



Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education 2025 Research and Education Grant Call for Pre-proposals

Maximum Amount Funded: \$400,000 for Research Grants
Pre-Proposal Submission Deadline: June 7, 2024 at 12 p.m. (noon) EST
Online Submission Link: [SARE Grant Management System](#)

Read more about the requirements for [Research and Education Grants](#) before applying.
Questions should be directed to Jeff Jordan or Sandra Blackwell at southern-re@sare.org

Research and Education Grant Schedule

March 2024: Call for Pre-proposals Released
June 7, 2024: Call for Pre-proposals Due
August 2024: Pre-proposals Invited to Submit Full Proposals
November 08, 2024: Full proposals due
February 2025: Full proposals awarded

Introduction

What is Sustainable Agriculture?

Southern SARE is requesting pre-proposals for **Systems Research Projects** that address issues of sustainable agriculture of current and potential importance to the region and the nation.

Maximum funding amount for Systems Research Projects is \$400,000. Pre-proposals with smaller funding requests are welcomed and encouraged.

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.

Proposed projects must focus on Southern SARE's [program objectives](#) in 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.”

Systems Research

Southern SARE seeks projects that explore a systems approach to sustainable agriculture. Systems research is based on the concept that a system is a function of its parts, or components, and that each component interacts, interconnects, interrelates, and in some cases influences each other. Interaction and dependency between system parts, in essence, add to the whole. From this perspective, breaking a system into components actually causes the researcher to lose some of what is under investigation. Researchers need to study systems intact. How much those parts and their interactions do or do not relate to agricultural sustainability is the question the researcher must answer.

Learn more about how Southern SARE [defines systems research](#). More information on systems research can be obtained from SARE’s [Systems Research for Agriculture](#) handbook – a guide that helps researchers navigate the complexities of multi-faceted systems projects.

Special Topic on Climate Change

SSARE encourages applications for the Research and Education program that focus on resilience to climate change. Projects that explore the social, economic, and environmental issues are encouraged, including climate mitigation strategies, interventions for farmers, ethical issues, consumer behavior, renewable energy, and branding.

Potential applicants should read the following USDA document for more details on climate-smart agriculture: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/climate-smart-ag-forestry-strategy-90-day-progress-report.pdf>

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 June 7, 2024 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.

Principal Investigator

Information requested consists of principal investigator name, lead institution name, full address, telephone, and e-mail. This person will be the main project PI listed on the proposal and the person the SSARE office will contact regarding this project. The institution/organization the PI is associated with is considered the leading institution and will receive the grant funding.

Principal Investigator Role

Detail the area of expertise and specific role of the principal investigator.

Early Career Professional

Southern SARE encourages and welcomes pre-proposals from early career professionals. Please indicate in the online application if you are an early career professional with five (5) years or less service.

Co-Principal Investigator(s) (if applicable)

Information requested consists of co-principal investigator name, lead institution name, full address, telephone, and e-mail. Detail the specific role of each co-principal investigator. No more than five (5) co-PIs may be listed.

PI and Co-PI CVs

Include a CV for the PI and for each Co-PI listed. The CV for the PI and the Co-PI(s) should be limited to 2 pages each in length. The CV should include a presentation of academic and research credentials, as applicable. Include a chronological list of publications in refereed journals during the past 4 years. List only non-refereed publications that have relevance to the proposed project.

Institutional Administrative Contact

The person who handles contracts and has authority to sign the contracts. Information requested consists of person's name, institution/organization name, full address, e-mail, and telephone.

Institutional Financial Contact

The person who submits invoices and answers questions concerning invoicing and payments. Information requested consists of person's name, institution/organization name, full address, e-mail and telephone.

Cooperating Institution(s) Receiving Funding

Listing of cooperating institutions receiving funding. If an individual or institution is not receiving any project funding, they should not be listed in this section.

Other Cooperating Institution(s) Not Receiving Funding

Listing of cooperating institutions that you would like to recognize as participants in your project proposal, but are NOT receiving any project funding.

Cooperating Farmers

You must list at least three (3) cooperating farmers in the project.

The primary farmer occupation is farming/ranching or part-time farming. Producers run their farm alone or with family or partners and have a least \$1,000 of documented annual income from the operation, as [defined by USDA](#). SSARE also considers proposals with indigenous farmer cooperators who produce for community food systems. These enterprises may be an eligible farmer cooperator where the production activity has an annual value of at least \$1,000, even if products are not sold due to cultural factors.

Each farmer listed must have a unique and detailed role. A proposal with a list of farmers all with the same role will not be nearly as competitive as one where each farmer is on the list due to their unique contribution to the project. Clearly identify the level of involvement of each producer at all stages – from inception to completion of the project. For each activity, indicate who will be responsible, and which partners are involved.

Farmers listed will be automatically contacted by SSARE by email when you submit your proposal. Your submission will trigger an automatic email from the SARE Grant Management System. Sometimes these emails will land in the junk/spam folder. Be sure to have farmers check their junk/spam folder if they have not received an email notification.

They will be asked to confirm their role in your project and that they agree to be involved in your project. They will have until seven (7) days past the proposal submission deadline to do so. You will receive an email copy of their confirmation. The deadline for them to respond is **FIRM**. **If they don't respond in time, your proposal will show that although you listed them, they did not agree to participate and your proposal will be disqualified. Be mindful when inputting the email addresses of your farmers. Any invalid emails will be kicked back and your farmers will not receive notification. It is the responsibility of the project investigator to make sure farmer email addresses are correct and cooperating farmers confirm their participation in the project.**

Other Project Cooperators (if applicable)

Project investigators may include other project cooperators in addition to their required farmer cooperators. Cooperators can include co-coordinators, educators, Extension specialists, NGO

representatives, researchers, and technical advisors. These individuals are recognized as participants in your project proposal, but are NOT receiving any project funding.

Project Duration and Timetable

Systems Research Project duration is limited to three (3) years. The project start date for FY2025 is April 1, 2025.

Develop a timetable for each year of your project. Limited to 250 words.

Project Area

Projects in all areas of sustainable agriculture are always welcome and are encouraged, especially emerging new ideas not covered by the following list. For our information, we ask that you choose only one of the following Project Areas. Pick the one that best fits your project:

- Emerging Area;
- Minority and Limited Resource Farmers;
- Environmentally Sound Practices/Agricultural Ecosystems;
- Marketing/Economic Development;
- Organic Farming Systems;
- Policy, Program Evaluation, Quality of Life;
- Women in Sustainable Agriculture.

Discipline/Sub-discipline

List, as closely as you can, the discipline and sub-discipline your proposal would fall under. An example would be: Weed Science/Seed Ecology.

Type of Institution

Select Institution Type: 1862 Land Grant University, 1890 Land Grant University, Other College/University, Governmental Organization, Non-Governmental Organization, or Other.

Primary State

Select the state where most of the work for this project will be conducted.

B. Body of Proposal

Project Abstract

Limited to 500 words.

Is this a Previous Submission?

If you are submitting a pre-proposal that has been submitted in the past, or is substantially similar to prior applications, the pre-proposal should take into account the comments from the prior review(s). Note how you have addressed reviewer comments. If you disagree with a review comment, just state that and explain why. This section can be no more than 1,000 words.

Statement of Problem, Rational and Significance

State the problem being addressed in your project and the rationale and justification for the objectives. State the potential economic, environmental, and social impact of the anticipated project outcome. Begin The Statement of the Problem as: *“The purpose of this project is to”*. Limited to no more than 250 words.

Define the Farming System

Describe the farming system under investigation and how your methods contribute to a whole-systems approach. No more than 250 words.

Sustainable Agriculture Relevance

State how solving the problem 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. Tell us how you will use systems research in your project. Make sure that your research -- 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.

How will this project improve quality of life for producers, communities and consumers in the Southern region? See Southern SARE's [working document](#) on what quality of life means for sustainable agriculture research grants.

Limited to 500 words.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

How does this project support underserved producers and/or increase equity in Southern agricultural systems? Limited to no more than 1,000 words.

SSARE defines underserved communities as those populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civil life.

Objectives

A numbered list of concise project objectives limited to no more than 125 words. You should be able to accomplish your proposal with no more than five major objectives. Make sure that farmer/rancher cooperators are involved in the planning and implementation of the project.

Approach and Methods

Provide a brief description of research and education/outreach methods to be used for each objective, numbered according to their corresponding objective noting which cooperating partners are involved for each objective. Invited full proposals will be expected to provide thorough research methodology for each objective.

For all pre-proposals that include an education component, the approach should lead to the development of quality educational materials and multiple format delivery methods with long shelf lives. The educational materials should be useful in future trainings. It is appropriate to conduct small focused educational sessions or trainings using the materials to verify how successful they are and improve the approach as well as determine participation rates. The applicant must make a defensible attempt to show how many will be educated and the makeup of the audience to be educated or trained.

Approach and Methods is limited to no more than 625 words total (no more than 125 words for each corresponding objective listed above).

Literature Cited

Limited to no more than 125 words.

C. Budget

An itemized budget is not required at the pre-proposal stage, only an estimate of your funding request. This includes estimates of any funds you will budget for cooperating institutions.

A Research pre-proposal example would look like:

Lead Institution	-- \$200,000
Cooperating Institution A	-- \$80,000
Cooperating Institution B	-- \$45,000
Cooperating NGO C	-- \$50,000
Cooperating Farmers	-- \$25,000

Total Research Pre-Proposal Budget Request -- \$400,000

Note: Farmer cooperators should be appropriately compensated or a justification should be provided that explains the lack of farmer compensation. This explanation should be provided in the funding request. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will be asked to explain how much individual farmer cooperators are being paid and for what project duties.

Among other criteria, proposals are evaluated based on the level of farmer involvement and appropriateness of compensation.

Indirect Costs

USDA-NIFA will allow recovery of indirect costs. Indirect cost rates are limited to 10 percent of total direct costs. When preparing budgets, applicants should limit their requests for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 10 percent of total direct costs. The Indirect Cost of 10 percent Total Direct Costs is the maximum allowable.

If your institution has never had a federally negotiated indirect rate agreement (NICRA), you may include indirect costs as a line item in your budget at a maximum rate of 10 percent modified total direct costs. This is the de minimus rate approved under Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200.414). The calculation of the modified total direct cost base must adhere to the definition of modified total direct costs in 2 CFR 200.68.

Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC)

MTDC means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. Other items may only be excluded when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

D. Applicant Demographic Data

SSARE has a continuing commitment to monitor the operation of its review and award processes to identify and address any inequities based on gender or race. To gather information needed for this important task, applicants are asked to voluntarily submit the requested information with the proposal. This information will not be part of the review process, will be confidential and will not appear on any copy of the submitted proposal including the applicant's copy.

Gender: Male, Female

Race: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, Other

Are you of Hispanic/Latino background? Yes, No

How Your Proposal Will Be Reviewed

To be considered for funding, a project must first meet the following criteria:

- Project outcomes must focus on developing sustainable agriculture systems or moving existing systems toward sustainable agriculture.
- The project's central purpose should be research-based with an educational/outreach component to extend the project findings to the public.
- The project should use a systems research approach.

The full Administrative Council is involved in screening pre-proposals. All pre-proposals are reviewed by four AC members who vote "yes" or "no" to the project moving forward to the full proposal stage. After the reviewers have voted "yes" or "no", each AC member provides a brief written explanation of his/her vote.

After the AC votes on the pre-proposals, the Project Review Committee of the AC meets to decide which of the pre-proposals to invite for full proposals. At the pre-proposal stage, the Project Review Committee focuses primarily on CONCEPTUAL issues. Specifically, the Committee judges the following:

- Does the pre-proposal focus on sustainable agricultural systems or make existing systems more sustainable?
- Is the central purpose research-based with an educational/outreach component to extend the project findings to the public? Are they realistic, acceptable to farmers, logical, and capable of leading to the actions and benefits described?
- Do the objectives indicate a systems approach in a research pre-proposal?
- Are farmers integrated into the pre-proposal plan?
- Are the objectives clear?
- Are the methods clear and reasonable to meet the objectives?
- Should the PI be invited to submit a full proposal?

At the summer AC meeting, selected pre-proposals are invited to be submitted as full proposals. The purpose of this review step is to select full proposals that clearly meet the conceptual requirements of the program and also appear technically feasible. Consequently, PI's will not be given a full review of their proposal at the pre-proposal stage. At this pre-proposal stage, it is not the intent to conduct a full review with comments. This stage is to identify those projects the AC wishes to explore more fully.

Those invited to submit a full proposal will be notified in August 2024. At that time, specific directions will be given regarding submission and review procedures for full proposals. Comprehensive reviews are undertaken at the full proposal stage. Full proposals will be required to be much more in depth, longer and require much more detail than the pre-proposals. Full proposals are due on November 08, 2024.

In grant year 2024 the Southern SARE Program received 86 pre-proposals; Thirty-seven were invited for full proposal development. Of the full proposals received, the AC chose 12 projects for funding. In grant year 2024, the range of funded proposals was from \$319,000 to \$399,000.

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](#).

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