



Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education 2025 Graduate Student Grant Call for Proposals

Amount Funded: Up to \$22,000 for a two-year project
Proposal submission deadline: May 16, 2025 at 12 p.m. (NOON) EST
[Online submission link](#)

Read more about the requirements for [Graduate Student Grants](#) before applying. Questions should be directed to the grant manager, Candace Pollock-Moore at southern-gs@sare.org or call 770-412-4786.

Graduate Student Grant Schedule

February 2025: Calls for Proposals Released
May 16, 2025: Proposals Due
August 2025: Selected Proposals Funded and Announced

Introduction

Southern SARE recognizes the value and importance of sustainable agriculture research contributions from graduate students as they pursue their professional careers. Graduate Student Grants allow Master's and PhD students at accredited institutions across the Southern region to conduct research projects on a wide variety of sustainable agriculture production, marketing and social science topics.

Who Can Apply

Master's and PhD students enrolled full-time at accredited institutions in the Southern region at the time of proposal submission are eligible to apply for Graduate Student Grants. International students are welcome to apply as long as they are enrolled full-time at an institution in the Southern region. Institutions can be from within the land-grant system (1862 or 1890 universities), or other colleges and universities outside of the land-grant system. A graduate student may receive only one Graduate Student Grant during a Master's program, and only one Graduate Student Grant during a PhD program. The grant can only be used by the student who submitted the proposal. If the student leaves

the institution or graduates from the degree program prior to completing the grant project, another graduate student must be selected to the grant project with SSARE approval.

Southern SARE accepts proposals from applicants in the Southern region: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

What is Sustainable Agriculture?

Proposed projects must focus on developing sustainable agriculture systems or moving existing farming systems toward sustainability, as [defined by the Congress](#) in the 1990 Farm Bill. Under that law, “the term sustainable agriculture means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- 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 operations; and
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.”

Graduate students can use the following focus areas as topic guidelines for submitting proposals, but are not limited to this list for their research ideas. Projects related to climate and/or bioenergy work should provide direct or indirect benefits to farmers, ranchers and private foresters.

1. **Beneficial Insect Habitat:** Developing cover crops or other plant mixes and locations to provide habitat (refuges) that keep populations of native beneficial insects living on the farm ready to attack crop pests as they occur.
2. **Alternative Crops/Animals:** Developing alternative crops, animals or products that help a producer’s operation become more economically sustainable. These projects must be at least as environmentally sustainable as the existing crops, animals or products they supplement or replace.
3. **Organic Agriculture:** Projects that address the production, distribution, marketing and consumption of organic farm products. This includes farmers adding value to organic products, and research into farming systems and practices that make use of on-farm biological cycles for soil, plant and pest management are accepted.
4. **Sustainable Agriculture Marketing Projects:** Developing markets for existing or alternative crops, animals or products.
5. **Sustainable Grazing Systems:** Use of native grass species and/or plant or animal management systems to make grazing systems more sustainable.

6. **Soil Organic Matter Building/Protection/Management:** Projects that increase the sustainability of farming systems by developing soil organic matter and soil biota.
7. **Natural Resources/Conservation/Water Quality:** Projects that increase the sustainability of farming systems using methods that support natural resources, enhance environmental conservation or improve water quality.
8. **Increasing Sustainability of Existing Farming Practices:** Any practice or system that increases the sustainability of an existing farming practice. The results should be able to be used by other farmers.
9. **Appropriate Technology:** Projects that support agricultural technology, or develop a device or piece of machinery that promotes sustainable agriculture and can't be purchased off the shelf. The device or machinery must have application for farmers/ranchers, be able to be built by them and enable them to operate more sustainably.
10. **Agroforestry:** Projects that demonstrate and quantify the feasibility of establishing agroforestry in the region.
11. **Socio-economic/Community:** Projects pertaining to impacts of sustainable agriculture in rural and urban communities in the social sciences realm. This can include topics from such disciplines as economics, sociology, anthropology, geography, history, philosophy, political science, and psychology.

Preparing Your Proposal

Refer to the following template when preparing your proposal. The information provided here is required for submitting your proposal online. When you are ready to submit your proposal, apply in the [SARE Grant Management System](#). **Be sure to submit your proposal prior to the application deadline. Once the May 16, 2025 deadline passes, the online system will close and late proposals will not be accepted.**

A. Basic Information

Project Title

The title of the proposed project.

Funding Amount Requested

Indicate the funding amount requested. Maximum funding is \$22,000.

Major Professor (Principal Investigator)

List the major professor as the principal investigator, the lead institution/organization, full address, telephone, and e-mail. Graduate students cannot be PIs on the project. The institution/organization the Major Professor (PI) is associated with is considered the leading institution and will receive the grant funding.

Graduate Student

List the graduate student, lead institution/organization name, full address, telephone, and e-mail.

Major Professor and Graduate Student Experience and Roles

Briefly describe the experience relative to the project and the role in the project for the major professor and graduate student. Limited to 500 words.

Institutional Administrative Contact

List the name of the administrative contact, including institution name, full address, telephone, and e-mail. The administrative contact is the person who handles grant contracts and has signature authority.

Institutional Financial Contact

List the name of the financial contact, including institution name, full address, telephone, and e-mail. The financial contact is the person who submits invoices and answers questions concerning invoicing and payments.

Type of Institution

Indicate the type of the main institution applying for the grant. This can include 1862 land-grant university, 1890 land-grant university, other college/university, or government.

State

Indicate the state where the research will be conducted.

Project Start Date

The project start date for the SSARE 2025 Graduate Student Grant will be September 1, 2025. This date is firm.

Project End Date

Project duration is limited to two years. The ending date would be 08/31/2027.

B. Proposal

Project Abstract

Provide a brief abstract or project summary. Limited to 250 words.

Statement of Problem

Provide a statement of the problem being addressed and how it is related to, or affects, the sustainability of agriculture. Discuss your rationale and justification for the proposed objectives. Begin the statement of the problem as: **“The purpose of this project is to...”**
Limited to 500 words.

Objectives

A list of concise project objectives, limited to no more than 500 words.

Project Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture

You must demonstrate how your project is relevant to sustainable agriculture. State how the project and the expected results contribute to agricultural sustainability. Don't simply tell us that your project addresses an element of sustainable agriculture, tell us how your project will address it and make it more sustainable. Make sure that your work, even though it is making a part of a system more sustainable, does not make the whole system or another part of it, less sustainable. Does your project use genetically engineered varieties or organisms? If so, state how their use will contribute to your project and make agriculture more sustainable.

Limited to 1,000 words.

Approach and Methods

Provide a brief description of the methods, demonstrating how your solution works in addressing the statement of the problem. What is the methodology? There must be a direct relationship between the approach and methods and the project relevance to sustainable agriculture. Limited to 1,000 words.

Timetable

Provide a timetable of the work to be completed. Limited to 500 words.

Literature Cited

List cited literature that supports the justification of the research project being proposed. Limited to 500 words.

C. Budget and Budget Narrative

Fill in a budget and provide a justification for each allowable item listed on the budget. **Refer to the budget checklist attached to this Call for Proposal.** SARE allows indirect costs. SARE does not require matching funds/cost-shares. Do not breakout your budget by year.

Allowable Expenses

- Materials and supplies needed for the project, including software. The materials and supplies must remain within the scope of the project and be a reasonable request relative to the research being conducted.
- Costs of sampling and data analysis, either in the lab or in the field.
- The purchase of equipment. Any equipment obtained becomes the property of the university that funded the graduate student grant.
- The rental of equipment or operating charges.
- Temporary irrigation and electric fences.
- Livestock or bees, only if the university does not already have animals available for use. Becomes the property of the university at project end.
- Graduate Student Labor. The graduate student may receive up to a maximum of **50 percent** of the project total (**includes salary and fringe benefits**). This is actual identifiable work on the project and NOT a general graduate stipend.
- General labor (such as an undergraduate student or lab technician). If general labor is required for the project, the budget for general labor is capped at **15 percent (includes salary and fringe benefits)** of the project total. This is actual identifiable work on the project and NOT a general stipend.
- Special texts not readily available.
- Travel and per diem necessary for the project. This can include outreach efforts.
- Food and refreshments. You must demonstrate that providing food or refreshments is necessary to effectively execute your grant project or provide educational continuation of the outreach efforts (Encouraging participation, fellowship or gathering as a justification does not meet the guidelines).
- Student travel to one conference (**not to exceed \$1,000 including registration**) to present his/her SARE-funded research.

Non-allowable Expenses

- Graduate student stipends, or any other funding the graduate student is receiving to fund their education.
- Preparation of thesis or dissertation copy.
- Publication costs associated with journal publications.
- Purchase of classroom books.
- Salary of the major professor or advisor listed as the PI on the project. The funds are intended to support the graduate student.
- Payment of tuition.
- Permanent capital improvements (such as land, buildings, purchase of permanent irrigation or fencing, greenhouses or high tunnels, or planting an orchard).
- Participant incentives (payment must be related to work performed on the project).
- Promotional items (pens with logos, t-shirts, tote bags, etc.)
- International travel.

- Breakfast. No breakfast is allowed on any grant in any capacity.

Indirect Costs

USDA-NIFA will allow recovery of indirect costs. Indirect costs under a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Education Grant is limited to 10 percent of Total Direct Costs (TDC) or the grantees' Federally Negotiated Rate, whichever is less.

Therefore, when preparing budgets, limit your request for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 10 percent of total direct costs awarded. The Indirect Cost of 10 percent Total Direct Costs (TDC) is the maximum allowable. Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable indirect cost is considered unallowable.

Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) Definition

If your institution or organization does not have a federally negotiated indirect rate agreement (NICRA), you may request a 10 percent de minimus indirect cost rate. The 10 percent de minimus rate is applied to modified total direct costs (MTDC). MTDC means total direct costs related to the award, such as labor, fringe benefits, materials and supplies, publications, consultant services and travel costs. MTDC excludes the following costs: equipment, capital expenditures, rental costs, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. Indirect costs cannot be charged on the excluded costs.

To determine MTDC:

Total Direct Cost Amount – (minus) Excluded Costs Amount = MTDC Amount

MTDC Amount X 10 percent de minimus rate = IDC Total

Organizations that do not have a NICRA in place may also waive indirect cost recovery and request only direct research costs. If this option is selected, the organization is required to include in the award budget only those types of costs consistently treated as direct research costs by the organization. If your organization is waiving indirect costs, this must be noted in the budget narrative.

The maximum amount allowed for funding a Graduate Student Grant, even if indirect costs are entered, is still \$22,000.

D. Signature Sheet

Before you submit your proposal as final, print a copy of the proposal signature sheet from the online system. It should be signed by both the Principal Investigator (Major Professor) and the Organizational Administrative Representative (a representative at your institution who has authority to sign contracts). After scanning your signed signature sheet, the system will allow you to upload it and submit it along with your proposal up to the proposal deadline. Signature sheets can be signed electronically. You may also send

in your signature sheet after the proposal deadline. After the proposal deadline, please send the signed signature sheet as an e-mail attachment to Tydaisha White at tydaisha.white@uga.edu Call Tydaisha White at 770-412-4787 with any questions regarding your signature sheet. **Graduate students do not sign the signature sheet.**

How Your Proposal Will Be Reviewed

All funding of Graduate Student Grants is awarded competitively and more proposals may be submitted than receive funding. Your proposal will be less competitive, or may not be funded at all, if it doesn't conform to the requirements in the Call for Proposal.

Proposals are first reviewed by a Technical Review Committee made up of university and government researchers, Cooperative Extension agents and specialists, and other agricultural professionals with a broad range of agricultural expertise.

The Technical Review Committee evaluates and scores proposals for technical merit and relevancy of the project to sustainable agriculture and Southern SARE criteria. The committee's evaluations are based on the following criteria:

- Contributing to and achieving the program goals of Southern SARE.
- Soundness of approaches and methods and the feasibility of obtaining the project goals by the methods stated.
- Appropriate time frame of the project proposed based on the stated methods and objectives.
- Appropriate, clear and realistic budget in relation to the research proposed.
- Qualifications of the applicant.

The Project Review Committee of the Southern SARE Administrative Council reviews proposals scored by the Technical Review Committee, and makes final project selections at the summer Administrative Council meeting. The selected projects for funding are presented to and voted on by the full Administrative Council during the summer Administrative Council meeting.

By late August, you will be contacted by e-mail regarding the status of your proposal, and review comments on your proposal will be made available to you. If awarded a Graduate Student Grant, your institution/organization will be asked to sign a contract prior to receiving any funds, at which time you may be asked to revise your budget. Once the contract is signed, you agree to conduct the activities outlined in your proposal. Any changes in budget or activities must receive prior approval from Southern SARE. The award funding will be paid through reimbursement of allowable project expenses.

Other Information

The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) at the National Agricultural Library specializes in locating, collecting, and providing information about sustainable agriculture. Information specialists can answer questions, highlight resources,

and share search techniques for literature reviews, background research, and identifying experts in the field and pertinent USDA researchers and projects. AFSIC has a number of resources on its website that may be relevant to your proposal. Contact: AFSIC, National Agriculture Library, USDA, 10301 Baltimore Ave., Beltsville MD 20705-2351, phone: [301-504-6559](tel:301-504-6559), fax: [301-504-6927](tel:301-504-6927), e-mail: afsic@nal.usda.gov, web: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/>.

If you are submitting a proposal on organic agriculture, you may want to consult the National Organic Standards Board [research priorities](#).

Published by the Southern Region of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. Funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Southern SARE operates under cooperative agreements with the University of Georgia, Fort Valley State University, and the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture to offer competitive grants to advance sustainable agriculture in America's Southern region. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.

**Required Budget Narrative Checklist for 2025 Graduate Student Grant
Proposals**
(form updated 01/2025)

****In the Budget Narrative, you must explain why each cost in the budget is needed to complete your Project. ****

PERSONNEL (LABOR): Your Institution Personnel

(non-employee payments are other direct costs)

- Position or Name
- Salary & basis for this salary (i.e. FTE; Hourly rate; etc.)
- Length of time expected to work
- What will they be doing?
***Secretarial / clerical** must be exceptional in nature and justified as it relates to the project.

FRINGE BENEFITS (if applicable)

- Provide Total allowable fringe benefits
Salary x % Rate = Benefits
NOTE: Graduate Student Labor (including salary and fringe benefits) cannot exceed 50 percent of the project total. General Labor (including salary and fringe benefits) cannot exceed 15 percent of the project total.

NON-EXPENDABLE EQUIPMENT

Equipment greater than or equal to \$5,000 and has a useful life of more than 1 year.

- Type / description
- List each Item and Cost
- Narrative on intended use in project
*Permanent capital expenditures (e.g. land, buildings, etc.) are NOT ALLOWED.

TRAVEL

All travel expenses associated with this request must be shown in budget narrative.

- How does this travel relate to your project goals/ activities (**required**)
- Destination – if known
- Mileage – Maximum rate is \$0.70/mi.
- Lodging - # of nights, # of people, Lodging cost
- Daily Per Diem-Rate for Meals; for current rate see: www.gsa.gov/perdiem
- ***International Travel is NOT ALLOWED***

MATERIALS & SUPPLIES

- State how each Material/Supply relates to the project.
- List Items and Cost
* **Items normally covered under F&A**, such as office supplies, must be justified as being required by the scope of the work, can be easily identified to your specific project, and are above and beyond what would normally be covered under F&A.

OUTREACH

- Field Days, Workshops, Educational Brochures, Fact Sheets and other outreach activities. **** No breakfast is allowed on any Grant. ****

Field Days & Workshops – includes costs of holding a field day or workshop. (e.g. Rental of facilities, cost of refreshments, equipment or supplies needed for the field day or workshop, and any other expenses associated with the preparation and execution of educational field days or workshops.) **Provide full details** in the budget narrative. Any purchases of food or refreshments must be itemized and justified in the budget, the cost must be reasonable, and the justification must explain the estimated cost per person and why these items are necessary for the project. **Also, must show expense is for the continuity of the meeting; that meeting will be held at a remote location; and includes non-UGA employee participants.**

MISCELLANEOUS ALL OTHER DIRECT COSTS

- Direct project charges not included in other categories. Description and cost must be included in budget narrative.

Some examples of direct charges include:

Communications – mailings, postage, faxes, telephone (*These items are also considered indirect costs and if placed in budget should be exceptional in nature and justified as it relates to the project*).

Service Maintenance – Maintenance contracts in direct correlation to use of equipment for the project (e.g. 50% use of equipment for project, 50% of service contract applied to budget costs).

Fee for Services -- A fee for services is the cost of professional services by nonemployees of the lead institution/organization required for a project that is beyond the scope of the work the grant recipient can perform or provide. Fee for services covers work that is needed for the project, but the professional performing the work or skill is not actually working on the project.

Examples of fee for services include: lab/data analysis, survey development, graphic design, videography/photography, transcription.

When listing fee for services in the budget narrative:

- Determine the cost of the service (per hour, flat rate, etc.);
- Provide the nature and scope of the service in relation to the project;
- Provide the qualifications of the individual/group rendering the service;
- Provide the fees charged by the individual/group for the service to be performed.

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TUITION

SARE PROGRAM - TUITION IS **NOT ALLOWED**

MATCHING FUNDS / COST SHARE

Are not required by SARE

***Note:** If you have concerns regarding budget placement of items please contact Denise Quick for assistance at 770-229-3420 or by email at denise.quick@uga.edu