



Contracted Work: Soil Health Project Evaluation

Request For Proposals

Contents

Contracted Work: Soil Health Project Evaluation	1
Request For Proposals	1
About FFAR	3
About the Project	3
Scope of Evaluation	4
Evaluation Timeline & Products	5
Proposal Guidelines	5

About FFAR

The [Foundation for Food & Agriculture](#)'s (FFAR) mission is to build collaborative partnerships to support audacious science addressing today's food and agriculture challenges. To do so, FFAR has built a research investment model to fill critical knowledge gaps, develop solutions previously deemed impossible and prepare today's scientific workforce to address the food and agriculture challenges of tomorrow. FFAR's work requires significant collaboration across the food and agriculture system to foster multidisciplinary expertise, input from stakeholders and support from a range of funding partners. FFAR's convening capabilities and agile approach leverage public funds by building public-private partnerships — resulting in an average of \$1.4 in match to every \$1 of FFAR funding.

About the Project

The project under evaluation is *Assessing and Expanding Soil Health for Production, Economic and Environmental Benefits*. The four-year project aimed to establish a definitive soil health evaluation protocol for deployment on different geographic scales, based on quantitative relationships with productivity, economic and ecosystem service outcomes; by enhancing adoption through on-farm demonstrations at both site-specific and expanded scales; and by developing effective communication and outreach strategies to farmers, consultants, educators, government agencies and policy makers, thus promoting incentives and policies supporting all who have a stake in sustaining and enhancing soil health and the natural resources upon which we all depend. As a collaborative project, the Soil Health Institute, The Nature Conservancy and the Soil Health Partnership (SHP) leveraged their respective missions and capacities, including a collective \$11,581,661 contributed from other organizations that share interest in soil health. FFAR awarded \$10,442,268 to address the need.

Project Aims

1. Identify and develop widely applicable soil health measurements, standards, and a comprehensive evaluation program that relates soil health evaluation to quantified productivity, economic, and environmental outcomes.
2. Enhance the existing SHP farm network and sustain it; develop a hybridized targeting strategy and collaborative approach to expand on-farm soil health networks for data collection and outreach.

3. Expand adoption of soil health practices and metrics by improving markets for non-operator landowners and agricultural retailers and through well-informed policies and constituencies.

Scope of Evaluation

FFAR seeks to evaluate the success of the Soil Health Institute project, *Assessing and Expanding Soil Health for Production, Economic and Environmental Benefits*. The evaluator, in collaboration with FFAR, will define criteria and standards of success. It is important for the evaluator to capture how project outputs have influenced the agriculture value chain and/or informed policy development.

We envision a summative program evaluation to **assess outcomes and impacts** (as defined in FFAR Program Evaluation FAQs). Through the evaluation we hope to better understand if the project aims were met, and how project deliverables are being used to date. We foresee the evaluator using a mixed methods approach, which includes qualitative analyses (such as surveys, interviews and focus groups) and quantitative analyses (including to the extent possible evaluating the most cost-effective outputs from funded research).

FFAR Will Provide

- Contact information for grantees and project partners
- Contact information for relevant FFAR staff
- High-level budget information
- Annual and final reports submitted by grantee

Other necessary data will be collected by the evaluator.

Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent did the project generate soil health measurements and standards?
2. To what extent did the project develop a comprehensive evaluation program that relates soil health evaluation to quantified productivity, economic and environmental outcomes?
3. To what extent was the SHP farm network enhanced (including engagement of non-operator landowners and agricultural retailers) and sustained during and beyond the project?
4. To what extent has on-farm soil health data collection increased?

5. To what extent have markets for non-operator landowners and agricultural retailers been improved?
6. To what extent have project-specific soil health practices and metrics been adopted?

Evaluation Timeline & Products

Expected Products & Deliverables

1. Standalone external-facing executive summary of findings
2. Slide deck presentation of high-level findings
3. Final report describing the evaluation background, methodology, findings including data visualization, interpretations of findings, conclusion and relevant references
4. Stakeholder feedback report that includes interview transcripts and summarized findings
5. Recommendations as applicable

Estimated Project Timeline

- Anticipated contract execution date: Friday, December 13, 2024
- Define criteria and standards of success completed: Friday, January 10, 2024
- Draft final report: Friday, May 30, 2025
- Final report and all deliverables: Friday, June 13, 2025

Proposal Guidelines

All proposals must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. PT, Friday, November 15, 2024. Proposals should be submitted as a Portable Document Format (PDF) via email to cgambino@foundationfar.org with the subject line "Soil Health Project Evaluation Proposal".

FFAR welcomes applications from individuals or teams with experience in soil health and soil microbiology and any of the following expertise to apply:

- Plant health
- Econometrics
- Evaluative methods

If beneficial to the success of the evaluation process, FFAR may match one or more individuals into a team.

Proposal Process Timeline

- Submission deadline: 5:00 p.m. PT, Friday, November 15, 2024
- Finalist presentations and panel discussions: Thursday, November 21 and Friday, November 22, 2024
- Client reference checks: Monday, December 2 and Tuesday, December 3, 2024

Proposals Should Contain the Following Sections

1. Applicant background/overview (1 page maximum), including an indication of relevant expertise
2. Previous experience(s) of research program evaluation work with a similar or related scope (2 pages maximum)
3. Description approach and evaluation plan (5 pages maximum)
 - a. Including relevant indicators to assess proposed evaluation questions
4. Project budget and budget justification (this evaluation does not require matching funds)
5. Evaluation timeline
6. Project key personnel including roles and responsibilities
7. Team members' CVs
8. Links to deliverables from past evaluation projects of a similar scope
9. Client references (at least two)

Finalist Presentation Preparation

FFAR will hold a 60-minute meeting (20-minute applicant presentation and 40-minute panel interview) with finalists via video conference. The presentation should highlight the applicant's approach, including the criteria and standards they envision being used to measure the success of the Soil Health project as a whole. Additionally, the presentation should include a brief explanation of methods, followed by a showcase of how collected data may be visualized.

The panel discussion may be used to clarify the methods used for collection and analysis of data. Additionally, the panel may inquire about past projects and previous client relations to ensure the applicant and FFAR are a good fit.