assistant	1485.00	
Fringe benefits	849.00	
Materials and supplies		1527.00
Seed, traps, mulch, and sampling supplies	1470	
Office supplies	15	
*Travel		504.36
To cooperating farms	475.76	
To experiment station	28.60	
Printing and publications		450.00
Flyers	450	
Other direct costs		3470.00
Cooperating farmers	600	
Lab fees	1676.00	
Consulting	600.00	
Collaborator	400.00	
PSNT tests	144.00	
Signage	50.00	
TOTAL grant funds requested (rounded to the nearest dollar)		\$10074.00

Note: if this sample organization were eligible for indirect cost recovery, then an indirect charge of \$1007 could be added to this budget for a total of \$11,081.

*For travel by car, use your institutional mileage rate. If your organization does not have a set rate, use the federal rate, which is currently 55 cents a mile.

Budget justification

Personnel: Tony Parks, associate director, Home Farms, Inc, @.02 FTE, \$ 940.00; Jenny Beel, student assistant, @\$11 an hour for 135 hours, \$1485.00; fringe @ 35% of \$4123, \$849

Materials and supplies: 120 pounds of seed @ \$4 a pound, \$480.00; 125 insect traps @ \$4.40 each, \$550.00; plastic mulch @ \$200/acre for 2 acres, \$400.00; zip-lock bags, 5 boxes @ \$4/box, \$20.00; sample bags, one ream of 500 #6, 20.00; 4 reams of paper @ \$3.75, \$15.00

Travel: Jenny Beel, nine round trips to cooperating farms, 865 total miles at 55¢ per mile, \$475.76; one round trip to Experiment Station, 52 total miles at 55¢ per mile, \$28.60

Printing and publications: 3000 flyers at .15 each, \$450.00

Other direct costs: Tom Arnold, cooperating farmer, at \$15 an hour for 20 hours, \$300; lab analysis of 98 forage samples at \$12 each, \$1176.00; four tissue analyses at \$125 each, \$500.00; insect specialist/consultant at \$20 an hour for 30 hours, \$600.00; collaborator, four half-day consults at \$100 each, \$400.00; 32 PSNT tests at \$4.50 each, \$144.00; estimated cost of signage for field day, \$50.00

Writing a strong application

Before starting to write, read through the entire application and make sure you understand the guidelines about eligibility, the use of funds, the application components, and the overall purpose of the Partnership Grant program. You may also want to look at the sample budget on page 9 to see how one fits together. If you have questions, call the Northeast SARE office at 802/656-0471 or send e-mail to nesare@uvm.edu.

Develop clear goals and state them plainly. Make sure you communicate how your goals, timelines, and project design mesh. Address and rethink obvious problems before writing anything at all.

Understand how to design a research or demonstration project. If you are not sure how to proceed, you should read “How to Conduct Research on Your Farm or Ranch.” This is available free from the national SARE web site at www.sare.org.

Work for measurable results. The nature of research is that you must quantify something, so make sure that the information you are collecting is the right information and will prove reliable. If you take samples of plants or insects, for example, make sure your samples represent a whole field or plot.

Get your farmers on board early and consult with them about the project before deciding on a final design. Make sure that you are offering them just compensation for the work they will do. Work collaboratively, and clarify who will do what to make the project go smoothly.

Spend time on your outreach plan. Look for ways to use different media in complementary ways and consider the potential of new media. Engage your cooperators in outreach and seek as wide an audience as possible.

Don't request money for items that SARE does not fund. See page 4 for a description of allowed and disallowed expenses. Make sure your request is no more than \$15,000.

If your project involves animals, you will need protocol review from your university Animal Care and Use Committee. If you aren't affiliated with an institution that can conduct a review, SARE will arrange for one through the University of Vermont. This review is only required if the project is funded, but please plan ahead.

Stick to the word count limitations. This often means drafting and refining your proposal so that it is brief, clear, and easy to follow.

Check your printed proposal before sending it in. Make sure all the signatures are on the printed proposal and that your attachments are included.

Don't live dangerously. The online interface closes at midnight of the submission deadline, and the postmark deadline for the signed hard copy is 15 days later. It's a good idea to submit and mail early. Snowstorms, family emergencies, and illnesses do happen. The online submission interface will not accept anything after the closing deadline, and hard-copy proposals with late postmarks will not be reviewed.

Electronic copies of this application can be downloaded from
www.nesare.org

Follow the links under “get a grant” for Partnership Grants

Use the right-hand “for applicants” box to get a PDF file