



by American Farmland Trust

**Brighter Future Fund's National Grant
for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers**
2024-2025 Grant Guidelines

PURPOSE

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is excited to announce the Brighter Future Fund's National Grant for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers to assist farmers in successfully launching, growing, and sustaining farms in the face of forces impacting the food and agricultural system, 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 up to \$5,000 per project; applicants indicating a direct impact caused by the 2024 Smokehouse Creek Fire in the Texas Panhandle are eligible for amounts up to \$15,000. A project may involve one or more individual farmers/ranchers or farm/ranch families. Only one grant can be awarded per farmer/farm family. Farmers or ranchers who received a previous Brighter Future Fund grant or New England Farmer Microgrants Program are not eligible to apply. Applicants who applied but were not funded during previous 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 who 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 five 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 or ranchers 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 or ranches must be able to provide proof of income (or similar if the farm engages in barter, exchange, or community supply). The Brighter Future Fund does not intend to support operations for personal consumption. Farms or ranches must be producing food or ag products for

your community, to barter or exchange, or for sale. Non-profit organizations that are not producing food or ag products are encouraged to take advantage of alternate resources designed specifically for non-profits.

A COMMITMENT TO UNDERSERVED FARMERS

AFT seeks to support farmers and ranchers across America through the Brighter Future Fund's National Grant for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers. Expanding on priorities established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Grant for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers focuses its support on beginning, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, women, and veteran farmers and ranchers to support greater equity and opportunities for all in agriculture. For more information on AFT's commitment to increased opportunity, please see [AFT's DEI statement](#).

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/>

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.
- A Farmer/Rancher 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 -

- A farmer/rancher paying capital costs associated with improving soil health and enhancing land for farm production. Examples include irrigation, fencing, or soil improvements.
- A farmer/rancher 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 work time to farming or ranching;
- Need-based consideration of projects;
- Diversity in farms is determined by the dollar value of farm products sold, acres in farming, and farm products grown, raised, or produced.
- 2024 Smokehouse Creek Fire in the Texas Panhandle eligible applicants:

- Priority for those individuals directly impacted by the Smokehouse Creek Fire proposing activities or projects to recover their agricultural operation from those impacts
- Although not required, practices focused on regenerative agriculture as a means of overcoming the impacts of the 2024 Smokehouse Creek Fire are encouraged.

TIMELINE

Applications will be available for submission from July 1 to July 8, 2024. They will be reviewed and awarded in the order they were received and based on eligibility.

All services supported by the grant must be completed by December 31, 2025. For grants funding long-range succession and transfer planning services, written statements showing progress/milestones may be requested.

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 upload a W9 (Form W9)
 - The name listed on 'Line 1' of your W9 must be the same name/holder of the bank account for ACH/Direct Deposit of your award AND match the name you list in your application in the 'Payable to' field.
 - Only list your farm name on your W9 and in the 'Payable to' field if you have an associated EIN number; if not, list an individual's name.
 - Failure to provide correct information will result in a delay in your award payment.
- Awardees will be required to provide follow-up information to AFT about their award-funded project. AFT will use this information to verify the permitted use of funds and evaluate the success of the grant program. Within one year of the award date, awardees will be asked to submit:
 - A report verifying completion of the project via the portal system.
 - A written paragraph describing the completed project.
 - Photos or videos documenting the use of funds.
- Funding is contingent on the awardee completing and submitting a Grant Award Form within 14 days. Notification of award and other communication will be conducted via email and/or phone. Failure to respond by the 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 that 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 awards, if any.
- AFT will require the awardee to provide their 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.

- Recipients are encouraged to keep receipts pertaining to the proposed use of funds for their own reporting purposes. At this time, AFT does not require receipts for proof of completion.
- Recipients will receive payments by December 20th, 2024.
- 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.

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 a budget overview

AWARD FORM CHECKLIST (if chosen to receive an award)

- ✓ Current photo representing yourself and your farm
- ✓ A brief summary regarding the 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 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.
- ✓ Completed [Form W9](#)
 - *Confirm accurate completion of Form W9 above in Section 'Award Process'

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.