Understanding Impact of Hub Farm Resources in Expanding Adoption of Regenerative Agriculture Practices

Match is optional but encouraged for this funding opportunity

Key Dates

Full Application Open: November 20, 2024 at 12 PM ET

Full Applications Due: February 5, 2024 by 5 PM ET

Award Notification: Spring 2025

Anticipated Project Start Date: 2025

The Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) and Danone US, LLC (Danone) announce a Request for Application (RFA) focused on increased understanding of factors that impact adoption of Regenerative Agriculture Practices by using a Hub Farm Model.

To scale regenerative agriculture (RA) practices (e.g., reduced tillage, cover crops, diverse crop rotations) we need innovative solutions that farmers can easily access and use. Danone intends to expand the development of a pilot project focused on leveraging one or more Hub Farms which would own, manage, and store farm infrastructure, such as cover crop equipment, provide labor to operate, and supply cover crop seed and agronomic knowledge to middle adopters that do not typically have access to these types of resources. This pilot hub farm project will be based in Indiana and New York and involve farm sizes from small to large. These include producers that may identify as Mennonite or Amish.

This RFA will aim to fund one or more complementary studies to increase understanding of factors that impact adoption of Regenerative Agriculture Practices using Danone's pilot Hub Farm Model. There is a need for more knowledge around farmer and operator decisions to gain insight on how a program of this nature can be applied, maintained, and scaled across different crop systems and regions. The study may include drivers for hub farms to implement this type of program and influencing factors of farmer participation and adoption that could lead to farmers implementing these types of systems on their own farm and scale the Hub Farm concept.

Program Priorities and Requirements:

The work funded through this RFA will support socio-economic focused research that will lead to a successful, sustainable, scalable, and replicable initiative. A successful application may include drivers for hub farms to implement this type of program and influencing factors of farmer participation and adoption. Successful proposals will also provide project analysis and an innovation dissemination and communication plan to leverage learning and achieve widespread impact. This includes establishing clear metrics for success, identifying potential barriers to adoption, and outlining strategies to overcome these challenges to ensure the benefits reach the intended audience effectively.

This funding opportunity seeks projects that will support socio-economic research on both large and small dairy farms and will aim to (1) promote replication across the farm environments and (2) lead middle adopters to increase and maintain cover crop acres and facilitate the acquisition of appropriate equipment and infrastructure to scale RA practices. Such activities aim to stimulate more resource sharing opportunities for new/middle adopters of RA practices.

The project should also contribute to the goal of sustainable food and agriculture, defined as practices that "satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends; make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; sustain the economic viability of farm operation; and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole." (Food and Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990, Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1603).

1. Fit within [FFAR's Priority Areas](#).

   - Cultivating Thriving Production Systems: supports research that equips producers with information and tools to manage their enterprises efficiently and profitably, including animal and crop management practices.

   - Sustaining Vibrant Agroecosystems: supports research that provides tools, technologies and integrative models at scales that allow producers to build and maintain healthy, productive agroecosystems under a changing climate.

   - Bolstering Healthy Food Systems: supports research that provides food processors, distributors and retailers with the information and technology needed to create efficient and sustainable supply chains that deliver nutritious food to consumers.

2. Increase understanding of factors that impact adoption of Regenerative Agriculture Practices: To foster broader adoption of regenerative agriculture practices, it is crucial to deepen our understanding of the social and economic factors that influence this shift. By identifying and harnessing these key drivers, we can develop targeted strategies to engage both middle and late adopters, thereby accelerating the transition towards a more sustainable and regenerative agricultural system. Fully integrated partnerships with different sectors are imperative so that

research outcomes may be scalable and applicable to food and agriculture systems. The proposed research program should clearly be expected to benefit the U.S. food and agriculture system.

3. Promote replication across different farm environments.

4. Uphold Danone and FFAR's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by seeking unique perspectives through participatory stakeholder engagement and developing results to serve the diverse stakeholders committed to addressing challenges related to food supply and agricultural sustainability. At Danone, inclusive diversity is a key level to drive the food revolution, where food and drink choices are driven by local culture, personal needs and choices.

Eligibility

Any individual(s) with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to conduct the proposed research as Program Director(s)/Principal Investigator(s) may apply to the RFA through their home institution or organization.

The Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research welcomes applications from all domestic and international higher education institutions, non-profit and for-profit organizations, and U.S. government-affiliated research agencies. The following principles guide FFAR's international engagement under this RFA:

- The proposal must identify a clear benefit to the U.S. food and agriculture system and a clear pathway to deploy the technology or solution in the U.S.

- FFAR will prioritize research that delivers broader benefits across geographies and production systems while ensuring mutual benefit for the U.S. and other nations.

FFAR will not support research that addresses a challenge primarily limited to another country or region outside the U.S. or where the technology or solution is not broadly relevant to the U.S.

Proposed projects that also demonstrate the following characteristics will receive preference:

1. Experience working with both small and large dairy producers

2. Experience working in the East and Midwest regions of the United States

3. Experience collaborating with communities that identify as Mennonite or Amish

Funding Availability and Award Information

Up to two awards between $225,000 and $450,000 will be granted under this funding opportunity. The performance period for completing the proposed work will be two years.

Matching funds are optional but encouraged for this funding opportunity. The funded applicant will receive annual disbursements contingent upon meeting reporting requirements (see Post Award Management below).

A budget justification is required for this funding opportunity. Applicants are encouraged to contact FFAR's Grant Team to discuss any questions or concerns.

- If matching funds are included in your project, matching funds must come from a non-U.S. Federal Government entity. Matching funds cannot supplement or supplant preexisting funds for projects initiated before or during 2024. Matching funds must correspond to project costs in the budget justification.

A maximum of 10% of the total award may be used for indirect costs. FFAR's indirect cost allotment is not an indirect cost rate applied to the total modified direct costs; instead, it is an overall allotment from the Total Funds Request, also known as the Total Project Costs. This requirement means at least 90% of the total funds requested must go directly to the proposed research.

Application Components

As previously noted, all applicants must submit their proposals through FFAR's online Grant Management System.

Full Application Components

Required Components

- Organization information
- Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) information
- Grant Administrator information
- Press Contact Information
- Governmental/Legislative Contact information
- Principal Investigator information
- Key project personnel – name(s), contact, affiliation, expertise
- Project title (*up to 250 characters*)
- Key Topics
- Project timeline
- Locations of performance
- Project Abstract (*up to 500 words*)
- Goals and objectives (*up to 500 words*)
- Project milestones by year, linked to objectives (*up to 500 words per year*)
- Project description and approach (*up to 2,500 words*)
  - What challenge or existing paradigm is the project addressing? What are the underlying research hypotheses?
  - How will the project address the stated challenge and advance understanding of an understudied research topic or information gap?
  - What innovative outcomes will the project generate? How will the project solve challenges to food supply or sustainable agriculture?
  - How does the project contribute to addressing inequities?
- Anticipated outcomes or outputs (*up to 500 words*)

- Plans for stakeholder engagement (*up to 500 words*)
- Data management plan (*up to 250 words*)
- Barriers to adoption of the research outcome(s) (*Note: FFAR strongly encourages applicants to address social and economic factors in the project design, evaluation processes, and outcomes, where applicable.*) (*up to 500 words*)
- Project Suitability: Why is FFAR ideally positioned to fund this project? (*up to 250 words*)
- Project funding overlap
- Proposed budget
  - Key Personnel – name(s), affiliation, role
  - Total FFAR funding request
  - If applicable, total matching funds (*at least 50% of match must be cash per [FFAR matching guidelines](#)*)
  - Total proposed budget (*FFAR funds + optional matching funds*)
  - Budget narrative: For each research objective, provide a brief overview of the underlying tasks, their expected timeframes for completion and the associated estimated budget. The budget outline should parallel the approach outlined in the project's description and the budget worksheet. Address costs related to personnel, equipment, and facilities, and analytics (*up to 500 words*)
  - Budget justification by year (*up to 500 words*)
  - Subawards (*if applicable*)
- Matching funder information (*if applicable*)
- Organizational Assurances
- **Required Attachments:** Failure to provide these attachments will result in the application's disqualification.
  - [Budget Form](#)
  - [P.I. and Key Personnel Biosketch](#): five-page limit per individual listed as P.I. or key personnel in the project
  - [Current and Pending Support](#)
  - Project timeline (*by year*)
- **Optional Attachments:** Applicants can upload any of the following as a single PDF document.
  - Matching Fund Verification Letter(s)
  - Additional Key Personnel
  - Five (5)-slide summary or description of the project
  - Letters of Support: Applicants can provide letters of support for the proposed project, especially from matching funders.
  - Graphics, Figures, Equations, and Tables not included in the Project Description: Applicants may upload a PDF document with graphics, figures, tables, or a list of equations to support the research program plan. **Five-page limit.**

Applications that demonstrate strong partnerships from external sources outside the applicant institutions are encouraged. These partners may include but are not limited to the private sector, non-profits, commodity and trade groups, state governments, and others that do not traditionally work in agriculture.

How to Apply

All proposals must be submitted by the deadline date through FFAR's online application Grant Management System, BBGM. Applications submitted outside of BBGM will not be considered. To start a new application, please click here. If you are a new user, register for an account by clicking "Create Account" button located under the email address field on the left side of the home page. Once you log in, you may begin working on your application. Please be sure to save your work often by clicking on "Save and Finish Later." To access a saved application, please do so through your Grant Management Account.

Only full proposals submitted by the deadline through FFAR's Grant Management System will be accepted and considered eligible for evaluation. To be fair to all our applicants, FFAR will not grant extensions to applicants who missed the deadlines posted in the Key Dates section.

Evaluation Criteria

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness, and compliance with FFAR policies. These include the following:

Novelty, Innovation, and Originality (20%)

- Does the proposed project demonstrate an innovative approach to innovation and scale?
- Does the proposal address an existing paradigm(s) in food and agriculture science?

Technical Merit and Feasibility (25%)

- Does the proposal clearly outline the goals, objectives, and a workplan to evaluate explicitly stated hypotheses?
- Does the proposal include appropriately thorough and feasible methods?
- Does the proposal present a tractable timeline and budget?
- Does the proposal include adequate risk evaluation and a mitigation plan?
- Does the proposal include an adequate data management plan with a commitment to public access?
- Is the research team qualified and have access to the appropriate field and laboratory facilities?

Impacts and Outcomes (35%)

- Does the proposal accurately include a comprehensive communication and dissemination plan which includes but is not limited to a process to measure, report and verify results of the proposed work, both internally and externally?
- Does the proposal provide a discussion on how this information can be shared with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, specifically producers and private sector partners?
- Does the proposal provide a clear discussion of what this work would lead to or address scale?
- Does the proposal adequately describe its potential, significant impact, and applied relevance to U.S food and agriculture systems, with far-reaching, global impacts?
- Will the investigators be able to apply their results beyond the study location and domain?
- Does the proposal present a plan for disseminating the project outcomes?

- Will results have relevance and reach underrepresented and diverse communities?

Dissemination and Scale (10%)

- Will the project provide training and support accessibility to a diversity of emerging scientists?
- Does the proposal identify how FFAR is uniquely positioned to fund this project?
- Does the proposal align with FFAR's Priority Areas?

Partnerships (10%)

- Does the project present a compelling and novel partnership opportunity?
- Does the proposal include adequate confirmation of partner commitment(s)?
- Does the proposal provide adequate discussion of experience/evidence in working with identified target communities/regions.

Award Administration

Review Process

Full Application Review: Full proposals undergo a two-stage peer-review process. First, each submission is assigned to an external review panel of at least three subject experts. In the second stage, external experts serving on the Selection committee will provide funding recommendations based on the initial peer reviews and a comparative evaluation of how well submissions meet the program objectives.

All external reviewers must agree and adhere to the terms outlined in FFAR's Conflict of Interest Policy and Non-Disclosure Agreement. FFAR makes reasonable efforts to ensure that applications are not assigned to reviewers with a real or apparent conflict with the applicant, institution, or project personnel. Reviewers with a conflict of interest are recused from evaluating or participating in related discussions. Each stage of the review is conducted confidentially, and as such, FFAR is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of the contents of the applications.

Award Administration

Selection Notice: Following the full application review process, the Principal Investigator/Program Director, and the authorized organization representative (AOR) listed on the project will be officially notified by email of the status of the application. If an application is selected for funding, FFAR reserves the right to request additional or clarifying information for any reason deemed necessary. Potential grantees are free to accept or reject the Grant Agreement as offered.

Intent to Fund Notification: FFAR notifies applicants of their awards by email. The notice does not constitute an award or obligatory funding from FFAR until there is a fully executed Grant Agreement. FFAR encourages applicants to review a sample Grant Agreement before applying to ensure they know the terms under which grants are offered.

Requirement to Demonstrate Matching Funds: **Matching funds are optional but encouraged for this funding opportunity.** If the applicant provides matching funds, the applicant agrees to identify and certify matching funds annually before disbursement of award funds. The match share is intended to supplement, not supplant existing funding for the principal investigator (PI). The applicant will abide by

FFAR's [Matching Funds Guidelines](#) to meet FFAR's matching requirements. To constitute a valid match, all matching funds on a FFAR grant must be expended during the grant period.

Post-Award Management

Annual Reporting Requirements: The grantee must provide annual scientific and financial update progress reports. The annual reports should include activities performed with award funding, highlighting project accomplishments.

Final Report Requirements: Within 90 days of completing the project, the grantee shall provide a final project report. This report should address the project objectives outlined in the original grant application, describe any modifications to the project objectives and scope, outline the final project accomplishments, and include a final project accounting of all grant funds.

Scientific Integrity: FFAR strives to advance knowledge and the application of science to address challenges related to food supply and sustainable agriculture. FFAR's ability to pursue its mission depends on the integrity of the funded science projects and programs. All FFAR grants must be conducted with the highest standards of scientific integrity.

Contact Information

For questions related to the online submission system, please contact FFAR's Grant Management team at grants@foundationfar.org.

For all other questions related to the funding opportunity, please contact Scientific Program Director LaKisha Odom at lodom@foundationfar.org.

FFFAR strives to respond to inquiries within two business days, but our response time depends on the volume of questions received and the complexity of the questions asked. Please note that we do not monitor mailboxes on evenings, weekends, or federal holidays.