



Please note that awards provided under these Calls are contingent upon USDA-NIFA authorizing the funding to our Host Institution, Montana State University.

Research & Education 2026 Call for Pre-Proposals

Submission Deadline: Friday, May 1, 2026, 5:00pm MT
 Submit online at www.projects.sare.org

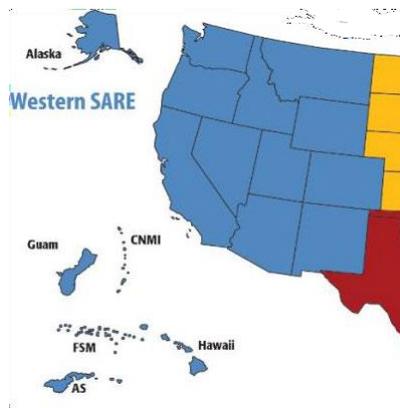
Project Team/PI: Researcher, Outreach Representative, and at least three Producers
Funding Limit: \$350,000
Project Time Limit: Up to 3 years
Invitations to submit announced: TBD
If selected, Full Proposals Deadline: TBD
Funding decisions announced: TBD
Contact: wsare-re@sare.org

Research & Education Grant Program

This program involves scientists, agricultural producers, and others using interdisciplinary approaches to advance sustainable agriculture at local and regional levels. With the collaboration of producers, projects must integrate rigorous research and education aiming to advance the three components of sustainable agriculture- environmental, economic, and social- and use innovative educational outreach to disseminate new knowledge to students, producers, and stakeholders. It is expected that outcomes of funded projects will result in quantifiable benefits for producers, increase the preservation of the natural resources upon which agriculture depends, be documented in scholarly journals and disseminated through teaching and educational activities with students, producers, and other agricultural stakeholders.

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The Western region includes:

- Alaska, American Samoa,
- Arizona, California, Colorado,
- Guam, Hawaii, Idaho,
- Micronesia, Montana, Nevada,
- New Mexico, Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, Utah,
- Washington, Wyoming

Western SARE
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Western SARE, one of four regional SARE programs, is hosted by Montana State University and is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.



About Western SARE

The Western SARE Administrative Council funds grant proposals that include creative and innovative on-farm/ranch research and educational outreach to advance Western SARE goals. All Western SARE projects **must contain both research and education components**.

What is Sustainable Agriculture?

Congress has defined sustainable agriculture as: *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 non-renewable 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.*

Western SARE Goals

- Promote **good stewardship** of the nation's natural resources by providing site-specific, regional and profitable sustainable farming and ranching methods that strengthen agricultural competitiveness; satisfy human food and fiber needs; maintain and enhance the quality and productivity of soil; conserve soil, water, energy, natural resources and fish and wildlife habitat; and maintain and improve the quality of surface and ground water.
- Enhance the **quality of life** of farmers and ranchers and ensure the viability of rural communities, for example, by increasing income and employment, especially profitable self-employment and innovative marketing opportunities in agricultural and rural communities.
- Protect the **health and safety** of those involved in food and farm systems by reducing, where feasible and practical, the use of toxic materials in agricultural production, and by optimizing on-farm resources and integrating, where appropriate, biological cycles and controls.
- Promote crop, livestock and enterprise **diversification**.
- Examine the regional, economic, social, and environmental **implications** of adopting sustainable agriculture practices and systems.



Program Overview

Proposed projects should be submitted from organizations that have demonstrated fiscal responsibility and expertise in sustainable agriculture and are qualified to receive funds from the U.S. Government. Multi-state and multi-agency collaborations within the Western region are encouraged. Cross-region applications will be considered when the Principal Investigator is in the Western region. Some participants and/or cooperators can be from outside the Western region.

Western SARE requires that agricultural producers be involved from inception to finish in the planning, design, implementation, and educational outreach of any Western SARE-funded project to best address the inherently interdisciplinary nature of sustainable agriculture.

Project Team

Researchers from Western institutions may apply; projects must incorporate research and education, and bring together a team of researchers, students, ag professionals, and producers.

The project team must be a minimum of five (5) people and must include:

- A Researcher (PI or co-PI)
- Outreach personnel (PI or co-PI)
- A ***minimum*** of three (3) Agricultural Producers (one of the producers must be identified as the Advisor Representative)

Principal Investigator (PI): This person serves as the principal researcher. The PI is responsible for coordinating the project and carrying out its contractual provisions. Principal Investigators need to reside in the Western region of the United States and should have the capability to conduct both research and Extension/outreach activities.

Extension/outreach representative, educator, or equivalent: The outreach representative may be an Extension agent, specialist, educator, or equivalent. This person is responsible for all education and outreach activities and might serve as PI or co-PI.

Agricultural Producers: Producer involvement means that each producer is meaningfully involved in some aspect of the research or education activities of the project. One of the producers will be designated as the Advisor Representative. The Advisor Representative must be involved in ***all*** aspects of the project from idea inception through project completion. Each producer must be associated with independent operations. Nonprofit farm operations may participate in the project as an optional team member, but do not count as one of the three required producers. A person qualifies as a producer (farmer/rancher) if they have a for-profit operation and:

- Their primary occupation is farming or ranching and have a farm/ranch taxpayer identification number (TIN); ***or***
- They are a part-time producer with at least \$1,000 documented annual income from farming or ranching activities. An equivalent of \$1,000 of agricultural production is acceptable under circumstances where food is not sold for profit, such as through cultural/indigenous farming operations.

Signed and dated producer collaboration letters stating their role in the project ***are expected for each***

producer. However, if letters are not available at the pre-proposal submission time, it is acceptable for the applicant to upload a *pdf-ed email confirmation* of producers' collaboration and contributions.

Other team members: Besides the aforementioned project team of five people, the team may include additional producers, researchers, educators, Co-PIs, and others with appropriate expertise for the project scope.

Project Funding Limit

Total funds requested may not exceed \$350,000 over the entire budget period. ***For the pre-proposal you are asked to provide an estimate of project costs.*** [Note: A detailed Budget and Budget Justification will be required in the full proposal round.]

Project Time Limit

Projects may be 1-3 years in length and cannot exceed 36 months in total. If a pre-proposal is advanced to the full proposal competition, project start and end dates are chosen by the PI with the earliest start date being set and provided for those selected for the full proposal competition.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Projects

Some research/educational outreach work in sustainable agriculture is complex and may require a collaborative interdisciplinary approach that takes many years to complete. To be effective, these projects are likely to exceed the time limits of Western SARE's normal one-to-three-year funding cycle. Projects that are long-term (more than three years) should be identified as such by checking the appropriate box in the online pre-proposal application. Short-term projects are those that can be completed within the three-year funding cycle.

Applications for long-term projects should clearly justify the need for a long-term study to achieve ***transformative changes*** in agricultural sustainability. Clearly indicate the proposed length of the study; short- and long- term objectives, hypotheses, and results; the core data set that will be gathered as well as the criteria for selecting these measures; the procedures for long-term archiving and analyzing the data; and the knowledge and educational outcomes that otherwise will be gained and why it is essential to the sustainability of agricultural systems. Long-term observational studies are discouraged.

Long-term projects that are funded will receive their funding in three-year increments. Each additional increment (up to three years) of funding will still go through a competitive full proposal process but will bypass the pre-proposal process. Long-term projects will be eligible to submit a full proposal for an additional funding cycle if the following reporting criteria are met and approved: 1. Reports are submitted in a timely manner; 2. Yearly objectives and measurable milestones are reported and met (as listed in the approved proposal).

Public Domain

While pre-proposals, proposals, and reviews will remain confidential, the Western SARE program considers all funded proposals, subsequent reports, and related information to be in the

public domain. See details of this stipulation in the Public Access of Research Data section in USDA Grant Policies

Pre-Proposal Instructions

All proposals must be submitted online at <https://projects.sare.org>. Review the submission checklist on page 8 below. To strengthen your submission, check the information located in the [Proposal Preparation Documents](#) section of the Western SARE [website](#).

Western SARE will disqualify proposals before review if applicants do not follow the instructions of the Call for Proposals or submit incomplete Supporting Documents. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure all sections of the proposal are submitted online before the due date.

Multiple submissions are accepted. However, only one application (from any one individual Principal Investigator) can be awarded funding in any of the Western SARE competitive programs in one grant budget cycle.

I. Project objectives, description, and team description

I.1. Research and Education objectives (word limit: 180)

Please provide a brief description of your research and education project objectives. If your pre-proposal is selected, we will ask for more details in the full proposal.

I.2. Describe your Project (60% of review score; word limit: 800)

The summary should include a brief description of the problem or need and the creative approach to solving it. Your project description should include the following:

- Producer identified problem and research question(s),
- Outline the project's research methods and economic impact and explain how it will solve the identified problem,
- Outline the project's outreach/education methods and explain how they will be disseminated among other agricultural stakeholders, and
- Identify the expected outcomes to advance sustainable agriculture and their relevance.

I.3. Project Team and Producers' Involvement (40% of review score; word limit: 400)

Western SARE is committed to addressing the needs of agricultural producers. Proposals must include evidence that producers are involved from project's inception to conclusion. This section must list all team members, and their roles and responsibilities showing clear producer involvement. Evidence of producer-identified needs may include, but are not limited to:

- Direct (documented) requests for information from producers,
- Recommendations from grower organizations or commodity committees. Please identify stakeholder group(s) or organization(s) other than your project team,

- References and citations to other studies/reports that encourage future research, and/or
- Needs assessments that relate to the project topic(s), if available.

Evidence of producer direct involvement must be documented in a support letter (or pdf-ed email) for each producer.

[Note: if your project is selected for the Full Proposal competition, ***signed letters of producer cooperation are required.***]

II. Project Basic Information

This section prompts general information about the project including:

- The ***main*** subject matter of the project
- Estimate of how long you expect the project will take (in months)
- Budget amount to be requested
- The state(s) where the work will be conducted
- Cooperating institutions
- Long-term submission
- Re-submission (Y/N), give information on how you addressed previous reviewers' suggestions
- How did you learn about the Call for Pre-proposal

III. Supporting Documents

All supporting documents ***must*** be attached in the Supporting Documents section of the online application. PDF documents are preferred but images are accepted. ***Failure to provide all the required supporting documents will disqualify the proposal before review.***

Current Vitae (required): Attach a current **2-page** CV or resume (***max. length, 2 pages***) for the Principal Investigator and each project team member, ***except for producers and students.***

Letters of Producer Cooperation (required): Each producer who is part of the project team must contribute a dated and signed letter of cooperation. The letter verifies the producer's willingness to participate in the project and outlines their commitment (resources and/or time) and role in the project. ***For purposes of the pre-proposal, uploaded pdf-ed emails from the producer are accepted.***

Letters of Stakeholder Support (required): Attach letter(s) of support from stakeholder individuals and/or organizations that support the proposed research and education activities. For the pre-proposal, please limit these stakeholder support letters to a maximum of three (3).

Citations (required, if applicable): If applicable, attach a list of cited sources.

Review Process

Eligible proposals received by the due date with all supporting documents will be evaluated by a Technical Review Panel, a group of reviewers from the Western SARE region with broad agricultural production, scientific, and educational expertise. The Technical Review Panel (TRP) evaluates the proposals based on the review criteria stated below and meets to discuss and appraise the merits of each proposal. TRP recommendations are presented to the Western SARE Administrative Council for additional review and final selection of pre-proposals to invite for the Full Proposal competition.

Reviewer Criteria	
Description of your project:	60%:
Producer identified problem and research question(s)	10%
Research methods and economic impact	20%
Outreach and education method and dissemination	20%
Outcomes and relevance	10%
Project Team and Producers' Involvement	40%
Total	100%

Western SARE will disqualify proposals before review if applicants do not follow the instructions of the Call for Proposals or submit incomplete Supporting Documents. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all sections of the proposal are submitted before the due date/time.

How to Apply

We strongly encourage applicants read the entire Call for Pre-proposals before beginning the proposal and to refer to it regularly in proposal development.

It takes longer than expected to upload the documents and finalize your proposal for submission in our Grants Management System. The GMS 'locks' at the specified deadline date/time. It is recommended to start at least one week before the deadline to enter parts of your proposal and understand how the system works.

Pre-proposals are due by: Friday, May 1, 2026, 5 pm MT

To start your proposal, go to <https://projects.sare.org>

Research & Education Grant Program Schedule
May 1, 2026 – R&E Pre-proposals are due by 5:00 PM Mountain Time
TBD* – Applicants are informed of their pre-proposal status
TBD – Full proposals (of selected pre-proposals) are due
TBD – A Technical Review Panel reviews full proposals
TBD – Western SARE Administrative Council selects full proposals for funding
TBD – Proposal status is announced to applicants and funded projects may begin
<small>* TBD = To Be Determined once the USDA-NIFA Notice of Funding Opportunities is released</small>

Submission Checklist

Project Basic Information

- Project Start Date
- Project End Date
- Primary State
- Primary Subject Matter
- Cooperating Institutions
- Budget Amount to Be Requested
- Research and Educational Objectives

Project Summary

- Producer Identified Problem

- Research Methods
- Educational/Outreach Methods
- Outcomes and Relevance

Producers' Involvement

- Team Members and Roles

Supporting Documents

- Current Vitae (2 page)
- Letters of Producer Cooperation
- Letters of Stakeholder Support
- Citations, if applicable

Resources

*Please review the documents located in the [Documents for Applying](#) section of the *Western SARE website* to strengthen your proposal.*

Information on past projects can be found at <https://www.westernsare.org/Projects>. We encourage you to visit this website to learn more about sustainable agriculture and the Western SARE program at <https://www.westernsare.org>. Tips for writing proposals are available [here](#).

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 and background research. AFSIC resources are accessible at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic>, or contact AFSIC afsic@nal.usda.gov, or 301-504-6559.

Statement from USDA NIFA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the extent permitted by law, will no longer make grants or otherwise fund programs or activities that improperly discriminate on the basis of race or sex, including discrimination in the name of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies. Instead, USDA will prioritize merit and efficiency. USDA recognizes programs and initiatives will have the greatest impact when these programs and initiatives put American farmers, ranchers, and foresters first by:

- solving the most pressing challenges they face;
- protecting America's food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security;
- supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers;
- expanding and developing domestic markets;
- training the next generation of agriculturalists; and
- fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is committed to advancing these principles and encourages applicants to actively engage farmers, ranchers, and foresters when applying for funding opportunities to ensure relevancy and adherence to them. NIFA also encourages agricultural leaders to engage in the peer review panel process to ensure American producers are better served through research, education, and extension activities.

In compliance with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, any material produced by Western SARE can be made available in other formats upon request.

The mission of Western SARE is to advance “innovations that improve profitability, stewardship and quality of life by investing in groundbreaking research and education.”