



Brighter Future Fund 2023-2024 Grant Guidelines

PURPOSE

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is excited to announce the Brighter Future Fund (BFF) to assist farmers in successfully launching, growing, and sustaining farms in the face of forces impacting the food and agricultural system, including the COVID-19 pandemic, changing markets, severe weather, and climate change. AFT seeks to uplift, support, and amplify the work of a wide range of farmers through this program.

Funding will be allocated to two primary categories: professional services and equipment or infrastructure costs. Grants are intended to leverage other resources (either in-kind from the farmer, or other private and public funds) and make a difference for farmers to 1) improve farm viability, 2) access, transfer or permanently protect farmland, or 3) adopt regenerative farming practices and increase resilience to climate change.

AWARD AMOUNT & ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Grants will be awarded in amounts up to \$10,000 per project. A project may involve one or more individual farmers or farm families. Only one grant can be awarded per farmer/farm family. Farmers who received a previous Brighter Future Fund grant or New England Farmer Microgrant are not eligible to apply. Applicants who applied but were not funded during previous BFF grant cycles are encouraged to apply again. We are unable to award grants to American Farmland Trust staff, board members, or substantial contributors to AFT, or their family members.

Funding for this program is limited. As funding remains, awards will be made on an ongoing basis to eligible applicants that fulfill all application requirements and meet selection criteria.

Land tenure (ownership, a lease, license, or other written agreement) for a reasonable time period will be required for projects that involve on-the-ground improvements to farmland. If tenure is less than 5 years, please be prepared to demonstrate in the application that the tenure is sufficient in relationship to the improvements being made or services being provided.

Farmers will receive direct payment of funds from American Farmland Trust. See additional requirements about Professional Services in the 'Eligible Projects' section and supporting information in the 'Timeline' section.

Eligible farms must be for-profit and be able to provide proof of income (or similar if farm engages in barter, exchange or community supply). It is not the intention of the Brighter Future Fund to support operations for personal consumption. Farms must be producing food or ag products for your community, to barter or exchange, or for sale. Non-profit organizations are encouraged to take advantage of alternate resources designed specifically for non-profits.

A COMMITMENT TO UNDERSERVED FARMERS

AFT seeks to support farmers across America through the Brighter Future Fund. We also recognize that social and racial injustices are entrenched in the history of our nation and our agricultural system. Our past informs inequities that persist today, and that marginalized agricultural producers have been denied equal opportunity to prosper, facing challenges such as loan discrimination, barriers to accessing federal and private programs, exploitative labor practices, intimidation, and theft and appropriation of land.

In recognition of the need for greater equity and inclusion for all groups who have been, and still are, marginalized, we aim to support these producers through the Brighter Future Fund. In alignment with USDA programs, we are focused on ensuring that beginning, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, women, and veteran farmers and ranchers have equal opportunity to seek awards from the Brighter Future Fund.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS (include but are not limited to):

Professional Services -

- Hiring an attorney to develop a farm lease, provide legal representation for a farm transfer or purchase, develop an estate plan to support a farm transfer, or navigate heirs property issues.
- Hiring a business, financial or estate planning consultant to assist with a farm transfer plan, business plan, or finance/loan plan.
- Hiring a service provider to support business planning and other services necessary for farmland access or expansion such as land search planning, property assessment, facilitation, succession planning, or crafting agreements.
- Paying transaction costs associated with securing land to farm. These may include costs associated with purchasing a farm, negotiating a lease agreement, or developing an agricultural conservation easement (e.g., survey, appraisal, etc.).

Infrastructure and Equipment -

- Paying capital costs associated with improving soil health and enhancing land for farm production. Examples include: irrigation, fencing, or soil improvements.
- Purchasing farm equipment or implements that would allow farmers to improve soil health, increase productivity, or enhance crop quality.
- Acquiring new equipment or making improvements to increase marketing and sales of farm products.
- Replacing infrastructure or equipment lost or compromised from natural disasters.

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

Additional information that will be taken into consideration when making funding decisions include:

- Priority for individuals who dedicate a majority of their worktime to farming or ranching;
- Need-based consideration of projects;
- Diversity in farms as determined by the dollar value of farm products sold, acres in farming and farm products grown, raised or produced.

AWARD PROCESS

If approved, AFT will send written notification in the form of a Letter of Award via email to the applicant within 60 days of the application closing. The Letter of Award will detail the approved timeline and process for payment based on the individual project.

Terms for all applications:

- AFT will pay funds directly to the farmer/awardee; funds may be a reimbursement for purchasing equipment or infrastructure
- Awardees will be required to provide follow-up information to AFT about their award-funded project. Within one year of the award date, awardees may be asked to submit: all receipts showing how the funds were spent, a written paragraph describing the project, and photos documenting how award funds were used. AFT will use this information to verify permitted use of funds and evaluate the success of the grant program.
- AFT anticipates paying approved expenses directly within 60-90 days of receiving requested documentation.
- AFT shall have no obligation to disburse amounts in excess of the approved grant, for services not completed, or goods or services not approved by AFT. Any expenses that exceed the grant maximum amount are the responsibility of the awardee.
- Expenses incurred prior to receiving written notification of approval will not be reimbursable by the grant.
- Any unspent grant funds may be dedicated towards further services for the applicant, pending written AFT approval.

TIMELINE

Applications will be available July 1 – July 15, 2023. Applications will be reviewed and awarded in the order the applications were received based on eligibility.

All services supported by the grant must be completed by June 30, 2024 (extensions may be granted upon request for extenuating circumstances which prevent completion of work. AFT encourages early spend-down and no extension will be granted beyond September 2024). For grants funding long-range succession and transfer planning services, written statements showing progress/milestones may be requested.

SPECIAL NOTES:

- *Funding is contingent on the awardee completing a Grant Award Form and submitting it within 14 days. Notification of award and other communication will be conducted via email and/or phone. Failure to respond by stated deadline could result in loss of award funds.*
- *The Brighter Future Fund has been established by AFT to provide support to awardees who need financial assistance to undertake proposed activities which further AFT's charitable purposes. These grants are motivated by charitable intent. AFT however does not make any representation as to the tax consequences of any award, if any.*
- *AFT may require the awardee to provide its SSN/EIN/TIN in order to fulfill AFT's obligation to report grant activities on its annual report to the IRS. AFT does not file Form 1099s with respect to this grant.*

HOW TO APPLY

To apply, farmers should submit a completed Brighter Future Microgrant Application to AFT. Applications must be submitted electronically through the link located on our webpage: <https://farmland.org/brighter-future/>

QUESTIONS

If you have questions or need additional assistance completing your application, please contact us at brighterfuture@farmland.org.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- ✓ Completion of the grant application;
- ✓ Including an accurate estimate of costs including budget overview

AWARD FORM CHECKLIST (if chosen to receive an award)

- ✓ Current photo representing yourself and your farm
- ✓ A brief summary regarding planned use of the funds and results you expect to achieve with the assistance of the funds.
- ✓ A statement agreeing to complete a brief final report and interview by AFT upon completion of the project. For farmers who opt in, we will share selected projects via social media and in promotional materials. While sharing stories is a priority for AFT, we understand there may be reason for discretion and will honor those instances. Participation in public-facing stories will not affect the applicant's receipt of funding.

Note on Language

We encourage you to be thoughtful and diligent in completing your application, but we will not evaluate applications by grammar or writing style. Complete the questions to the best of your ability and take advantage of the narrative questions to describe your farm, your personal and professional goals, and the challenges you face in reaching them. Feel free to write in whatever style or language feels truest and most comfortable to you.