

Soil Health Stewards: Promoting Soil Health on Protected Agricultural Lands
> Grant Guidelines and Application <

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

Land trusts and public Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) programs steward over 6 million acres of permanently protected agricultural land and continue to work with landowners to put more farm and ranch land under easement. Soil health improvements on this permanently protected land will have a lasting impact. Accordingly, AFT's *Soil Health Stewards* program seeks to support land trusts and public PACE programs, both those already engaged in this work and those just beginning, in growing their efforts to engage and encourage producers and landowners of protected land to address soil health.

Beginning in the fall of 2021, AFT began to provide unique learning opportunities and support for the staff of land conservation organizations and public PACE programs from across the nation. To date, AFT has provided training and implementation grants for five different cohorts of practitioners-- from the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, West, and Northeast. **In April 2024, the *Soil Health Stewards* program will be offered to any land trust or public PACE program from around the country that holds easements funded in part through the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).**

This opportunity will provide training on basic soil health principles and practices ***but will have a special emphasis on soil health principles and practices applicable to land that is grazed (both rangeland and pasture).***

Participants in AFT's *Soil Health Stewards* virtual training will learn about the economic and environmental benefits of soil health practices and the science behind them while building skills to support farmers, ranchers, and landowners in adopting these practices.

Participants who complete the training will be able to:

- Communicate effectively about the primary benefits of healthy soil and types of conservation practices that enhance soil health.
- Understand basic challenges involved in soil health practice implementation.
- Understand and communicate effectively about basic practices and challenges associated with soil health improvements on rangeland and pasture.
- Connect interested producers with technical advisors, cost-share programs, and other resources to help them adopt soil health practices successfully.
- Understand options and alternatives for addressing and incentivizing specific soil health practices through agricultural conservation easements and other instruments.

Please note: Both entities that have and have not previously participated in the *Soil Health Stewards* program are eligible to participate and are encouraged to apply. Entities that have participated previously will be asked to create and make progress on a new *Soil Health Stewards* Action Plan focused primarily on land that is grazed (either rangeland or pasture) and will be expected to participate fully in the cohort.

AWARD AMOUNT & ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

For April 2024, AFT invites applications from land trusts and public PACE programs (state or local) from any state in the country that holds easements on land protected through USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). Entities must be interested in working with landowners and producers on protected land to increase awareness and adoption of soil health practices. Thirty-five entities will each receive \$10,000 to enable two staff to attend a three-day virtual training and to develop programming to engage landowners and producers around soil health on grazed land.

In addition to the training and \$10,000 grant, participating entities will receive an additional year of technical assistance from AFT for their outreach efforts. Support will include periodic networking calls and individualized assistance to partners.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ENTITY PARTICIPATION

- Dedicate up to two staff to attend a virtual *Soil Health Stewards* training on April 16, 17, 18, & 19. Staff must attend the entire training and participate in all activities and discussions.
- Develop a *Soil Health Stewards* Action Plan describing actions the agency or organization will take to promote soil health with landowners and farmers, including those who own or manage land on which the organization or agency holds an easement. (Time will be set aside during the training for initial plan development. A final version of the plan will be due by May 31, 2024).
- Participate in project evaluation. The evaluation will include a required pre- and post-training survey, an impact assessment, and an optional interview with AFT program staff and consultants at the end of the grant term.

TIMELINE

- Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. (EST) on February 16
- Letters of award for accepted applications will be granted by March 1.
- *Soil Health Stewards* training will take place virtually on April 16, 17, 18, & 19.

DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

- \$3,000 sent prior to virtual training (April 2024).
- \$3,000 sent once *Soil Health Stewards* Action Plan is submitted (June 2024).
- \$4,000 sent upon completion of evaluation (May 2024).

SPECIAL NOTES

- Funding is contingent on the awardee completing a Grant Award Form and submitting it within 14 days after receiving the letter of award.
- A W9 is required to receive awarded funds and must be submitted along with the Grant Award Form.
- Entities are encouraged to join the National Agricultural Land Network either as an organization or as an individual to enable continued learning opportunities with other *Soil Health Stewards*.
- If the awardee does not provide the required documents within 14 days of notification of the award, AFT may choose to award funds to another applicant.
- This is a competitive application process. Priority will be given to applicants based on both the number of agricultural conservation easements held and the demonstrated interest in advancing soil health as expressed in the application narrative.

HOW TO APPLY

To apply, submit a completed *Soil Health Stewards* Program Application electronically through this link: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=9DZ9usq8W0ODzin3qwZEyDvQVvx5txtLqRTeVJNEEENUQkpYUDBBTjZKSk1VSIVPTUISRzBWMlYxNy4u>

QUESTIONS

Contact Beth Fraser, National Agricultural Land Network Manager, at bfraser@farmland.org or 413-240-4282