



Vermont Dairy Farms Working for Water, Wildlife, Climate, Food and Farmers Request for Technical Assistance Providers – 2024

Full Proposal Due Date: **Thursday, September 12, 2024, by 11:59 PM ET**

OVERVIEW

In partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service ([NRCS](#)) and Stonyfield, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is seeking partners to implement a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project to accelerate the voluntary adoption of conservation practices on organic and pasture-based dairy farms throughout Vermont that reduce their water quality and climate footprints, while also bolstering their economic sustainability. The RCPP project will leverage Stonyfield’s dairy supply chain to bring farmers to the table and facilitate shared learning among farmers expanding the reach of projects.

The RCPP project seeks to grow a network of technical assistance providers who can advise dairy farmers on whole-farm conservation planning that integrates both climate-smart and water quality practices. Through this Request for Proposals, NFWF is seeking technical assistance providers who will assist dairy farmers in assessing and prioritizing opportunities to reduce their climate and water quality footprints, applying for NRCS and state cost-share programs, and designing and implementing priority conservation practices. Successful applicants will work in partnership with NFWF, Stonyfield and NRCS to implement the RCPP project. Approximately \$2M in funding is available under this funding opportunity RFP, which is a combination of Federal NRCS technical assistance funding and contributions from Stonyfield.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The overall goal of this project is to assist 25-40 small and medium-sized, pasture-based dairy farms to adopt new or enhanced conservation practices, with a specific focus on manure management, pasture and grazing management and barnyard management. The RCPP project aims to facilitate whole farm conservation that 1) minimizes GHG emissions, and 2) protects rivers and streams that boast resilient populations of fish and wildlife.

The project will seek to ensure each participating farm has an active conservation plan, nutrient management plan and grazing management plan, as appropriate. The project specifically will focus on implementing the following priority [NRCS practice codes](#).

Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities: A major focus of this project is to assist Vermont’s organic dairy farmers to reduce their climate footprints. In many cases, the target farms already have completed assessments, with Stonyfield’s support, of their GHG emissions using Cool Farm Tool; however, some farms will need to complete an assessment of carbon sequestration and GHG reduction opportunities in order to prioritize practices with the greatest potential conservation impact. Practice codes include: Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Assessment (218) or similar.

Design and Implementation Activities: Ultimately, the project will prioritize implementing at least one climate-smart practice for each participating farm. Given the significant GHG emissions associated with manure management, the project will especially focus on practices and innovations that enhance existing slurry pits to reduce methane emissions or improve solid storage management, while protecting water quality. Pasture and grazing management practices that have the dual benefit of improving carbon storage while protecting water quality and habitat also will be prioritized. These practices include grazing management that builds soil carbon while reducing erosion; and riparian forest buffer plantings coupled with livestock exclusion fencing and off-stream watering, which sequester carbon while reducing erosion and filtering pollutants. Practice codes include:

- **Manure Management Practices** -- Nutrient Management (590); Waste storage facility (313); Pond Sealing or Lining (520,521 & 522); Roofs and Covers (367); Waste facility cover (360) Anaerobic Digester (366); Composting facility (317); Waste separation (632); Pumping Plant (533); Waste facility closure (360); Waste treatment (629); Waste recycling (633); Waste transfer (634); Wastewater Treatment – Milk House (627); Short term storage of animal waste and by-products (318); Amendments for treatment of agricultural waste (591)); Obstruction removal (500); Subsurface drain (606); Underground outlet (620)
- **Pasture and Grazing Management** -- Riparian Forest Buffer (391); Exclusion Fencing (382); Access control (472); Prescribed grazing (528); Stream Crossing (578); Watering Facility (614); Vegetated treatment area (634); Livestock Pipeline (516); Trails and Walkway (575); Access Road (560); Lined Waterway or Outlet (468); Spring Development (574); Water Well (614);
- **Barnyard Management** - Roof Runoff Structure (558); Heavy Use Area Protection (561); Stormwater Runoff Control (570); Diversion (362)

Through this solicitation, NFWF is seeking technical assistance providers who will work with all or a subset of target farms to:

1. Ensure each farm has a current conservation plan, nutrient management plan, and grazing management plan, as appropriate. These plans should meet NRCS standards, but should be updated and/or developed independent of NRCS cost share.
2. Conduct a Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Assessment or similar assessment, with recommendations integrated into their Comprehensive Conservation Plan.
3. Establish baseline measurements of GHG emissions from selected farms' manure management systems.
4. Identify the highest priority manure management projects, pasture and grazing management projects and/or barnyard management projects for each farm.
5. Facilitate sign up to NRCS and state costs-share programs for priority projects.
6. Through cost-share and/or supplemental funding from Stonyfield, implement at least one priority enhancement or new practice on each farm.

Successful applicants also will be expected to participate in RCPP project coordination meetings with other project partners, strategize opportunities for shared learning, and help adaptively manage the RCPP project to meet shifting needs.

Additionally, NFWF is seeking a partner to measure emissions reduction from each on-farm project, using COMET-Farm and potentially other modeling tools. Technical assistance providers may propose to conduct this work, or NFWF may award a separate contract for this verification work across all farms participating in the RCPP project.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

The RCPP project will target pasture-based dairies throughout Vermont.

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure consistency of project data across numerous grants, the application includes a list of standard metric options for describing project impacts and reporting outcomes (Table 1). Applicants should select the metrics most relevant to their proposed projects from the table below.

Strategy	Recommended Metric	Instructions
Capacity, Outreach, Incentives	# jobs created	Enter the # of individuals hired to directly work on the project (non-volunteers). Jobs should be directly engaged in grant activities, funded by the grant, and shouldn't have existed prior to the grant. In the notes, provide the FTE for the jobs created. If applicable, in the NOTES section report the number of new jobs created for people in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.
	# jobs sustained	Enter the # of paid jobs that are partially or fully sustained through this grant. Jobs should have existed prior to the grant, be funded by the grant, and be directly engaged in project activities. The starting value for this metric should be zero. If applicable, in the NOTES section report the number of jobs sustained for people in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.
	# participants receiving gov't agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the number of participants enrolled in government cost share or financial assistance programs. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP), how you will track enrollment, and if applicable note the number of participants in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.
	Dollar value of government agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the dollar value of federal, state, or local government agency cost share or financial assistance. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP).
	Acres covered by government agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the number of acres enrolled in government agency cost share or financial assistance. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP). If applicable, number should be equal to or less than "Acreage of project footprint" metric. Indicate which practice(s) were covered with acres of each.
	# workshops, webinars, meetings	Enter the number of workshops, webinars, and meetings held.
	# people reached	Enter the number of participants who attended a workshop, webinar, and/or meetings. In the NOTES, specify the percent of participants out of the total targeted. If applicable, note the number of people in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.

Project Overview	# of management plans with BMPs	Enter the number of completed or updated management plans. In NOTES, indicate the type of plan that was completed or updated (e.g., conservation plan, nutrient management plan, grazing management plan).
	Acreage of project footprint	Enter the total number of unique acres impacted by one or more project conservation activities. Only count an acre once, even if multiple activities or treatments will occur on that acre during the project.
Manure Management Practices	Acres with enhanced nutrient management	Enter the number of cropland acres with enhanced nutrient management practice. Acres with enhanced nutrient management practices under this metric should comply with NRCS Conservation Practice Standard - Nutrient Management (590). Please describe the nutrient management practices in the NOTES section.
	Improved management practices – number of sites under improved management	Enter the number of farms with new or improved manure storage. In the notes indicate the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, if applicable, including Waste storage facility (313); Pond Sealing or Lining (520,521 & 522); Roofs and Covers (367); Waste facility cover (360) Anaerobic Digester (366); Composting facility (317); Waste separation (632); Pumping Plant (533); Waste facility closure (360); Waste treatment (629); Waste recycling (633); Waste transfer (634); Wastewater Treatment – Milk House (627); Short term storage of animal waste and by-products (318); Amendments for treatment of agricultural waste (591)]; Obstruction removal (500); Subsurface drain (606); Underground outlet (620)
Pasture and Grazing Management	Riparian restoration - acres of riparian forest buffer restored	Enter the number of riparian acres restored, including riparian buffers. Riparian acres restored under this metric should comply with the following NRCS Conservation Practice Standards - Riparian Forest Buffer (391). In the NOTES section, specify the landcover type prior to planting (barren, cropland, grassland), the dominant vegetation being planted (Broadleaf, Conifer, Shrub, Grass, Wet meadow), and the average width of the riparian buffer.
	Riparian restoration - miles of riparian forest buffer restored	Enter the linear extent of the riparian restoration in miles.
	Miles of livestock exclusion fencing installed	Enter the number of miles of livestock exclusion installed. Fence (Ft.) (382) Conservation Practice Standard Natural Resources Conservation Service (usda.gov) NFWF will assume activities include exclusion fencing and a 35-foot forest or grass buffer, unless otherwise noted.
	Acres of prescribed grazing implemented	Enter the number of acres with managed grazing (i.e., promoting plant growth above and below ground, improving wildlife habitat, and maximizing soil carbon through grazing approaches that optimize stocking rates, livestock rotations, utilization rates, and plant rest and recovery, including development of associated grazing infrastructure). Acres under this metric should comply with NRCS Conservation Practice Standard - Prescribed Grazing (528). Please describe the grazing practices in the NOTES section.
Barnyard Management	Acres with BMPs to reduce stormwater runoff	Enter the number of acres treated by practices to reduce barnyard runoff and control erosion. In the NOTES, indicate the NRCS practice code(s) (e.g., Roof Runoff Structure (558); Heavy Use Area Protection (561); Stormwater Runoff Control (570); Diversion (362))

As part of interim and final performance reporting, grant recipients may be required to submit additional field-level implementation data using a template to be provided by NFWF. NFWF may use this information, as well as information in the proposal's Easygrants metrics, to estimate and track anticipated and actual project outcomes in terms of carbon and water benefits. These benefits will not be used as carbon or water credits, but rather for narrative purposes and demonstration of the values provided by various projects and conservation practices.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, tribal governments and organizations, educational institutions, and for-profit entities. To be competitive, applicant organizations must demonstrate capacity and experience commensurate with the scale of the project being proposed and the funding being requested.
- Individuals and federal government agencies are not eligible to apply for grant funding.

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- **Equipment:** Applicants are encouraged to rent equipment where possible and cost-effective or use matching funds to make those purchases. NFWF acknowledges, however, that some projects may only be completed using NFWF funds to procure equipment. If this applies to your project, please contact the program staff listed in this RFP to discuss options.
- Federal funds and matching contributions may not be used to procure or obtain equipment, services, or systems (including entering into or renewing a contract) that uses telecommunications equipment or services produced by Huawei Technologies Company or ZTE Corporation (or any subsidiary or affiliate of such entities) as a substantial or essential component, or as critical technology of any system. Refer to Public Law 115-232, section 889 for additional information.
- NFWF funds and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities, or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NFWF funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation, and settlement agreements. However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Approximately \$2 million in funding is available under this funding opportunity.

PROJECT PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

Grant period of performance will typically be three years following finalization of the grant agreement.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness, and compliance with NFWF and funding source policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

Priorities – Project addresses the program priorities and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success.

Technical Merit – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical and achievable work plan and timeline. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout the project.

Spatial Data – Project spatial data submitted to NFWF’s online mapping tool accurately represent the location(s) conservation activity(ies) at the time of proposal submission. Successful projects will be required to submit improved spatial data for each conservation activity within the period of performance as necessary.

Partnership and Community Impact – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with diverse local community members, leaders, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement the proposed project. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project, integration into local programs and policies, and community acceptance of proposed restoration actions. Non-traditional partners or communities are enlisted to broaden the sustained impact from the project.

Budget – Costs are allowable, reasonable, and budgeted in accordance with NFWF’s [Budget Instructions](#) cost categories. Federally funded projects comply with [OMB Uniform Guidance](#) as applicable.

Cost-Effectiveness – Cost-effectiveness analysis identifies the economically most efficient way to meet project objectives. Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness evaluation includes, but is not limited to, an assessment of effective direct/indirect costs across all categories in the proposed budget according to the type, size, and duration of project and project objectives. Project budgets will be compared to similar projects to ensure proposed costs across all budget categories are reasonable for the activities being performed and the outcomes proposed.

Past Success – Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing other relevant projects with specific and measurable results, including but not limited to experience assisting farmers to sign up for NRCS and state cost-share programs, and in designing and implementing agricultural conservation practices that meet NRCS cost-share standards.

Partnership – Relationships are in place to implement the project and the project is supported by relevant stakeholders, constituents, and communities. Project identifies key partners (including potential or contemplated subawards to third party subrecipients of the applicant), the roles they will play in implementation, and how this project will build new or enhance existing partnerships. (Note: a project partner is any local community, non-profit organization, tribe, and/or local, state, and federal government agency that contributes to the project in a substantial way and is closely involved in project completion.)

OTHER

Applicant Demographic Information – In an effort to better understand diversity in our grantmaking, NFWF is collecting basic information on applicants and their organizations via a voluntary survey form (available in Easygrants). This information will not be shared externally or with reviewers and will not be considered when making grant decisions. For more details, please see the tip sheet and the Uploads section of Easygrants.

Procurement – If the applicant chooses to identify specific proposed Contractor(s) for Services, an award by NFWF to the applicant does not constitute NFWF’s express written authorization for the applicant to procure such specific services noncompetitively. When procuring goods and services, NFWF recipients must follow documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable laws and

regulations.

Publicity and Acknowledgment of Support – Award recipients will be required to grant NFWF the right and authority to publicize the project and NFWF’s financial support for the grant in press releases, publications and other public communications. Recipients may also be asked by NFWF to provide high-resolution (minimum 300 dpi) photographs depicting the project.

Receiving Award Funds – Award payments are primarily reimbursable. Grantees may request funds for reimbursement at any time after completing a signed agreement with NFWF. A request of an advance of funds must be due to an imminent need of expenditure and must detail how the funds will be used and provide justification and a timeline for expected disbursement of these funds.

Compliance Requirements – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be approved prior to initiating activities that disturb or alter habitat or other features of the project site(s). Applicants should budget time and resources to obtain the needed approvals. As applicable, successful applicants may be required to comply with additional Federal, state or local requirements and obtain all necessary permits and clearances.

Federal Funding – The availability of federal funds estimated in this solicitation is contingent upon the federal appropriations process. Funding decisions will be made based on level of funding and timing of when it is received by NFWF.

Underserved/Special Emphasis Categories – The historically underserved farmer and rancher categories include those with limited resources, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged (American Indians or Alaska Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics) and veterans. More information on the underserved categories can be found [here](#). The special emphasis categories are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Black, Disability, Women, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Hispanic, and Veterans. More information on the special emphasis categories can be found [here](#).

Environmental Services – NFWF funds projects in pursuit of its mission to sustain, restore and enhance the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats for current and future generations. NFWF recognizes that some benefits from projects may be of value with regards to credits on an environmental services market (such as a carbon credit market). NFWF does not participate in, facilitate, or manage an environmental services market nor does NFWF assert any claim on such credits.

Intellectual Property – Intellectual property created using NFWF awards may be copyrighted or otherwise legally protected by award recipients. NFWF may reserve the right to use, publish, and copy materials created under awards, including posting such material on NFWF’s website and featuring it in publications. NFWF may use project metrics and spatial data from awards to estimate societal benefits that result and to report these results to funding partners. These may include but are not limited to: habitat and species response, species connectivity, water quality, water quantity, risk of detrimental events (e.g., wildfire, floods), carbon accounting (e.g., sequestration, avoided emissions), environmental justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change.

Applicant Webinar: **Tuesday, August 20, 2024 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM**

[Register Here](#)

Full Proposals Due: Thursday, September 12, 2024

Review Period: September - November

Awards Announced: December 2024

After award announcements, NFWF staff will work with grantees to prepare grant agreements and other

necessary paperwork, all of which will be completed electronically using the Easygrants system. Additional information about the grantee's organization and its finances may be solicited during this time. Once grant agreements are finalized, funds will typically be paid to grantees on a reimbursable basis. Funds may be advanced to qualified grantees on an as-needed basis.

HOW TO APPLY

All application materials must be submitted online through NFWF's Easygrants system.

1. Go to easygrants.nfwf.org to register in NFWF's Easygrants online system. New users to the system will be prompted to register before starting the application (if you already are a registered user, use your existing login). Enter your applicant information. Please disable the pop-up blocker on your internet browser prior to beginning the application process.
2. Once on your homepage, click the "Apply for Funding" button and select *Northeast Forests and Rivers Fund* from the list of options.
3. Follow the instructions in Easygrants to complete your application. Once an application has been started, it may be saved and returned to at a later time for completion and submission.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

A *Tip Sheet* is available for quick reference while you are working through your application. This document can be downloaded [here](#).

Additional information to support the application process can be accessed on the NFWF website's [Applicant Information](#) page.

For more information or questions about this funding opportunity, please contact:

John Wright
Manager, Northeast Watersheds NFWF
John.wright@nfwf.org
202-595-2478

For issues or assistance with our online Easygrants system, please contact:

Easygrants Helpdesk
Email: easygrants@nfwf.org
Voicemail: 202-595-2497
Hours: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm ET, Monday–Friday.
Include: your name, proposal ID #, email address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.