



Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant

2024 Request for Proposals

Applications due by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, November 21, 2024

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this information is available in alternative forms of communication upon request by calling 651-201-6000. TTY users can call the Minnesota Relay Service at 711. The MDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

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Grant Summary

Overview

The Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant program, administered by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), offers up to \$20,000 for beginning farmers in Minnesota to make investments in their farm's equipment and infrastructure.

The intent of this grant program is to support new farmers in Minnesota to access equipment and develop infrastructure that will be crucial to the future of their farm business.

Through this grant, beginning farmers will be able to pay for:

- Farm equipment
- Farm infrastructure development such as investments in water access, irrigation, fencing, electricity, walk-in coolers, production-related structures such as livestock buildings and greenhouses, and other farm infrastructure.

Funds available

Applicants may request funds at two levels:

- up to \$5,000 for a mini grant or
- up to \$20,000 for a full grant.

The minimum request allowed is \$1,000.

Please note: Grant funds are dispersed on a reimbursement basis. A grantee will need pay for their expenses up front and then request reimbursement with proof of payment for expenses.

The MDA expects to award \$800,000 using a competitive review process, with at least half of the funds going to the mini grants.

This program is funded by the Minnesota State Legislature.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants

Applicants must be:

- A beginning farmer, defined as a person who:
 - Seeks entry or who entered into farming within the last 10 years.
 - Provides the majority of labor and management on a farm.
 - Has some farming experience and knowledge.
- A Minnesota resident.
- Farming within the borders of the State of Minnesota.
- In good standing with the State of Minnesota:
 - No back taxes owed.
 - No defaults on Minnesota state-backed financing for the last seven years.
 - Acceptable performance on past MDA grants.
 - Compliant with current state regulations.

Note:

- Only individuals are eligible to apply.
- Only one application per farm will be accepted.

Priority will be given to applicants who:

- Grossed less than \$100,000 from farm product sales in the most recent tax year.
- Demonstrate limited access to land for their farm business, defined by statute as leasing or renting land:
 - (1) with a three-year-or-shorter term agreement from a person who is not related to the individual or the individual's spouse by blood or marriage; or
 - (2) from an incubator farm.

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grantmaking. [Policy 08-02: Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review \(PDF\)](#) sets up the expectation that grant programs intentionally show how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities or disparities.

Eligible expenses

Through this grant, beginning farmers can pay for:

- Farm-specific equipment purchase or lease.
- Farm infrastructure development costs.

“Farm-specific” refers to equipment that is designed to carry out a function related to a farm activity. This can be contrasted with general purpose equipment, see below for example of ineligible expenses.

Eligible expenses include but are not limited to:

- Farm-specific equipment needed to grow crops and raise livestock as well as to store and sell the related farm products. This includes a large variety of items, if you would like to check the eligibility of a specific type of equipment, please contact the grant administrator.
- Materials, labor, permitting and other expenses for farm infrastructure investments related to water access, irrigation, fencing, electricity, walk-in coolers, production-related structures such as livestock buildings and greenhouses, and other farm infrastructure.

Ineligible expenses

The grant will not fund:

- General purpose equipment and supplies, for example office supplies, computer, tablet or smart phone purchases, and non-farm specific vehicles.
- Improvements to residential infrastructure located on a farm.
- Value-added equipment or infrastructure development that is related to processing farm products. For support with this type of expense, see the [AGRI Value-Added Grant Program](#).

Ineligible expenses include but are not limited to:

- Expenditures incurred before the grant agreement is signed by all parties.
- Donations and in-kind services or contributions, including property and services, made by the applicant (regardless of the recipient).
- Fines, penalties, and other settlement expenses resulting from failure of the applicant to follow federal, state, local, or tribal nation laws and regulations.
- Entertainment, amusement, diversion, social activities, gifts, or any costs directly associated with such purchases (such as tickets to shows or sports events, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, alcohol, and gratuities).
- Fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions, regardless of purpose for which funds will be used.
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services.
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges, legal costs, or contingency funds.
- Parking or traffic violations.
- Out of state transportation and travel expenses. Minnesota will be considered the home state for deciding whether travel is out of state.

How to Apply and Grant Timeline

How to apply

Apply for the Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant using the MDA’s [online application system](#).

- If you’re a new user, you need to create an account first.
- Once you’re logged in, select “Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant.”
- Contact us if you need this information in a different format.

Applications are due by **11:59 p.m. Central Time (CT) on Thursday, November 21, 2024**.

You will receive a confirmation email after submitting your application. The MDA is not responsible for any technical or logistical problems resulting in not receiving your application or additional grant communication. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the MDA receives your application and to check on the status of your grant application. Contact the MDA if you do not receive a confirmation email after submitting your application.

Key dates

- Tuesday, September 24, 2024.....Application period opens
- Thursday, November 21, 2024, 11:59 p.m. CT.....Applications due
- January 2025 (estimated).....Applicants notified of decisions

Questions

For questions on the grant program or application, submit them in writing before **11:59 p.m. CT on Tuesday, November 19, 2024**, to Emily Toner at beginning.farmer.grant.mda@state.mn.us.

Note: MDA employees are not authorized to give advice or feedback on any application. Applicants who solicit or receive advice from unauthorized MDA employees may be disqualified from eligibility for a grant award.

For help with the online application system, email Emily Toner or call her at 651-201-6034.

Application guidelines and tips

- Use plain, easily understood language. Write for reviewers who have general knowledge but may not have a thorough or deep understanding of your farm.
- Answer all questions completely.
- Review the [Application Evaluation Profile](#) included in this document. It is used to score and compare grant applications.
- Make sure your budget is realistic and includes only eligible items. Include a detailed budget narrative that clearly explains how the money will be spent. More detail is better than less.
- We will not accept late applications. Apply early so there is enough time to get help with the application process if you need it. It’s best practice to submit your application at least 24 hours in advance.

Application Evaluation Profile

Yes / No Eligibility

- Applicant is a beginning farmer (see [Definitions](#)).
- Applicant is a Minnesota resident.
- Farm of the applicant is located in Minnesota.

Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure evaluation criteria	Points possible
Farm equipment and infrastructure development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment or infrastructure need is clearly explained. • Funds are requested for farm-specific equipment or infrastructure. 	15
Impact on farm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested use for the funds will significantly develop the farm business, providing a sustained and transformative impact. (10 pts) • Applicant has specific and compelling explanation of the investment’s impact on their farm, such as estimated revenue improvement, estimated labor reduction, or other type of measurable change for their farm. (5 pts) • The grant funds are important for the completion of the project. (5 pts) 	20
Limited market access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm has gross sales of no more than \$100,000 per year from farm products. 	15
Limited land access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant has limited access to farmland (see Definitions) 	10
Budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes a detailed budget and all costs are clearly explained. (5 pts) • Budget shows evidence of being based on quotes or other cited costs. (5 pts) • All expenses are for farm-specific equipment and infrastructure development. (5 pts) 	15
Total	75

Both the review committee and commissioner may consider geographic distribution, diversity in agricultural enterprise, applicant’s history as a state grantee, and capacity to perform the work in their decisions.

Application Definitions and Questions

Definitions

Beginning farmer – means a person who:

- Seeks entry or who entered into farming within the last 10 years.
- Provides the majority of labor and management on a farm.
- Has some farming experience and knowledge.

Farm-specific equipment – means equipment designed to carry out a function related to a farm activity. This can be contrasted with general purpose equipment. A seeder is farm-specific, whereas a truck is not because a truck has many off-farm uses as well.

Limited land access – means farming without ownership of land and:

- (1) the individual or the individual's child rents or leases the land, with the term of each rental or lease agreement not exceeding three years in duration, from a person who is not related to the individual or the individual's spouse by blood or marriage; or
- (2) the individual rents the land from an incubator farm. (as defined in [2024 Minnesota Session Law](#))

Limited market access – means the individual has gross sales of no more than \$100,000 per year from the sale of farm products in the most recent tax year. (as defined in 2024 Minnesota Session Law)

Application questions

Contact and farm information

- Applicant's full name
- Farm name (if applicable)
- Farm address
- Mailing address (if different than farm address)
- County of residence
- Phone number
- Email address

- Describe your farm. (800-character limit)
- What crops do you grow or intend to grow?
 - Barley
 - Beans, edible
 - Cannabis
 - Corn, field corn
 - Corn, sweet corn
 - Hay
 - Hemp, industrial
 - Herbs and spices

- Flowers
- Fruit
- Medicinal plants
- Nursery crops
- Oats
- Soybeans
- Sugar beets
- Sunflower
- Tree nuts
- Wheat
- Vegetables
- Other (please list):
- Not growing crops
- What livestock do you raise or intend to raise?
 - Bees/honey
 - Cattle/calves
 - Dairy
 - Goats
 - Hogs
 - Poultry/eggs
 - Sheep
 - Other (please list):
 - Not raising livestock
- Where do you sell your farm products? (400-character limit)

Eligibility

Confirm that the following statements apply to you and or your business/organization.

Note: Applicant must be a beginning farmer, defined as a person who:

- Seeks entry or who entered into farming within the last 10 years.
- Provides the majority of labor and management on a farm.
- Has some farming experience and knowledge.
- I entered into farming with in the last 10 years. (Yes)
 - Select year when you entered into farming.
- I provide the majority of labor and management on a farm. (Yes)
 - Indicate the percentage of labor and management you provide on a farm. (Numeric entry)
- I have some farming experience and knowledge. (Yes)
 - Briefly explain your farming experience and knowledge. (200-character limit)
- I am a resident of Minnesota. (True)
- The proposed work serves a farm located in the state of Minnesota, including tribal lands. (Yes)
- I/We do not owe the State of Minnesota any back taxes and have not defaulted on any State of Minnesota-backed financing in the last seven years. (True)
- My farm business is compliant with current state regulations. (True)

- I attest that I have the authority to apply on behalf of the business/organization and no other application is being submitted from this farm. (Yes)
- I attest that none of the farm's staff with authority to access grant funds have been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last 10 years. (Yes)
- I understand that if my application is successful, the MDA cannot reimburse for any expenses incurred or work performed prior to the start date of the contract (expected to be January 2025). (Yes)
- Are you an employee of the MDA or part of an MDA employee's family or household? (Yes or No)
 - If yes, briefly describe the individual's role with the MDA and their relationship to your farm.

Farm equipment and infrastructure development need

- I am applying for the: (check one)
 - Mini grant (up to \$5,000)
 - Full grant (up to \$20,000)
- Grant funds requested. (Minimum \$1,000, maximum of \$20,000)
- Explain the equipment or infrastructure development need that you would address with the grant funds. (1,200-character limit)
- Expected start date for using these funds. (No earlier than January 2025)

Impact on farm

- Explain how these funds can provide a **sustained and transformative** impact for the future of your farm business. (1,000-character limit)
- Give one or more **measurable impacts** this equipment or infrastructure investment will make for your farm. Examples of measurable impacts include: estimated revenue improvement, estimated labor reduction, or other type of quantified change. (500-character limit)
- Describe the necessity for grant funding to complete this project. Where applicable, note what other funds and resources besides this grant will be used. Matching funds are not required. (500-character limit)

Priority audience

Regarding the land you use to farm:

- Are you already farming? Yes/No
 - If no, please explain your plan for accessing farmland in the future.
- Do you own the land where you farm? Yes/No
- Do you lease the land where you farm? Yes/No
 - If you lease land to farm, is your rental agreement a term of **three years or less** and from a person who you or your spouse are not related to by blood or marriage? Yes/No
- Do you farm at an incubator farm? Yes/No
- Is there any other information you would like to share or clarify regarding your access to farmland? (400-character limit)
- In 2023, did your sales of farm products gross \$100,000 or less? Yes/No
 - If no, how much did you gross in farm product sales in 2023?

Budget

- Complete a budget table detailing all expenses that will be paid for by the grant funds. The budget table should reflect the total grant funds requested. (20 rows available in budget table)

Item	Quantity	Rate	Total amount	Source of estimate
--	-	\$	\$	--
--	-	\$	\$	--
--	-	\$	\$	--
--	-	\$	\$	--

Budget narrative

- Explain why each expense listed in the budget table is necessary for your proposed equipment or infrastructure investment. (1,200-character limit)
- Have you previously applied for any grant(s) from any source for a similar purpose? (Yes/No)
 - If yes, briefly describe your previous grant(s) including funding source, grant purpose, date, and amount awarded.

Application Review and Selection

Review process

A review committee made up of MDA staff and external reviewers evaluates all eligible applications based on the criteria in the Application Evaluation Profile. Reviewers may recommend whole or partial funding of a project. The commissioner of agriculture reviews the committee recommendations and makes the award decisions. Both the review committee and commissioner may consider geographic distribution, diversity in agricultural enterprise, applicant's history as a state grantee, and capacity to perform the work in their decisions.

We will notify applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, in writing. Applicants may request a summary of reviewer comments.

Conflicts of interest

State grant policy requires that steps and procedures are in place to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers ([MINN. STAT.16B.98](#) and [Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grantmaking, 2022 \(Word\)](#)).

In cases where a conflict of interest is suspected, disclosed, or discovered, the applicant or grantee will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Privacy notice and data classification

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant under this program. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Data provided in this application is initially classified by the Minnesota Data Practices Act as private or nonpublic, although some or all of the data will generally become public at various points of the application process unless the data are otherwise classified by state or federal law. Access to private or nonpublic data is limited to those authorized by law, including but not necessarily limited to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant, parties identified in a valid court order or federal subpoena, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, the MDA may also share the data with law enforcement or the Office of the Attorney General.

Per Minnesota's statute on grants ([MINN. STAT. 13.599](#)):

- Names and addresses of grant applicants, and the grant amount requested, will be public data once application responses are opened.
- All remaining data in application responses (except for data otherwise classified by law, including trade secret information, see below) becomes public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret information, see below) will generally be public data after the evaluation process is completed.

Procedure for claiming protection of trade secrets:

Trade secret information is classified as not public data. In order to qualify as trade secret information, the data in question must be provided to the MDA by the affected person (i.e. the data must be about the applicant) and otherwise meet the legal definition found in statute ([MINN. STAT. 13.37, subd. 1\(b\)](#)). In order for an applicant to assert trade secret protection for data submitted as part of this application: the applicant must: 1) clearly identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or process that the applicant believes to be trade secret information; 2) describe what efforts the applicant takes to maintain the secrecy of the data; and 3) adequately explain how the data derive(s) independent economic value from not being generally known to, and not readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons. Merely asserting trade secret protection does not, in and of itself, classify the data in question as not public; determining what data meet the definition of trade secret information is ultimately the legal responsibility of the MDA, and the MDA cannot guarantee that data identified as trade secret information by an applicant will be classified as such. If the MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, the data in question will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

All persons, businesses, and individuals applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must comply with applicable laws. Under the law titled Right of Setoff ([MINN STAT 270C.65, subd. 3](#)), a grantee consents to disclosure of its social security number, federal employer tax identification number, and/or Minnesota tax identification number, already provided to the State, to federal and state tax agencies, and to state personnel involved in the payment of state obligations. These identification numbers may be used in the enforcement of federal and state tax laws which could result in action requiring a grantee to file state tax returns and pay delinquent state tax liabilities, if any.

Requirements for Grant Recipients

Pre-award risk assessment

Under [Policy 08-06: Policy on Pre-Award Risk Assessment for Potential Grantees \(PDF\)](#) the MDA is required to complete a pre-award risk assessment of grantees selected to receive a grant award of \$50,000 or greater. Applicants will be asked to submit documents relevant to their entity.

If the MDA determines that the awardee has substantial risks that inhibit its ability to perform the required duties under the grant contract agreement, then the MDA may either request more information for the purpose of satisfying the concerns, develop a risk mitigation plan to protect the interests of the state, or not award the grant.

Grant award agreement and payments

Grant contract agreement templates are available for review on the [Office of Grants Management Forms and FAQs](#) webpage.

Upon approval of an application and before beginning work on the grant project and receiving reimbursements, the applicant must:

- Complete an IRS W-9 form or register as a vendor in SWIFT, the state's accounting system, or confirm that the information in SWIFT is still correct.
- Awardees may decide if funds dispersed to the individual applicant or the farm entity.
- Submit other required documentation within 30 days of award notification.
- Submit documentation to meet the pre-award financial review requirements.
- Sign a grant contract agreement showing their intention to complete the proposed tasks. The agreement also authorizes the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. This agreement must be signed within 30 days of being sent to the grantee.

Eligible expenses may only be incurred after the contract has been signed by all parties. Grant contracts will last no more than two years and cannot be extended.

Payments

Grant funds are dispersed on a reimbursement basis. All grantee requests for reimbursement must correspond to the approved grant budget. To receive grant payments, grantees must provide proof that grant project work has been done by submitting details of each purchase on receipts or invoices, and proof that the vendors have been paid.

Accountability and reporting

The MDA will perform a monitoring visit for all grantees with awards of \$25,000 or more before a final payment is approved. Other grantees may receive monitoring visits at the discretion of the MDA.

All allowable expenses must be submitted with proof of purchase and proof of payment, unless otherwise specified. For this purpose, the grantee must provide expense receipts, employee timesheets, invoices, and any other supporting documents requested by the state.

The grantee must submit an annual report each year of the grant, the deadline for the report will be included in the award contract. A final report must be submitted prior to receiving final payment. Annual and final reports must include a summary of project results to-date, impact of the grant program, and three to five photos of the project. The MDA reserves the right to modify reporting requirements during the project. Information submitted in any report or survey will be a public record.

We conduct follow-up surveys to help us determine the long-term impacts of the grant. Grantees must respond to requests for follow-up information for three years beyond the term of the grant agreement. Failure to respond to these promptly may affect your ability to secure future funding from the MDA.

Audits of project

The grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate ([MINN. STAT. 16B.98, subd. 8](#)). This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

Other requirements

Bidding requirements

All funded applicants will be required to abide by the state's bidding requirements for larger purchases. See a detailed list of the state's [bidding requirements](#) for details.

Publicity

All projects funded must publicly credit Minnesota Department of Agriculture funding, including on the grantee's website when practical.

Affirmative action and non-discrimination policy

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified ([MINN. STAT. 363A.02](#)). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship ([Minnesota Rules, part 5000.3500](#)).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#).

Voter registration requirement

If the grantee is a state agency, community-based public agency, or nonprofit corporation, they will provide voter registration services for its employees ([MINN. STAT. 201.162](#)).