



State of New Jersey

Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council
100 North Road (Route 513)
Chester, New Jersey 07930-2322
(908) 879-6737
(908) 879-4205 (fax)
www.nj.gov/njhighlands



PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

TAHESHA L. WAY
Lt. Governor

CARL J. RICHKO
Chairperson

BENJAMIN L. SPINELLI, ESQ.
Executive Director

Contact:
Carole Ann Dicton, Manager of Communications
(908) 879-6737 ext. 105 or caroleann.dicton@highlands.nj.gov

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Highlands Council Approves Funding for Innovative Ideas to Position Region as Agricultural ‘Hub’

CHESTER, N.J. — At its October meeting, the Highlands Council awarded six grants that will bolster and strengthen agricultural operations in the Highlands. Projects include the introduction of new crops, expansion of sustainable farming practices, education and marketing campaigns, and other efforts aimed at positioning the Highlands to become an agricultural hub for the region and beyond. The selected projects are eligible for continued funding for up to three years.

“Agriculture is not only a defining characteristic of the Highlands region, but it’s also an essential economic driver,” said Highlands Council Executive Director Ben Spinelli. “By equipping Highlands farmers with new and innovative ideas to prosper via sustainable and eco-friendly farming practices, we also ensure continued access to locally grown, healthy food for our region, and, at the same time, we protect the supply of fresh, clean, drinkable water for 70 percent of all New Jerseyans.”

“In the face of climate change, expanding the potential for food production in a region that will continue to see reliably adequate rainfall, has an extended growing season, and is within a two-hour drive of more than 20 million people is critical to the entire state,” Spinelli explained. “It’s incumbent upon us to ensure Highlands farmers have the resources they need to remain vital.”

The Highlands Council’s Sustainable Agriculture Grant program was announced in June with a submission deadline in August. The program sought proposals for projects that will assist agriculture operations in the Highlands Region including value-added facilities, technical assistance, new farmer programs, sustainable land management practices, and other sustainable agriculture activity. Projects needed to be innovative in nature, replicable, and aligned with the goals, policies, and objectives of the Regional Master Plan (RMP).

A total of six applications were received; five will be funded through the Sustainable Agriculture grant program and the sixth proposal was transferred to a different grant program and also approved for funding at the October meeting. Although proposals outlined three-year programs, the Council today approved funding only for year one. As with all Highlands Council funding awards, grants are reimbursement based and annual check points will ensure continued progress, with prior authorization required before proceeding to the next year's funding.

A summary of funded projects follows:

- **Strengthening Sustainable Land Management Practices and Transportation at the City Green Farm at South Branch Preserve**

City Green, Inc.

Award: \$90,000

City Green, a nonprofit farming and gardening organization, is proposing to expand regenerative farming practices in Morris County. The funded project will increase production at City Green Farms at South Branch Preserve in Mount Olive Township, and result in the development of a farmer education program that focuses on teaching regenerative practices to the next generation of farmers.

- **Using Regenerative Agriculture to Grow the Local Grain Economy in the NJ Highlands, various locations**

Foodshed Alliance

Award: \$92,840

The Foodshed Alliance, a non-profit farming organization, is proposing to create a program that will help farmers plant and harvest high-demand grains and then connect them to burgeoning markets for these products. At least 20 Highlands farmers are anticipated to participate in the program in its initial stages. Foodshed Alliance will create educational, training and networking tools for farmers and purchase mobile grain-processing equipment, which will be shared among participating farms.

- **Operation Diversification: Adaptive Farm Stewardship Modeling, Tewksbury Township, Hunterdon County**

Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) of New Jersey

Award: \$93,245

This project will take place at Provenance Farm in Tewksbury Township as well as on farms throughout the Highlands Region. Across a series of 11 fields, NOFA will conduct demonstrations of rotational grazing, increasing pasture diversity, and agroforestry via on-farm presentations farmer-to-farmer training and networking events, and the development of technical and educational resources. The project aims to teach risk-averse farmers how to restore their land in a profitable and ecologically sustainable way.

- **Building Resiliency and Supporting Sustainable Agriculture in the NJ Highlands through the River Friendly Farm Certification Program, Various Locations**

North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development

Award: \$90,000

The River Friendly Farm (RFF) Certification program promotes sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices by evaluating farms based on soil health, nutrient management, pest management, farmstead management, waterway protection, and water conservation. North Jersey RC&D proposes to expand the program to 24 Highlands farms over three years while increasing understanding and recognition of the RFF Certification program. In addition, the organization will participate in outreach events, create marketing materials, advertise, provide technical and financial assistance to Highlands farms, and increase awareness among farmers and consumers about sustainable agriculture practices.

- **Transitioning Conventionally Farmed Land to Organic Management Practices in NJ Wildlife Management Areas (Supporting the Whittingham Pilot), Green Township, Sussex County**

Ramapough Culture and Land Foundation of the Turtle Clan of the Ramapough Lunape (Lenape) Nation

Award: \$83,930

Located on 40 acres of NJDEP land in the Whittingham Wildlife Management Area, the Ramapough Culture and Land Foundation proposes to grow a consistent food supply of indigenous crops to support the Turtle Clan Food Sovereignty. The project will involve coordination with NJDEP to develop organic farming practices in accordance with policies for leased land in a Wildlife Management Area.

- **Implementation Plan - Northwest Jersey Food Processing and Innovation Center**

Award to Oxford Township, Warren County, through the Plan Conformance Grant Program: \$150,000

An award of \$150,000 to Oxford Township will support planning efforts for the development of the Northwest Food Processing and Innovation Center, which will be a regional hub for food processing and an incubator for creative agricultural business development. Funding from the Highlands Council will aid in the development of business and marketing plans, the preparation of a preliminary design, and project budget to support and facilitate the construction of the center. The project also aims to innovate new products, packaging, and distribution ideas.

“While the New Jersey Highlands is home to more than 800,000 residents, it is also home to rolling farmlands, lush forests and bucolic rural vistas. By helping Highlands farmers to innovate and succeed, the Highlands Council is protecting the heart and soul of this region and ensuring that the agricultural tradition here continues well into our future,” said Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman.

Actions taken by the Council at this meeting will take effect following the Governor's review and consideration of the meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of the minutes. Materials related to this meeting including resolutions, presentations, audio, and minutes will be posted at: www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/index.html (click on October 19 meeting).

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at www.nj.gov/njhighlands. Actions taken by the Council will take effect following the Governor's review and consideration of meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of meeting minutes.

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