USDA Opens Application Period for Composting and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreements

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WASHINGTON, June 12, 2024 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting applications for Composting and Food Waste Reduction (CFWR) pilot projects for fiscal year 2024. The cooperative agreements, using remaining funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, are jointly administered by USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Selected projects will develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans and are part of USDA's broader efforts to support urban agriculture.

USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) - led by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - will accept applications on Grants.gov until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Sept. 4, 2024. Projects must be two years in duration with an estimated start date of June 1, 2025.

"Uneaten food makes up approximately 4% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions," said Terry Cosby, Chief of NRCS, which houses the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. "Turning food waste into valuable compost is an important climate solution and benefits both farmers and communities. Local strategies and tools like the cooperative agreements are important climate solutions and also contribute to food security at the community level, and we encourage communities to apply."

Cooperative agreements support projects led by local and tribal governments, schools or other eligible entities that:

- Generate compost.
- Increase access to compost for agricultural producers.
- Reduce reliance on and limit the use of fertilizer.

- Improve soil quality.
- Encourage waste management and permaculture business development.
- Increase rainwater absorption.
- Reduce municipal food waste.
- Divert food waste from landfills.

OUAIP will prioritize projects that anticipate or demonstrate economic benefits; incorporate plans to make compost easily accessible to farmers, including community gardeners; integrate other food waste strategies, including food recovery efforts, and collaborate with multiple partners. Additional details are available in the Grants.gov notice.

This is the fifth year that OUAIP has offered this funding opportunity. Examples of past investments include Geneva Compost and Food Waste Diversion, from the Town of Geneva, New York, which diverted food waste and other biodegradables from the waste stream to generate nutrient-rich compost, improving soil quality, reducing reliance on fertilizers, and engaging in food recovery efforts that take "extra" food and get it to community members in need.

Another example of a past recipient is the Composting and Food Waste Reduction Pilot Project by Tucson Unified School District in Tucson, Arizona. The project built infrastructure to provide compost to school and community gardens, improve soil quality, reduce food waste, and demonstrate the economic benefits of including food reclamation education as an integral part of a school garden and nutrition programs for students, their families and the community.

Webinar

A pre-recorded webinar will provide an overview of the cooperative agreements' purpose, project types, eligibility and basic requirements for submitting applications. The webinar will be posted at usda.gov/urban.

More Information

Earlier today, USDA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the White House announced the National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics as part of President Biden's whole-of-government approach to tackle climate change, feed people, address environmental justice, and promote a circular economy.

OUAIP was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture and innovative production. Other efforts include:

- Administering the People's Garden Initiative, which celebrates collaborative gardens across the country and worldwide that benefit their communities by growing fresh, healthy food and supporting resilient, local food systems using sustainable practices and providing greenspace.
- Creating and managing a Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production to advise the Secretary on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban agriculture.
- Investing $9.1 million for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production competitive grants in fiscal year 2023.
- Investing $40 million, made possible by President Biden's American Rescue Plan, into partnerships with community-based organizations that will conduct outreach, education and technical assistance to support urban producers.
- Investing in risk management education to broaden the reach of crop insurance among urban producers.
- Organizing 27 FSA urban and suburban county committees to make important decisions about how FSA farm programs are administered locally. Urban farmers who participate in USDA programs in the areas selected are encouraged to participate by nominating and voting for county committee members.
- Establishing 17 new Urban Service Centers staffed by FSA and NRCS employees where urban producers can access farm loan, conservation, disaster assistance and risk management programs.
- Partnering with the Vermont Law and Graduate School Center for Agriculture and Food Systems to develop resources that help growers understand and work through local policies.

Learn more about Composting and Food Waste Cooperative Agreements at usda.gov/urban and view a complete list of 2023 cooperative agreement recipients and project summaries. In 2023, USDA awarded $11.5 million in 38 cooperative agreements. For additional resources available to producers, download the Urban Agriculture at a Glance brochure or visit farmers.gov/urban.

NIFA is building a better future by nurturing innovation in the food and agricultural sciences and cultivating equitable change in communities across the nation. Through investment in science as a solution to our greatest challenges, USDA NIFA collaborates with partners to drive research, education and Extension - improving lives, supporting livelihoods and sustaining the planet. In FY 2023, NIFA's total investment was $2.5 billion.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities throughout America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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