

# Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Farmer Drought Relief Program



## Request for Applications and Application Workbook

RFA#: ARDFDRF2025

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<p>RFA Coordinator</p>	<p>All communication regarding the RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified below.</p> <p><b>Name:</b> Tom Gordon <b>Title:</b> Soil &amp; Water Conservation Program Coordinator</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:Tom.Gordon@maine.gov">Tom.Gordon@maine.gov</a></p>
<p>Written Questions Deadlines and Information Session See section 2.3</p>	<p>The RFA Coordinator will offer an information session on 5/9/2025 from 1 – 2 p.m., ET. Please use this <a href="#">link</a> to register for the info session.</p> <p>All written questions must be submitted via this link by 5/30/2025 no later than 5:00 p.m., local time.</p>
<p>Application Submission Deadline See section 2.5</p>	<p>DACF must receive applications by:</p> <p><b>Submission Deadline:</b> 6/20/2025, no later than 5:00 p.m., local time.</p> <p>Applications must be submitted electronically via <a href="#">this link</a>, with additional requested material emailed to: <a href="mailto:Tom.Gordon@maine.gov">Tom.Gordon@maine.gov</a></p>
<p>Further resources</p>	<p>Additional information and resources can be found on the program website linked here: <a href="https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/farmer-drought-relief-program.shtml">https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/farmer-drought-relief-program.shtml</a></p> <p>For timely information about this RFA and related programs, enroll in the Maine DACF “Agricultural Grants and Loans” email listserv <a href="#">here</a>.</p>

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## 1. OVERVIEW

### 1.1. Background and Purpose

The Maine Farmer Drought Relief Fund (FDRF) was created by the Maine Legislature (7 M.R.S.A., Chapter 8-A, subchapter 4 § 220-A(3)) to assist farmers in the State to overcome the adverse effects of drought conditions by providing grants. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (Department) is seeking applications for Farmer Drought Relief Fund grants in two categories:

Category 1 – Agricultural Water Management Plans – up to \$ 7,500

Category 2 – Agricultural Water Source Development – 90 percent of the cost for installation of:

- Installation or deepening of a dug water well – up to \$ 15,000
- Installation of a drilled bedrock well – up to \$ 25,000
- Installation of a gravel-packed well – up to \$ 50,000
- Installation of a water storage pond – up to \$ 50,000

### 1.2. Eligibility to Submit Application

Applicants are eligible to apply to the Farmer Drought Relief Fund Grant if:

- Are a farm operation located in Maine.
- In at least one of the last three years, you produced agricultural products with a gross annual value of at least \$10,000,

OR you produced agricultural products with a gross annual value of at least \$2,000 and can demonstrate that the farm provides unique benefits to the local food economy as determined by the Commissioner,

OR that you have an ancestral history of disinvestment or land dispossession in the State of Maine.

- The application is intended to address agricultural water management of cropland.

For more detail, the eligibility guidelines can be found in the rules governing the Maine Farmer Drought Relief Fund. If you have any additional questions about your eligibility, contact the RFA Coordinator.

### 1.3 Allowable Costs

Costs are allowable unless they are explicitly unallowable per section 1.4 of this RFA. In your application, you must describe how the costs will improve your farm's water management. The following are some examples of allowable costs:

- *Development of an agricultural water management plan prepared by a Soil & Water Conservation District or other qualified technical service provider*
- *Installation or deepening of a dug water well*
- *Installation of a drilled bedrock well*
- *Installation of a gravel-packed well*
- *Construction or expansion of a water storage pond*
- *Water pumps and necessary appurtenant equipment for a water storage pond*

#### **1.4 Unallowable Costs**

- *Field irrigation equipment such as center-pivot or micro-irrigation systems*
- *Water supply for livestock operation \**
- *Water supply for residential use \**
- *Water supply for commercial processing \**

*\* (unless expressly waived by the DACF Commissioner to allow uses that do not impair cropland irrigation or result in increased environmental impacts)*

#### **1.5 Funding and Duration**

- The Maine Farmer Drought Relief Program will make up to \$300,000 available for Agricultural Water Management Plans from FY 25 funding.
- The Maine Farmer Drought Relief Program will make up to \$1,300,000 available for installation of agricultural water sources from FY 26 and nonlapsing funding.
- Agricultural Water Management Plans must be completed by June 1, 2026.
- The program reserves the right to offer an award amount different than the amount requested.

#### **1.6. Statutory References**

All general instructions for submitting the applicable application are provided in this document in accordance with:

- Statute establishing the Maine Farmers Drought Relief Program (7 MRS Ch. 7 §220-A)
- Rules for Operation of the Maine Farmers Drought Relief Fund (01-001, Ch. 38)
- Rules for Departmental (DACF) Grant Awards and Appeals (01-001, Ch. 8)

#### **1.7. Appeal of Contract Awards**

In accordance with the [Rules for Departmental \(DACF\) Grant Awards and Appeals \(01-001, Ch. 8\)](#) an aggrieved person (hereinafter the “petitioner”) may request an appeal hearing on a grant award decision by submitting a request for appeal to the Commissioner, in writing, no later than fifteen (15) calendar days from the date of the award decision. The written request for appeal must describe the specific nature of the grievance. The Commissioner shall grant an appeal hearing unless it is determined that: A. the petitioner is not an aggrieved person, or B. the written request for appeal was submitted more than fifteen (15) calendar days after notification of award.

## **2. APPLICATION PROCESS**

### **2.1. Timeline and Key Dates**

Date	Item
5/2/2025	Application opens
5/9/2025	Live Q/A session
5/16/2025	Summary of questions and answers from live session posted on the program website
5/30/2025	Written questions due via online submission
6/6/2025	Questions and answers posted on the program website
6/20/2025	Application Due date. Applications and accompanying documents must be submitted by 5:00 p.m.
7/18/2025	Anticipated completion of application review/scoring
8/1/2025	Anticipated notification date of project and award decisions Upon signed contract, period of performance begins. Funds are accessible, and expenses from on or after this date are eligible for reimbursement

### **2.2. Solicitation**

This RFA and all relevant documents and forms were posted on the release date noted on the cover page and can be found at DACF Maine Farmer Drought Relief Fund website. It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain the Question-and-Answer Summaries and any amendments to this RFA.

### **2.3. Submission of Questions and Amendments**

It is the responsibility of all applicants and other interested parties to examine the entire RFA and seek clarification in writing if they have specific questions. All written questions must be submitted via this online form. For technical questions concerning application submission, online form issues, supplemental file submission, or compatibility problems, please email [Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov](mailto:Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov).

#### **2.3.1 Question/Answer Process**

We will offer a live question-and-answer session on the date listed on the cover sheet. This session will be recorded, and we will post a written summary of the questions within 7 business days after the live Q/A. Applicants and other interested parties may additionally submit any questions via this online form by 5:00 p.m. on the written questions due date listed on the cover sheet of this RFA. Responses to all written questions will be compiled in writing and posted on the DACF Maine Farmers Drought Relief Program webpage within 7 business days after the written questions due date. All interested parties are responsible for going to this website to obtain a copy of the Question & Answer Summary. Only those answers issued in writing on this website will be considered binding. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate, complete, and on-time submission and receipt.

### **2.4. Amendments to the Request for Applications**

All amendments (if any) released in regard to this RFA will be posted on the DACF Maine Farmers Drought Relief Program webpage. It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this webpage to obtain amendments. For timely information about this RFA and related programs, an email listserv signup can be found on the DACF Maine farmers Drought Relief program webpage.

Only those amendments posted on this website are considered binding.

DACF reserves the right to revise, suspend, or terminate this RFA at its sole discretion. In such an event, DACF will inform all applicants as soon as reasonably possible. DACF also reserves the right to extend the deadline for submission of proposals or to seek additional proposals under this RFA.

## **2.5. Application Submission Instructions**

Applications Due - Applications must be received by the due date listed on the cover page of this RFA by 5:00 p.m. local time. Applications must be submitted via this link, and all supplemental files must be emailed to [Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov](mailto:Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov) . Any emails containing application materials or any additional or revised application files received after the 5:00 p.m. deadline may be rejected. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete/on-time email/online form transmission and receipt.

Applications that do not comply with the instructions specified in this RFA, or failure to submit all required documents, may result in the proposal being disqualified or receiving a reduced score at the sole discretion of the Department. Applicants may not provide additional supplemental files beyond those specified in the RFA. Additional materials not requested will not be evaluated. Applicants may not submit more than one application. Submission of multiple applications may result in both applications being disqualified from consideration for an award.

### **Submission Instructions**

All activities described in the instructions below must occur BEFORE 5:00 p.m. on the application due date listed on the cover page of this RFA.

1. Fill out and submit the online application form found at [this link](#).
2. Email a map that outlines the farm to [Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov](mailto:Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov) . This can be a Google Map, Web Soil Survey map, or other map, so long as it shows the layout of the farm.
3. IF you are applying for establishment of a water source (a well or pond), you must include a copy of an existing agricultural water management plan for your farm in your supplemental files email.
4. IF you are applying for establishment of a water source (a well or pond), you must include a price quote from a well driller or excavating contractor in your supplemental files email. Quotes must be submitted in PDF format, and all quotes must be combined into a single file. If the quote exceeds the funding limit on this grant, you must also include a pre-qualification or pre-approval letter from a financial institution if you intend to use loan funds to fund the difference between the estimated cost and the grant award.

For submission of required supplemental files:

- E-mails containing links to file-sharing sites or online file repositories will not be accepted as submissions.
- Encrypted e-mails received which require opening attachments and logging into a proprietary system will not be accepted as submissions.
- Supplemental documents must be saved and submitted as PDF (pdf) or Word (.doc or .docx) file(s).
- File size limits are 25 MB per email. Applicants may submit files separately across multiple emails, as necessary, due to file size concerns. All emails and files must be received in accordance with all the instructions above.

## **2.6. Evaluation and Selection Process**

A review panel will evaluate and score project applications based on the program requirements and selection criteria found in the rubric below. Applications will NOT be scored question by question but instead based on how the whole application addresses the rubric criteria. Applications will be scored for completeness.

Members of the review panel will first score applications individually. The review panel will then meet to arrive at a consensus score. Applications that are ineligible, late, incomplete, or incorrectly formatted may be disqualified from panel review.

Based on the review panel's scoring and evaluation, the RFA Coordinator will make recommendations to the Commissioner. Final decision-making authority for awarding grants rests with the Commissioner, based upon the program requirements and selection criteria found in the rubric below. All applicants shall be notified in writing following the Review Panel's decision.

### 3. RUBRIC

#### 3.1. Point Ranges for Scoring Criteria for Agricultural Water Management Plans

<b>CRITERIA FOR AGRICULTURAL WATER MANAGEMENT PLANNING GRANTS</b>	Point Range
<b>Management Capacity</b>	0-20
Experience and training	
Decision-making authority over the land and resources	
Use of soil health or water conservation practices	
<b>Physical Resource Base</b>	0-25
Farmland suitability based on soils, topography, and land cover	
Physical condition of buildings and equipment	
<b>Economic Impacts</b>	
Evidence of adverse impacts from prior drought/water insufficiency	0-25
Potential for economic damage	
<b>Environmental Impacts</b>	0-25
Sensitivity of water resources to potential low-flow conditions	
Environmental stress associated with current or projected water use	
<b>Commissioner’s designation of priority geographic area or crop sector</b>	0-5

#### 3.2. Point Ranges for Scoring Criteria for Agricultural Water Source Implementation

<b>CRITERIA FOR AGRICULTURAL WATER SOURCE IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS</b>	Point Range
<b>Cost</b>	0-25
Costs are itemized appropriately and are reasonable	
Evidence of 10% match (as cash or in-kind contribution)	
Coordination with NRCS assistance for related practices	
<b>Physical Resource Base</b>	0-20
Farmland suitability based on soils, topography, and land cover	
Physical condition of buildings and equipment	
<b>Economic Impacts</b>	0-25
Evidence of adverse impacts from prior drought/water insufficiency	
Potential for economic damage	
<b>Environmental Impacts</b>	0-25
Avoided use of water resources with potential low-flow conditions	
Reduction of environmental stress associated with current or projected water use	
Use of appropriate soil health or water conservation practices	
<b>Commissioner’s designation of priority geographic area or crop sector</b>	0-5

## APPENDIX A: RFA TERMS and DEFINITIONS

1. “Agricultural produce” means food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops that are useful to humans, including forages and sod crops, grains and food crops, fruits, berries, vegetables, flowers, seeds, and grasses.
2. “Agricultural Water Management Plan” means a plan for the development and use of water resources to sustain the growth of agricultural produce on a farm.
3. “Cropland” means land that is used for the production of adapted crops for harvest, alone or in a rotation with grasses and legumes, including cultivated cropland in row crops, small grain crops, hay crops, nursery crops, orchard crops, and non-cultivated cropland, such as permanent hay land and horticultural cropland.
4. “Department” means the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.
5. “Farm” means the aggregate of all agricultural land, equipment, and all related facilities and crops, regardless of their location or ownership within the State of Maine, that form part of an integrated agricultural business or enterprise.
6. “Farmer” means the owner or operator of cropland, which may include one or more individuals, partnerships, corporations, or associations that produce gross annual sales of agricultural products of at least \$10,000 in at least one of the previous three years. This term may also apply to an owner or operator of a farm that produces gross annual sales of agricultural products of at least \$2,000 and who can demonstrate that the farm provides unique benefits to the local food economy as determined by the Commissioner or that the owner or operator has an ancestral history of disinvestment or land dispossession in the State of Maine.
7. “NRCS” means the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, its Maine State Office, and associated Field Offices.
8. “Soil health practices” means the use of conservation cover, contour buffer strips, cover crops, crop rotation, no-till or reduced tillage, or similar practices as specified by NRCS.
9. “Water conservation practices” means the use of drip irrigation, water storage, compost and mulching, water-conserving plants, or similar practices.

## **APPENDIX B: GENERAL PROVISIONS**

1) From the time this RFA is issued until award notification is made, all contact with the State regarding this RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified on the cover page of this RFA. No other person/State employee is empowered to make binding statements regarding this RFA. Violation of this provision may lead to disqualification from the application process at the State's discretion.

2) Issuance of the RFA does not commit the Department to issue an award or to pay expenses incurred by an Applicant in the preparation of a response to the RFA. This includes attendance at personal interviews or other meetings, where applicable.

3) All applications must adhere to the instructions and format requirements outlined in the RFA and all written supplements and amendments (such as the Summary of Questions and Answers) issued by the Department.

4) Applicants will take careful note that in evaluating an application submitted in response to this RFA, the Department will consider materials provided in the application, information obtained through interviews/presentations (if any), and internal Departmental information of previous contract history with the Applicant (if any). The Department also reserves the right to consider other reliable references and publicly available information in evaluating the Applicant's experience and capabilities.

5) The application must be signed by a person authorized to legally bind the Applicant and must contain a statement that the application and the pricing contained therein will remain valid and binding for a period of 180 days from the date and time of the RFA deadline.

6) The RFA and the awarded Applicant's application, including all appendices, attachments, or updated documents requested by the Department will be the basis for the final contract, as determined by the Department.

7) Following the announcement of an award decision, all submissions in response to this RFA will be public records, available for public inspection pursuant to the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) (1 M.R.S. § 401 et seq.).

8) The Department, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to recognize and waive minor informalities and irregularities found in applications received in response to the RFA.

9) All applicable laws, whether or not herein contained, shall be included by this reference. It shall be the Applicant's responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them