

Grand Rapids Urban Agriculture Outreach

USDA CBO Micro-grant

Applicant Selection Process 2024-2027

We're excited to announce a new initiative, the USDA Community-Based Organization Program Project, a Cooperative Agreement in partnership with the West Michigan Environmental Action Council (WMEAC) and others. As part of this project, we're launching a microgrant program for eligible producers. The primary goal of this microgrant is to stimulate diverse and sustainable agricultural activity within the West Michigan region, promoting not just economic growth, but also environmental conservation and community well-being. We're actively seeking to support producers who are implementing innovative and/or traditional, environmentally-friendly, regenerative farming techniques and who are passionate about nourishing our community. This is more than just a grant; it's an investment in our shared future. Let's foster a thriving agricultural community that is as diverse and sustainable as the land it cultivates!

What are Micro-Grants: Micro-grants are \$2,000-\$20,000, one-time-only, awards given to eligible producers for capacity building projects. Micro-grants are grants that can be awarded by awarded cooperators of the FSA Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund. These grants can be awarded by cooperators to urban agricultural producers (beneficiaries) for projects that support the goals of FSA Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund and for areas of work (i.e., projects).

Micro-grant Uses: Micro-grants can be utilized to leverage or implement conservation practices, improve soil quality, purchase on-farm infrastructure, or provide cost share for supplies and equipment if funding isn't currently available and/or hasn't already been awarded through other existing USDA programs for the designated micro-grant recipients.

1. **Eligibility Screening:** Interested applicants first undergo an eligibility screening phase. Applicants must meet the following criteria:
 - a. Have at least 2 years experience of working on a farm or conducting farm related activities, and have a registered Farm number through the Farm Service Agency.
 - b. Identify as urban producer
 - c. Are currently farming or plan to farm in the Local Administrative Areas (LAAs) for this project; this includes Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Muskegon and Holland.
 - d. Are willing to submit a W9
 - e. Must be a legal entity able to accept funds, for-profit entities prioritized

- f. Must not be a previous grant recipient, producers will be eligible to receive a microgrant only once.
2. **Application Submission:** Eligible applicants are required to submit an application through [this](#) Google form (physical forms available upon request). This typically includes a farm business plan or general plans for the following growing year, demonstrating financial need, a description of how the grant money will be used, and an explanation of how the grant will support the sustainability and growth of the farm. Video submissions are welcomed! Check out this [website](#) for some USDA resources and templates to build out a farm plan.
 - a. **Vision Statement:** This embodies the long-term goals for the farm and provides direction for future growth. It outlines what the farm aims to become in a set time frame, such as five or ten years down the line.
 - b. **Mission Statement:** This lays out the basic purpose of the farm and explains why it exists. It distinguishes the farm from others and expresses the unique value it provides.
 - c. **Objectives:** These are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals that align with the farm's vision and mission. Objectives provide a clear strategy for how to realize the farm's vision.
 - d. **SWOT Analysis:** This is an examination of the farm's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It allows farmers to leverage their strengths, address weaknesses, seize opportunities, and mitigate threats.
 - e. **Marketing Strategy:** This involves identifying the farm's target market and outlining ways to reach and engage this audience. It considers factors like product pricing, distribution, promotion, and customer service.
 - f. **Financial Plan:** This includes a detailed budget, income statements, balance sheets, and cash flow forecasts. It provides a clear picture of the farm's current financial standing and its future financial projections.
 - g. **Operational Plan:** This outlines the day-to-day activities on the farm, such as planting schedules, animal husbandry tasks, and equipment maintenance. It provides an overview of how the farm will operate to produce the products it will sell.
3. **Review and Evaluation:** Once applications are received, a panel including WMEAC and project partners and other identified agriculture experts reviews each submission. The evaluation criteria include the impact of the funds to advance the farming business, feasibility of the business plan and/or plan for the next growing season, the potential impact of the grant on the farm's overall success, and the overall benefit to the local community and economy.
4. **Site Visit/Interview Phase:** In the event that more farms apply for grants than are available the most promising or highest scoring applicants are then invited to host a site visit. This gives the panel a chance to ask further questions and applicants the opportunity to clarify or expound upon their plans. At least 3 members of the panel shall

visit the farm site and complete the site visit review form to be deliberated with the entire panel.

5. **Final Decision:** After a thorough review and site visit, the panel makes a decision based on the merit of each application. Successful applicants are notified and the microgrant allocation process begins.

Post-Award Process

1. **Award Acceptance:** Upon notification of selection, the first step in the process is for farmers to formally accept the award. To do this, they'll need to sign and return the official grant agreement document.
2. **Kick-off Meeting:** Once the signed contract is received, WMEAC will schedule a kick-off meeting to review the grant's terms and conditions, and the farmers obligations as a recipient. WMEAC will also discuss reporting requirements and the schedule for fund disbursement.
3. **Disbursement of Funds:** After the kick-off meeting, funds will be disbursed in accordance with the schedule outlined in the grant agreement.
4. **Reporting:** As a grant recipient, farmers will be required to submit 2 reports detailing the progress of their project. The first one will come 6 months after the award and the final one will be 12 months after the award which is when the funds need to be spent by.
5. **Storytelling:** Grant recipients must agree to submit photos and or videos to be shared publicly. Photos and videos are a required element of the 6 and 12 month reporting. They must sign a photo/video release and agree to have outside photographers/videographers come to their site and interview them.

Microgrant Scoring Rubric

1. Sustainable, Regenerative Farming Techniques and Key Objectives (30 points):

- 0-10 points: Conventional farming practices with little to no climate-friendly practices. Vague or no clear sustainable business objectives.
- 11-20 points: Some regenerative, traditional farming techniques are used, but they're not a major part of the operation. Room for improvement.
- 21-30 points: Innovative or Climate-friendly, regenerative farming techniques are a core part of the operation. High level of accountability to environmental stewardship.

2. Community Impact (20 points):

- 0-7 points: Little to no impact on the local community.
- 8-14 points: Some impact on the local community, but more could be done.
- 15-20 points: Significant impact on the local community, improving quality of life and well-being.

3. Business Model and Growth Potential (20 points):

- 0-7 points: Limited potential for economic growth. Vague or no clear plan for evolutionary success of the business.
- 8-14 points: Moderate potential for economic and operational growth. Some strategic planning has been done. Project has the beginning of a roadmap to growth. **Highest score a non-profit organization can receive is 14 points as priority is for-profit farms.**
- 15-20 points: High potential for economic growth that could benefit the wider community. A for-profit business has clear roadmap and has identified strategies for gaps in resources

4. DEI (up to an additional 30 points):

- 0-10 points: Lead farmer and/or owner belongs to at least one historically underserved demographic group
- 11-20 points: Lead farmer and/or owner belongs to at least two historically disadvantaged demographic groups
- 21-30 points: Lead farmer and/or owner belongs to three or more historically disadvantaged demographic groups

Please note: Applicants can earn a maximum of 100 points.

Communications & Marketing Plan:

WMEAC will release a media advisory for publication in local periodicals, and we will advertise this opportunity on our organizations' website and social media sites; as well as our partners' sites. The opportunity will also be shared directly with organizations, groups and networks that serve and work with local producers (including but not limited to neighborhood associations, community garden clubs and farmers markets).

Applications will be open upon approval (August 1), and have a rolling deadline that ends December 1 of each project year (2024-2027).

IMPORTANT COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS AND INFORMATION:

Microgrant Environmental Review Process:

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the implementing regulations in 40 CFR Parts 1500 – 1508, and FSA's NEPA implementing Regulations in 7 CFR Part 799 for cooperative agreements entered under the FSA Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund. After review at the programmatic level, USDA determined that, in general, cooperative agreements entered under Section 1001 of the Build Back Better Act, Food Systems Transformation Effort do not have the potential for significant impacts to the human environment. FSA has determined that the following categories of activities are categorically excluded from further review under the National Environmental Policy Act, per 7 CFR § 799.31:

- Educational or informational (i.e., outreach) activities; and
- Procurement actions for goods and services conducted in accordance with Executive Orders.

However, a site-specific review will be needed for activities funded through the cooperative agreement, or subsequent micro-grant programs, if any of the following conditions are true:

1. Disturb ground to a level that has not been previously disturbed, remove any trees, remove any tree roots, or use mechanical means to remove damaged fencing or debris that will impact below the level of previous disturbance.
2. Place a farm storage or other facility on a farm eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places and would have a visual impact to the historic character of the farm.
3. Modify, renovate, or remove a structure or building that is 50 years old or older.
4. Involve an activity including new land clearing, impacts to any water body, wetland, floodplain, riparian buffer, threatened or endangered species, their critical habitat, or cultural resources that would otherwise require consultation.
5. Result in any extraordinary circumstances in accordance with Handbook 1-EQ (Rev. 3) Par. 25.
6. Change the existing land use or remove the land from agricultural use.
7. Involve FSA actions or programs not specified in this P-850, not approved in that municipality, or for which an individual site-specific FSA-850 or environmental assessment is required.

For micro-grants, the grantee must satisfy any site-specific NEPA requirements identified by FSA prior to drawing down funds or incurring expenses related to the micro-grant. Once these conditions have been successfully completed, FSA will notify the grantee that the review is complete. At that time, the distribution and expenditure of micro-grant funds will be authorized. Before the NEPA process is completed, Federal regulations specify acceptable actions in 40 CFR § 1506.1.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, and American Sign Language) should contact the responsible State or local Agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online, at www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-programdiscrimination-complaint-form.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by: mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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