

Request for Proposals

Soil Health Sampling

Overview

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) seeks a qualified contractor to perform soil sampling on fields that were cover cropped as part the [Farmers for Soil Health \(FSH\)](#) program, a USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart project (Award NR233A750004G003).

Background

Within its portfolio of agricultural programs, NFWF provides funding for projects that accelerate the adoption of conservation practices on private working lands. Funded projects provide technical and financial assistance that help farmers enhance wildlife habitat, soil health, water quality, and carbon sequestration while providing important social and economic benefits to agricultural producers.

In 2023, NFWF received a \$95 million award from USDA under the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities program. Administered by NFWF, Farmers for Soil Health is a farmer-led partnership of the Soy Checkoff, Pork Checkoff, and National Corn Growers Association. Farmers for Soil Health aims to accelerate long-term cover crop adoption by providing financial incentives and developing a marketplace platform that quantifies, verifies, and facilitates the sale of ecosystem benefits. In its targeted 20-state geography¹, FSH supports and expands technical assistance, enrollment, and education programs. Strong preference will be given to applicants who can perform sampling across the entire 20-state geography.

In addition to driving cover crop implementation, FSH is committed to analyzing the associated environmental benefits. NFWF seeks a contractor to sample cropland soils in enrolled fields across the 20-state Farmers for Soil Health project geography.² The selected contractor will collect samples from 600-800 sampling locations³ in Spring 2025 after enrollees' first year of cover cropping. The selected contractor will resample these same 600-800 locations using GPS coordinates in Spring 2027, after three consecutive years of cover cropping.

Request

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation requests proposals from contractors to collect and ship soil samples to a NFWF-selected laboratory. The sampling points will be determined by NFWF and shared

¹ The following 20 states are eligible to participate in the Farmers for Soil Health Climate Smart Commodities Partnership: Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

² In the first program year, most enrollments were concentrated in five states (Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas, Indiana). The contractor will perform a first round of soil sampling in Spring 2025 on fields that are not yet enrolled. These fields will belong to a cohort of farmers who will enroll in the second program year. We anticipate that enrollment in the second program year two will be more evenly distributed across the 20-state geography, albeit with a concentration in the Midwestern states listed above. The contractor should thus be willing and able to sample across the entire project geography.

³ We anticipate that there will be 600-800 sampling locations distributed across 300-400 fields. We do not yet know the precise location or properties of these fields, because the program must first enroll and verify the eligibility of the fields.

with the contractor 4-6 weeks prior to anticipated sampling start dates. At each sampling location, the following set of soil samples will be collected:

1. Two bulk density samples collected using a 7.5 cm-diameter core (0-15 cm and 15-30 cm depths)
2. Two soil health and carbon samples collected as composites using a push probe (0-15 cm and 15-30 cm depths), following Soil Health Institute's [Sampling SOP](#)
3. One composite sample of intact aggregates collected [via shovel slices](#) (1 sample at 0-7.5 cm depth)

After soil sampling, the chosen vendor will be responsible for shipping the samples in batches to a NFWF-selected laboratory. Care should be taken to keep samples as cool as possible prior to shipping. Composite and bulk density samples will be shipped in double bagged gallon bags, while aggregate stability samples will be shipped in 50 mL conical tubes.

Additionally, the chosen vendor will need to collect site metadata associated with each sampling location, including, but not limited to: GPS coordinates, presence of stones in bulk density samples, bulk density sample head space, and general cropping system information. Preference will be given to vendors that utilize an electronic labeling system (QR codes) for sample labeling and be willing to work with SHI-selected lab for smooth data transfer.

Criteria for Competitive Applications

1. **Understanding of the Scope of Work.** This section must demonstrate an understanding of the goals of the activities involved under this Contract. It should describe an approach for communicating with NFWF and reporting on progress, results, and deliverables. Weight 10%
2. **Technical Approach.** The proposed technical approach for soil sampling. The proposal must specifically address the applicant's ability to:
 - a. Work with NFWF-selected laboratory vendor to ensure receipt of all samples.
 - b. Finish sampling in the months of March and April each year.
 - c. Record high-quality sample notes and site metadata following NFWF specifications.
 - d. Label and track samples, while linking field-collected metadata to the samples
 - e. Maintain biological integrity of soil samples by keeping samples away from heat and shipping promptly. Weight 25%
3. **Qualifications of Proposed Personnel.** This section should clearly describe which tasks each member of the team will conduct and how their training and experience provide the requisite experience to do so successfully. Weight 25%
4. **Applicant's Past Performance.** The proposal should include information on the primary investigator(s)'s past performance experience. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered. If subcontractors are to be used, information should be provided that demonstrates their past performance as well. Describe how that past performance is applicable to this evaluation. Weight 20%
5. **Budget.** The proposed budget should itemize work in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the entire funding request. Applicants must use the [Contract Budget Template](#). Applicants may add columns to the template for additional tasks if needed, but should not make any other changes. Weight: 20%

Eligible Applicant & Conflict of Interest Statement

Eligible applicants include institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, international organizations, local and state governments, and Tribal Nations. Small and minority businesses, and women's business enterprises are strongly encouraged to apply.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the Applicant warrants and represents that it does not currently have any apparent or actual conflict of interest, as described herein. In the event an Applicant currently has, will have during the life of the contemplated contract, or becomes aware of an apparent or actual conflict of interest, in the event an award is made, the Applicant must notify NFWF in writing in the proposal, or in subsequent correspondence (if the issue becomes known after the submission of the proposal) of such apparent or actual conflicts of interest, including organizational conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest include any relationship or matter which might place the Applicant, the Applicant's employees, or the Applicant's subcontractor in a position of conflict, real or apparent, between their responsibilities under the award and any other outside interests, or otherwise. Conflicts of interest may also include, but are not limited to, direct or indirect financial interests, close personal relationships, positions of trust in outside organizations, consideration of future employment arrangements with a different organization, or decision-making affecting the award that would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question the impartiality of the Applicant, the Applicant's employees, or the Applicant's future subcontractors in the matter. Upon receipt of such a notice, the NFWF Contracting Officer will determine if a conflict of interest exists and, if so, if there are any possible actions to be taken by the Applicant to reduce or resolve the conflict. Failure to resolve conflicts of interest in a manner that satisfies NFWF may result in the proposal not being selected for award.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the Applicant warrants and represents that it is eligible for award of a Contract resulting from this solicitation and that it is not subject to any of the below circumstances:

Has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an Contract with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, where the awarding agency is aware of the unpaid tax liability, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or

Was convicted (or had an officer or agent of such corporation acting on behalf of the corporation convicted) of a felony criminal violation under any Federal or State law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency is aware of the conviction, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or

Is listed on the General Services Administration's, government-wide System for Award Management Exclusions (SAM Exclusions), in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 C.F.R Part 180 that implement E.O.s 12549 (3 C.F.R., 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 C.F.R., 1989 Comp., p. 235), "Debarment and Suspension," or intends to enter into any subaward, contract or other Contract using funds provided by NFWF with any party listed on the SAM Exclusions in accordance with Executive Orders 12549 and 12689. The SAM Exclusions instructions can be found here: <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>

Submission

Proposals must be submitted under the same cover at the same time in three distinctly labeled and separate documents: 1) Technical Proposal, 2) Budget, and 3) Evidence of Financial Stability.

Interested parties should submit proposals electronically to NFWF (Ernest Newborn, ernest.newborn@nfwf.org), including "FSH Soil Sampling Proposal" in the subject line, using the requirements below:

1. Technical Proposal

- a. Format: Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF with a font size no smaller than 11 pt. Note: The only section of the proposal that has a page limit is the work plan narrative (maximum of 6 pages).
 - b. Contact information: Primary contact person, company name, address, phone, email, website, UEI number, and EIN/Taxpayer ID#
 - c. Work Plan Narrative: Concise (**6-page limit**) description of work plan.
 - d. Past Experience: Summarize Applicant’s expertise and experience. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered.
 - e. Biographies: Resumes and/or Vitae of key staff and their role in the proposed work area.
 - f. References: List two clients who have received services from the applicant that is similar in nature to the proposed work; include names, phone numbers, and email addresses.
 - g. Example: Provide a report on a similar topic, embedded in the technical proposal or attached separately.
2. **Budget**: The budget proposal must be submitted using the following [NFWF budget template](#).
3. **Evidence of Financial Stability**: The applicant shall provide proof of financial stability in the form of financial statements, credit ratings, a line of credit, or other financial arrangements sufficient to demonstrate the applicant’s capability to meet the requirements of this solicitation.

Selection Procedure

A panel of NFWF and Farmers for Soil Health partners will review the proposals. Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of the award. Only one award will be made for this project. If multiple institutions are involved, they should be handled through subcontracts.

Submission Deadlines

August 9, 2024	Deadline for questions about solicitation to NFWF. Applicant should submit questions regarding this solicitation via email to Ernest Newborn (ernest.newborn@nfwf.org). NFWF will post all the questions and responses to all questions so that all Applicants have access to them at the same time. In order to provide equitable responses, all questions must be sent to NFWF no later than August 9, 2024 .
August 14, 2024	NFWF will post the questions submitted regarding the solicitation and responses on the NFWF website here.
September 4, 2024	Deadline for receipt by NFWF of proposals. Proposals must be sent electronically as an email attachment to Ernest Newborn (ernest.newborn@nfwf.org) by September 4, 2024, 5:00 PM ET . Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF.
Late September – Early October	NFWF will interview finalists to gather additional information.
Early November 2024	Contract award to selected Applicant.