Northwest Connecticut
Land Conservancy

PROTECTING LAND AND WATER FOR PEOPLE, FOR WILDLIFE, FOREVER.

BUILDING RESILIENCY ON NORTHWEST CONNECTICUT FARMLAND
CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTATION GRANT GUIDANCE

Overview

Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy (NCLC) is pleased to announce the ***Building Resiliency on Connecticut Farmland*** grant program (known as the *Building Resiliency* program), made possible through a generous grant from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) program.

NCLC's *Building Resiliency* program funds two types of projects: (1) climate-smart agricultural assessments and (2) the implementation of climate-smart agricultural practices.

This guidance document describes the **Implementation Grant** and how to apply. Please direct all questions to Shelley Rose, Agricultural Program Manager, at shelley@ctland.org, or call 860-927-1927.

NCLC will accept applications in two rounds:
- **April 1-May 31**
- **October 1-November 30**

Eligibility

Eligible applicants must operate working farmland or a farm business in NCLC's service area, which includes all of Litchfield County and Brookfield, Newtown, and Sherman in Fairfield County. All agricultural activities as defined by Conn. Gen. Stat. § 1-1(q) qualify, including but not limited to, the "cultivation of the soil, dairying, forestry, raising or harvesting any agricultural or horticultural commodity, including the raising, shearing, feeding, caring for, training and management of livestock, including horses, bees, the production of honey, poultry, fur-bearing animals and wildlife."

The proposed project must occur on property owned, licensed, or leased by the applicant (for all property, the **Landlord Consent Agreement** authorizing the assessment must be submitted with the application).

The following individuals and entities are eligible for funding:
- Agricultural producers and agricultural cooperatives
- Land trusts
- Municipalities
- Non-profit organizations

Priority will be given to historically underserved producers, as defined by the NRCS. Click here to determine if this classification applies to the applicant's farm.

Climate-Smart Projects

NCLC's *Building Resiliency* program will fund the implementation of climate-smart agricultural practices. The NRCS defines **climate-smart agriculture** as "an integrated approach that enables farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to respond to climate change by reducing or removing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and adapting and building resilience (adaptation), while sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes."

NCLC will prioritize projects that include practices from the following categories:

- **Soil Health** – Reducing emissions and enhancing soil carbon sequestration. Examples include tillage management, cover cropping, and field borders.
- **Nitrogen Management** – Managing the rate, source, placement, or timing of plant nitrogen while reducing emissions of nitrous oxide, a potent greenhouse gas. Examples include precision agriculture technology and enhanced efficiency fertilizers.
- **Grazing and Pasture** – Reducing emissions and building soil carbon stocks in grazing systems. Examples include prescribed grazing and pasture and hay planting.
- **Agroforestry** – Building carbon stocks in perennial biomass and soils. Examples include alley cropping, hedgerow planting, riparian forest buffers, and silvopasture.
- **Energy Use** – Transitioning to renewable energy and reducing emissions from agricultural operations and infrastructure. Examples include the installation of solar panels on existing farm infrastructure and energy efficient lighting, ventilation, and equipment.

The NRCS has compiled a comprehensive suite of climate-smart agricultural practices: Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List for FY2024. Click the "Code" number to access guidance for specific activities.

Measuring Impacts of Climate-Smart Activities

All applicants must demonstrate that their project produces quantifiable outcomes – the Environmental Impacts. To assess these impacts, the applicant will submit data collected before and after project implementation on chosen metrics. The applicant is responsible for identifying **at least two different types of metrics** from the provided categories below. If the applicant determines that a metric not represented below is more appropriate for the project, the applicant must seek approval from NCLC in writing *prior to submitting the application*, and demonstrate that the metric is environmentally related, economically feasible, and measurable within the timeframe of the grant. Applications that do not present provided or approved metrics will not be considered.

For practices under Soil Health, Nitrogen Management, Grazing and Pasture, and Agroforestry:

1. **Soil testing** – Cornell's Basic Soil Health Analysis Package assigns a soil health score to soil samples based on biological, physical, and chemical properties
2. **COMET-Planner** – A tool used by the NRCS to measure greenhouse gas emissions reductions and carbon sequestration associated with various practices
3. **Adaptation and Resiliency Co-Benefits *** – Including but not limited to:
   - Pesticide use
   - Fertilizer use
   - Biodiversity/species abundance
   - Water use
   - Water quality

- o Erosion
- o Fuel use
- o Yield
- o Cost savings

*Note that Adaptation and Resiliency Co-Benefits is one category. NCLC encourages measuring multiple co-benefits.

For practices under Energy Use:
1. **Energy Assessment** – Conducted by entities such as Energize CT
2. **Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator** - A tool created by the EPA to convert energy data to the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide emissions and other metrics
3. **Cost savings**

Award Information

The maximum award for this grant is $50,000. The minimum award is $1,000. NCLC will prioritize funding opportunities within the range of **$5,000-$20,000**.

Eligible Use of Funding

Applicants will submit a budget worksheet describing anticipated costs incurred throughout the course of the project.

Eligible expenses include the following:
- Materials and supplies related to project implementation
- Consultants and contractors
- State/local/federal permits
- Equipment purchases and rentals

Ineligible expenses include the following:
- Salaries and wages
- Any expense incurred prior to contract execution
- Land acquisition/mortgages
- Cost of borrowing (points and other fees)
- Expenses related to establishing a new organization/business
- Any portion of expense for which the applicant pays a contractor in merchandise or service in lieu of cash
- Tuition/tuition reimbursement or career-related/scholarship funds
- Disposable supplies (office, farm, otherwise) unrelated to the project
- Legal expenses related to litigation

Contractual Requirements

Selected awardees must sign a contract with NCLC governing the terms of their grant award. The contract will require that awardees comply with the following:
- Provide a certificate of insurance holding NCLC and the CT Department of Agriculture harmless
- Determine permits and other local requirements and supply a copy of documentation prior to project implementation
- Conduct data collection before and after project implementation on the chosen metrics

- Submit an initial and final report detailing project information, as detailed below
- Receive a site visit from a representative of NCLC and DOAG after project completion
- Publicly acknowledge funds
- Other applicable information, as outlined in the contract

Reporting will include the following information:
- Baseline data and data collected during the monitoring period on the chosen metrics, including detailed documentation
- Financial information with expenses itemized and broken down by project category, invoices from and payments to contractors/consultants, among other forms of proof of payment
- A timeline of activities for the upcoming period
- Deviations from the approved project and timeline
- Difficulties or challenges encountered
- Solutions developed to overcome difficulties

Grant Payment

After contract signing, awardees will receive up to a 50% advance of award funds. The remaining funds will be reimbursed to the applicant upon favorable review of the final report. The specifics of the grant payment will be tailored to each project and will be outlined in the contract.

Example Timeline

A typical timeline will look like the following, but will be tailored to each project in the contract:

Activity	Anticipated Completion
Applicant receives award notification.	2 months after the round closes
Awardee and NCLC execute contract.	Within 2 months of award notification
Awardee submits initial report.	Within 3 months of contract signing
NCLC disburses initial funds.	Within 1 month of Initial Report submission
Awardee completes project.	1-2 years after contract signing
Awardee submits final report.	Within 3 months of project completion
NCLC conducts site visit.	Within 6 months of project completion
NCLC disburses final funds.	Within 1 month of Final Report submission

How to Apply

1. Complete the following online form. A PDF version is also available, which applicants can download, complete, and send to shelley@ctland.org.
2. Complete the budget worksheet.
3. Make sure all required documentation is submitted with the application and worksheet, including:
   - Landlord consent agreement

- Maps, sketches, pictures, and other visual materials
- Contractor quotes

4. Make sure all supplemental documentation is submitted with the application, when applicable:
   - Conservation easement
   - Farm management plan
   - NRCS conservation plan
   - Any other materials necessary to demonstrate planned project

NCLC will not accept incomplete applications. Technology should not be a barrier to participation in this program. If the applicant needs any technological assistance or clarification on application questions, please reach out to Shelley Rose, Agricultural Program Manager, at shelley@ctland.org, or call 860-927-1927.

Evaluation Criteria (Strength of Application)

Applicants must show proof of eligibility, request an award within the minimum and maximum funding range, and submit all required documentation to be considered for a climate-smart agricultural implementation grant. Strong applications will also demonstrate the following:
- Projects that fall under the above climate-smart mitigation categories or otherwise have a climate mitigation focus, improve the farm's adaptability and resilience, and promote ecological sustainability
- Projects that can be measured through multiple metrics from provided or approved categories
- The applicant's capacity to complete and measure the project within the timeframe of the grant
- Eligible and justified expenses

Learn More

- Attend the online information session Wednesday, March 27, 6-7pm. Register here.
- Join office hours on Wednesday, May 1, 12-1pm. Register here.