



EXTENSION

AGEC-2004

Grants for small-scale farms

November 2025

Introduction

Many Extension and agricultural educators use grants to fund programming and workshops for small-scale and beginning farmers and ranchers. In addition, many small-scale and beginning farmers and ranchers are looking for grants to subsidize operation expansion, increase market reach, diversify the operation or share lessons learned with other producers. The federal government, as well as state governments, local governments, local organizations and foundations, sometimes set aside funding to help educators and farmers invest in their businesses, expand their knowledge or mentor other producers. Some funding sources will provide the full amount needed for a project, while others use a cost-sharing or matching model. The information in this fact sheet can be used for Extension professionals, agricultural professionals and end users, such as farmers and ranchers.

Note that funding sources and program details might change over time.

Key vocabulary

It is important to understand the terminology used in grant or loan writing. Each funding agency may use different terms, so familiarize yourself with the language they prefer. Below are commonly used terms you may come across:

- **Call for proposals.** A formal announcement from a funding agency inviting individuals or organizations to apply for financial support. Request for Proposals (RFP) and Request for Applications (RFA) are also commonly used. Different agencies use different terminology, but all mean an official announcement of funding availability. It will include basic information about the grant. It will include information about the type of projects that they will fund. The call for proposals will typically include information about who can apply, the amount that can be requested, deadlines and other details.
- **Proposal.** A written plan or project description submitted by an applicant to a funding agency. Agencies will tell applicants what to include in their proposal. A proposal will typically include the purpose, goals, methods and budget of the proposed work.
- **Grant application.** A structured form or set of documents submitted by an applicant to a funding agency.
- **Matching funds (cost share).** Some grants require the applicant to contribute money, resources or in-kind support to the project. For example, a 25% match means you must provide one dollar for every four awarded.
- **In-kind contribution.** Non-cash support provided to a project, such as volunteer time, donated equipment or the use of facilities.
- **Indirect costs/overhead.** Administrative expenses that support the organization (e.g., utilities, office supplies and administrative staff). Some funders cap or prohibit indirect costs.
- **Evaluation plan.** The section of a proposal that explains how you will measure success, track progress and report results.

Grants and loans: What is the difference?

Grants provide funds that do not have to be repaid; however, grants generally require that recipients share lessons learned with other producers through field days, open houses, publications, presentations at workshops or conferences, etc. Grants are scarce and typically have a specific focus, which may or may not apply to your operation. Grants rarely pay for capital assets (such as land, machinery, equipment, breeding livestock, buildings or property improvements). Instead, they are typically used for funding workshops and other educational programming, adopting conservation practices, testing new production methods or utilizing new technology.

Loans are funds that must be repaid. The terms, such as interest rate, payback period and frequency of payments, may be negotiable. Having a financial plan to demonstrate repayment capacity will be important. Some funding agencies, like the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF), have thresholds that trigger grant vs. loan designation. For example, funding under \$10,000 might be administered as a grant, but funds of \$10,001 or more are considered loans and must be repaid.

Funding sources

Small-scale farms add value to local communities and food systems. Since the 2008 Farm Bill, substantial resources have been dedicated to small-scale and beginning farmers and ranchers. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), a farm is defined as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products may be produced and sold. Beyond direct capital, USDA has composed a list of resources for new and beginning farms that provides information on everything from developing a business plan to seeking funding and program assistance from the state.

Resource

- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). Grants and Loans: Financial resources for farmers and ranchers. <https://www.usda.gov/farming-and-ranching/financial-resources-farmers-and-ranchers/grants-and-loans>

Descriptions of some opportunities for funding for small-scale farms follow. Remember, this is not a comprehensive list; additional funding sources may be available in your city, county, state or region.

Federal level grants

Grants are a good avenue for funding to support economic development or educational programs without taking on additional debt. Grants are generally not available to fund a business startup and often limit or preclude purchases of capital assets such as land, machinery and equipment or breeding livestock.

USDA small farm funding resources

This site contains resources for the entire funding process, from developing a business plan to financial planning resources and program assistance. It also contains information for state programs, agricultural lenders and funding available through USDA programs such as Rural Development and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Additionally, it has an alphabetized list of organizations and their websites that provide funding for small-scale farms.

Resource

- National Agricultural Library. (n.d.). Small Farm Funding Guide. U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://www.nal.usda.gov/economics-business-and-trade/small-farm-funding-guide>

Southern extension risk management education (SERME)

These grants are for educational providers, such as Extension and agricultural educators. The Southern Extension Risk Management Education Center serves the southern region of the U.S., including Oklahoma. The Extension Risk Management grant program offers funding for educational projects that help farmers and ranchers improve their economic vitality through targeted risk management strategies. SERME offers funding opportunities through two program areas: Education Grants and Producers Underserved by Crop Insurance Grants.

1. Education grants provide funding for educational programs in any of the five areas of risk: production, marketing, financial, legal or human. This is an 18-month grant with a maximum award amount of \$75,000.
2. Exploratory project funding is also available for smaller projects with the purpose of initiating new ideas through educational programs that also address one of the areas of risk. These funds can be used to host a workshop or conference. This is an 18-month grant with a maximum award amount of \$10,000. Producers Underserved by Crop Insurance Grants fund risk management education for producers underserved by the Federal Crop Insurance Program. This might include producers with unique commodities, small farms or socially disadvantaged farmers.

Resources

Southern Extension Risk Management Education Center. (n.d.). 2024 ERME Request for Applications [Funding]. Retrieved October 16, 2025, from <https://srmece.uada.edu/>

National Institute of Food and Agriculture. (n.d.). Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) [Grant opportunity]. Retrieved October 16, 2025, from <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities/beginning-farmer-rancher-development-program>

A beginning farmer or rancher is someone who has not yet operated a farm or ranch, or has operated a farm or ranch for no more than 10 years. The Beginning Farmer or Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) provides assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers who are looking to begin or improve their farm, ranch, or forested land through projects that provide education, technical assistance and mentoring, giving beginning farmers and ranchers the knowledge, skills and tools to make informed decisions about their operations.

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program funds three types of projects for Extension or agricultural educators:

1. Standard Projects provide funding to new and established local and regional training, education outreach and technical assistance initiatives that address the unique local and regional needs of beginning farmers and ranchers.
2. Educational Team Projects provide funding to develop seamless beginning farmer and rancher education programs by conducting evaluation, coordination and enhancement activities for standard projects and other non-funded beginning farmer programs.
3. Curriculum and Training Clearinghouse provides funding to make educational curricula and training materials available to beginning farmers and ranchers and organizations who directly serve them.

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program provides an array of grants for sustainable agriculture and conservation efforts, such as renewable energy, high tunnels, implementing crop rotation and cover crops, crop and livestock diversity, no-till, and more. Grant programs can be searched by state and indicate who can apply for a particular grant: educators, non-profits, producers, graduate students, agricultural researchers, etc. For the southern region of the U.S., producer grants are for research, education and outreach purposes only. SARE grants are not targeted to beginning farmers, nor are they intended to pay a farmer to farm, start a farm, buy land, or make capital investments or farm improvements.

The grants are designed to reduce the financial risk in trying to find a sustainable agricultural solution to a current farm issue. Project maximums are \$10,000 for an individual farmer or rancher and \$15,000 for a farmer organization. Grants can include up to two years of research. Southern SARE funds about eight producer grant proposals each year, selected from the pool of applications that are read and rated by external reviewers. Thus, your application competes with other applications for funding. Producer grant funds may be used for items such as costs of sampling and sample analysis, materials and supplies needed for the project, outreach expenses such as holding a field day, travel needed for the project, hiring labor for things that you can't do yourself, your labor for project activities above and beyond normal farming duties, refreshments at field days, etc. The schedule for Southern SARE grants is as follows: September – calls for producer grant proposals are released; November – producer grant proposals are due; March – producer grants are awarded.

Applicants can be farmers or ranchers, researchers, Extension educators, other educators or graduate students.

Resources

Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education. (2025). Grants. <https://www.sare.org/Grants/>

Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education. (2025). Producer grants. <https://southern.sare.org/grants/apply-for-a-grant/producer-grants/>

State level grants

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF)

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry provides both grants and loans to small scale farms and ranches. A summary of the programs and funding opportunities are in the chart below. <https://ag.ok.gov/economic-development-and-agriculture-markets/>

Specialty crop block grant

- **Grant.** Projects must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets.
- **Eligibility.** Government agencies, non-profits, for-profit organizations, colleges and universities. A list of previously funded projects is on the ODAFF website.
- **Funding levels.** Minimum of \$10,000 and a maximum of \$100,000. Matching funds of 20%, including in-kind contributions, will be required.
- **Timeline for application.** January - Request for proposals released. February - Submission deadline. March - April - Submissions are evaluated. October - Award announcement from USDA.
- **Length of grant.** Up to two years.

Healthy food financing program

- **Grant.** Provides financing to retailers to provide healthy food to underserved communities.
- **Eligibility.** For construction of new grocery stores or small food retailers, grocery store or small food retailer renovations, expansions and infrastructure upgrades.
- **Funding levels.** Grants are limited to \$10,000. Loans* are not limited to a specific dollar amount.
- **Timeline for application.** Revolving deadline for submissions - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, or next business day if the submission deadline falls on a date the offices are closed.
- **Length of grant.** No timeline stated - funding is to complete the submitted project.

Agriculture Enhancement and Diversification Program Grants

All applicants must be at least 21 years of age and a legal resident of Oklahoma. <https://ag.ok.gov/economic-development-and-agriculture-markets/>

Agriculture event grant

- **Grant.** Funding is provided to create new agricultural events that highlight agricultural products and will create an economic impact. An educational component must be illustrated. A letter of support from the city or county government, or Chamber of Commerce is required.
- **Eligibility.** Applicants should focus on creating or expanding an event that benefits and furthers the public interest in agriculture. In addition to the written proposal, all applicants must make a 15-minute oral presentation to the selection committee.
- **Funding levels.** \$2,500 or less funded with an economic impact of \$5,000 or less. \$2,501-\$5,000 funded with an economic impact of \$5,000-\$75,000. \$5,001-\$50,000 funded with an economic impact of \$75,001 or more.
- **Timeline for application.** Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their proposal for a minimum of 6 months prior to the event. Revolving deadline for submissions - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, or next business day if the submission deadline falls on a date the offices are closed.
- **Length of grant.** Through the completion of the event.

Farm diversification grant

- **Grant.** Projects must diversify the farm to non-traditional crops, livestock or on-farm processing. Projects cannot be an extension of existing operations
- **Eligibility.** Applicants should currently be involved in farming, ranching or agritourism and would like to diversify their farming operation or agritourism venture. Applications must include a letter of recommendation from an agricultural specialist (refer to the list on the application form for those who qualify).
- **Funding levels.** \$2,500 or less; no match required. \$2,501-\$5,000; 25% match required. Match can be dollar-for-dollar or in-kind. \$5,001-\$10,000; a dollar-for-dollar match is required.
- **Timeline for application.** Revolving deadline for submissions - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, or next business day if the submission deadline falls on a date the offices are closed.
- **Length of grant.** Not to exceed one year in length. Payments will be disbursed in three equal increments based upon properly submitted invoices.

Product development and research grant or loan*

- **Grant.** Projects should create or expand agricultural business through research, feasibility studies, test marketing or product development.
- **Eligibility.** Farmers, ranchers or producers.
- **Funding levels.** \$2,500 or less; no match required. \$2,501-\$5,000; 25% match required. Match can be dollar-for-dollar or in-kind. A \$5,001-\$10,000; a dollar-for-dollar match is required. \$10,001 or above will be considered a loan*.
- **Timeline for application.** Revolving deadline for submissions - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, or next business day if the submission deadline falls on a date the offices are closed.
- **Length of grant.** Not to exceed one year in length. Payments will be disbursed in three equal increments based upon properly submitted invoices.

Value-added agriculture grant or loan*

- **Grant.** Funds projects to develop or establish production, processing or marketing of agricultural products.
- **Eligibility.** Individuals who demonstrate the ability to produce a viable product are interested in recipe scaling, packaging and ingredient sourcing. Must include a marketing plan and show profitability. Applicants will also need to demonstrate how production will create jobs and enhance the community.
- **Funding levels.** \$2,500 or less; no match required. \$2,501-\$5,000; 25% match required. Match can be dollar-for-dollar or in-kind. A \$5,001-\$10,000; dollar-for-dollar match is required. \$10,001 or above will be considered a loan*.
- **Timeline for application.** Revolving deadline for submissions - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, or next business day if the submission deadline falls on a date the offices are closed.
- **Length of grant.** Not to exceed one year in length. Payments will be disbursed in three equal increments based upon properly submitted invoices.

Veteran or young farmer grant or loan*

Eligibility

- **Grant.** Opportunity for young farmers and veterans involved in agriculture to create or expand an agricultural farming/ranching business.
- **Eligibility.** Veterans who served in the US Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard, including the reserve components and who were discharged for any conditions other than dishonorable; -or- farmers who are between the ages of 21 and 45 years of age.
- **Funding levels.** \$2,500 or less; no match required. \$2,501-\$5,000; 25% match required. Match can be dollar-for-dollar or in-kind. 5,001-\$10,000; a dollar-for-dollar match is required. \$10,001 or above will be considered a loan*.
- **Timeline for application.** Revolving deadline for submissions - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, or next business day if the submission deadline falls on a date the offices are closed.
- **Length of grant.** Not to exceed one year in length. Payments will be disbursed in three equal increments based upon properly submitted invoices.

*Funding amounts of \$10,001 or more will be considered loans and not grants. Grants do not have to be repaid, but loans do need to be repaid.

Loan amounts of \$10,001 - \$20,000 will be subject to 0% interest and on a three year deferred repayment plan. Repayment will start in year four. For example, an \$18,000 loan will begin repayment of \$6,000 in year four, \$6,000 in year five, and \$6,000 in year six.

Loan amounts of \$20,001 or more will be subject to 0% interest and on a five year deferred repayment plan.

Note: This information is current as of 10/1/25. Please see the links above for any changes and the most up to date information.

Local level grants

Local grants, very specialized and tailored to the particular needs of an area or region, may also be available. Your local OSU Extension educator or area agricultural economics specialist may know of local or regional funding sources, and meeting with the educator may save time spent searching on your own. Introducing yourself and your operation to someone who can be of great assistance in the future, beyond seeking funding, is time well spent.

Summary and conclusions

Obtaining funding for an agricultural enterprise or activity requires planning and preparation. The tips provided in this fact sheet are designed to enhance the likelihood of success in getting funding. Farmers and ranchers seeking funding for operations or purchases of capital assets such as machinery and equipment, breeding livestock or land are likely limited to loans. If credit is not available from commercial sources, USDA's Farm Service Agency offers several types of loans, some of which are targeted to small and beginning farmers. Grants are typically targeted at expanding educational opportunities for producers. Developing successful grant proposals requires careful thought and attention to detail.

Preparing a grant or loan proposal

To learn more about preparing a Grant or Loan proposal, please visit AGEC-9504 Grant writing basics: Tips and best practices from application to submission fact sheet.



Sara Siems

Assistant Extension Specialist, Agricultural Economics

Joshua Campbell

Extension State Program Specialist, Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

Gina Peek

Associate Dean for Extension, Engagement and Continuing Education and Assistant Director, Family and Consumer Sciences OSU Extension



Scan the code or visit extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets for more OSU Extension fact sheets.

EDUCATION EVERYWHERE FOR EVERYONE
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

Oklahoma State University, as an equal opportunity employer, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding non-discrimination. Oklahoma State University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all individuals and does not discriminate based on race, religion, age, sex, color, national origin, marital status, disability, or veteran status with regard to employment, educational programs and activities, and/or admissions.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President for Agricultural Programs and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. 11 15 SB.