VAFAIRS Agriculture Grant Quick Guide

A guide to agricultural grant opportunities, how to apply, and VAFAIRS support.



Prepared by: Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation & Rural Sustainability

Last updated: July 2026

Table of Contents

Virginia FAIRS 3
What are Grants? 4
Grant Application Process 5
Grant Writing Guidelines 6
Basic Parts of a Grant Proposal 7
Understanding a NOFO 8
How to Find Agriculture Grants 9
Match Requirements Explained 10
What Happens After Receiving a Grant 11
Key Terms 12
Grant Opportunities 13
Grants at a Glance 14
- Ag and Forestry Industries Development Planning Grant 15
- Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program 16
- Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program 17
- Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund 18
- Food and Ag Service Learning Program 19
- Healthy Food Financing Initiative 20
- Local Food Promotion Program 21
- Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program Phase 4 22
- Persimmon Collective Infrastructure Grant 23
- Regenerate Virginia Farm Vitality Grant Program 24
- Regional Food System Partnerships 25
- Rural Business Development Grants 26
- Southeast Dairy Business Innovation Initiative 27
- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program 28
- Sustainable Ag Research and Education Producer Grant 29
- UIE Ag Production Research, Education & Extension Initiative 30
- Value-Added Producer Grants 31
- Virginia Cattle Industry Board Grant Program 32
- Virginia Food Access Investment Fund 33
- Virginia Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program 34

Additional Resources 35
Contacts 36

Virginia FAIRS

What is VAFAIRS?

Virginia FAIRS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that offers technical assistance for people transitioning into or currently involved in value-added agriculture. FAIRS stands for the Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation and Rural Sustainability. Our mission is to assist rural Virginians in developing and advancing their agricultural, economic, and social interests to enhance their quality of life.

How does VAFAIRS help with grants?

Virginia FAIRS does not provide funding directly but offers comprehensive support to help producers identify and pursue grant opportunities. Support includes identifying appropriate programs, developing business plans and feasibility studies, and preparing competitive grant applications. These services are designed to help producers clarify project goals, assess financial viability, and strengthen applications for grants and other financing.

Many services provided by VAFAIRS are free of charge, including initial consultations, cooperative development, grant application review, technical resources, and other assistance. VAFAIRS does charge discounted fees for conducting feasibility studies, writing business plans, completing grant applications, and other select activities, relative to the fees charged by for-profit service providers. Before providing fee-based services, we require clients to enter into a service agreement that details responsibilities and costs.

If you are interested in working with VAFAIRS, please reach out early to allow enough planning and preparation time.

To learn more about VAFAIRS, access additional resources, or contact us, please visit our website.

www.vafairs.com

What are grants?

Grants are money provided by a government agency, organization, or foundation that does not need to be repaid. The funding is intended to support a specific goal or solve a defined problem identified by the funder. While each grant is different, successful applications clearly show how the proposed project aligns with the funder's objectives.

For example, a federal agriculture grant may help a farmer purchase equipment to increase access to fresh, local food. To receive the funding, the farmer must show how the project supports the grant's goal of improving food access in the community.

Grants vs Loans

Grants

- Funding awarded for a specific project or purpose
- Do not need to be repaid
- Typically involves a competitive application process
- Must support the funder's goals and priorities
- Require reporting and compliance with grant requirements
- May require matching funds or cost sharing

Loans

- Borrowed money for personal or business needs
- Must be repaid with interest
- Approved based on creditworthiness and ability to repay
- Funds can often be used more flexibly
- Generally have fewer reporting requirements
- Do not require matching funds
- Involve financial risk due to repayment obligations

Grants aren't free cash, they are earned funding!

Grant Application Process

1. **Identify goals and needs**
   Clearly define what it is you want to do and why funding is needed.

2. **Find the right grant program**
   Identify grant opportunities that match your project goals and eligibility.

3. **Review grant requirements**
   Carefully review the funding priorities, eligibility criteria, application requirements, and deadlines.

4. **Prepare application materials**
   Complete all required application materials and fully answer all application questions.

5. **Submit the application**
   Complete and submit the application by the deadline, following all eligibility requirements and application instructions.

6. **Await review and award decision**
   Applications are evaluated competitively based on program criteria, often using a point system.

7. **Implement the project and report**
   If awarded, carry out the project as approved and complete required reporting and documentation.

VAFAIRS provides support throughout the grant process. Contact VAFAIRS for assistance!

VAFAIRS

Grant Writing Guidelines

Follow the grant instruction exactly

Read the Notice of Funding Opportunity carefully and follow all formatting, page limits, and submission requirements. Make sure to respond to all required sections and questions. Missing details can disqualify an application. Take note of any potential issues, such as conflicts of interest between the organization and the business.

Writing Style

Grant applications should use professional, clear, and specific language. Writing should be concise, persuasive, and accessible. Avoid using excessive jargon, acronyms, and overly descriptive language. If acronyms are necessary, spell them out on first reference.

A strong grant proposal starts with a strong project plan. The writing simply communicates the plan to reviewers.

Each paragraph should begin with a strong topic sentence and focus on a single main idea, helping reviewers quickly understand the purpose and value of the project. Organize the application so it directly and clearly answers each question being asked. Always write with the review audience in mind, particularly those responsible for scoring and funding decisions. Use active voice whenever possible to clearly identify who will take specific actions and how the project will be implemented, rather than relying on passive constructions.

Weak vs. Strong Examples

Problem: Clear vs. Vague

✗ This project will greatly improve operations in many important ways.

✓ This project will improve on-farm efficiency by installing a refrigerated storage unit that reduces post-harvest loss by an estimated 20%.

Problem: Unaligned vs. Funder-Focused

✗ Funding is needed to help the business grow and succeed.

✓ Funding will support local food system development by expanding direct-to-consumer sales within the region.

Basic Parts of a Grant Proposal

The sections of a proposal will vary depending on the specific grant

Summary or Abstract

- A brief overview of the project and organization.
- Includes the problem or need, goals and objectives, activities, expected outcomes, and funding amount requested.
- Make sure to follow all word limits and format requirements.

Activities

- Explain how the project objectives will be achieved.
- This section should clearly describe what will be done, who will do it, and how the activities will achieve the project's goals.
- Include:
  - Key activities and project approach
  - Staff and partner roles
  - Outreach, training, or technical assistance methods

Objectives

- Describe the specific results the project aims to achieve.
- Make sure they are clear, specific, and measurable (SMART).

Problem Statement

- Clearly explain the issue the project will address.
- Describe why the problem matters, who is affected, and why action is needed now.
- Make sure to highlight how the project aligns with funder priorities.

Evaluation Plan

- Explain how project success will be measured.
- Include things like:
  - Performance indicators
  - Outcomes vs outputs
  - Methods
- This section demonstrates accountability and project impact.

Timeline

- Provide a schedule of major project activities and milestones.
- Show that project activities can be completed within the proposed grant period.
- Make the timeline realistic and aligned with project objectives.

Understanding a NOFO

Notice of Funding Opportunity

A Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is the official announcement that provides details about a funding opportunity, including eligibility requirements, program goals, application instructions, and review criteria. Carefully reading and understanding the NOFO is one of the most important steps in the grant-writing process. Even a strong project idea can be rejected if it does not follow the NOFO's requirements.

Many agencies host NOFO webinars after release. These are great opportunities to ask questions and clarify application requirements.

NOFO Reading Tips

- Read the entire NOFO first to understand the overall opportunity.
- Highlight key requirements, deadlines, and eligibility criteria.
- Create a checklist of required documents and proposal sections.
- Review the scoring criteria before writing your proposal.
- Use NOFO language when describing your project to show alignment with program goals.
- Check for updates, changes, or FAQs released by the funding agency.
- Refer back to the NOFO often throughout proposal development.



Value-Added Producer Grants

Fiscal Year 2026

Notice of Funding Opportunity

Funding Opportunity Number: RDBCP-VAPG-2026

Publication Date: February 17, 2026
Application Due Date: 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET), April 22, 2026

J.R. Claeys
Administrator
Rural Business Cooperative Service

1 | Page

Example NOFO from the 2026 USDA Value Added Producer Grants

How to Find Agriculture Grants

Finding the right grant requires a combination of research, organization, and outreach. Because grants are not a one-time opportunity, it is important to check regularly, track what you find, and build connections with available resources to stay informed and competitive.

1. Start with Federal Resources

The USDA is the largest provider of agricultural funding and is a good starting point.

- Grants.gov
  - Central database for all federal grants.
  - Filter grants by agency (USDA), eligibility, and category.
- SAM.gov (System for Award Management)
  - Free to register and is required to apply for federal grants.

Tip: Set up accounts early to avoid delays when deadlines approach.

2. Leverage Local & State Agencies

Local offices provide guidance tailored to your region and can connect you to the most relevant programs.

- USDA Service Centers (example FSA & NRCS)
- Virginia FAIRS

Tip: Network and build relationships with local staff.

3. Target Specialty & Private Grants

Many grants are available for specific industries, practices, or farmer groups.

- Example: VDACS Specialty Crop Program that supports producers of fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops.

Grant databases like www.thegrantportal.com.

- Provides a centralized place to search for agriculture, rural development, and innovation funding.

Tip: Niche grants often have less competition.

4. Stay Organized

Tracking opportunities is key to long-term success.

- Create a simple tracker that includes important information such as grant name, deadline, eligibility, and funding amount.

Tip: Many grants are offered annually; keep track of them for future cycles.

Match Requirements Explained

A matching grant requires the applicant to contribute a portion of the total project cost, which the funder then matches at a set rate to help cover the remaining project expenses.

What is a Match?

A match is the portion of project costs not paid by the grant.

- May include cash or in-kind (non-cash) contributions.
- Must come from non-federal sources (in most cases).

Also known as cost share

Examples:

- 1:1 match (50/50) means that for a $20,000 project, the grant provides $10,000 and the applicant contributes $10,000 to match it.
- A 70/30 match with in-kind contributions means that for a $10,000 project, the grant provides $7,000, and the required $3,000 match can be met through volunteer labor or donated materials.

Types of Match

Cash Match

- Direct financial contributions toward the project.
- Includes personal funds, business funds, or partner funding.
- Easiest to track and document.
- Usually preferred by funders.
- Examples: purchasing equipment and paying wages.

In-Kind (Non-Cash) Match

- Non-cash contributions that support the project.
- Includes labor, equipment, materials, or space.
- Often used when cash is limited.
- Examples: volunteer labor, donated equipment, use of land or facilities.

What Happens After Receiving a Grant

Pre-Award
- Identify funding opportunity.
- Prepare and submit application.

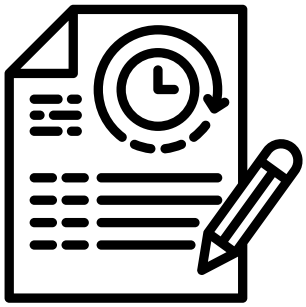
Award
- Grant is approved.
- Official award notice is issued.

Acceptance & Start-Up
- Review the agreement carefully.
- Understand approved budget, reporting requirements, and conditions.
- Sign and return any documents.

Project Implementation
- Carry out approved activities.
- Follow the approved work plan and timeline.
- Keep a record of activities.

Financial Management
- Use funds only for approved expenses.
- Keep grant and personal finances separate.

Grant Closeout
- Complete all approved activities.
- Submit final reports and documentation.
- Ensure all reimbursements are requested.
- Retain records for the required period.



Reimbursement-Based Grants
- Expenses are paid upfront by the grantee.
- Reimbursement is requested after costs are incurred.
- Receipts and proof of payment are required.
- Sufficient cash flow is needed until reimbursement is received.

Key Terms

Award	The grant funding that is given to an applicant after a successful review process.
Cash Match	Direct financial contributions provided by the applicant or partners to meet a grant's matching requirement.
Cost Share	Another term for a required match; the portion of project costs not covered by the grant.
Grants.gov	The official federal website used to find and submit applications for most U.S. government grant opportunities.
In-Kind Match	A non-cash contribution, such as labor, equipment, materials, facilities, or services, used to meet a match requirement.
Match Requirement	The amount or percentage of project costs the applicant must contribute toward a grant-funded project.
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity. The official announcement with eligibility requirements, deadlines, and application instructions.
Objectives	Clear, measurable goals the project intends to accomplish.
Outputs	Direct products or activities completed through the project, such as workshops held or equipment purchased.
Outcomes	The changes, benefits, or impacts resulting from project activities.
Reimbursement Grant	A grant that requires expenses to be paid upfront and reimbursed after documentation is submitted.
SAM.gov	The System for Award Management. Registration is typically required before applying for federal grants.
UEI	A unique identifier assigned through SAM.gov that organizations need to apply for and receive federal funding.
Value-Added Product	An agricultural product that has been changed or enhanced in a way that increases its value or marketability.

Many NOFOs include grant-specific definitions that apply only to that funding opportunity. These definitions can directly affect eligibility and project requirements. Always use the definitions provided in that specific NOFO. Example: In MPPEP, a "Very Small Processor" is defined as a business with fewer than 10 employees or annual sales under $2.5 million.



Virginia Agricultural Grant Opportunities

Grant Opportunities at a Glance

AFID Planning Grant	Virginia local governments. Funds planning projects like feasibility studies, strategic plans, and local food system development.
BFRDP	Universities, nonprofits, Extension, and similar organizations. Funds training and education programs for beginning farmers.
CFPCGP	Nonprofits and community organizations. Funds projects that improve food access and strengthen local food systems.
Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund	Military veterans who are beginning farmers. Funds equipment, infrastructure, and other farm startup needs.
FASLP	Schools, universities, and nonprofits. Funds education and farm-to-school projects.
HFFI	Nonprofits, businesses, cooperatives, and governments. Funds food retail and food access projects in underserved communities.
LFPP	Food hubs, cooperatives, nonprofits, and local governments. Funds projects that improve local food marketing, aggregation, processing, and distribution.
MPPEP 4	Existing meat and poultry processors. Funds equipment, facility improvements, and capacity expansion projects.
Persimmon Collective	BIPOC farmers and land stewards. Funds infrastructure needs such as fencing, storage, utilities, and equipment repairs.
Regenerate VA Farm Vitality Grant	Virginia farms and ranches. Funds equipment purchases, business planning, and market expansion projects.
RFSP	Nonprofits, cooperatives, tribes, and public entities. Funds business development, feasibility studies, and technical assistance projects.
SDBII	Dairy farms and dairy processors. Funds planning, equipment, technology, and infrastructure.
SCBGP	Producer groups, nonprofits, and universities. Funds projects that benefit the specialty crop industry, such as research, marketing, and education.
Southern SARE Producer Grant	Farmers, ranchers, and farmer-led groups. Funds on-farm research projects.
UIE	Universities, nonprofits, businesses, and researchers. Funds research, education, and extension projects related to urban and indoor agriculture.
VAPG	Producers, cooperatives, and producer-owned businesses. Funds business planning and working capital for value-added products.
VA Cattle Industry Board Grant	Universities, nonprofits, and producer groups. Funds cattle-industry education, research, promotion, and market-development projects.
VFAIF	Farms, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals. Funds grocery stores and other projects that improve food access.
RFSI	Producers and food businesses. Funds processing, storage, distribution, and aggregation infrastructure projects.

Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund Planning Grant (AFID)

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)

The AFID Planning Grant program helps Virginia localities strengthen agriculture and forestry as part of their economic development strategy. The program supports early-stage planning, coordination, and development efforts that build long-term growth for agricultural and forestry-based industries. Funding supports projects such as feasibility studies, strategic plans, market development efforts, local policy development, and initiatives that support agritourism, local food systems, and working land preservation. These projects are intended to improve how communities support farms, forestland owners, and related businesses. Projects cannot primarily benefit a single private business and are not intended for education or youth training programs.

Award Amount: Varies depending on applicant type,

- Single locality applicants: up to $20,000
- Multi-locality applicants: up to $35,000

Total Funding Available: Varies annually based on state appropriations.

Eligible Applicants: Virginia local governments (political subdivisions). Applications may represent one locality or multiple localities working together.

Match Requirement: Depends on locality, but must include at least 50% cash,

- Standard: 1:1 match
- Economically distressed localities: reduced 2:1 match

Key Dates: Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, depending on available funding.

Application Details: Applications are submitted to VDACS and evaluated competitively based on project quality, impact, and alignment with program goals. Projects must demonstrate strong support from the local agricultural or forestry community and include involvement from a board, committee, or working group.
Applications typically require:

- Project description and work plan
- Budget and match documentation
- Letter of support from local government leadership

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

For more information visit
www.vdacs.virginia.gov/agriculture-afid-planning-grants

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

The BFRDP program supports education, training, and technical assistance projects that help new and early-stage farmers and ranchers start, manage, and grow successful operations. Funding is used for activities such as business planning, production training, financial management, mentoring, and market development. Projects are designed to build the skills and knowledge needed for long-term farm success and typically serve farmers in their first 10 years of operation.

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Standard Grants: $49,999 to $750,000
- Education Team Grants: Up to $750,000
- Clearinghouse Grant: Up to $750,000

BFRDP funds training and support programs, not individual farmers.

Total Funding Available: Approximately $44,000,000

Eligible Applicants: Applications must be submitted by partnerships or networks of organizations such as universities, Extension, nonprofits, government agencies, or community-based organizations. Individual farmers are not eligible to apply directly but are the primary beneficiaries of funded programs.

Match Requirement: 25% match required (cash or in-kind), with possible waivers for underserved audiences

Key Dates: Applications are typically due annually in mid-June, with awards announced later in the year and projects beginning in early fall.

Application Details: Applications are submitted through Grants.gov and require a detailed project narrative, budget, timeline, partnership documentation, data management plan, and letters of commitment. Projects must clearly describe the target audience (beginning farmers), training approach, expected outcomes, and how results will be measured and shared.

For more information visit www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities/beginning-farmer-rancher-development-program

Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (CFPCGP)

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

The CFPCGP is designed to support community-led efforts that improve local food systems and reduce food insecurity. The program helps communities increase access to healthy food, build long-term food system resilience, and strengthen connections between producers and consumers. Funding supports projects that address both immediate food access needs and long-term solutions that increase community self-reliance. There are three types of projects:

- Planning Projects: Support early-stage planning and development.
- Community Food Projects: Support long-term, comprehensive projects that address food system challenges and build sustainable solutions.
- Training and Technical Assistance Projects: Provide education, technical support, and capacity-building for applicants and funded projects.

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Planning Projects: $25,000 to $50,000
- Community Food Projects: $125,000 to $400,000
- Training and Technical Assistance: Up to $250,000 per year, up to $1,000,000 total

Total Funding Available: $4.8 million.

Eligible Applicants: Public or private nonprofit organizations, tribal organizations, and food program service providers with experience in community food work. Individuals and for-profit entities are not eligible.

Match Requirement: Planning Projects and Community Food Projects require a 1:1 match using cash or in-kind contributions from non-federal sources. Training and Technical Assistance Projects do not require a match.

Key Dates: Applications typically due mid-July, with awards made later in the year and project timelines ranging from 1 to 4 years, depending on project type.

Application Details: Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov and include a project narrative, budget, timeline, partnerships, and a data management plan.

For more information visit https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities/community-food-projects-competitive-grants-program

Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund

Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund

A small grant program that provides direct assistance to military veterans who are in the early years of farming or ranching. Funds are used to support purchases that make a critical difference in launching or growing a farm business. Grant funds are paid to approved third-party vendors rather than directly to the veteran.

Award Amount: $1,000 to $5,000.

Total Funding Available: Not fixed annually. Nearly $4 million has been awarded to more than 930 veterans since 2011.

Eligible Applicants: Military veterans in their beginning years of farming.

Match Requirement: 1:1 match.

Key Dates: The application opens once per year and remains open for at least four weeks. Awardees are typically notified in the spring, and recipients have six months to use the awarded funds.

Application Details: The application includes short-answer and essay questions that cover military service, education, farming experience, business and financial planning, and short- and long-term goals. Applicants are evaluated based on their farm training or transferable skills, personal investment in their farm business, the strength of the funding request and how the award will help grow the business, clarity of future goals, and community involvement.

FARMER VETERAN COALITION

FARMER VETERAN FELLOWSHIP FUND

For more information visit www.farmvetco.org/fvfellowship

Food and Agriculture Service Learning Program (FASLP)

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

The Food and Agriculture Service Learning Program (FASLP) supports projects that help children learn about agriculture and healthy eating through hands-on education. Funding can be used to increase food, garden, and nutrition education; strengthen farm-to-school partnerships; improve access to healthy foods; reduce food waste; and build stronger connections between schools, farms, and community organizations. The program also supports student leadership development and career exploration in agriculture. Projects may provide mentorship, job-shadowing, and leadership experiences that help students build skills in communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving while learning about agricultural career opportunities.

Award Amount: Up to $230,000 per award.

Total Funding Available: Approximately $930,539 available for FY 2026.

Eligible Applicants: Eligible applicants include colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations, school districts, and other organizations with experience delivering agricultural education, nutrition education, or service-learning programs.

Match Requirements: No match required.

Key Dates: FY 26 applications where due in July, with projects funded for periods of up to 24 months.

Application Details: Typical applications include an abstract, project narrative, three letters of support, and clear descriptions of the project's goals, outcomes, and planned activities. Applications should include an evaluation plan to measure project success and a self-sustainability plan that demonstrates how activities and outcomes will continue beyond the grant period.

For more information visit https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/food-agriculture-service-learning-program-faslp

Healthy Food Financing Initiative Food Access and Retail Expansion Fund (HFFI)

USDA Rural Development / Reinvestment Fund

The HFFI supports projects that create or expand healthy food retail business models and post-harvest food retail supply chain enterprises. The program aims to improve access to fresh, healthy, and affordable foods in underserved communities by funding SNAP-authorized retailers and distributors that offer a variety of staple and perishable foods. Funding supports both planning and implementation projects and can include expenses such as technical assistance and capacity building,

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Planning and Implementation Grants: $20,000 to $250,000
- Technical Assistance: Up to $75,000 per project

There is a second HFFI grant for financing partnership programs.

Total Funding Available: At least $5,250,000 is available for planning and implementation grants, and at least $1,000,000 is available for technical assistance.

Eligible Applicants: Government agencies, nonprofit organizations, cooperative businesses, and for-profit businesses. Projects must improve access to fresh, healthy foods through SNAP-eligible retailers.

Match Requirements: No match required.

Key Dates: The program is offered annually. Applicants typically begin by submitting a Funding Inquiry, followed by an invitation-only full application process. Specific deadlines vary by funding cycle.

Application Details: The application process takes place through the SmartSimple online grants portal. Interested organizations should first complete a screening quiz to determine eligibility and may work with Community Connectors for guidance and technical assistance. The first step is submitting a Funding Inquiry. Organizations that meet eligibility requirements will be invited to submit a full application.

For more information visit
www.investinginfood.com/fare-fund-2026/-grants-program

Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

The goal of the LFPP is to help develop, coordinate, and expand local and regional food businesses. The program funds organizations that serve as supply-chain partners for farmers (such as food hubs, markets, and aggregators) to increase consumer access to local agricultural products and create new income opportunities for producers. The LFPP offers three types of grants:

- Planning Grants: Support the early stages of developing or expanding a food business, including business plans, feasibility studies, training, and pilot projects.
- Implementation Grants: Support the start-up or expansion of food businesses, such as shared-use kitchens, food hubs, and food incubators.
- Farm to Institution Grants: Support efforts to connect local producers with institutional buyers, such as schools, hospitals, and other large food service operations.

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Planning Projects: $25,000 to $100,000
- Implementation Projects: $100,000 to $500,000
- Turnkey Marketing and Promotion / Recruitment and Training: $50,000 to $100,000

Total Funding Available: Around $13.84 million per year

Eligible Applicants: Eligible applicants are U.S.-based organizations that support local and regional food businesses through processing, distribution, aggregation, storage, or marketing. The program does not fund farm production, equipment purchases, land or building construction, SNAP/WIC outreach, single-producer projects, or activities already funded by another federal program.

Match Requirement: 25% cost share.

Key Dates: Announced in the spring and applications are due in early summer.

Application Details: Applications are submitted through Grants.gov. Applicants must describe their project, explain how it helps farmers or local food businesses, provide a budget, show where the match will come from, and include letters from partners. Applicants must also register in SAM.gov and Grants.gov before applying.

For more information visit www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/lfpp

Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program (MPPEP)

USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service

The MPPEP is a USDA grant program that helps expand meat and poultry processing capacity, strengthen supply chains, and create new market opportunities for producers. Funding may support equipment, workforce development, food safety improvements, and facility expansion. MPPEP has been offered through several funding rounds, with each phase addressing specific industry needs and priorities.

- Phase 1: Expanded meat and poultry processing through investments in facilities, equipment, workforce development, and food safety.
- Phase 2: Continued support for independent processors to increase capacity and strengthen regional supply chains.
- Phase 3: Supported invasive, wild-caught catfish processing through equipment purchases and facility upgrades.
- Phase 4 (Current): Focuses on strengthening the beef supply chain through cattle processing expansion and equipment investments.
- Future Phases: Additional funding rounds may be announced to address evolving industry needs.

Award Amount: For phase 4, ranges from $50,000 to $2,000,000

Total Funding Available: $60 million for Phase 4.

Eligible Applicants: Depends on the phase, but Phase 4 is open to small independently owned meat processors.

Match Requirement: For phase 4 depends on the project type,

- Processing Expansion Projects: 50% match (cash only)
- Simplified Equipment-Only Projects: 25% match (cash only)

Key Dates: The MPPEP is offered in funding phases, with application deadlines varying by funding round.

Application Details: Applications are submitted through Grants.gov. Applicants must describe their project, explain how it helps farmers or local food businesses, provide a budget, show where the match will come from, and include letters from partners.

For more information visit www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/meat-and-poultry-processing-expansion-program-phase-4

Persimmon Collective Infrastructure Grant

Persimmon Collective Fund

The Persimmon Collective Fund is a practitioner-led mutual aid initiative that supports BIPOC farmers and land stewards in their on- and off-farm efforts. The program focuses on uplifting community-based work, strengthening relationships, and preserving cultural and agrarian traditions across generations. This grant supports on-farm infrastructure projects that help farmers scale production and stay rooted on the land. Funding is flexible and can be used for needs such as storage, fencing, equipment repairs, housing improvements, utilities, and specialized tools.

Award Amount: Up to $10,000 (unrestricted funding)

Total Funding Available: Varies by funding cycle.

Eligible Applicants: Farmers and land stewards of color in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia who:

- Are currently farming
- Have at least 2 years of experience
- Are committed to building relationships within their agricultural community

Match Requirement: No match required.

Key Dates: Announced in the spring and applications are due in early summer.

Application Details: Applicants should clearly describe their infrastructure needs and how the project will support their farm and community. Strong applications highlight:

- Connection to community and collective work
- Cultural or heritage-based agricultural practices
- Long-term impact on the farm or land

Priority is given to projects focused on regenerative agriculture, agroecology, cooperative or collective farming, agrarian traditions, and intergenerational farming.

PERSIMMON
COLLECTIVE FUND

For more information visit
www.persimmoncollective.org/infrastructure-grants-2026

Regenerate Virginia Farm Vitality Grant Program

American Farmland Trust (AFT)

The Regenerate Virginia Farm Vitality Grant Program helps Virginia farmers strengthen the long-term viability of their operations while adopting or expanding regenerative agricultural practices. The program provides funding to improve farm profitability, support land stewardship, and help ensure farms remain productive and resilient for future generations. Funding is available through three project tracks:

- Equipment: Supports equipment purchases for regenerative farming practices.
- Business Development: Supports farm business planning and management.
- Product & Market Expansion: Supports new products and market growth opportunities.

Award Amount: Varies on project track

- Equipment: Up to $15,000
- Business Development: Up to $15,000
- Product & Market Expansion: Up to $25,000

Total Funding Available: Total program funding not specified.

Eligible Applicants: For-profit Virginia farms and ranches with at least two seasons of production experience. Startup farms may also qualify if they can document at least two years of farming experience through work, training, education, or internships. Aquaculture, equine, and forestry operations are not eligible, though agroforestry and silvopasture operations may qualify.

Match Requirements: No match required.

Key Dates: The grant program is offered annually. Applications typically open in December, with funding decisions announced in early spring.

Application Details: Applicants may apply for only one funding track and must submit an online application through the American Farmland Trust grant portal. Applications should describe the proposed project, anticipated impacts, and how the funding will support farm vitality and regenerative agriculture goals.

For more information visit https://farmland.org/mid-atlantic-grants

Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

The RFSP program helps groups of farmers, businesses, and organizations work together to strengthen local and regional food systems. Projects focus on improving how food moves from farms to markets, including processing, distribution, and sales, while creating new opportunities for producers and food businesses. Funding supports building partnerships, developing plans, and carrying out projects that improve coordination, expand markets, and keep more value within the region. There are two project types:

- Planning and Design: Supports building partnerships, exploring ideas, and creating plans for regional food system projects.
- Implementation and Expansion: Supports putting those plans into action and growing existing efforts, such as developing supply chains or expanding market access.

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Planning and Design: $100,000 to $250,000 for up to 24 months
- Implementation and Expansion: $250,000 to $1,000,000 for up to 36 months

Total Funding Available: Approximately $4.71 million.

Eligible Applicants: Partnerships made up of eligible entities (such as nonprofits, producer groups, local governments, or cooperatives) and one or more partners (such as universities, lenders, or private businesses); one organization applies on behalf of the partnership.

Match Requirement: 25% cash match required, with additional in-kind contributions allowed beyond the minimum.

Key Dates: Applications are typically due annually in early June.

Application Details: Applications must be submitted through Grants.gov and include a project narrative, budget, cost share documentation, and letters of commitment from all partners outlining roles and contributions.

For more information visit www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/rfsp

Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG)

USDA Rural Development (Virginia)

The Rural Business Development Grant program is designed to promote economic development and job creation in rural communities. Funding is awarded to eligible entities to support business and community projects through two distinct categories.

- Opportunity grants: Community and technology-based economic development, feasibility studies, and strategic planning.
- Enterprise grants: Benefit small and emerging businesses through activities like training, technical assistance, and infrastructure development.

In Virginia, these funds assist with activities ranging from feasibility studies and business plans to infrastructure development like building renovation and equipment acquisition.

Award Amount: Generally ranges from $10,000 to $500,000. Smaller funding requests are given higher priority.

Total Funding Available: About $27.7 million nationwide.

Eligible Applicants: Public bodies, government entities, federally recognized Indian Tribes, rural cooperatives, and nonprofit entities primarily serving rural areas are eligible to apply. Projects must benefit rural areas located outside of urbanized regions with populations of 50,000 or more. Individuals and for-profit businesses are ineligible to apply for RBDGs directly.

Match Requirements: None required but, applications are partially evaluated and scored based on the percentage of non-federal funding committed to the project

Key Dates: Typically opens in mid-May and closes in late June

Application Details: Virginia applicants must submit applications through Grants.gov. Applicants should contact the USDA Rural Development State Office and speak with a Business Programs Specialist before starting the application process.

The RBDG is a federal program, but local USDA offices manage it. Grant applications and requirements vary in each state.

For more information visit https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants-3

Southeast Dairy Business Innovation Initiative (SDBII)

SDBII with funding from USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

The SDBII grant supports dairy farms and dairy processors across the Southeast in improving their operations, increasing profitability, and creating higher-value dairy products. The program is designed to help businesses grow through investments in planning, equipment, infrastructure, and new marketing or processing opportunities. Funding can be used for a wide range of projects, including business planning, purchasing equipment, adopting new technologies, upgrading facilities, and expanding processing or marketing efforts.

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Dairy Business Planning Grants: up to $30,000
- Specialty Processing Equipment Grants: up to $150,000
- Precision Technology and Management Grants: up to $150,000
- Farm Infrastructure Improvement Grants: up to $100,000

Total Funding Available: Varies by grant cycle; for example, Specialty Processing Equipment Grants total approximately $1.5 million per cycle.

Eligible Applicants: Dairy farms and processors in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Puerto Rico proposing projects that improve efficiency, profitability, or add value to dairy products.

Match Requirements: No match required for Dairy Business Planning Grants, 25% cash match required for the other project types.

Key Dates: Grant cycles open once or twice per year, depending on the grant type

Application Details: Applications are submitted through the SDBII online portal (Foundant). Most applications require a project description, a budget, a timeline, and supporting documents. Funded projects must be completed within 12 months. Awardees are required to submit progress and final reports demonstrating how the project improved their business.

For more information visit sdbii.tennessee.edu

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP)

USDA AMS, administered in Virginia by VDACS

The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program provides funding for projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops. In Virginia, VDACS administers the program and awards funding through a competitive process. Projects must benefit the broader specialty crop industry rather than a single farm or business and often focus on research, marketing, food safety, education, or supply chain improvements.

Award Amount: Varies by state allocation; in Virginia, individual projects are typically capped around $75,000 over a project period of up to 2 years.

Total Funding Available: Varies annually; Virginia typically receives around $500,000 to $600,000 total to distribute across projects.

Eligible Applicants: Agricultural associations, industry or producer groups, nonprofits, community-based organizations, and universities are eligible to apply through VDACS. Projects must demonstrate benefits to the specialty crop industry as a whole rather than a single individual or business.

Match Requirement: No match required.

Key Dates: Applications are typically announced in late December, with pre-applications due in early February, followed by a full application phase; awards are announced in the fall and projects begin around October.

Application Details: Applications are submitted through the VDACS WebGrants system and follow a two-phase process: a pre-application followed by a full proposal for selected applicants. Proposals must include a project description, budget, measurable outcomes, and supporting documents such as letters of support and required forms. VDACS reviews applications and submits selected projects to USDA for final approval, with funds distributed after federal approval.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

For more information visit www.vdacs.virginia.gov/sales-specialty-crop-competitive-grant-program.shtml

Southern Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education Producer Grant (SSARE)

Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education (SARE)

SSARE Producer Grants help farmers and ranchers test new ideas directly on their operations. These are hands-on research projects designed to solve real production or marketing challenges while improving long-term sustainability. Projects are expected to generate practical results that can be shared with other farmers, not just benefit one operation. Funding supports on-farm research and demonstration projects such as field trials, testing new production practices, or trying new marketing approaches. Projects should focus on sustainable agriculture by balancing profitability, environmental stewardship, and quality of life.

Award Amount: Varies based on organization type,

- Individual farmers: up to $20,000
- Farmer organizations: up to $25,000

Total Funding Available: Varies each year based on federal allocations.

Eligible Applicants: Applicants must be farmers, ranchers, or farmer-led organizations actively engaged in production. They must have at least $1,000 in annual farm income and be located in the Southern SARE region. There are no limits on farm size or years of experience, but the program is geared toward producers who already have an established operation. Only one proposal may be submitted per farm each year.

Match Requirement: No match required.

Key Dates: The program follows an annual timeline, with the call for proposals opening in September, applications due in November, and awards announced in February.

Application Details: Applications are submitted through the Southern SARE online system during the open call. Proposals must clearly describe the problem, research approach, timeline, budget, project partners, and how results will be shared with other farmers.

SARE has four regions, North Central, Northeast, South, and West. Each region offers a variety of grant programs.

For more information visit
https://southern.sare.org/grants/apply-for-a-grant/producer-grants/

Urban, Indoor, and other Emerging Agricultural Production Research, Education, and Extension Initiative (UIE)

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

The UIE program supports research, education, and extension projects that advance urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production systems. Projects must address challenges across the food value chain, including production, processing, distribution, and marketing, with a focus on improving productivity, sustainability, and market opportunities. Project types include:

- Standard Projects: Comprehensive integrated projects combining research with education and/or extension.
- Workshop Projects: Short-term convenings that generate priorities, resources, or tools for the sector.

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Standard Projects: Up to $500,000 for 24 to 36 months
- Workshop Projects: Up to $50,000, typically completed within 12 months

Total Funding Available: Approximately $4 million.

Eligible Applicants: Colleges and universities, research institutions, nonprofits, private organizations, government entities, individuals, and partnerships of these groups.

Match Requirements: No match required.

Key Dates: Applications are typically due in mid-to-late July, with exact dates announced each year.

Application Details: Applications must be submitted through Grants.gov and include a project narrative, executive summary, timeline, budget, and required supporting documents such as a data management plan and letters of support. Proposals must demonstrate stakeholder involvement, a clear research and outreach approach, and how results will be shared and used.

For more information visit www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/urban-indoor-emerging-agriculture-program-uie

Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG)

USDA Rural Development

The VAPG program is a USDA initiative that helps U.S. agricultural producers turn raw agricultural commodities into new, higher-value products. The program provides funding to expand marketing opportunities, increase producer income, and create new revenue streams for farm operations through value-added activities that:

- Generate new products from raw agricultural commodities
- Create and expand marketing opportunities
- Increase producer income by improving product value and market reach

The program offers two types of grants to support producers at different stages of their business. Grant funds may be used for planning activities (including feasibility studies and business or marketing plans) or for working capital needs (such as processing, packaging, marketing, inventory, and labor).

Award Amount: Maximum funding amounts,

- Planning Grants: Up to $50,000
- Working Capital Grants: Up to $200,000

This is the main grant VAFAIRS helps producers with!

Total Funding Available: Approximately $25,000,000 annually.

Eligible Applicants: Independent agricultural producers, producer groups, farmer or rancher cooperatives, and producer-owned businesses. Applicants must own and produce more than 50% of the raw agricultural product that will be processed.

Match Requirement: 1:1 match.

Key Dates: The application cycle opens in November and runs through February.

Application Details: Applicants must have an active SAM.gov registration and UEI and apply through USDA's Grant Application Portal. Producers may work with a grant writer. Applications typically include a project description, budget, match documentation, and materials showing producer control and project feasibility.

USDA

For more information visit www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/value-added-producer-grants

Virginia Cattle Industry Board Grant Program

Virginia Cattle Industry Board

The Virginia Cattle Industry Board (VCIB) Grant Program provides funding for projects that support the promotion, education, research, and economic development of Virginia's cattle industry. The program is designed to improve the commercial value of cattle and beef products, strengthen producer profitability, expand market opportunities, and support industry growth across the Commonwealth. Funding is available for projects focused on education, market development, promotion, research, and youth development that provide a direct benefit to Virginia cattle producers and the broader cattle industry.

Award Amount: No maximum award amount specified. Grant requests over $20,000 are encouraged to have a representative attend the VCIB funding meeting to provide a brief project presentation.

Total Funding Available: Funding varies annually based on revenue generated through Virginia's cattle assessment program and interest earnings. Available grant funding has historically been approximately $330,000 to $380,000 per year.

Eligible Applicants: Localities, universities, researchers, producer groups, nonprofit organizations, associations, and other institutions planning projects that benefit Virginia's cattle industry. Individual producers are not eligible to apply directly but may participate through an eligible organization.

Match Requirements: No match required, but matching funds and other forms of external support are encouraged and may strengthen an application.

Key Dates: Funding opportunities are usually announced each year in the spring, with applications generally due in June. Award decisions are typically made during a summer Board meeting, and funded projects usually begin in the fall and run for up to one year.

Application Details: Applications must be submitted as a single PDF by email and include an official cover page, project narrative, and budget. Applicants are encouraged to provide letters of support and clearly demonstrate project benefits, measurable outcomes, and industry impact.

VIRGINIA CATTLE INDUSTRY BOARD

For more information visit
https://www.cattleindustryva.com/grant-funding

Virginia Food Access Investment Fund (VFAIF)

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)

The VFAIF is a statewide program that promotes equity and justice in local food systems by investing in new and expanding food retailers that address food access challenges across the Commonwealth. The program provides grants to support business development, construction, rehabilitation, equipment upgrades, and expansion of grocery stores, small food retailers, and innovative food retail projects in low-income, low-access communities. Funding supports projects that improve access to fresh, healthy foods in underserved communities.

Award Amount: $10,000 to $50,000 per project.

Total Funding Available: Approximately $1 million annually through the Virginia Food Access Investment Fund.

Eligible Applicants: Individuals, farms, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit businesses located in Virginia that operate, or plan to operate, an eligible food retail project. Projects must accept federal SNAP benefits and participate in the Virginia Fresh Match nutrition incentive program, or demonstrate a plan to do so.

Match Requirements: No match required.

Key Dates: The application cycle is annual and typically opens in February.

Application Details: Applicants must first submit a pre-proposal and receive an invitation to apply. Invited applicants submit a full application using the program's online application form. Applications should include a project plan, timeline, budget, and explanation of how the project will serve low-income, low-access communities.

The VFAIF is Virginia's state-level counterpart to the federal HFFI.

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

For more information visit www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing-food-access-investment-fund

Virginia Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI)

USDA AMS partnered with State Departments of Agriculture (VDACS)

The RFSI program in Virginia supports projects that build resilience across the middle of the food supply chain, including aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storage, transportation, wholesaling, and distribution of locally and regionally produced food products. This includes products such as specialty crops, dairy, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry. Funding supports projects that expand infrastructure and equipment for food and farm businesses. Projects may include:

- Processing and packaging equipment
- Storage, aggregation, and distribution infrastructure
- Facility upgrades or renovations, in some cases

USDA-funded program implemented at the state level, with each state running its own version of RFSI.

Award Amount: Varies depending on project type,

- Equipment Only: up to $100,000
- Infrastructure: typically $100,000 to $3,000,000 depending on scope

Total Funding Available: Part of a $400 million national investment distributed to states, including Virginia.

Eligible Applicants: Virginia producers, food businesses, and other eligible entities proposing projects that strengthen processing, aggregation, storage, or distribution of local and regional food products (excluding meat and poultry).

Match Requirements: Depends on project type,
Equipment Only: 50% match (cash or eligible in-kind)
Infrastructure : 50% match (cash required for most project costs)

Key Dates: Virginia's most recent application period ran from March to April. Future funding rounds will be announced by VDACS.

Application Details: In Virginia, RFSI is administered by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). Applicants apply for competitive subawards through VDACS rather than directly through USDA.

For more information visit www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/rfsi

Additional Resources

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

- *www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities*
- A comprehensive, up-to-date listing of current NOFOs for research, education, and extension programs in agriculture.

Grants.gov (Federal Grants Portal)

- *https://www.grants.gov/*
- The official U.S. government portal for federal funding opportunities. Can search and apply for grants across agencies.

USDA Grants and Funding Programs

- *https://www.usda.gov/farming-and-ranching/financial-resources-farmers-and-ranchers/grants-and-loans*
- List of a variety of different grants offered through USDA

Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (VDACS) Funding Portal

- *https://vdacs.webgrantscloud.com/index.do*
- Access current Virginia-specific agricultural funding opportunities and application system.

USDA Rural Development Programs (Virginia)

- *https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs/va*
- Lists grant and funding programs available to support rural businesses, value-added agriculture, and community development.

Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC)

- *https://revitalizeva.org/programs/*
- The TRRC operates and lists a variety of agricultural and other grant programs for Southern and Southwest Virginia.

VAFAIRS Agriculture Grant Quick Guide

Grant information can change frequently. Funding amounts, eligibility requirements, deadlines, and application procedures may vary from year to year. Always review the current program guidelines and official NOFO before applying.

For additional resources, information, or assistance, visit:

www.vafairs.com