

Seeding Solutions 2021 Request for Application

Key Dates

Pre-Application Open: January 27, 2021 at 12:00pm ET

Pre-Applications Due: March 10, 2021 5:00pm ET

NOTE: An approved pre-application with an invitation to submit a full application is required for submission.

Full Application Invitation: May 5, 2021

Full Application Receipt Open: May 5, 2021 at 12:00 PM ET

Full Applications Due: July 7, 2021 5:00 PM ET

Award Notification: Fall 2021

Anticipated Project Start Date: Early 2022

The Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) is announcing the 2021 Seeding Solutions program and is inviting applications for audacious research that benefits farmers, consumers and the environment. FFAR seeks to award up to ten meritorious proposals across our [Challenge Areas](#), prioritizing those projects that emphasize a commitment to cross-sector partnerships.

Program Priorities and Requirements:

FFAR seeks projects that foster innovation with the potential for transformative impact within FFAR's Challenge Areas. Applications that address the following will receive preference:

1. Contribute to the goal of sustainable food and agriculture, defined as practices that "satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends; make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; sustain the economic viability of farm operation; and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole." (Food and Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990, Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1603).

2. Accelerate innovation within FFAR's Challenge Areas. For this request for applications (RFA), FFAR defines innovation as follows:

- *Radical Innovation*: **Development of new technologies**, software, algorithms, methodology or products with the potential to transform agricultural systems.
- *Applied Innovation*: **Application and validation of new or emerging technologies, processes or management strategies** to address significant challenges in food and agriculture systems.
- *Re-imagined Innovation*: **Adaptation of existing technologies, processes or management strategies for entirely new agricultural applications.**

3. Address an aspect of the following [Challenge Area priorities](#). Additional information is available through the Challenge Area links provided. We encourage applicants to reach out to the Scientific Program Director of the appropriate Challenge Area of interest to hone ideas before submitting a pre-application (see Application Assistance below).

- [Soil Health](#): Advanced understanding of what soil health is, how it is measured and how to manage and optimize the sustainable delivery of the ecosystem services which soils provide
- [Sustainable Water Management](#): Interdisciplinary, model-based research related to near-surface hydrology and designed to advance precision agriculture and water management
- [Next Generation Crops](#): Advanced breeding methods and development of biotic and abiotic stress tolerance for crops grown in organic and conventional cropping systems to increase farmer profitability and environmental resilience
- [Advanced Animal Systems](#): Improved animal health, welfare and productivity, antibiotic stewardship and the environment through innovative partnerships
- [Urban Food Systems](#): Elucidation of connections between urban food systems and the urban environment, in addition to the connections between rural and urban communities to improve food and nutritional security, human health outcomes, economic opportunities and food system resiliency through transdisciplinary partnerships
- [Health- Agriculture Nexus](#): Systems-level approaches (both technological and non-technological) aimed at reducing food and nutritional insecurity and improving human health in the United States and worldwide

4. Demonstrate fully integrated partnerships with different sectors (private, non-government organizations (NGO), governments, academia and other stakeholders) such that research outcomes may be scalable and applicable to food and agriculture systems.

The development of public-private partnerships is central to FFAR's vision and core mission: *Building unique partnerships to support innovative science addressing today's food and agriculture challenges*. External matching funds (i.e., contributions provided by partners outside of an applicant's home institution) will strengthen the application's standing. These partners may include but are not limited to private and public corporations, non-profits, foundations, commodity and trade groups, and state and local governments. Unique partnerships including organizations that may not typically work in agriculture, are strongly encouraged.

5. Serve the public good by making data open and accessible to the public, creating unique economic development opportunities or contributing to food and agriculture workforce development.

FFAR, as a part of its mission, seeks "not only brilliant minds but also fresh perspectives tackling today's challenges in food and agriculture. We embrace diversity and promote inclusiveness in all we do, from the teams we build to the grantees we support." FFAR also understands that the outside-the-box thinking needed to drive innovation occurs when researchers with different skillsets and experience collaborate. With that spirit of diversity and inclusiveness in mind, cross-disciplinary research teams, especially those that include disciplines not traditionally associated with food or agriculture science, to develop innovative solutions to address current agricultural challenges are strongly encouraged to apply to the Seeding Solutions program.

Eligibility

The Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research welcomes applications from all domestic and international higher education institutions, non-profit and for-profit organizations, and US government-affiliated research agencies.

Any individual(s) with the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research as Program Director(s)/Principal Investigator(s) may apply to the Seeding Solutions program through their home institution or organization.

Funding Availability and Award Information

At FFAR's discretion, we will award a total of up to \$10 million in grants through the 2021 Seeding Solution program. Individual awards will range from \$300,000 to \$1 million for up to ten awards. All projects must have planned durations ranging between 12 and 60 months. Successful projects will receive annual disbursements.

Key budget considerations are noted below and additional budgetary guidelines can be found on our [website](#). Applicants are encouraged to contact [FFAR's Grant Team](#) to discuss any concerns related to the matching requirements (see [Matching Guidelines](#)).

- **All grants require matching contributions equal to or greater than the FFAR funding request.** Matching funds must come from a non-US Federal entity. Excess match will not influence the potential success of an application.
- Matching funds cannot supplement or supplant preexisting funds for the project. Matching funds must correspond to line items in the full application budget. At least 50 percent of matching funds must be a cash match per FFAR's definition of cash. The remainder may be an in-kind match per FFAR's definition of in-kind.
- A maximum of 10 percent of the total award may be used for indirect costs. FFAR's indirect cost allotment is not an indirect cost rate applied to the total modified direct costs; instead, it is an overall allotment from the Total Funds Request, also known as the Total Project Costs. This requirement means 90 percent of the total funds requested must go directly to the proposed research.
- Reasonable budgets work in favor of the applicant. Budgets that are not commensurate with proposed work or poorly justified likely will negatively affect the overall evaluation of the application.

Evaluation Criteria

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness and compliance with FFAR policies. Pre-proposal applications must demonstrate the potential to meet the evaluation criteria. Full proposals then will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Novelty, Innovation, and Originality (30%)

- Does the proposed project innovatively address a challenge related to our food supply or sustainable agriculture?
- Does the proposal align with FFAR's Challenge Area priorities?
- Does the proposal challenge an existing paradigm(s) in food and agriculture science?

Technical Merit and Feasibility (30%)

- Does the proposal clearly outline the aims and objectives?
- Does the proposal include appropriately thorough, tractable and feasible methods?
- Has the principal investigator assembled a qualified research team with access to the appropriate field and laboratory facilities?
- Does the proposal present a tractable timeline and budget?
- Does the proposal include adequate risk evaluation and a mitigation plan?
- Does the proposal include an adequate data management plan with a commitment to public access?

Impacts and Outcomes (25%)

- Does the proposal adequately describe the potential impact and applied relevance of the research?
- Does the proposal identify how FFAR is uniquely positioned to fund this project?
- Does the proposal emphasize scalability and present a plan for disseminating the project outcomes?
- Does the proposed project provide training for the next generation of scientists?

Partnerships (15%)

- Does the proposal include and description of the partnership?
- Does the project present a compelling and novel partnership opportunity?
- Does the proposal include adequate confirmation of partner commitment(s)?

How to Apply

All proposals must be submitted through FFAR's online application [Grant Management System](#). If the applicant is a new user, they must register for an account by clicking the green "Register" button at the top right corner of FFAR's Grants Management System home page. Once a user is registered and a confirmation email is received, the user can activate the account, and once logged in, click on the Seeding Solutions program link to start the application.

Only applications submitted by the deadline through FFAR's Grant Management System will be accepted and considered eligible for evaluation. To be fair to all our applicants, FFAR will not grant extensions to applicants who missed the deadlines posted in the [Key Dates](#) section.

Additional Information

Review Process

Pre-Application Review: Submitted pre-applications undergo an internal review by FFAR's science team to assess if the project is relevant to the Seeding Solutions RFA and that the application demonstrates the potential to meet the evaluation criteria. The most innovative and cutting-edge projects with significant potential for advancing FFAR's mission are invited to submit a full application. ***Applicants must submit a pre-application to be eligible to submit a full application.***

Full Application Review: Full proposals undergo a three-stage peer-review process. First, each submission is assigned to an external review panel of three to four subject experts. In the second stage, Advisory Councils for each of FFAR's Challenge Areas provide funding recommendations based on the external peer reviews and a comparative evaluation of how well submissions meet the Seeding Solutions program objectives and advance FFAR's mission. Finally, FFAR's Executive Director will review positive funding recommendations with consideration to the Advisory Councils' program priorities, the portfolio balance across FFAR programs, and available funding.

All external reviewers must agree and adhere to the terms outlined in FFAR's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) and [Non-Disclosure Agreement](#). FFAR makes reasonable efforts to ensure that applications are not assigned to reviewers with a real or apparent conflict with the applicant, institution, or project personnel. Reviewers with a conflict of interest are recused from evaluating or participating in the related discussions. Each stage of the review is conducted confidentially, and as such, FFAR is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of the contents of the applications.

Award Administration

Selection Notice: Following the full application review process, the principal investigator and the authorized organization representative listed on the project will be officially notified by email of the status of the application. If an application is selected for funding, FFAR reserves the right to request additional or clarifying information for any reason deemed necessary. Potential grantees are free to accept or reject the Grant Agreement as offered.

Intent to Fund Notification: FFAR notifies applicant of their awards through email. The notice does not constitute an award or obligate funding from FFAR until there is a fully executed Grant Agreement. FFAR encourages applicants to review a sample Grant Agreement before applying to ensure they know the terms under which grants are offered.

Post-award Management

Grant Period: Upon receipt of the Grant Agreement, the grantee should confirm the project's start and end dates. Once signed, the start date cannot be changed. Grantees may use FFAR funds only on project expenditures on or after the Grant Agreement is fully executed or with prior approval of pre-award expenditure. Charging expenditures to the grant before the fully executed date is strictly prohibited. Likewise, grantees may not use FFAR funds after the end date except to pay allowable project costs committed on or before that date.

A grantee may request a no-cost extension of up to six months to complete the work's planned scope. The request must be communicated to FFAR and submitted through the Grant Management System at least thirty (30) days before the end date of the grant. The request must justify the need for the extension, include a summary of the unobligated, remaining funds, and provide a plan for fulfilling the project's terms. If a no-cost extension request is approved, FFAR will issue an amendment to the Grant Agreement. This extension will not be approved merely for using unexpended funds.

Annual Reporting Requirements: After FFAR confers a grant, the grantee must provide annual scientific and financial progress reports. The report should include activities carried out under the grant, highlighting project accomplishments, and an account of all expenditures to date.

Final Report Requirements: Within 90 days of completing the project, the grantee shall provide a final project report. This report should address the project objectives outlined in the original grant application, describe any modifications to the project objectives and scope, describe the

final project accomplishments, and include a final project accounting of all grant funds.

Scientific Integrity: FFAR strives to advance knowledge and the application of science to address challenges related to food supply and sustainable agriculture. FFAR's ability to pursue its mission depends on the integrity of the funded science projects and programs. All FFAR grants must be conducted with the highest standards of scientific integrity.

Application Components

Please note, the [Grant Management System](#) requires completing each section before advancing to the next. To view the entire application, please download the application template [here](#). As previously noted, all applicants must submit their proposal through FFAR's online Grant Management System.

Pre-Application Components

- Project title (*up to 250 characters*)
- Key project personnel – name(s), affiliation, expertise, project role
- Project description
 - What challenge or existing paradigm is the project addressing? (*up to 500 words*)
 - How will the project address the stated challenge and advance understanding of an understudied research topic or information gap? (*up to 500 words*)
 - What innovative outcomes will the project generate? Describe how the project will solve challenges to food supply or sustainable agriculture. (*up to 500 words*)
 - Why is FFAR ideally positioned to fund this project? (*up to 500 words*)
- Project timeline
 - Proposed project start date
 - Proposed project duration (*in calendar months*)
- Budget
 - Total FFAR funding request
 - Total matching funds (*at least 50% of match must be cash per [FFAR matching guidelines](#)*)
 - Total proposed budget (*FFAR funds + matching funds*)
- Funding partners: List any committed or potential funding partners, describe why they are an appropriate source of matching funds, and any prior contact you have had or relationship you have developed with them about this project.

Applications that demonstrate strong partnerships by way of matching from external sources outside the applicant institutions are encouraged. These partners may include but are not limited to the private sector, non-profits, commodity and trade groups, state governments and others that do not traditionally work in agriculture.

Full Application Components

Required components

- Project title (*up to 250 characters*)
 - Key project personnel – name(s), affiliation, expertise, project role
 - Locations of performance
 - Project abstract (*up to 500 words*)
 - Why is FFAR ideally positioned to fund this project? (*up to 500 words*)
 - Goals and objectives (*up to 500 words*)
 - Project description and approach (*up to 5000 words*)
 - Anticipated outcomes or outputs (*up to 1000 words*)
 - Data management plan (*up to 500 words*)
 - Barriers to adoption of the research outcome(s) (*Note: FFAR strongly encourages applicants to address social and economic factors in the project design, evaluation processes, and outcomes, where applicable.*) (*up to 500 words*)
 - Organization Assurances
 - Proposed budget
 - Total FFAR funding request
 - Total matching funds (*at least 50% of match must be cash per [FFAR matching guidelines](#)*)
 - Total proposed budget (*FFAR funds + matching funds*)
 - Budget narrative: Provide a brief overview of the budget by task or objective, in parallel to the approach outlined in the project's description. Address costs related to personnel, equipment, facilities and analytics. (*up to 1000 words*)
 - Budget justification by year (*up to 1000 words*)
 - Current and Pending Support Form: complete for everyone listed as P.I. or Key personnel on the project
- **Required Attachments:** Failure to provide these attachments will result in the application's disqualification.
- Project Description and References Cited: **This should be identical to the Project Description written out in the Full Proposal Application form**, but may include graphics, figures, equations, and tables. Please also include up to five pages of references cited, which will not count toward the word limit. (*up to 5000 words*)
 - [Budget Form](#)
 - [P.I. and Key Personnel Biosketch](#): three-page limit per individual listed as P.I. or key personnel in the project
 - Project timeline (by year)
 - Matching Fund Verification Letter(s)

- **Optional attachments:** Applicants can upload any of the following as a single PDF document.
 - Five (5)-slide summary or description of the project
 - Letters of Support: Applicants can provide letters support for the proposed project, especially from matching funders.
 - Graphics, Figures, Equations, and Tables not included in the Project Description: Applicants may upload a PDF document with graphics, figures, tables, or a list of equations to support the research program plan. **Five-page limit.**

Application Assistance

Technical Help Contact

Mon–Fri: 8 AM EST – 8 PM EST, **Weekends:** 10 AM EST – 6 PM EST

Phone support upon request Mon–Fri: 9 AM EST – 7 PM EST

Email: support@smapply.com

For questions related to the online submission system, please contact FFAR's Grant Management team at grants@foundationfar.org.

For questions related to the Seeding Solutions grant program, please contact FFAR's Grant Team at grants@foundationfar.org.

For questions related to the Challenge Area or Programmatic Questions, please contact the appropriate Scientific Program Director:

Challenge Area:

Soil Health
 Sustainable Water Management
 Next Generation Crops
 Advanced Animal Systems
 Health and Agriculture Nexus
 Urban Food Systems

Scientific Program Director (Email Contact):

LaKisha Odom (lodom@foundationfar.org)
 Kathleen Boomer (kboomer@foundationfar.org)
 Jeff Rosichan (jrosichan@foundationfar.org)
 Tim Kurt (tkurt@foundationfar.org)
 Lucyna Kurtyka (lkurtyka@foundationfar.org)
 John Reich (jreich@foundationfar.org)

We only accept scientific or programmatic and grants inquiries by email. We strive to respond to inquiries within two business days, but our response time depends on the volume of questions received and the complexity of the questions asked. Please note that we do not monitor this mailbox on evenings, weekends or federal holidays.

Challenge Area Priorities

Soil Health

The Soil Health Challenge Area aims to increase soil health by building knowledge, fueling innovation, and enabling adoption of innovative practices. FFAR believes that strategic soil health research is essential to increasing farmer and rancher productivity and profitability. We support research that provides a better understanding of what soil health is, how it is measured and how to manage and optimize the sustainable delivery of the ecosystem services that soils provide.

While FFAR will not seek to limit pre-applications to specific target areas within this Challenge area, we encourage applications that propose innovations that address the following research topics:

- Climate resilient soil management practices
- Assessments of the Soil Microbiome
 - Measurements of microbial processes
 - Investigations of microbial communities at different scales, including spatial, temporal and molecular
- Soil Enhancing Techniques
 - Alternative Soil Amendments
 - Optimization of Nutrient Use Efficiencies
- Linkages between farm productivity and soil health
 - Quantitative assessments that demonstrate Soil health practice adoption and their connection to or impact on economic, socioeconomic, and physical health
- Novel/innovative strategies to address barriers to adoption of soil health practices

Sustainable Water Systems

The Sustainable Water Management Challenge Area aims to enhance and protect an adequate supply of healthy natural waters to sustain long-term agricultural production and human/environmental health under shifting climate conditions. FFAR seeks to fund cross-disciplinary research that directly informs decisions related to sustainable water management in agricultural production, fostering broad-scale adoption of advanced management practices.

While FFAR will not limit pre-applications to specific target areas within this Challenge Area, we encourage applications to address the following:

- Evaluation of potential or unrecognized threats to ground- and surface-water resources
- Innovation in the designs, techniques or strategies to advance sustainable water management
- Development of precision decision tools and modeling systems to support sustainable agriculture and water management in the face of climate change
- Investigation of how to use science-based information effectively to address stakeholder concerns and effective outreach strategies to increase adoption of conservation management strategies

Next Generation Crops

FFAR supports the advancement of novel, nutritious, profitable and resilient on-farm crops. There is a strong emphasis on increasing crop diversity and use of new technologies to benefit consumers, producers and the environment. FFAR seeks to fund projects with an emphasis on innovative technologies and environmentally-sound production practices, as well as the discovery and development of new end uses for both conventional and non-traditional crops. We also prioritize advanced breeding methods and development of biotic and abiotic stress tolerance for crops grown in organic and conventional cropping systems with the aim of providing increased farmer profitability and environmental resilience. FFAR is seeking ground-breaking research leading to increasing adoption of innovations across the US food system.

While FFAR will not seek to limit pre-applications to specific target areas within this Challenge Area, we encourage research applications that address any of the following areas:

- Crop diversification
- Crop resiliency
- Accelerated breeding methodologies

Preference will be given to applications that include:

- Emphasis on how we can increase on farm profitability.
- Creating additional consumer-based value at the farm level.
- More multifaceted teams that include economists and soil health. Thinking beyond the primary target and extend that team to include people who are thinking about things from different perspectives.

Advanced Animal Systems

The Advanced Animal Systems Challenge Area aims to support innovations and collaborative partnerships that improve animal health, welfare and productivity, antibiotic stewardship and the environment.

FFAR will not seek to limit pre-applications to specific topics within the Advanced Animal Systems Challenge Area. Pre-applications should describe innovative research, coupled with transformative partnerships, with the potential to shift paradigms in livestock production.

Projects that directly involve producers or end-users, with potential for large-scale adoption of results, are highly encouraged.

Urban Food Systems

The Urban Food Systems Challenge Area explores areas of innovation with the potential to transform urban food systems to improve food and nutritional security, human health outcomes, economic opportunities and food system resiliency. FFAR supports innovative, systems-level approaches aimed at creating healthy and equitable food systems. Emphasis is placed on transdisciplinary approaches that consider the connections between urban food systems and the urban environment, in addition to the connections between rural and urban communities to achieve this goal.

While FFAR will not seek to limit pre-applications to specific target areas within urban food systems. We strongly encourage applications that take advantage of data and infrastructure that spans different sectors to address the following research topics:

- Increase our understanding of the impact a region's collective or potential production systems as part of an overall strategy to promote urban health and well being, ecosystem services, or climate variability risk mitigation
- Technologies and/or interventions that promote food and nutritional security within urban populations, including:
 - Utilizing existing interventions in novel ways
 - Transportation and/or the delivery of healthy and nutritious food
 - Increasing the affordability of healthy and nutritious food
 - Utilizing data across sectors to develop novel solutions
- Increasing our understanding of a region's foodshed
- Systems and technologies that advance the food and agriculture economy within a region, including:
 - Products: regional production, high-value products
 - Circular Economy: food production/system byproducts
 - Urban environment: design/organization to promote economic viability and efficiencies that enhance farmer profitability

Health-Agriculture Nexus

The Health-Agriculture Nexus Challenge Area supports innovative, systems level approaches (both technological and non-technological) aimed at reducing food and nutritional insecurity and improving human health in the United States and around the globe.

COVID-19 has caused major disruptions across the food system, which affected food security in

various communities throughout the US In the 2021 Seeding Solutions program, Health-Agriculture Nexus Challenge Area is seeking ground-breaking research leading to viable alternative distribution mechanisms to increase efficiency and resiliency of the distribution of and access to affordable and healthy foods, especially produce and protein products. Projects should take into consideration ecosystem factors needed to provide a viable, scaled solution such as affordability, consumer behavior, material sustainability (i.e., packaging), ability to scale and/or replicate nationally, as well as the social, environmental and economic impacts. Projects that emphasize these food distribution/access issues in underserved population(s) are strongly encouraged.

[Return to RFA](#)