

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture Oklahoma Producer Grant Program

2008 Call for Preproposals

Introduction

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture is soliciting grant proposals from producers across Oklahoma who are interested in conducting research or demonstration projects. **This is a competitive grant program. The goal of the program is to advance the use of sustainable farming/ranching practices by Oklahoma producers. Educational programs should be a key component of any proposal submitted. All research and demonstration projects should have measurable outcomes.** The program is based upon the recognition that farmers know their land best and are eager to innovate if given support and encouragement. This program is designed to provide producers with an avenue to utilize new sustainable practices and learn from each other.

Summary

To streamline the process for producers, the Kerr Center has divided the grant process into two sections. The first is the preproposal process, producers write a two or three page summary of the project they want to do on their farm/ranch and submit the preproposal to the Kerr Center by the due date. The preproposal should follow the guidelines outlined in this text. A technical committee will select a certain number of preproposals for development into a full proposal.

Selected preproposals will be asked to complete a full proposal application by the second due date to compete for grant funds. This allows producers to write down an idea for consideration without spending long hours completing a full proposal. If selected to complete the full proposal, the preproposal will be further developed into a full application and returned to the Kerr Center by the deadline date.

To apply for this grant, a farmer/rancher can request an information packet to use with this set of guidelines for completing the preproposal from the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture or from our web page at www.kerrcenter.com. The project must fit into one of the selected priority areas listed on the following pages. **All proposals are reviewed by a qualified independent technical committee.** Farmers are encouraged to link up with Extension personnel, other state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, other farmers or specialists to assist with executing and analyzing their projects. Grants can be funded for up to \$3,500 for a two year project and up to \$7,500 for a three year project. The application must be returned by the due date listed below. Confirmation of receipt of application will be mailed, emailed or faxed within two working days. The timeline and guidelines are on the next page.

Time Line

Call for Preproposals Released	September 28, 2007
Preproposals Due (Received by 5:00 p.m.)	October 31, 2007
Notification to develop full proposals	November 15, 2007
Full Proposals Due (Received by 5:00 p.m.)	December 14, 2007
Award Notification	January 16, 2008

Guidelines for Preproposals

In the preproposal process, a producer will use the following guidelines to complete a two or three page preproposal depicting the activity the producer wants to do in the project they propose. **We recommend you read the information packet prior to starting to fully understand the program.**

Projects that are innovative, applicable to many farms, and useful beyond the length of the project have the best chance of being funded

All projects must have a strong outreach plan for providing other producers, researchers, extension personnel, and the general public with the opportunity to learn from project results. Outreach plans may include workshops, field days, fact sheets, or brochures.

Black and white project maps highlighting important areas of the project may be submitted with the application. Maps must be capable of being photocopied for review by committee members. Refer to information packet for more helpful information.

The producer must answer the following questions in the following format:

Format

Cover Page

Title, Name, Address, e-mail, phone, estimated grant request amount

Preproposal body

No more than three typewritten pages, using 12 point font, single spaced, 1 inch margins, and address the following questions:

1. Briefly describe your farm/ranch operation.
2. Describe the problem you want to address. Describe your possible sustainable solution(s) and what you will do to test them.
3. Explain how your project relates to the selected priority area.
4. What are the objectives of your project and expected outcomes?

5. What measurements will be taken in your research or demonstration project? How will the measurements be taken?
6. What is your outreach plan - how will you share information from your project with other producers? Outreach plans may include workshops, field days, fact sheets, or brochures.
7. Give an estimate of your cost for the project. Provide a short explanation of the cost figures; this needs to be brief, but should be given some thought before just writing down numbers.

2008 Priority Area

All projects must fit in the priority areas listed below. It is important to clearly show how your project fits the area you have chosen. The following is a brief guideline showing in general the kinds of projects that fit. Because this program focuses on innovative methods, feel free to roam outside the examples mentioned here. Please remember that developing a program proposal to these examples does not guarantee funding.

1. Conserve and create healthy soil

Soil erosion is still a problem in agriculture –half of farmland is losing soil faster than it is formed. Conservation tillage and cover crops help reduce erosion of precious topsoil by keeping bare soil protected from wind and rain. Keeping topsoil both on the farm and healthy is essential for a sustainable agriculture. Healthy soil has a large amount of organic matter, is biologically active, and fertile. Cover crops and manures add this essential organic matter to soil, while maintaining adequate fertility. For livestock, planned rotations in mixed pastures seeded with legumes can maintain soil health and fertility, and reduce erosion.

2. Conserve water and protect its quality

Agriculture affects water quality when soil washed from farmlands enters waterways. This sediment damage costs the nation four to five billion dollars annually. Farming/ranching methods that prevent soil erosion or filter pollutants before they reach waterways can dramatically improve water quality, as does fencing livestock out of ponds and streams.

Water quantity, as well as quality, is also declining –in some places water is being pumped out to irrigate farmland faster than it is replaced by surface water percolating down. Raising drought tolerant crops and using irrigation methods such as drip irrigation help to conserve water.

3. Manage organic wastes and farm chemicals so they don't pollute

Organic wastes such as manures and litters can be valuable fertilizers on the farm if they are managed correctly. Applying them at the right time and at the right rate can prevent the water pollution that plagues areas with heavy animal concentrations. Farm chemicals can find their way into wells and streams, endangering human and animal health. Applying them at reduced concentrations or in a more precise way (as in banding) can protect water quality and wildlife.

4. Manage pests with minimal environmental impact

Pesticides are costly, can cause farmer health problems, and can pollute the environment. Heavy use of pesticides has made some target insects resistant. Using integrated pest management can cut frequency of applications. Other approaches include enhancing habitat for beneficial insects, and using biological or mechanical controls. Multi-species grazing can control weeds without chemicals.

5. Select crops and livestock adapted to the natural environment

Crops suited to the climate and soil type, and livestock adapted to natural forages require fewer costly inputs such as pesticides and water in order to produce well. Adapted crops and livestock often produce well under adverse conditions. One of the questions posed in this area is whether we should change the soil to grow a particular crop or should we be selecting species that grow well under good management without the input cost of changing the soil?

6. Encourage biodiversity

Encouraging biodiversity of wild plants and animals helps the farmer take advantage of possible natural controls of pests. Leaving strips uncultivated provides habitat for endangered grassland birds which eat many harmful insects. Fencing cattle from ponds and waterways protects aquatic life. Rotations of hay and grain crops maintain small game populations. Planting a variety of cultivars, including non-hybrids, and raising old breeds preserve genetic diversity among domesticated plants and animals. Preserving genetic diversity makes it less likely that disease will wipe out whole crops or populations of animals.

7. Conserve energy resources

Cutting the direct use of fossil fuels (diesel, gasoline) and costly inputs (fertilizers, pesticides) made from fossil fuels protect producers from price increases or fluctuations that will occur as fossil fuel supplies continue to decline. The use of solar systems for fence charging, solar water pumps, or any other practice reduces the cost of operating a farm. One might demonstrate the energy savings of growing one's own fence post to save the energy of manufacturing metal fence posts.

8. Increase profitability and reduce risk

Diversifying farm enterprises provides protection against price fluctuations and crop failures. Growing new or unusual crops may bring greater profits. Reducing costly inputs (which may account for over half of operating costs) and capital expenditures on machinery also improve the bottom line. Preserving healthy soil guarantees a farm's viability into the future.

Producers applying for a grant should read the grant program information and instruction packet and sample application.

Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. on October 31, 2007 to be considered for review.

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The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Inc. Oklahoma Producer Grant Program Preproposal Information Packet

Mission Statement

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture offers progressive leadership and educational programs to all those interested in making farming and ranching environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically viable over the long term.

Introduction

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture invites farmers across Oklahoma to submit preproposals that test, evaluate, and adapt sustainable agriculture practices for their operations. These grants also fund educational events, field days, or demonstrations to further disseminate information to other producers.

The goal of the program is to advance the use of sustainable farming/ranching practices among Oklahoma producers. The program is based upon the recognition that farmers know their land best and are often eager to innovate if given support and encouragement. In order to capture this producer experience and enrich applied research on Oklahoma farms, the Kerr Center is requesting grant applications from producers or producer organizations interested in conducting research or demonstration projects related to sustainable agriculture.

Applicants must identify specific problems and potential solutions to these problems. The grant applications will be reviewed by a qualified technical committee that will review them for technical merit. Educational programs should be a key component of any proposal submitted. All research and demonstration projects should have a measurable outcome. Farmers will be encouraged to link up with Extension personnel, other state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, other farmers or specialists to assist with executing and analyzing their projects. Preference will be given to proposals that incorporate collaboration.

Sustainable agriculture The USDA definition is: An integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term:

- \$ enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends
- \$ make the most efficient use of non-renewable and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls
- \$ sustain the economic viability of farm operations

\$ enhance the quality of life for farmers/ranchers and society as a whole.

What is a producer grant?

A producer grant funds the development of a new idea or innovative practice. These projects may be in the form of research or demonstration activities in the area of sustainable agriculture.

Who can apply?

Any active resident producer in the state of Oklahoma is eligible to receive a grant. Projects must be developed, coordinated, and conducted by farmers/ranchers. Producers complete an application describing their project and how it will help other producers understand and adopt sustainable agriculture practices. Previous grant recipients are eligible to apply for a new grant, but cannot be involved in two grants simultaneously.

What types of projects will be funded?

Grant funds will be allocated for two broad categories: research or demonstration.

Research projects involve an on-farm test of an idea or technology in sustainable agriculture. An example of a research project would be a farmer receiving a grant to set up an experiment to compare compost with a conventional fertility program on a tomato crop. The farmer would work with Extension personnel, nonprofit organizations, or other state and federal agencies to design the experiment for the project. The grant would cover the cost of sampling, monitoring, additional labor, travel, and costs associated with any educational programming.

Demonstration projects involve the on-farm demonstration of a proven practice or system that applies to other farmers in the state. All demonstrations should include a comparison trial and have measurable outcomes. An example of a demonstration project is the use of ridge till for growing soybeans. The farmer would set up a demonstration of a conventional tillage practice versus a ridge tillage practice and use field days, presentations, and educational materials to promote the practice to other farmers. The grant would cover the cost of additional labor, travel, and costs associated with any educational programming.

How much will a producer grant fund?

Projects are funded for two or three years. Two year grants are funded up to \$3,500. Three year grants are funded up to a total of \$7,500.

Do I have to have a cooperator?

Demonstration projects are not required to have a cooperator. Research projects will require a cooperator. The review committee will give special preference to proposals which include cooperators for demonstration projects. All project cooperators must submit a letter of commitment during the full proposal process. Letters of commitment must clearly state what duties or activities the cooperator will perform in the project. Cooperators can be other farmers, researchers, extension agents, specialists, governmental or non-governmental organizations, or other interested individuals who can assist in project planning, data collection, and communication of project results.

Do I have to own the land I am conducting the project on?

Projects being conducted on leased land must obtain a letter of support for the length of the grant from the land owner. Upon notification of a grant awarded to a recipient, a written copy of a lease containing the option to lease one year past the end of the grant and the letter of support must be submitted to the Kerr Center.

What expenses will a producer grant cover?

The producer grant will cover costs associated with the project. Funds may cover the cost of sampling and sample analysis, materials and supplies needed for the project, outreach expenses such as holding a field day, and travel if needed for the project. The grant will pay for renting specialized equipment, tractors, and other equipment that may be needed for use in the project. Other expenses such as fencing, irrigation systems, or tree plantings that pertain to the project will be covered. An example would be fencing a riparian area to demonstrate creek bank stabilization. In certain cases, recipients may be asked to utilize Kerr Center equipment in their project.

The producer grant program will not cover costs of purchasing general equipment such as tractors, implements, or vehicles. Funds will not cover expenses related to normal farming/ranching activities. Producer grant funds are not meant to pay a farmer for farming. However, grant funds will pay for additional labor for a project.

What expenses will you be expected to cover if you get a Producer Grant?

Although the Kerr Center once required matching contributions, we no longer ask recipients to show or track matching contributions. Our experiences have shown that producer's efforts are more than enough matching contributions.

How are grants funded from the Kerr Center?

The Kerr Center annually budgets a certain amount of money to be awarded in grants. These funds are used to fund grants at the discretion of the technical committee's recommendations. Due to funding limitations, the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture grant program cannot fund all the projects that meet the criteria. All funding is awarded competitively. A qualified technical committee will evaluate and rank the producer grant applications.

What are the key questions that this committee uses to evaluate applications?

- 1) Does the proposed activity address an important problem facing agriculture in Oklahoma from a sustainable perspective?
- 2) Is the proposed activity an appropriate and realistic way to address the problem for a number of farmers?
- 3) Does the application explain how the results will be communicated to a large audience?
- 4) Does the application explain in detail how the project will be accomplished?
- 5) Is the budget realistic and appropriate for the project?
- 6) Are all participants and cooperators committed and contributing to the project?

The following factors will also be considered:

- 1) Funds are not being used primarily for personal use, to buy equipment, or make capital improvements on a farm.
- 2) Submission is limited to what is requested. No photos, news articles, or brochures are allowed, although black and white maps of project areas highlighting important areas of the project may be submitted with the full proposal. Maps must be capable of being photocopied for review by committee members. Only the application will be reviewed, not appendices.
- 3) The project must be useful beyond the length of the project and applicable to similar farm and ranch operations.

What will happen if your project is selected?

You will be contacted regarding the status of your preproposal application. Unsuccessful applicants may reevaluate their preproposals and resubmit at a later call. Preproposals selected to be developed into full proposals will be contacted and provided information and a packet to complete the full proposal. Selection for development of a full proposal does not mean that you have been awarded a grant, but only that your idea was chosen for competition with other full proposals.

If you are awarded a producer grant during the full proposal competition, you will be asked to sign a Plan of Work and a contract prior to receiving the funds. The grants are awarded on a competitive basis, but once you have been selected to receive a grant, the Kerr Center specialists

will provide assistance needed to help you succeed in completing your project.

Any expenses you incur prior to signing the contract cannot be reimbursed. By signing the contract and Plan of Work, you agree to conduct the activities outlined in your application and Plan of Work. Any changes in budget or activities must receive prior approval by the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

You will be asked to keep detailed financial and project activity records. The grantee will be expected to cover cost of purchases and submit a bill accompanied with a copy of all receipts for reimbursement on a monthly basis.

You will also be asked to submit photographs/slides and a short report detailing your activities annually and a final report at the end of the project. The final 10% payment will not be issued until annual or final reports and slides are received by the Kerr Center as stated in your contract.

How can you apply for a Producer Grant?

To apply for this grant, a farmer/rancher can request a call for preproposal containing a set of guidelines to use for completing the preproposal and an information packet from the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture or from our web page at www.kerrcenter.com. If you have any questions about the application process or the producer grant program contact:

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