New Jersey Highlands Council
Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program
Guidelines

Purpose

The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (the “Highlands Act”) requires the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (the “Highlands Council”), to promote compatible agriculture and the continuation and expansion of uses and opportunities within the frame work of protecting the Highlands Region. The Act also authorizes the Highlands Council to make available grants and other financial and technical assistance to the 88 municipalities and 7 counties in the Highlands Region.

The purpose of the Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program is to further to goals noted above. The proposed agricultural grants will concentrate on assisting the agriculture community by funding sustainable programs over a two year period and focusing in three areas described below. Funds will be made are available, on a competitive basis, to Highlands municipalities, counties and County Agriculture Development Boards (“CADBs”) that demonstrate the ability to fulfill the goals of this program. Submitting CADBs are encouraged to develop cooperative arrangements with other entities in order to fulfill the program goals. The Highlands Council is making a total up to $450,000 per year available for these grants.

Program Areas and Goals

1. Integrated Crop Management (ICM)

ICM is the combination of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Nutrient Management. IPM is a strategy that uses all available means to manage pests including weeds, insects and disease, and involves application of biological models in conjunction with scouting information to appropriately implement biological or chemical controls. Nutrient Management includes soil testing and fertility and crop protection recommendations. Grants are available in amounts up to $75,000 per year to municipalities or counties.

Goals
- Maintain the ICM program for farmers already using vegetable, fruit tree and field crop ICM programs and Nutrient Management throughout the Highlands Region
- Educate farmers of the benefits of ICM
- Expand the program to farmers not currently using the program
- Expand the ICM program to nursery crops

2. Market Development/Niche Crops

Through the “Jersey Fresh” program, the Department of Agriculture has been able to develop community farmers markets where New Jersey farmers can directly market their locally grown crops. Additionally New Jersey farmers rely on value-added products, market stands and other
agritourism efforts to augment their bottom line through other programs like the Skylands Agritourism Program. The plan is to utilize these programs in the Highlands Region to create new markets and opportunities within the Region and its counties. Grants are available in amounts up to $50,000 per year to municipalities or counties.

**Goals**

- Develop new markets for Highlands agriculture products inside and outside of the region
- Develop and promote value-added products, niche crops and new markets
- Promote agritourism initiatives and activities


The final area of focus is CADB capacity building. Funds will be made available to each county to create capacity building, such as hiring staff to assist in land preservation outreach and processing; provide CADB staff support for the county agricultural grant programs or developing educational materials or programs educating municipalities on being farm friendly communities. Grants are available in amounts up to $50,000 per year to counties only.

**Goals**

- Develop approaches to expedite the farmland preservation process
- Assist with the monitoring agricultural easements on preserved farms
- Promote collaboration among the seven CADBs in the Highlands Region in order to expedite the farmland preservation process
- Educate landowners and municipalities of the benefits of farmland preservation and the availability of funding programs

**Eligibility**

The sustainable agriculture grant program will only accept applications from municipalities and counties in the Highlands Region as defined in the Highlands Act. Grantees will be chosen by the Highlands Council’s Natural Resources Committee based on major review criteria including responses to a request for proposal and the overall appropriateness of the application. Grants for up to 2 years may be eligible.

Receipt of a sustainable agriculture grant will not prejudice an applicant from applying for any grants other Highlands Council grant programs that may be administered by the Highlands Council in the future.

The IPM/ICM and Market and Niche Development grant programs will be in the form of grants to municipalities, counties and/or County Agriculture Development Boards (“CADBs”). A qualifying municipality, county or CADB will be awarded the grant funds who will then solicit
Requests For Proposal from qualified IPM/ICM providers and market and niche crop development programs to implement the grant programs.

There are two approaches to managing these grants that can be taken with the counties:

All of the ICM and/or Market and Niche Development grants can be managed by one municipality or county through inter municipal or inter county agreements or multiple municipalities or counties can manage the programs. Individual farms will apply for services and receive their direct benefit from the qualified providers, with no direct benefit to any municipality or county with the exception of covering some administrative costs.

The capacity building grants for CADBs will go directly to each county and/or CADB.

**Funding Levels and Review Criteria**

The Highlands Council will provide up to two years of funding within the amounts per year specified in the above programs. A detailed and itemized budget must be presented with any request. The level of funding awarded to a project will be determined on the basis of its relationship to major review criteria and the availability of funding to meet application requests.

Major review criteria include: the comprehensiveness of the scope of proposed project, i.e., working with partners, scoping the entire Region, endorsements by multiple municipalities or counties; the efficacy of the proposed budget; the availability of grant funds; and the willingness of the applicant to work with the Highlands Council and its staff to ensure that the objectives of the Highlands Act are achieved.

Applications will also be reviewed on the basis of clarity and detail of scope of work, anticipated final deliverable(s), and detailed budget support. Matching funds are not required; however, these should be listed where available as the ability to leverage funding is part of the basic review criteria.

Grant assistance may be awarded for costs, including costs relating to reasonable and appropriate administrative and technical assistance, to be incurred as a direct result of sustainable agriculture grant project.

**Application and Approval Process**

All applications shall use the 2006 Highlands Council Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program application found at [www.highlands.state.nj.us](http://www.highlands.state.nj.us). When all of the required information is received, Highlands Council staff will review the materials, rank applications according to the review criteria, and make recommendations regarding fund allocations.

Applications shall contain a purpose statement that will describe how the proposal will further the objectives of the Highlands Act with regard to sustaining agriculture in the Highlands Region. It shall also include a Scope of Work that sets forth a specific description of deliverables along with a schedule and set of milestones to be met towards completion of those deliverables.
Completed applications must be submitted to the Highlands Council, 100 North Road, Chester, NJ 07930 for review by January 1, 2007. Applications will be reviewed by the Highlands Council staff and approved by the Highlands Council at a regularly scheduled meeting. At the discretion of the Highlands Council Natural Resource Committee, applicants may be required to make a presentation summarizing their projects, scope of work and deliverables. Such presentations may be required where there are questions regarding the scope of work content, deliverables, procedure or other ambiguity in the application.

**Timeframe and Reimbursement**

Upon approval, the Highlands Council Executive Director will issue a Commitment Letter with a Grant Agreement, which the applicant must execute and return within 30 days to the Highlands Council office at 100 North Road, Chester, New Jersey 07930, attention: Kim Ball Kaiser. A PDF version of the executed Grant Agreement may be e-mailed to kim.kaiser@highlands.state.nj.us in addition to mailing the executed original. Failure to execute and return the Grant Agreement to the Highlands Council within 30 days will result in rescission of the grant approval. The Executive Director may, at his discretion, extend the 30-day expiration date for receipt of the executed Grant Agreement upon request from the applicant. Additionally, the applicant must submit all required documentation outlined in the Commitment Letter, in form and content satisfactory to Highlands Council.

Quarterly progress reports will be submitted throughout project development as a requirement of payment. The first report is due 90 days from the start of the Grant Agreement date. Reimbursement will be made on quarterly basis on invoices submitted with the applicable monthly reports.

Once approved, substantial changes in the nature of the project or deletions of any scope of work item included in the original proposal requires Highlands Council approval.