



Part I
2010 Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration
Grant Program Overview
(Second Call for Proposals, March 2010)
(MN Statute 17.116)

- ✓ **Deadline for receiving completed applications at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture is 4:30 p.m. CST, Monday, March 29, 2010 (Applications must be postmarked, hand/messenger delivered OR emailed by this date.)**
- ✓ **Faxes will NOT be accepted.**
- ✓ **READ THE APPLICATION THOROUGHLY AND FOLLOW ALL DIRECTIONS SO THAT YOUR PROPOSAL QUALIFIES.**

Send Application to:

Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)
Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program
ATTN: Jeanne Ciborowski
625 Robert Street North
St. Paul, MN 55155-2538
E-mail: jeanne.ciborowski@state.mn.us

Please note: A MANDATORY orientation meeting for new grantees will be held on Thursday April 15, 2010 (9:30 – 3:00) at the MDA Office in St. Paul. Travel expenses will be paid. *For grants awarded to post secondary or non-profit organizations – your farmer cooperators must also attend this meeting.**

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PART I

2010 Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program (Second Call for Proposals, March 2010)

INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) will award grants for the 2010 Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program - Second Call for Proposals. Competitive grants for up to \$25,000 are awarded to individuals or groups for on-farm sustainable agriculture research or demonstration projects in Minnesota. The purpose of the grant program is to fund research and demonstration projects that promote environmental stewardship and conservation of resources, and improve profitability and quality of life on farms and in rural areas.

Please note: ONLY grant applications that specifically target on-farm research and demonstration for cropping systems, soil fertility, and energy related projects will be considered.

BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED GRANT MONEY AVAILABLE, APPLICATIONS THAT REQUEST \$8,000 OR LESS FOR A THREE (3) YEAR PROJECT WILL BE GIVEN PRIORITY CONSIDERATION.

Contact our office if you don't have experience with writing proposals. We will be happy to give you some pointers (see page 5). You must have at least one cooperator (technical advisor) involved in your project. Preference is given to 3 year projects.

GRANT PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Who May Apply

Eligible recipients include Minnesota farmers*, individuals at Minnesota educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and local natural resource agencies. Priority is given to projects submitted by and/or led by farmers. All non-farmer initiated projects must show significant collaboration with farmers.

***Please Note:** Definition of "Farmer" from MN Statute 500.24, Subdivision 2. (n) "Farmer" means a natural person who regularly participates in physical labor or operations management in the person's farming operation and files "Schedule F" as part of the person's annual Form 1040 filing with the United States Internal Revenue Service.

Applicants must be residents of Minnesota and projects must be done on farms located in the state. An applicant is eligible to receive only one MDA sustainable agriculture grant at a time. Grantees who complete projects are eligible to receive additional grants to either continue the project or for a new idea.

Eligible Activities

The program objectives are to research and demonstrate the profitability, energy efficiency, and benefits of sustainable agriculture practices and systems from production through marketing.

Activities may include, but are not limited to:

- enterprise diversification and organic production using traditional and non-traditional crops and livestock;
- cover crops and crop rotations to increase nitrogen uptake, reduce erosion, or control pests;
- conservation tillage and weed management;
- cropping systems to implement integrated pest management systems for insects, weeds, and diseases;
- nutrient and pesticide management, including runoff protection;
- energy production such as wind, methane, or biomass.

The program does not fund projects that duplicate previously funded projects. It may, however, fund similar projects in parts of the state where the practice or system is still considered new or innovative. You can read prior issues of the *Greenbook* to see the summaries and locations of previous grants. This will help you design a project that meets your goals and adds new information. Several years of the *Greenbook* are available on the MDA web site at: www.mda.state.mn.us/greenbook.htm

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on:

Sustainability

1. Could the project reduce energy use or improve management in the use of fuel, electricity, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, or fungicides; external input reduction; or on-farm resource production?
2. Could the project positively effect the environment, the community, and family quality of life?
3. Could the project increase profitability for the individual farm by reducing costs and/or increasing income through product development, processing, and improving marketing opportunities?

Project Design

1. Is the project applicable to other farms? Could the techniques or systems demonstrated be adapted by other farmers? Does the application include a plan and budget to share results with others?
2. Does the applicant appear able to accomplish project goals for the practice or system being proposed? In the case of a collaborative project, is there an appropriate team of participants?
3. Are the project design, work plan, and methods for measuring results (both environmental and economic) appropriate? Are the proposed budget and timeline reasonable for the proposed activities?

Project Funding

Grants may not exceed \$25,000. A portion of each grant must be targeted for public information activities of the project. All costs required to carry out project activities must be identified and approved in the budget.

- Grant projects are funded for up to 3 years: 3 year projects preferred so that grantees can collect enough useful information to make informed decisions about the impact of their project on their operation especially if one of the project growing seasons has bad or unusual weather.
- Cost overruns from original grant amount will not be eligible for additional grant money.

- An annual progress report of the project is required and is evaluated each year before second and third year funding is approved.
- One (1) field day is required during the course of the project.

Eligible costs:

- salaries paid for time spent directly on the grant project (beyond time spent on normal farming operations)
- reasonable consultant fees, but not a grant manager
- costs associated with lease or use of farm equipment needed for the project
- purchase of materials and supplies specific to the project
- project-related services like soil testing and consulting
- project-related travel
- postage, printing costs, web and telephone expenses related to the project
- field day costs such as refreshments for attendees and advertising

Calculating costs:

- Use realistic cost estimates.
- Grant funds are for project related expenses only, not day-to-day farming expenses.
- Labor, land, equipment, and supplies should be calculated on an annual cost-equivalent basis. (For example, operator labor per year at \$12/hour; \$10/acre rental of tillage equipment, etc.).
- For travel in a passenger vehicle that you own, use a mileage rate of \$0.50/mile.

Ineligible costs include but are not limited to:

- purchase of most farm equipment, motorized vehicles, greenhouses, high tunnels, windmills, building construction, or other depreciable items
- fee for a consultant to write your grant proposal
- start-up of a business

Project Evaluation Process

Applicants must provide detailed information on how they plan to do the project. All applications go through an intensive competitive selection process by the program staff and an external technical review panel that consists of: a soil scientist, an agronomist, a representative from a post-secondary educational institution, two farmers using sustainable farming methods, two farmers using organic methods, an agricultural marketing specialist, and, a chairperson representing the MDA. See the “Evaluation Profile” and the “Score Sheet” that the review panel will use to evaluate applications. Use these two documents to help design a proposal that will score well. The technical review panel makes recommendations to the Commissioner of Agriculture. The Commissioner approves awards after considering these recommendations.

Assistance With the Application

If you have any questions about the Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grants, call us at 651-201-6012.

All applicants are encouraged to ask MDA staff for technical assistance in preparing the application and help with idea development. Our staff has experience in many areas such as cropping systems, alternative livestock production systems, soil quality, whole farm planning,

integrated pest management, fruit and vegetable production, and organic production. However, any assistance provided does not guarantee a grant award.

Calendar for the 2010 Grant Funding Cycle – Second Call for Proposals

- *March 3, 2010* – Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Application available for second call for proposals on the MDA web site and in hard copy
 - *March 29, 2010* – Post marked or hand/messenger delivered DEADLINE for receiving grant applications
 - *April 8, 2010* – Grant Panel reviews grant applications and makes funding recommendations
 - *Mid- April, 2010* – Commissioner of Agriculture approves recommended grants
 - *Mid-April, 2010* – Grant Coordinator contacts perspective grantees
 - *April and/or early May, 2010* – Contracts are set-up and signed
 - ***April 15, 2010* – Mandatory grantee meeting at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Building to review grants and procedures for carrying out grant projects**
 - *Late April and/or early May, 2010* – First payments are issued to new grantees
-

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO CONSIDER

What Reviewers Look For In a Proposal:

- A direct link to agricultural sustainability - Clearly and carefully describe how your project would contribute to sustainability.
- Clear objectives - Is the project doable? It's important to convey what you want to do, why, and how this will be of general benefit to other farmers in Minnesota.
- Innovative content and approach - Proposals should not merely verify that an existing practice really works. The purpose is to advance and explore new aspects of sustainability.
- Familiarity with related work - It's important to show that you've investigated the problem and can describe how your work will build upon previous efforts.
- Involvement from at least one consultant/technical advisor - Technical advisors can be another farmer, Natural Resources Conservation Service staff, U of MN Extension staff, certified crop advisors, or other agricultural service providers with expertise needed for the project. They should review your proposal for feasibility and good design and they must provide a letter of support. Your consultant can be a volunteer or you can pay the individual to assist in your project. Fees and number of hours included must be reasonable.
- Appropriate methods - Spend time working on the design of your project and deciding how you will collect and evaluate your data. If you have never done on-farm research, you should consult with a technical advisor who has the expertise to help you design a workable project.
- Effective outreach with a strong public information plan – One (1) field day is required during the life of the project. Target an audience that will benefit from your experience. Get your technical advisor and local media involved.
- Reasonable budget - The budget should be reasonable and there should be value for the dollars asked for.

(Modified from: 2008 Northeast SARE Farmer Grant Application)

Some Common Reasons Why Reviewers (Grant Panel Members) Give Proposals Low Scores:

- The applicant is not a farmer or is not working with a farmer on the farmer's farm.
Definition of "Farmer" from MN Statute 500.24, Subdivision 2. (n)
"Farmer" means a natural person who regularly participates in physical labor or operations management in the person's farming operation AND files "Schedule F" as part of the person's annual Form 1040 filing with the United States Internal Revenue Service.
- Application does not clearly explain the reason for the project – how and why it would be important to other farmers besides the applicant? Is the project transferable?
- The application is incomplete.
- Applicant didn't follow directions/read instructions carefully.
- The budget includes request for funds for items that are not allowed such as equipment and buildings or wind turbines.
- The request is for more than \$25,000.
- The project is not on-farm; back yard gardens or similar types of garden plots are not considered a farm for this program.
- The requested money is budgeted in only one or two categories such as personnel.
- The scale of project is too big; project should be more focused and simpler.
- There are no outside cooperators listed in the proposal.
- The project is not clearly described and the methods used to evaluate the results are inappropriate or inadequate.