



FY 21 Farmer & Ranchers Stress Assistance Network

Grant Program

Request for Applications (RFA)

Application Due Date:

March 31, 2022 4:00 P.M.

Overview

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) is pleased to announce the 2021 competitive Request for Applications (RFA) for the West Virginia Farmers and Ranchers Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) grant. The purpose of the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network Program is to establish a network that connects individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculturally related occupations to stress assistance programs. The establishment of the network assists farmers and ranchers in time of stress can offer a conduit to improving behavioral health awareness, literacy, and outcomes for agricultural producers, workers and their families.

Application Submission Information

Application Deadline: Applications must be **received or postmarked** no later than **4:00 PM** on **Thursday, March 31, 2022**. **Late applications will NOT be accepted.**

See FRSAN Application Instruction Manual for application requirements.

Completed applications may be submitted to:

WV Department of Agriculture
Agriculture Business Development Division
ATTENTION: Leslie Boggess/Michelle Parsons, FRSAN

217 Gus R. Douglass Lane
Building 2, Suite 204
Charleston, WV 25312

Or

E-mail: grants@wvda.us

If you have any questions or need assistance in the preparation of this grant application, please contact:

Telephone: (304) 558-2210

Legislative Authority

Section 7522 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, 7 U.S.C. 5936, authorizes NIFA to establish a Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network as follows: § 5936. Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network

In General – “The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall make competitive grants to eligible entities described in subsection (c) to establish a Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network that provides stress assistance programs to individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations.”

The authority for the FRSAN-State Department of Agriculture (SDA) is Public Law No: 116-260 Sec 766(a)(link is external), 7 U.S.C. 5936(link is external) of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021.

Purpose & Priorities

The purpose of the FRSAN program is to establish a network that connects individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations to stress assistance programs. The term “farmer” is used in the broadest sense and may be interpreted to include agricultural farmers, ranchers, workers, business owners, and non-industrial private forest owners and managers.

Agricultural work is one of the most hazardous professions, with risk of injury, disability, and death higher than most other career paths. Daily decision-making in the context of long-term planning to ensure crop and livestock yields and profits can prove extremely difficult. Even the most proactive planning can be short circuited by factors beyond an individual’s control, such as natural disasters or pest infestations. Operating costs are many, and prices have remained stubbornly flat for some commodities.

“Family farms as a group, across type, accounted for 98 percent of farms and 88 percent of production in 2018 (*America’s Diverse Family Farms*, Economic Research Service, 2019).” The ERS further notes “Financial performance varies across farm size. Most small farms have an operating profit margin (OPM) in the red zone—indicating a higher risk of

financial problems—while most midsize, large, and very large farms operate in a lower financial risk zone.” In result, some farmers and ranchers have reported increasing levels of stress associated with heightened risk of crop/livestock losses and loan defaults. Regardless of farm size, successfully operating a farm or ranch or associated business requires a wide range of skills, breadth of knowledge, and a resilient nature.

Financial stress is just one form of stress and, like other stressors, may be a short-term occurrence that abates when the condition is addressed and/or alleviates on its own. Long-term stress can be more threatening to an individual’s physical and mental health. In worst case scenarios, unresolved stressors may contribute to a person threatening and/or harming themselves. In a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study comparing suicide rates for major occupational groups across 17 states, the rate of suicides by farmers was 32.2 per 100,000 in 2015. The 32.2 rate was more than twice the rate for the general population (13.3) in 2015.

Taking practical steps to manage stress can help lessen or prevent such ill effects. Knowing where to turn is also key. Programs that offer access to resources (e.g., information, skills) and people (e.g., Extension agents, health care providers) can also help identify underlying causes of farm/ranch risk factors and serve as an entry point to working with farmers and ranchers on recognizing their stress, understanding the importance of seeking assistance, and learning how to manage their stress. However, lack of access due to geography, distance, and availability of resources and providers, combined with any real or perceived stigma and privacy concerns, can influence an individual’s decision to seek and receive help.

The FRSAN is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Goals:

- Strategic Goal 2: Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers To Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World;
- Strategic Goal 3: Promote American Agriculture Products and Exports
- Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development;
- Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands Through Technology and Research;
- Strategic Goal 6: Ensure Productive and Sustainable Use of Our National Forest System Lands; and
- Strategic Goal 7: Provide all Americans Access to a Safe, Nutritious, and Secure Food Supply.

Projects & Grant Types

Funding appropriated for the FRSAN-SDA program may be used to expand or sustain stress assistance programs for individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations, including:

Programs that use funds to initiate, expand, or sustain programs that provide professional agricultural behavioral health counseling and referral for other forms of assistance as necessary through any of the following:

- (A) Farm telephone helplines and websites
- (B) Training, including training programs and

- i. Advocates for individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other occupations relating to agriculture: and
- ii. Other individuals and entities that may assist individuals who –
 - (1) are engaged in farming, ranching, and other occupations relating to agriculture and
 - (2) are in crisis.

- (C) support groups; and
- (D) outreach services and activities, including the dissemination of information and materials.

***Initiating and planning may be a part of the grant application, however the majority of the application should address implementation.

Eligibility Requirements

Applicants for the FR SAN must meet all the requirements discussed in this RFA. Applications may only be submitted by a collaborative state; tribal; local or regionally-based network, or partnership of qualified public and/or private entities. For purposes of implementing FR SAN, a network is an organizational arrangement among three or more separately operated domestic public or private entities, including the applicant organization, with established working histories statewide. Applications submitted by individuals, or by organizations that do not involve other entities in a network or partnership, are not eligible for consideration and will be excluded from review.

Available Funding

The total amount of funds available for award under this request for applications (RFA) is approximately \$300,000.

Cost Sharing or Matching

Matching is not a requirement for awards resulting from an application in response to this RFA.

Competitive Grant Application Review Process

The competitive application review process will follow state policies and procedures and include the use of an independent review panel of experts or qualified individuals, overseen by state officials. This review will include the below evaluation criteria. All documentation affecting the decision to approve, disapprove, defer, or otherwise not fund an application will be maintained in an accessible, centralized program file.

Evaluation Criteria

WVDA will use the following criteria to evaluate the applications:

1. *Partnerships and Collaboration.* To what extent does the application represent a substantial and effective collaborative regional network or partnership of public and/or private entities? Does the proposal include the necessary partners to meet the needs of the audience, and does it make appropriate use of the expertise and other strengths of each of the partners? Priority will be given to partnerships and collaborations that are led by or include nongovernmental organizations (NGO), state departments of agriculture (SDA), and Cooperative Extension Services (CES) with expertise in providing stress assistance programs to individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations. In addition, these partner organizations must have been involved and played an important role in the project design and development. Projects must also employ an equitable and appropriate decision-making and oversight process that includes all partners to be given this priority. For purposes of implementing FRSA, a network is an organizational arrangement among three or more separately operated domestic public or private entities, including the applicant organization, with established working histories in the targeted region.

2. *Relevancy.* To what extent do the explanation and documentation convey that the project is directed toward specific topic areas identified in this RFA? These topics are designed to support and strengthen farmers and ranchers as defined in 7 U.S.C. 5936. In addition, the relevancy will be evaluated by the description of the necessity of the project based on the needs identified for the target audience, the development of project activities, and the degree to which the project addresses audience(s), needs, and the geographic area(s) served.

3. *Technical Merit.*

- a. Clarity and delineation of objectives, activities and outcomes;
- b. Conceptual adequacy of the proposed activities to meet the needs of the targeted region and audiences including suitability and feasibility of the approach (e.g., social, economic and cultural relevance);
- c. Innovation and originality of objectives and activities;
- d. Performance targets and outcomes;
- e. Sustainability of the project partnerships and collaborations beyond the life of the grant, or a compelling explanation of how the project outcomes will be lasting if the collaboration itself is not sustained; and
- f. Reasonableness of the budget for planned activities. (While the size of the budget is not an evaluation criterion, the reviewers will be asked to comment whether it matches logically with the program described in the narrative.)

4. *Achievability.* Probability of success of the project is appropriate given the level of originality, target audience and budget for each activity. The extent to which the applicant identifies potential pitfalls and how they will be addressed. Sufficient time commitment of

project directors and co-directors for project activities including management. The plans for management and collaborative arrangements of the proposed project should be adequate, e.g., sufficient time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives; clearly defined project roles and relationships among the key participants and collaborators; plan for decision-making; and plan for administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, and collaborative efforts.

5. *Expertise and track record of the applicants.* To what extent does the application demonstrate expertise through successful prior experience in education, outreach, training and/or technical assistance for farmers and ranchers experiencing stress? The successful prior experience can be demonstrated by the operation of a helpline; number of training, assistance, or education activities previously carried out; number of participants of the program and/or referrals made; the number of years a program or activity has been offered; engagement with other USDA, HHS, and Veterans Affairs programs and resources that can assist; and/or other evaluation metrics. The extent to which the qualifications of the applicant (individual and team) to conduct the proposed project activities are detailed. The applicant's ability to evaluate project outcomes. The applicant's demonstration of experience and competence in serving the needs of the identified target audience.

6. *Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation.* Includes the expertise of consultants and collaborators, sufficiency of the network members and their facilities and equipment for the proposed project activities. If the application proposes to develop and/or utilize tele-delivery of services, adequacy of details provided on e-connectivity and technological requirements that are available for the project and what is required (hardware/software) by those accessing such services.

7. *Adequacy of plans for outcome-based reporting, and the communication of findings and results.* Includes the expertise of evaluation team members who have agreed to serve or who have been identified.

Duration

Proposed projects require prior WVDA approval. The grant period will begin May 1, 2022 and end no later than April 30, 2023.

How to Apply

For an application and all attachments please email Leslie Boggess, lboggess@wvda.us, or Michelle Parsons, michelleparsons@wvda.us.