Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SSARE) 2026 Research & Education Grant Call for Pre-Proposals

Amount Funded: $400,000
Project Duration: Three (3) years
Proposal submission deadline: November 21, 2025 at 12 p.m. (NOON) EST
Online submission link: SARE Grant Management System

The release timeline for the 2026 Research & Education Grants Pre-proposal, along with the full proposal invite, has been adjusted. Please make a note of this one-time, modified schedule. **Awarded grants under this funding cycle will not be allowed a no-cost extension.**
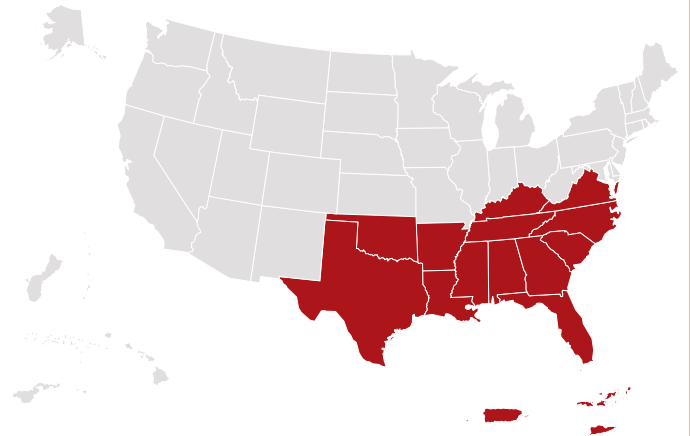
Read more about the requirements for Research and Education Grants before applying. Questions should be directed to Jeff Jordan or Sandra Blackwell at southern-re@sare.org, or call 770-229-3212

About SARE

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program is a U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grants and outreach program.

Competitive research grants, offered annually, are the primary tools of the SARE program. SARE seeks out innovations in sustainable agriculture, and rewards grant applicants who offer interesting and potentially workable ideas. SARE also emphasizes outreach and the dissemination of project results so the grant programs will have the widest possible benefits.

Southern SARE is one of four regional SARE programs, hosted by University of Georgia, Fort Valley State University and the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture. 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.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
Griffin Campus

Southern SARE Research & Education Grants

Overview

Research and Education Grants are competitive research grants for teams of interdisciplinary researchers that encourage a systems approach in sustainable agriculture. Research and Education-Grants are research-based with an educational/outreach component to extend the project findings to the public. **The grant is comprised of a pre-proposal and full proposal application process. This document represents the Call for Pre-proposals.**

Most agricultural field research is component research – analyzing a part of a system in isolation to the other system's components to seek a solution to one problem. While good information has been gained from well-conducted component research, one of the shortcomings of a component view is that sometimes a solution to a problem creates new problems to be solved. In addition, component research provides results that often only offer short-term solutions to long-term problems.

As researchers dig deeper into the impacts of component research on other parts of the system, the research agenda is becoming more complex. With this complexity in mind, systems research is becoming more important to addressing the questions and finding the methods needed for a more balanced, long-term sustainable agricultural system. Systems research provides the opportunity to probe the interrelationships of all parts of a system in a long-term environment to answer questions related to profitability, environmental stewardship and community quality of life as the system changes over a long period of time.

To retain our historical strengths, to advance sustainable agriculture, and to encourage a systems approach to research, SSARE offers three categories for Research Grants: Production research, postharvest-food systems research, or a continuum that spans both.

Production research—Focused on actual production methods, this kind of research has made up the bulk of SARE's project portfolio in the past and has developed techniques that have become common tools for farmers. SSARE continues to fund these types of research proposals as they provide key parts of a larger holistic system, particularly as they relate to farmer participation in our program and complement the Producer, On-farm, Professional Development, and Graduate Student grant programs.

Postharvest/food systems research—These projects examine what happens past the farm gate such as in the markets, distribution systems and policy making. This category can serve as a funding path for social science researchers to also make a difference in our farm and food systems.

A combination of production and postharvest/food systems research—While some research can be separated into production and postharvest levels, we also seek to encourage attempts to provide integration of the different levels of the agricultural system, as well as the different sciences that lend more value to the results. The ultimate in systems research would connect what goes on in the ground with everything that happens after a crop is harvested, including adding value, marketing, infrastructure for processing and transportation, as well as policy making.

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IMPORTANT! Research & Education Grants are systems research projects, focusing on how component systems interrelate, integrate, and impact one another to make the whole system more sustainable. Submitted projects should focus on more than one component system, cover all three pillars of sustainability, and involve multi-institutional, multi-disciplinary researchers.

Check out these systems research resources to learn more about conducting research based on a whole systems approach to sustainable agriculture.

Research and Education Grant Call for Pre-proposals 2026 Schedule

October 2025: Calls for Pre-Proposals Released
November 21, 2025: Pre-Proposals Due
February 2026: Selected Pre-Proposals Invited to Submit Full Proposals
May 2026: Full Proposals Due
August 2026: Full Proposals Awarded

Eligibility Requirements

- Invited to apply: Researchers (tenured faculty, early career professionals, postdocs) from public and private institutions, including Land-Grant universities and institutions outside the Land-Grant system; government agencies; non-governmental organizations; agribusinesses; individuals, such as independent scientists or ag consultants.

- Per USDA-NIFA, proposals must not promote, support, or take part in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives or any other initiatives that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected characteristic.

- Projects must be relevant to sustainable agriculture and outcomes must focus on developing sustainable ag systems or moving existing systems toward sustainable ag.

- Emphasis in Research and Education Grants is placed on farmer participation. Farmers are a required component of the project. At least three (3) cooperating farmers must be involved in the project, each with a unique and detailed role. For farmers involved in your project, the primary 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.

- The project's central purpose must be research-based with an educational/outreach component to

extend the project findings to the public, with specific applicability for and potential adoption by farmers.

- Social science projects are welcomed and encouraged.

- Projects must involve a holistic approach to sustainable agriculture, covering the three pillars of sustainability: farmer profit, environmental stewardship, and community quality of life.

> ✋ **IMPORTANT! Research and Education Grant funds are paid by reimbursement of allowable project expenses. Advance payments are not possible. Before applying, be sure your institution/organization has both the financial and resource capacity to effectively manage a Research and Education Grant project.**

What is Sustainable Agriculture?

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 [Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill](). Applicants specifically should be aware of this definition, as proposals will be reviewed with this legal definition in mind.


SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PILLARS

A simple way to think about sustainable agriculture is that it involves producing enough food and fiber to satisfy today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. Sustainability as defined by the SARE program embraces three common goals (or pillars of sustainability):

- Profit over the long term;
- Stewardship of our nation's land, air and water;
- Quality of life for farmers, ranchers, farm employees and our communities.

There are almost as many ways to reach these goals as there are farms and ranches in America. One thing sustainable producers have in common is they look at their farm or ranch from a holistic perspective and develop an integrated management plan that uses principles from nature.

> 💡 **Because farms and ranches everywhere are incredibly diverse, there's no "one-size-fits-all" approach to sustainability. Learn more about how some of the most common practices can enhance sustainability for all farms through this SARE sampler of proven practices: "What is Sustainable Agriculture?"**
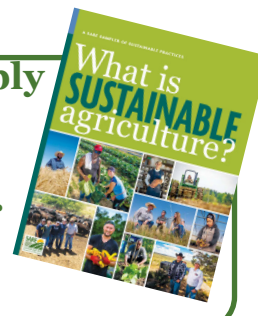
Preparing Your Proposal

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](https://southern.sare.org). Be sure you submit your proposal prior to the deadline. Once the November 21, 2025 application 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.

Are You an 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

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

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.

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 partic-

ipate 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 FY2026 is September 1, 2026.

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

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

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

> Begin the statement of the problem as: **"The purpose of this project is to...."**

> 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?

Define the Farming System

Describe the farming system under investigation and how your methods contribute to a whole-systems approach. Limited to 250 words.

Project Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture

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. Limited to 500 words.

Objectives

A numbered list of concise project objectives limited to 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 625 words (125 words for each corresponding objective listed above).

Literature Cited

Limited to 125 words.

C. Budget and Budget Checklist

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

IMPORTANT! 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.

SARE allows for indirect costs. SARE does not require matching funds/cost-shares. If invited to submit a full proposal, applicants will be asked to calculate Indirect Costs or Modified Total Direct Costs into their itemized budget.

Indirect Costs

USDA-NIFA will allow recovery of indirect costs. Indirect costs under a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) 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 Costs

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.

How Your Proposal Will Be Reviewed

Research and Education Grants reviews are a two-stage pre-proposal and full proposal process. Roughly 30 percent of pre-proposals are invited to submit a full proposal.

The full Administrative Council (the governing body of Southern SARE) is involved in screening pre-proposals at the close of the pre-proposal grant deadline. All pre-proposals are reviewed by four Administrative Council members who vote on whether or not a pre-proposal should move forward to the full proposal stage.

Full proposal invite is based on the following review criteria:

- A Systems Approach to Sustainable Agriculture: The pre-proposal demonstrates a whole systems approach to sustainable agriculture, focusing on more than one component system and including SARE's three pillars of sustainability.

- Project Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture: The pre-proposal focuses on sustainable agricultural systems and makes a clear, well-thought case of either making existing systems more sustainable, or creates a new and innovative method for sustainability. The project meets SARE goals of sustainable agriculture.

- Multi-institutional/Multi-disciplinary Collaborations: The pre-proposal includes meaningful multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary collaborations with their roles in the project relevant to the three pillars of sustainability.

- Farmer Participation: The project includes the required number of farmer collaborators with direct and meaningful involvement in the project. Farmer roles in the project are clear.

- Appropriate Research-based Project Design/Methods with an Educational/Outreach Component: The Approaches and Methods are clear and reasonable and are capable of meeting the objectives. The project design is realistic based on the timeline, with regional and/or national adaptability of the findings and outcomes of the project. An educational component is included with usable findings by farmers/ranchers and other intended audiences.

- Objectives: The pre-proposal includes clear objectives that indicate a systems approach to the research.

Each criteria is scored on a scale of One to Four (1-4) with the scores averaged for a final score. Each pre-proposal is scored as described:

- Four (4): High Priority. Invite for Full Proposal: Pre-Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, addresses SARE's three pillars of sustainability, and fulfills the review criteria. Pre-Proposal requirements are met and addresses a topic of need with a unique, innovative, sus-

tainable ag solution. The Technical Reviewers should provide information on the Objectives and Methods.

- Three (3): May Be Invited for Full Proposal But Not as Strong as High Priority Pre-Proposals: Pre-Proposals are not as strong as high priority pre-proposals, but there are elements that might make them worth seeing again. Pre-Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, pertains to sustainable agriculture, and fulfills the review criteria. Improvements are evident before they go through a technical review.

- Two (2): Revise and Resubmit: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program and pertains to sustainable agriculture, but there are sections of the proposal that don't fulfill review criteria or not all requirements of Call for Proposals have been met. Applicant is encouraged to Revise and Resubmit for the next grant cycle per the Administrative Council reviewer's comments to strengthen the proposal.

- One (1). Do Not Invite for Full Proposal: Proposal does not fit into the grant program applied for; proposal does not meet the mission/vision of the SARE program; does not pertain to sustainable agriculture; and/or does not meet the requirements of the Call for Proposals.

A brief written explanation is also included in the review process. Based on this final score and the comments, the Administrative Council makes a recommendation to invite pre-proposal applicants to submit a full proposal.

After the full Administrative Council makes its recommendation on the pre-proposals, the Project Review Committee, a subcommittee of the full Administrative Council, meets to discuss which pre-proposals to invite for full proposals based on the scores, comments, and recommendations put forth by the Administrative Council. The purpose of this review step is to ensure that pre-proposals recommended to submit a full proposal meet the conceptual requirements of the program and are technically feasible. It is at this time that final selections are made and are presented for a vote at the winter Administrative Council meeting.

Applicants 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 Administrative Council wishes to explore more fully. Comprehensive reviews are undertaken at the full proposal stage.

Those invited to submit a full proposal will be notified via email in February following the winter Administrative Council meeting. At that time, specific directions will be given regarding submission and review procedures for full proposals. 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 in May.

Expectations for Pre-Proposals Invited to Submit Full Proposals

If the Southern SARE Administrative Council selects your pre-proposal to be submited for a full proposal, you will expect the following:

Notification: Southern SARE invites Research and Education Grant pre-proposals during its winter Administrative Council meeting. Applicants will be notified via email soon after regarding the status of their project and whether they have been invited to submit a full proposal.

Full Proposal Submission: Applicants invited to submit a full proposal will receive an email with the full Call for Proposals and Budget Checklist, and a link to access the full Call for Propoals in the SARE Grant Management System. If revisions to the proposal are needed, per reviewer comments, applicants should take this time to make those corrections in the full Call for Proposals. Applicants should also make sure they have at least three farmer cooperators confirmed to participate in their project. Most of the information in the pre-proposals is autopopulated in the full Call for Proposals in the online system, allowing applicants to make edits as needed.

Resources

Learn more about Southern SARE Research and Education Grants, with information on grant writing tips.

Contact your local SARE state ag coordinator for information on SARE.

Reach out to ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas) for practical sustainable agriculture resources.

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.

Looking for more sustainable agriculture research ideas? Visit SARE's national projects database to learn more about funded projects. Over 9,000 research and education projects have been funded nationally.