New Opportunities for Funding Organic Practices: The USDA's $3.1 Billion Commitment to Climate-Smart Agriculture

By Sancha Gonzalez

In 2022, the USDA committed more than $3.1 billion to support a diverse range of farmers, ranchers, and private landowners to adopt climate-smart agriculture practices through the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities.

With this funding, the USDA has supported over 140 projects that provide technical and financial assistance to producers who voluntarily implement climate-smart practices, monitor and report greenhouse gas benefits, and promote climate-smart commodities. While "climate-smart" agriculture is defined as practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resilience to environmental changes, many of these methods are also regularly used in organic farming.

Because organic farming is based on improving soil resources and increasing organic matter without synthetic inputs, organic systems not only improve the health and quality of soil over time but also are found to use 45% less energy and release 40% fewer carbon emissions. With this in mind, the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities provides a unique opportunity for organic farmers to incorporate practices you may already be interested in with financial and technical support. By getting involved in these projects, you will be able to learn more about premiums and additional incentives to implement climate-smart organic practices.

The projects listed are funded by the USDA and focus on providing financial and technical support to organic practices that lessen CO_2 entering the atmosphere and increase carbon sequestration in the soil.

Acres already enrolled in USDA conservation programs are not eligible to apply for funding for the same funded practice under the Climate-Smart Commodities program. To learn more about each project and the opportunities available to farmers, click the title name or email us with your questions – helpline@organicfarmersassociation.org.

SOUTHERN PIEDMONT CLIMATE-SMART PROJECT (AL, GA, NC, SC, VA)

Focused on the Southern Piedmont region (Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, & Alabama), this project aims to help small-scale vegetable farms adopt farming methods that support the local ecosystem. Through educating farmers and developing recommendations, the Rodale Institute hopes to better quantify the benefits of climate-smart methods (primarily the use of cover crops) and their effect on soil health, greenhouse gas emissions, and other environmental factors. Farmer participants receive cash incentives and non-cash incentives such as equipment, technical support, and seed. **Applications are open.**

RICE STEWARDSHIP PARTNERSHIP FOR CLIMATE SMART COMMODITIES (AR, CA, LA, MO, MS, TX)

Along with Ducks Unlimited, USA Rice provides financial assistance to U.S. rice producers in specific regions in California, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana. Each state has different opportunities to receive varying payments based on the specific practice you sign up for. **Applications for each specific state and more details on the specific practices included can be found here.**

ARIZONA ALLIANCE FOR CLIMATE-SMART CROPS (AZ)

Good Food Finder will work with Arizona farmers to trial climate-smart practices such as alley cropping, using conservation cover, multi-story cropping, agrivoltaics, and reduced/no-till. This project will provide cash incentives directed at reducing farmers' input costs, and increase farmers' income while reducing the risk of trying these climate-smart practices and foods. Good Food Finder will also provide new markets and revenue streams that help farms cover the costs and gain economic benefits from using these farming practices that lower greenhouse gas emission. **Applications are open.**

NORTH VALLEY FOOD HUB FOR CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE (CA)

The North Valley Food Hub is providing marketing and sales support for growers who implement practices such as cover crops, no-till/reduced till, crop rotation, soil amendments, prescribed grazing, hedgerows, and nutrient management. Prioritizing farmers in the greater Sacramento Valley, the Hub is looking for **farmers to apply for funding and technical support** to implement these climate-smart agricultural practices. Farmers will receive direct payments for every year of participation, access to equipment, and one-on-one technical service assistance to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate these practices. Farmers will also have access to the Hub's integrated sales and marketing food hub platform where they can sell directly to buyers.

A VIBRANT FUTURE: USDA CLIMATE-SMART PILOT PROJECT (CA, FL, MS)

This project aims to encourage the use of climate-smart production practices among specialty crop growers in California, Florida, and Mississippi. Examples of eligible speciality crops include annuals (strawberries, tomatoes, carrots, onions, broccoli, kale, speciality greens, and sweet potatoes),short-lived perennials (blueberries and cane berries), and long-lived perennials (vineyards and orchards).

Growers can receive up to $10,000 to offset approximately 80% of direct cost of materials, soil testing, equipment, labor and technical support as well as cash incentives that will be determined based on acreage committed, practice selected, and percentage of total acreage committed to a practice. These practices include short-season cover crops, nutrient management, residue/tillage management, alley cropping, water management, and soil amendments/mulches. **This program is accepting applications.**

PROXIMITY MALT: CLIMATE-SMART COMMODITY (DE, MD, NC, PA, VA, CO, KS, NE, NM, WY)

Proximity Malt and Sustainable Environmental Consultants will provide educational and financial opportunities for farms interested in growing regeneratively produced barley. This project will provide a payment premium for regeneratively grown barley, and provide access to educational field days. Proximity Malt (buyer) is looking for farms able and interested in growing regenerative barley in Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Wyoming to adopt or use practices like: conservation crop rotation, residue and tillage management (no-till), cover crops, sprinkler systems, and irrigation water management.

ADVANCING U.S. PORK SUSTAINABILITY GRANT (IA, MN, MO)

Farmers in Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri may receive financial and technical incentives for adopting practices: cover crops, livestock integration (in cover crops), conservation tillage (no till), manure management, edge-of-field and perennial grass buffers, and in-barn LED lighting. The application process starts after you sign up for a Pork Cares Farm Impact, which will be used to implement practices tailored to the grower's needs. Pork production is not required for this program.

INNOVATIVE AGRICULTURE AND MARKETING PARTNERSHIP (ID)

Aimed at Idaho farmers and ranchers growing barley, beef, chickpeas, hops, potatoes, sugar beets, and wheat, this project provides financial and technical assistance to increase the adoption of climate-smart practices. Average program payments are estimated at $60/ acre. Covered practices include cover cropping, cover cropping with livestock grazing, reduced/no-till, interseeding, precision fertilizer application, partial nitrogen fertilizer replacement with biochar, and more. Technical expertise and site visits for participating producers are additional incentives. Farmers already using these practices can still enroll, but acres already enrolled in federal programs for the same practices may not enroll for the same practice. **This program is still accepting applicants.**

CLIMATE-SMART FARMING AND MARKETING PROJECT - ORGANIC ASSOCIATION OF KENTUCKY (KY)

The project will provide direct technical assistance, educational programming, financial incentives, and market development support for Kentucky farmers who implement climate-smart practices. Practices eligible for incentives could include: conservation cover, conservation crop rotation, cover crop, residue and tillage management, perennial crops, silvopasture, and more. Farmers will receive free soil sampling and surface water testing to collect data on the environmental impact of adopting such practices. Eligible farmers must have commercial operations and must be selling one of these commodities: lamb/sheep, beef, corn, soybeans/small grains, hemp, or agroforestry products. **Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and will close in early 2025.**

MICHIGAN CLIMATE-SMART FARM PROJECT (MI)

The goal of the Michigan Climate Smart Farm Project (MCSFP) is to assist small/diversified farms in Washtenaw, Monroe, Wayne, and Lenawee counties in Michigan implement climate smart practices. Farmers interested in participating in this project's pilot will be eligible for cost-share payments for practices including: alley cropping, conservation crop rotation, cover crop, residue and tillage management (no till), silvopasture, and more.

ACTIVATING FOOD HUB NETWORKS FOR CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE AND RURAL REVITALIZATION GUIDE (NC)

This North Carolina project promotes climate-smart agriculture practices among small and underserved producers, including tribal producers, by providing financial and on-farm technical support to implement climate-smart practices. Participating farmers would implement practices such as intensive rotational grazing, multispecies cover crops, crop rotations, reduced tillage/no-till, compost and biochar. Acreage may not already be enrolled in other USDA-funded programs that fund the same practices. **Applications are open.**

CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE FOR REGENERATIVE NATIVE AGRICULTURE - IOWA TRIBE (NE, KS)

Implemented by the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, this project is designed to help Native American farmers and Tribally owned farming enterprises transition to regenerative agriculture practices. There will be two cohorts a year for Native and non-Native students, where they will participate in a two-week course on regenerative agriculture techniques. The program will also provide financial support (direct payments and market research) to farmers who adopt practices such as cover cropping, no-till farming, mulching and improved ground cover, water conservation, reduced tillage, livestock integration and rotational grazing, and the reduction of synthetic fertilizers.

EXPANDING MARKETS FOR PECANS AND LIVESTOCK IN OK, THE MUSCOGEE NATION, AND CHOCTAW (OK)

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) aims to support the production of climate-smart commodities by providing incentives to producers and landowners who implement climate-smart agricultural production practices on working lands. During this project, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will use soil sampling to verify the carbon and greenhouse gas benefits of practices such as: cover cropping, no-till, buffers, grassland management, native grass plantings for high carbon sequestration, and agroforestry on working lands. However, if you are already receiving funding for certain practices from other government programs such as EQIP, OACD cannot provide further funding. Monetary incentives will depend on the practice adopted and the acreage used.

TEXAS CLIMATE-SMART INITATIVE (TX)

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) and Texas A&M AgriLife are working directly with producers to implement new climate-smart practices. Farmers will receive financial incentives for successfully executing the practices on their land. Click here for the **list of approved practices and the funding received per acre and the application.**

GRAZING FOR APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABILITY - GRASS (VA, WV)

The West Virginia University Extension is looking for small and underserved farmers in Central Appalachia, including West Virginia, and western counties in Virginia to expand climate-smart cattle and beef. Farmers will receive financial and technical support for their participation as they transition from conventional management to sustainable, climate-smart conservation practices. Cash incentives will be awarded when farmers adopt climate-smart practices such as silvopasture, fencing, pasture and hay planting, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, and water facility on working land. The types of producer incentives available are listed in the link above and the **application form can be found here.**

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

This list of available programs is just a brief introduction to all the funds made available by the USDA. In fact, even more opportunities can be found on the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Dashboard.

There you can organize the programs by state, type of practice, or commodities based on your preference to find one that fits your needs. However, some of these projects, like the ones listed below, are not accepting applications yet, or are reopening their application cycle later in 2024. If you're interested in any of these projects, be sure to visit the link and sign up for any updates on their website.

APPLICATIONS NOT AVAILABLE

- Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture
- Growing the Supply and Market for Climate-Smart Grass-Fed Organic Dairy - Maple Hill Creamery Guide
- Horizon II Climate-Smart Commodities Grant
- USDA Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities - Marbleseed

APPLICATIONS WILL REOPEN

- Climate-Smart Grown in SC
- Climate-Smart Wheat - Go Seed
- Farmers for Soil Health - NFWF
- The Future of America Depends on Building Resilient Farmlands Today - Accelerating Appalachia

PROGRAM ONLY OFFERS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- MO BioChar - Missouri Organic Association (MOA)
- Climate Smart Farm Project - College of Agriculture Food and Natural Resources

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