



**Northeast Sustainable Agriculture
Research and Education**

**2011 Graduate Student Grants in Sustainable
Agriculture**

Applicant Instructions

Proposals must be submitted on line by midnight, May 31, 2011

**Printed copy with signatures from your institution and advisor must be
mailed to Northeast SARE by June 15, 2011**

To submit, go to <http://www.ciids.org/nesare/gs>

Northeast SARE
655 Spear Street
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405-0107
802/656-0471
www.nesare.org

Agriculture in the Northeast will be diversified and profitable, providing healthful products to its customers. It will be conducted by farmers who manage resources wisely, who are satisfied with their lifestyles, and have a positive influence on their communities and the environment.

—Northeast SARE outcome statement

Notice to applicants

Copies of these instructions can be downloaded from the Northeast SARE web site at www.nesare.org as a PDF file. If you prefer a printed application, call 802/656-0471.

All Graduate Student Grant proposals must be submitted on line at <http://www.ciids.org/nesare/gs>. The online application interface has strict word limits, and we strongly suggest you prepare your proposal using a word processing program, edit each response to comply with the word limits, and then copy and paste your proposal section by section into the online template, saving as you go. Make sure the plan of work and the budget are acceptable to your faculty advisor and your academic institution before you submit the proposal. Once the proposal has been submitted, you can print out the entire file, collect all the necessary signatures, and send a single signed copy to **Northeast SARE, 655 Spear Street, University of Vermont, Burlington VT 05405-0107.**

Overview

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program offers grants to graduate students to conduct research on topics specific to sustainable agriculture under the supervision of a faculty advisor. Proposals for these grant funds should address issues of current or potential importance to Northeast farmers, farm support professionals such as NRCS staff and Cooperative Extension, and agricultural researchers.

Projects should explore the sustainable themes of good stewardship, profitability, and quality of life for farmers and the farm community. We specifically seek projects that are consistent with our outcome statement, which says: **Agriculture in the Northeast will be diversified and profitable, providing healthful products to its customers; it will be conducted by farmers who manage resources wisely, who are satisfied with their lifestyles, and have a positive influence on their communities and the environment.**

Who can apply

This grant is open to graduate students enrolled at an accredited college, university, or veterinary school in the Northeast region. The region is made up of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Vermont, and Washington, D.C. Applications are limited to one per graduate student per year.

To qualify, you must have a faculty advisor who will endorse the proposal, oversee the research, and act as the official principal investigator. Applications must support the research effort of one graduate student, not group projects or teams of researchers. Collaboration is encouraged, but there must be one person who is in charge of the project, making sure the work is done and reports are filed.

Because universities typically do not allow students to manage institutional grant awards, the applicant's faculty advisor will be named the principal investigator if a grant is awarded. Make sure the project you are proposing and the budget presentation is acceptable to your faculty advisor and your institution's grants office before you submit.

Size and duration of awards

Grants are capped at \$15,000 and projects can run up to two years.

Types of projects funded

Successful proposals will address inquiries in sustainable agriculture that are important to farmers, Cooperative Extension staff, and agricultural researchers. Awards may encompass a wide range of topics including, but not limited to cropping systems, pest management, livestock health, farm energy production, farm labor, soil quality, and the marketing of local food.

If you want to see what has been funded by graduate student grants in all four SARE regions, go to <http://www.sare.org/MySare/ProjectReport.aspx?do=search> and, under "project type," select "Graduate Student Projects." Newer projects listed there may not yet have reports, but older projects normally do; reading through these will give you an idea of the duration, complexity, and variability of content possible using these grant funds.

What funds can be used for

SARE funds can be used for supplies, labor, equipment specific to the project (which must then become the property of the college or university), farm equipment rental or operating charges specific to the project, and travel expenses specific to the project and consistent with institutional mileage and per-diem rates. Please note that any labor costs must be for actual project effort. SARE will cover indirect costs up to 10 percent of your project's direct costs.

What funds *cannot* be used for

Excluded are graduate student tuition remission, tuition payment, fee waivers, curriculum fees, travel to scholarly meetings (unless essential to the project, such as for a presentation of project results), travel outside the country, costs associated with preparing a thesis, the purchase of classroom texts, or capital costs such as the purchase of land, buildings, livestock, orchards, greenhouses, or other major farm or laboratory improvements.

How funds are disbursed

Graduate Student Grants are awarded to the graduate student's host institution with the student's faculty advisor acting as the principal investigator. Funds are to be used exclusively for the graduate student's research, subject to the restrictions described above. Funds are released on a reimbursement basis – Northeast SARE will pay the institution in response to invoices, typically invoices from the institution's financial office. Northeast SARE will hold the last 10 percent of the award until the final project report has been received and approved.

If your project is funded

Northeast SARE requires annual progress reports and a comprehensive final report for all projects. Annual reports are due by December 31 of each year and final reports are due within 60 days of the end date of the project. Northeast SARE asks that the graduate student provide contact information for at least two years after the project has ended to allow for follow-up and ensure a good response to inquiries about the project. Any publication that arises from the project must credit Northeast SARE as a source of support.

Review criteria

All proposals are evaluated using these criteria. **All the criteria must be adequately addressed for a proposal to be funded:**

1. Direct link to agricultural sustainability: The project must focus on building knowledge that farmers can use to become more profitable, be good stewards of the land, or help strengthen their community, and the project must have a direct link to key themes in sustainable agriculture. These themes are incorporated into the Northeast SARE outcome statement on page 3. Proposals should address **at least one** (although two or more is better) of the following:

- ❖ the reduction of environmental and health risks in agriculture
- ❖ improved productivity, the reduction of costs, and the increase of net farm income
- ❖ the conservation of soil, the improvement of water quality, and the protection of natural resources
- ❖ the enhancement of employment in rural areas
- ❖ the improvement of quality of life for farmers, their employees, and the farm community

2. Innovation and significance: The project should develop new information and explore innovative approaches that address a demonstrated need on the part of farmers or the wider agricultural community. The project should avoid replicating known practices or confirming known results.

3. Clear objectives and sound methods: Proposals should specifically describe the goal of the project, the details of what will be done to achieve the goal, and how tangible, measurable results will be collected.

4. Outreach: How others will learn from the project is a key to long term impact. A thoughtful outreach plan for sharing project information and results--expected as well as unexpected -- should be provided. Potential for further outreach should also be discussed.

5. Capacity for success: Proposals should describe the key people in the project and their relevant experience, including their commitment, expertise, and ability to see the work through to its conclusion.

6. Familiarity with related work: The proposal should describe previous efforts to address similar problems and go on to explain how this project would build on that work.

7. Sensible budget: It must be clear how the money will be spent, why budget items are needed, and whether the project is a sound investment for SARE.

How to apply

Online submission will be available from mid-April to May 31.

Please note that a hard copy of the application signoff sheet must be filled out by your faculty advisor and academic institution. Most grants or sponsored programs offices need at least two weeks to review and approve proposals, so plan accordingly. It is a good idea to run a draft of your proposal by them prior to submission to be sure they find it acceptable. You will need to print your proposal from the online submission system and get the applicant signoff sheet completed, signed, and mailed on or before June 15, so allow enough time to collect the necessary signatures. Do not include any additional materials that were not in your online submission, since they won't be reviewed. Mail to: **Northeast SARE, Graduate Student Grant Program, 655 Spear Street, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405.**

1. Project abstract.

The lower half of the cover sheet will contain your project abstract. Keep in mind that this is what reviewers read first, so put some time into making it clear and compelling. Limit the abstract to no more than 250 words.

2. Statement of the problem, rationale, and justification

Explain the issue being addressed, why it is important, and justify its objectives. Begin the statement of the problem with "The purpose of this project is to..." Justify the project objectives and tell us how the project will contribute to agricultural sustainability. Describe how your project will address specific issues and how your inquiry will advance current knowledge in a way that will potentially affect whole-farm systems in a positive way. Explain how the approach is innovative, or builds on prior work, and describe the significance of the proposed research to sustainable agriculture. No more than 800 words.

3. Objectives

A numbered list of the project objectives. No more than 400 words.

4. Approach and methods

A succinct description of the methods to be used for each objective, numbered according to their corresponding objective. Describe what you will measure and how. Explain how the methods used will address the problem. Describe any anticipated publications that will describe the results of the project other than your thesis. No more than 1500 words.

5. Outreach

Explain how you plan to inform others about the results of your project. Make the case for your project's potential for outreach and publication, describing who will benefit from your project results and why. No more than 500 words.

6. Timetable

Describe a clear timetable of events, keeping in mind there is a two-year maximum. No more than 500 words.

7. Major professor and graduate student experience and roles

Briefly describe the role of your advising professor in the project, and then describe your experience relative to the project, your role in the project, and how the project relates to your thesis. Describe your access to the required resources such as labs, equipment, greenhouses, etc., to carry out this work. No more than 500 words.

8. Literature cited

Limit your literature citations to those that relate directly to the project and provide the foundation for the proposed work. No more than 500 words.

9. Budget

Present your budget using the same categories (personnel, materials and supplies, travel, printing and publications, other direct costs, and indirect costs) as in the sample budget on page 7. If there is a category in the budget section that will have no expenditures, enter zero. No word limit.

Until this year's grant cycle, indirect costs – overhead charges for facilities and administration--were not allowed, but this policy has recently been revised by USDA. For 2011 Graduate Student Grants, USDA-NIFA will allow SARE to cover indirect costs. You may include a line item in the budget proposal that requests up to 10 percent of your project's direct costs as a charge for indirect costs. This amount may need to be adjusted prior to final project budget approval to meet USDA-NIFA requirements and University of Vermont guidelines.

10. Budget justification

For each item in your budget, show how you computed the expense by giving a unit cost times some quantity. The budget justification entries must add up to be the budget line request. For example if, under materials, you are proposing to buy landscape cloth, your justification budget line should specify how much and cost per unit ("Landscape cloth, 3' X 250' @ \$92 each, four rolls, \$368"). Show personnel costs – your time, or the time of any collaborators – as an hourly rate times anticipated time needed to complete the project. Provide narrative explanations for labor needed and for purchases. For travel, specify the purpose of the trip. No word limit; be as concise as possible.

Attachments (.pdf, .doc, .docx, .xls or .xlsx) to your proposal narrative should be limited to items that add specificity and clarity – plot plans for field experiments, draft survey or evaluation instruments, an explanation of statistical design, or perhaps diagrams or photographs of project components that are otherwise difficult to explain. Also, if your project involves significant collaboration, include a letter from each collaborator that describes his or her role and commitment to the project; if your project involves farmers as participants or cooperators in on-farm research, include letters from them as well. Do not attach letters of general support from people who are not direct participants, and do not include curriculum vitae.

Proposal Outline and Checklist

When your proposal is complete, it will consist of the following components in the following order:

- Cover page with abstract (250 words)
- Application sign-off form
- Statement of the problem, rationale, and justification (800 words)
- Objectives (400 words)
- Approach and methods (1500 words)
- Outreach (500 words)
- Timetable (500 words)
- Major professor and graduate student experience (500 words)
- Literature cited (500 words)
- Budget (no fixed word limit)
- Budget justification (no fixed word limit)
- Attachments: as described above.

Complete your online submission by going to <http://www.ciids.org/nesare/gc>. You must register as an applicant before submitting your proposal.

The application template will **open mid-April** and **close May 31, 2011**.

Mail the completed proposal with the cover page and signed application sign-off sheet to Northeast SARE by June 15, 2011. Send it to:

**Northeast SARE
Graduate Student Grant Program
655 Spear Street
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405**

SAMPLE BUDGET & JUSTIFICATION

Before you prepare your own budget and justification, you may want to look at a sample to see how one fits together. Remember that every budget is different – yours should reflect how your project is designed and what you plan to do.

Personnel	
Mary Greene, graduate investigator	6,200
Student worker	1,000
Fringe 8%	576
Personnel subtotal	7,776
Materials and supplies	
Seed	480
Insect traps	556
Materials and supplies subtotal	1,036
Travel	
Mileage reimbursement	198
Travel subtotal	198
Printing and publications	
Flyers for field days	75
Printing and publications subtotal	75
Other direct costs	
Lab charges	750
Compensation, farmer collaborator	500
Field day	50
Copies	18
Other direct costs subtotal	1318
Indirect costs	
Facilities and Administration, 10% of direct costs	1040
Total Amount of This Request	11,443

Budget Justification

Personnel: Graduate investigator \$15.50/hr. for 400 hours; student worker, \$10/hr. for 100 hrs. Fringe at institutional rate. The graduate investigator will be putting in 5 hours per week for ten weeks and twenty hours per week for fifteen weeks to complete the field and laboratory work and data collection, and ten hours per week for five weeks to complete data analysis and reporting, preparing outreach (publication) materials. The student worker will put in 10 hours per week for 10 weeks to process samples.

Materials and supplies: 120 lbs. of seed at \$4 a pound; 125 insect traps at \$4.45 each.

Travel: Personal auto use for 20 round trips to Experiment Station: total 120 miles at \$0.55/mile, and 20 round trips to collaborator's farm: total 240 miles at \$0.55/mile.

Printing and publications: For field day at research farm and twilight meeting at demonstration project on Dodge Farm, 300 flyers at .25 each.

Other direct costs: Lab tissue analysis: 6 at \$125 each, conducted at university lab; Katherine Dodge, farmer collaborator: \$25/hr for 20 hrs, to oversee crop establishment and cultivation; estimated cost of signage materials for field day \$50; field scouting check-off sheets, 200 at \$0.09.

Indirect Costs: 10% of total direct costs.

How to write a strong proposal

Make sure SARE is the right granting organization for your project. Read up on SARE program priorities and make sure you understand what can and can't be funded. If you have questions about whether your project is a good fit with Northeast SARE, call us at 802/656-0471 or send e-mail to nesare@uvm.edu.

Keep the writing clear and simple. Avoid jargon and write for a mixed audience that includes farmers, researchers, extension staff, and other agricultural service providers. You can assume your reviewers have broad expertise, but do not necessarily have deep expertise in your subject area.

Make sure your project methods match your objectives. Are plot sizes, replications, controls, surveys, or other project elements likely to yield meaningful information? Clearly define your response variables and be sure to consult with a statistician while developing your experimental design.

Develop a realistic budget. Be clear about what you are requesting funding for, show how you calculated each line item, provide a narrative justification as to why the item is needed or what work is being done for the labor payments requested, and make sure you only request funds for allowed expenses.

Ask someone else read to your proposal. A fresh set of eyes can help you identify sections that are unclear or find errors you overlooked.

Questions?

nesare@uvm.edu

www.nesare.org

802/656-0471