

Ashe County

Planning Department

Staff Report

Date: 11/29/2016

RE: Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund Grant

Summary:

The NC Department of Agriculture is requesting proposals for their 2016 Trust Fund Grants. The grant makes available funds for projects that will encourage the preservation of agriculture, horticultural and forestlands and to foster the growth, development and sustainability of farms in the state.

The Ashe County Planning Department and the Agricultural Extension Office are seeking approval to apply for the grant. If successful, the grant money would be used to develop a farmland protection plan that would help protect farmland throughout the county and identify actions to promote and grow farming in the county.

The maximum grant amount is \$15,000 which will cover the cost of preparing the plan. We hope to use the High Country Council of Governments to development the plan so that we can stay within this budget. The grant also requires a 30% match (\$4,500) which we intend to make with staff involvement as well as donations from farm related businesses and organizations in the county. This grant would also coincide with next year's budget and at this time will not require and budget changes.

Attachments:

1. Request for Proposals Guidelines



Ashe County Planning Department
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N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
N.C. ADFP Trust Fund
Requests for Proposals Guidelines



▪ **Overview**

▫ **Mission**

To fund projects to encourage the preservation of qualifying agricultural, horticultural, and forestlands to foster the growth, development, and sustainability of family farms.

▫ **History**

Although the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture showed that the rate of farmland loss in North Carolina has slowed in the five years prior to the census, North Carolina is still losing farms and farmlands. North Carolina had 2,700 fewer farms in 2012 than in 2007, while losing 62,560 acres of farmland during the same period.

Today, approximately 90 percent of all North Carolina lands are privately owned. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that our state's population will expand from 9.5 million to more than 12 million by 2030, and this growth threatens our farm and forestland. Preserving farmland also protects our natural resources, wildlife habitat, and water resources.

▪ **Eligibility**

- All applicants must be non-profit conservation organizations or county agencies. (G.S.106-744)
- Farmers, landowners, and others interested in applying must partner with a non-profit conservation organization or county agency to participate in an ADFP Trust Fund grant proposal.
- Agricultural Development and Plan grants are limited to requests serving projects serving the constituents of a Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) or Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District (EVAD) or the establishment of a VAD, EVAD, or County Farmland Protection Plan.
- Must have a Conservation plan if the farm has a highly erodible land (HEL) classification and a forestry plan if there is more than 20 acres of timber.
- For military-designated conservation easement or agreement grant requests, there must be proof of military importance by the appropriate military service. Written confirmation from the associated armed service agency will be required.

▪ **Funding Purposes**

- To secure agricultural conservation easements on agricultural, horticultural, and forestlands for active production of food, fiber, and other agricultural products. Easements include the following options:
 - Perpetual
 - 50 year term
 - 40 year term
 - 30 year term
 - 20 year term
 - 10 year term
- To support public and private enterprise programs that will promote profitable and sustainable agricultural, horticultural, and forestlands through assistance to farmers in developing plans for:
 - production of food, fiber, and value-added products
 - agritourism activities

- marketing and sales of agricultural products produced on the farm
- agriculturally-related business activities
- other programs approved by the NC ADFP Trust Fund
- To support the preservation of agriculture/military-designated uses through conservation easements and conservation agreements.
 - Definition of a conservation agreement: A conservation agreement is a binding contract between a property owner and a qualified organization that accomplishes the same restriction with regard to the use of the land as a conservation easement through contractual terms. A memorandum of agreement is recorded in the public records as notice to the public that the agreement exists. The length of the conservation agreements can be for 50, 40, 30, 20, or 10 years.

- **Funding Priorities**
 - Funding priority will be given to projects that involve the following affiliations:
 - To counties to establish a Voluntary Agricultural Districts program or Farmland Protection Plan
 - Counties with Farmland Protection Plans
 - Goodness Grows Farmers/ American Tree Farm/ Forest Stewardship
 - Program Members
 - Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Farmers
 - Voluntary Agricultural District Farmers
 - Groups and Individuals with Farm or Forest Transition Plans
 - Groups and Individuals with Conservation Plans
 - Groups and Individuals with Forest Management Plans
 - Limited Resource Farmers
 - Beginning Farmers
 - Century Farm Members
 - Projects with emphasis on job creation
 - Properties that are in agricultural use and are of military importance

- **Grant Amount Requests**
 - The maximum grant will be based on the potential beneficial impact of the project, the resources available to the Advisory Committee, and the needs of the project or the groups intended to be served by the grant programs.
 - Conservation Easement applications may include grant requests for the purchase of the easement and other allowable costs. However, conservation easement grant requests for the purchase of the easement may not exceed 50 percent of the easement purchase value.
 - It is recommended that applicants follow a “50/25/25 Funding Model” for conservation easement grant requests.
 - The recommended funding model is as follows: 50% Partnership Funding (Federal, Local, and/or Nonprofit), 25% ADFP Trust Fund Grant, 25% Landowner Donation.
 - If the grant request only has an ADFP Trust Fund grant request, it is recommended that there is a 50% landowner donation or greater.
 - County Farmland Protection Plans are limited to \$15,000 per county and must be accompanied with a letter of request from the County’s Board of Commissioners and/or County Manager in support and plans to implement when completed.
 - Agricultural Development grant requests shall be restricted to:
 - agricultural value-added projects
 - permanent agricultural job creation

- Agricultural Plan grants are limited to the development and adoption of a county Voluntary Agricultural District, Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District, County Farmland Protection Plans, or Cost of Community Services Studies.
 - Agricultural Development grants are restricted to public or private enterprise programs that will promote profitable and sustainable farms by assisting in developing and implementing plans for the production of food, fiber, and value-added products, agritourism activities, marketing and sales of agricultural products produced on the farm, and other agriculture-related business activities.

- **Match Requirements**
 - Documentation of match will be required in the reporting process.
 - For ADFP Trust Fund general appropriations grants:
 - Non-profit conservation organizations must match a minimum of **30%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - A Tier Two or Tier Three Enterprise County (as defined in G.S. 143B-437.08)
 - **With** a NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), must match a minimum of **15%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. (G.S. 106-744(c2)) These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - **Without** a NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), must match a minimum of **30%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. (G.S. 106-744(c2)) These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - A Tier One Enterprise County (as defined in G.S. 143B-437.08)
 - **With** a NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), is **not required** to acquire matching funds. (G.S. 106-744(c2))
 - **Without** a NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), must match a minimum of **30%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. (G.S. 106-744(c2)) These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - Note: List of tiers is available on the application website.
 - For military-designated conservation easement or agreement grant requests:
 - Preference will be given to grant requests that meet or exceed a 1-to-1 match ratio to state funds. This may include federal, local, nonprofits, and/or private landowner donations.

- **Allowable Costs**
 - ADFP Trust Fund monies may not be used to reimburse for administrative or personnel costs unless specialized services are needed. Approval of necessary specialized services will be determined by ADFP Trust Fund staff when reviewing application.
 - Travel – Use State Guidelines
 - No travel is approved for Easements; however it can be used as match.
 - Plans and Projects are allowed travel.
 - ADFP approved Subcontract Expenditures.
 - Allowable and non-allowable costs for reimbursements:

Allowable Costs	Non-allowable Costs
Equipment (Exceeding \$5,000)	Travel (for easements grants only)
Consultant and Specialized Services	Personnel/Administrative Services
Office Supplies	Promotional Materials (unallowable costs include gifts, memorabilia, models, and souvenirs)
Printing and Binding	Appraisal
Promotional Materials (<i>see exceptions listed in Non-allowable costs</i>)	
Site Development (Plans & Land Preparation)	
Construction	
Special Program Supplies (Less than \$5,000)	
Survey	
Baseline Documentation Report	
Environmental Assessment/Audit	
Legal Fees	
Closing Costs	
Stewardship endowment (Funding is limited to 3% of the appraised easement value being purchased by the ADFP Trust Fund and must be equally matched.)	
Workshops and Conferences	

★ For Match Purposes Only: All reimbursement for travel, meals, rentals including meeting facilities, etc. for agricultural development related expenditures shall follow the State of North Carolina reimbursement guidelines. Prudence must be demonstrated by grantee for reimbursement to be granted. (See NC Budget Manual at http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/files/pdf_files/BudgetManual.pdf)

▪ **Number of Proposals Allowed**

- Non-military proposals:
 - Each organization or agency may submit up to six (6) proposals per funding cycle which shall be restricted to two (2) perpetual easements, two (2) term easements, and two (2) agricultural development projects/agricultural plans.
- Military proposals:
 - Each organization or agency may submit up to six (6) proposals per funding cycle which may be either perpetual easements, term easements or agricultural contractual agreements for the purpose of acquiring buffers for military training.

▪ **Incomplete Applications**

- All information requested in the application is required. Incomplete applications may be considered ineligible for funding.

▪ **Evaluation of Applications**

- The ADFP Trust Fund staff evaluates each application. The evaluation includes a review of the application and all the documents submitted with it. On-site visits and interviews will be conducted for all eligible applications.

- **Selecting Recipients**
 - The Commissioner of Agriculture in consultation with the ADFP Trust Fund Advisory Committee selects the applicants who will receive an ADFP Trust Fund grant.
- **ADFP Trust Fund on the Web**
 - The ADFP Trust Fund application is to be completed online. Application form link, materials, and additional information are available at www.ncadfp.org.
- **Funding Period**
 - All general appropriations grants during the funding cycle will have an expiration date of September 30, 2019.
 - Any extension requests for a grant must be received 60 days prior the contract expiration date to be eligible for an extension.
- **Questions about Filling Out the Application**
 - If you have questions about filling out this application, please contact the ADFP Trust Fund office by email at evan.davis@ncagr.gov or by phone at 919-707-3072.
- **Application Deadline**
 - **Applications must be submitted online no later than 5:00 PM on December 16, 2016.**

▪ **Definitions**

- **Agricultural Conservation Agreement:** A conservation agreement is a binding contract between a property owner and a qualified organization that accomplishes the same restriction with regard to the use of the land as a conservation easement through contractual terms. A memorandum of agreement is recorded in the public records as notice to the public that the agreement exists.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement:** A negative easement in gross restricting residential, commercial, and industrial development of land for the purpose of maintaining its agricultural production capability (G.S. 106-744(b)).
- **Beginning Farmer:** A farmer who has not operated a farm or who has operated a farm for not more than 10 years and who will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm.
- **Buffers (military):** Lands around the installation that serve the interests of the US Armed Services in a manner to eliminate or minimize encroachment to and provide a protective buffer zone for the installation, its mission and operations. This includes Military Training Routes (MTR).
- **Countywide Farmland Protection Plan:** A plan that satisfies all of the following requirements:
 - (1) The countywide farmland protection plan shall contain a list and description of existing agricultural activity in the county.
 - (2) The countywide farmland protection plan shall contain a list of existing challenges to continued family farming in the county.
 - (3) The countywide farmland protection plan shall contain a list of opportunities for maintaining or enhancing small, family-owned farms and the local agricultural economy.
 - (4) The countywide farmland protection plan shall describe how the county plans to maintain a viable agricultural community and shall address farmland preservation tools, such as agricultural economic development, including farm diversification and marketing assistance; other kinds of agricultural technical assistance, such as farm infrastructure financing, farmland purchasing, linking with younger farmers, and estate planning; the desirability and feasibility of donating agricultural conservation easements, and entering into voluntary agricultural districts.
 - (5) The countywide farmland protection plan shall contain a schedule for implementing the plan and an identification of possible funding sources for the long-term support of the plan. (G.S. 106-744(e))
- **Limited Resource Farmer:** A farmer with direct and indirect annual gross farm sales that do not exceed one hundred fifty five thousand two hundred dollars (\$155,200) in each of the previous two years and with an adjusted household income in each of the previous two years that is at or below the greater of the county median household income, as determined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, or two times the national poverty level based on the federal poverty guidelines established by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and revised each April 1.
- **Option to Purchase an ADFP Agricultural Easement:** A written and notarized agreement of understanding between the landowner and the request for proposal applicant to place a conservation easement on a defined land parcel(s).
- **Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD):** Farmland as defined voluntary agricultural district or an enhanced voluntary agricultural district as noted under Article 61 of Chapter 106 of the North Carolina General Statutes.

For additional resources, go to <http://www.ncadfp.org>.