



**FARM GRANT PROGRAMS through the Mass
Department of Agricultural Resources and the
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

**Brimfield Agricultural Commission Forum
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Agricultural Energy Grant Program (Ag-Energy)



The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Agricultural Energy Grant Program (Ag Energy) is a competitive grant program that funds agricultural energy projects in an effort to improve energy efficiency and to facilitate the adoption of alternative clean energy technologies by Massachusetts farms in order that farms can become more sustainable and the Commonwealth can maximize the environmental and economic benefits from these technologies.

Ag-Energy will fund projects up to \$25,000 that fall into either the renewable energy category or the energy efficiency category. All farm related energy efficiency and renewable energy projects that meet the program requirements will be considered, although priority will be given to proposals that focus on the technologies listed in the application. Examples of priority projects for renewable energy have included; geothermal, photovoltaics, wind, and solar thermal.

Examples of priority projects for energy efficiency have included precoolers, variable speed vacuum pumps, thermal blankets, reverse osmosis, and high efficiency refrigeration.




Eligibility and Applying

The farming operation must have received an energy audit/energy assessment, or demonstrate the initiation of such. The operation must be a legally recognized entity within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and must have the ability to enter a legally binding agreement with the Commonwealth. The operation must be an agricultural operation as defined by M.G.L. c.128, Sec. 1A.




The application period is now closed. Applications for Department programs will become available spring 2016. **Contact:** Gerry Palano, Gerald.Palano@state.ma.us, 617-626-1706

USDA 2015 Rural Energy for America Program (REAP)

Energy Efficiency Improvement Grants

- [Total Project Costs \\$200,000 or more](#) 
- [Total Project Costs between \\$80,001 and \\$199,999](#) 
- [Total Project Costs \\$80,000 or less](#) 

Renewable Energy Grant

- [Total Project Costs \\$200,000 or more](#) 
- [Total Project Costs between \\$80,001 and \\$199,999](#) 
- [Total Project Costs \\$80,000 or less](#) 

Agricultural Business Training Program (ABTP)

Today's agricultural business climate favors farms that:

1. Identify and reach diverse markets to distribute risk and net better returns.
2. Consider loans and/or make personal investments of time and money based on realistic financial planning and record keeping.
3. Provide a living wage and rewarding work for family members and employees that keeps them involved in the business and improves stability Understand and work as partners within the regulatory requirements of Commonwealth and the municipalities in which the farms are located.
4. Understand and work proactively within the regulatory requirements of Commonwealth and the municipalities in which the farms are located.
5. Pay attention to trends in the larger “food system” that are increasingly affected by climate, global commerce and regional economies.

MDAR's Agricultural Business Training Program responds to these and other planning needs by raising awareness and providing a forum for feedback and support. More than 500 agricultural enterprises have completed MDAR courses for different stages of farm development.

- **Course Description:** For pre-venture and just beginning farmers still trying to decide on their basic early ideas – a five session course:
 - [Exploring The Small Farm Dream \(course description\)](#) 
 - [Exploring The Small Farm Dream \(application\)](#) 
- **Course Description:** For existing agricultural enterprises with at least two years of income generating operation and farm record keeping. that are seeking an in-depth tune-up and are preparing to make new investment and/or prepare for expanded operation – a 10 session course:
 - [Tilling the Soil of Opportunity \(course description\)](#) 
 - [Tilling the Soil of Opportunity \(application\)](#) 

Contact: Melissa Adams, MDAR, melissa.adamsaip@gmail.com, 413-268-8269

Agricultural Business Planning Courses

MDAR offers two courses for participants who are 1) thinking about farming or 2) already operating an agricultural enterprise undergoing growth or change. Our courses are not offered online - participants find most benefit as part of a guided peer group sharing ideas over several weeks. Attendance is required at all sessions. Fees are kept low through MDAR financial support, and a farming partner may attend at no additional cost. *Course dates and locations for Fall/Winter 2015-2016 TBD based on enough interest*

Exploring The Small Farm Dream - For those who are thinking about getting into farming or are expanding a hobby to an income-generating scale. This course offers guidance and feedback to help make informed decisions about whether or not to take the plunge - and how to proceed in the first stages. Five sessions over 6 weeks on weekday evenings. Cost per enterprise - \$100

Tilling the Soil of Opportunity – For those already operating a commercial, income generating agricultural enterprise and in need of a comprehensive business plan. This in-depth course offers a chance to assess, regroup, plan ahead, finance expansion, or clarify transfer/succession. The course draws on peer experience, instructor knowledge and guest speakers. Meets USDA/FSA certification for “Borrower Training”. Graduates may qualify for individual post-course technical assistance. Ten sessions over 11 weeks. Cost per enterprise - \$200.

Registration is rolling (no payment is due until enrollment is complete). – *For more information or to submit an application, contact Melissa Adams at melissaadamsAIP@gmail.com or 413-268-8269*

Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP)



AEEP supports agricultural operations that are looking to install conservation practices that prevent direct impacts on water quality, ensure efficient use of water, as well as address impacts on air quality. Farmers selected to participate in the program are reimbursed up to \$25,000 for the cost of materials and labor necessary for the installation of the approved practice.

AEEP will fund conservation practices that protect water quality, ensure water conservation, and address air quality issues. All projects where the primary focus is renewable energy or energy conservation would need to apply to the Massachusetts [Ag-Energy Grant Program](#). Some examples of eligible projects for funding include manure waste storage, irrigation efficiency, water control structures, pesticide storage, and fencing to keep livestock out of a water resource.

Eligibility and Applying

Property must consist of land under the same ownership and be actively devoted to agricultural or horticultural use. Aquaculture operations must possess a current valid shellfish license. There is no minimum acreage requirement; however, projects that address significant resource concerns are more likely to receive funding.

Where applicable, applicants must have proof of a written and updated NRCS Conservation Plan (flower growers and aquaculture operations are excluded from this requirement). Developing a plan will qualify you to apply to AEEP, as well as USDA financial assistance programs to install the recommended practices. Please contact your [local NRCS office](#) to start the conservation plan. There is no charge for conservation planning.

The application period for AEEP is now closed. Applications for Department programs will become available early spring 2016.

Contact: Laura Maul, laura.maul@state.ma.us, 617-626-1739

Agricultural Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP)



The Agricultural Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP) supports agricultural operations that are looking to upgrade their food safety measures and thereby maintain or increase their competitive market access while reducing food safety risks. Participants selected to participate in the program will be reimbursed up to \$20,000 or 75% of their total project costs.

AFSIP will fund practices that help minimize the risk of microbial contamination and food-borne illnesses. In addition, eligible upgrades will increase competitive market access by meeting buyer demands for demonstrated practices that work towards protecting public health and food safety.

Projects will be broken into a produce category and an aquaculture category. Some examples of projects in the produce category include wildlife fencing, packing shed walls, ceilings and light fixtures, field harvest systems, hand washing sinks, restrooms, drainage systems, and water systems. Some examples of projects in the aquaculture category include ice machines, harvest gear, and testing/monitoring equipment.

Eligibility and Applying

To be eligible for funding the applicant must be in good standing with the Department and other local and state regulatory agencies. Additional consideration will be offered to applicants who are participants in the [Commonwealth Quality Program \(CQP\)](#), are currently audited under a [Good Agricultural Practices \(GAP\)](#) certifier, or are covered under the Commonwealth's Vibrio Management Plan for aquaculture. There is no minimum size requirement; however, projects that address significant food safety concerns are more likely to receive funding.

The application period is now closed. Applications for Department programs will become available late spring 2016. **Contact:** Laura Maul, laura.maul@state.ma.us, 617-626-1739


APR Improvement Program (AIP)



The purpose of the APR Improvement Program (AIP) is to help sustain active commercial farming on land that has already been protected through the Department's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. AIP provides technical assistance and business analysis to help improve the productivity and profitability of participating farms with the goal of enhancing the significance of APR farm operations and their contribution to the state's agricultural industry.

Eligible farms selected to the program must participate in a technical assistance and business analysis process to develop an APR Improvement Plan. Participants that agree to implement farm improvement strategies identified in the Plan that meet Program objectives may be eligible to receive a grant, subject to the availability of funding. Grant funds will be made on a reimbursement basis and must be spent by June 30, 2016 on farm infrastructure, as defined in the current Request for Response for the Program. Costs incurred prior to executing a contract with the Department cannot be reimbursed and will not qualify as Program expenditures.

AIP Applications

The Department of Agricultural Resources expects to announce an open application period for the APR Improvement Program by early April 2016 and applications will be due by late June 2016. RFRs (Request for Responses) and the policy information they contain do change from year to year. If you would like to see a copy of the last APR Improvement Program application - click on [RFR AIP 16-7](#) . This application is posted for informational purposes only and will not be accepted if submitted.

If you would prefer to have a hard copy of the application mailed to you, contact the APR Improvement Program at [413-268-8269](tel:413-268-8269) or Melissa.AdamsAIP@gmail.com

Results since 2009 First 5 Rounds of AIP:

- 53 farms have received grant awards totaling \$3,525,000 (average \$66,509 per farm)
- 7,087 total acres of APR land owned or leased by participating farmers
- \$330,150 in technical assistance provided to 55 farms (average of \$6,003 per farm).
- While not required, all participants to date have invested additional capital, an estimated \$2.95 million total (approximately \$67,000 average per farm).
- Participating farms from across the state include dairy farms, livestock operations, vegetable farms, orchards, cranberry farms, & a grain producer.

Farm Energy Discount Program



The Farm Energy Discount Program provides discounts on electricity and natural gas bills of 10% to eligible entities engaged in production agriculture. Subject to certification by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources ("MDAR" or "Department") persons or corporations determined to be principally and substantially engaged in the business of production agriculture or farming for an ultimate commercial purpose will, upon written application, be eligible for a ten percent discount on rates.

Persons or corporations with 75 or more full time employees in January of the application year will not be eligible for nor qualify for the Farm Discount. Full time employees shall not include any seasonal or part-time workers.

Please note that the discount will not be available until an application is filed and MDAR certifies eligibility to your energy supplier. Each application will be considered on the basis of the information contained therein. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you provide the Department with as much detail as possible.


Upon determination that the applicant qualifies for the Farm Discount, MDAR will certify to the appropriate power supplier (either electricity or natural gas) that the applicant meets the requirements for the Farm Discount. The discount is not available for propane or fuel oil accounts. **Contact:** [Linda Demirjian](#), 617-626-1733.

Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP)



The Farm Viability Program seeks to improve the economic viability and environmental integrity of participating farms through the development and implementation of farm viability plans. The Program offers farmers environmental, technical and business planning assistance to expand, upgrade and modernize their existing operations. Capital for the implementation of the improvements recommended in the viability plan is available in exchange for an agricultural covenant on the farm property for a fixed term of five or ten years.

Farm Viability Program Applications:

The Department of Agricultural Resources expects to announce an open application period for the Farm Viability Enhancement Program by early April 2016 and applications will be due by late June 2016. RFRs (Request for Responses) and the policy information they contain do change from year to year. If you would like to see a copy of the last Farm Viability Program application click on: [Farm Viability Enhancement Program Request for Response 16-23](#) . This application is posted for informational purposes only and will not be accepted if submitted.

Farm Viability Enhancement Program Results as of June 30, 2015

During **Fiscal Year 2015**, the Farm Viability Enhancement Program provided technical assistance to **9** farms with **9** completing business plans. Of these, **9** farms received funding and were placed under Agricultural Covenants protecting **1,441** acres. The Program impacted an additional **1,833** acres of leased land and protected land under participant management. FY2015 spending was **\$650,000** in direct grants to farms and over **\$80,000** was spent on technical assistance costs to consultants and business plan writers.

Since the Farm Viability Program was initiated in 1996, **471** farms have been selected to participate in the program. A total of **404** farms have now been protected by Covenants and received grant awards.

The **404** farms that have participated in the Farm Viability Enhancement Program result in:

- **39,805** acres placed in protective covenants; **38,850** acres were impacted (additional acreage leased or used by participant farms.)
- A total of **78,655** acres of Massachusetts farmland have been impacted by the Farm Viability Program.
- Total of grants paid to participant farms **\$17,671,472**. Total spending on grants per acre placed in protective covenant: **\$444** per acre.
- 73% of farmers in the Program invest additional capital beyond the grant amount to implement business improvement strategies. The average additional investment is about \$36,000 per farm.
- For FY 2015, **9** of the 9 participants invested **\$782,962** in additional capital or an average of **\$86,995** per farm.
- Improvement projects for the year included: 1 new poultry processing structure and value added kitchen, a new dairy processing facility, a new farm stand with farm kitchen, a robotic milking system, a new poultry housing structure, a farm store and farm kitchen renovation project, 1 delivery truck, 1 new sugarhouse, and 2 farms purchased new or updated field and haying equipment.
 - **Contact:** Craig Richov, craig.richov@state.ma.us, 617-626-1725.

Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture Program (MEGA)



The Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture Program (MEGA) seeks to help Massachusetts' farmers who have been in business for at least one, but no more than five years, acquire equipment and other non-land assets, or make infrastructure improvements, that can help insure the financial viability of their farm businesses. Matching funds of up to \$10,000 are available to implement improvement strategies after individual business review and analysis provided by the Department. Business analysis assistance is an additional program benefit and the value of that service is in addition to the grant award.

It is the objective of the MEGA Program to assist farmers who aspire to develop their farms into commercially viable operations. Priority will be given to new farms that can use program investment to increase farm production, marketing, and income. It is not the objective of the MEGA Program to support "hobby" or rural lifestyle enterprises where only minor consideration is given to the success of the business of agriculture.

Funding provided from this Program will be made available on a one to one matching, cost reimbursement grant basis. The maximum award shall be \$10,000. Selected participants will sign a contract with the Department for the agreed upon project. Expenditures made prior to the contract start date will not be eligible for reimbursement. All expenditures must be made by June 30, the end of the state fiscal year.

Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture Applications Available:

The Department of Agricultural Resources expects to announce an open application period for MEGA by early April 2016 and applications will be due by late June 2016. RFRs (Request for Responses) and the policy information they contain do change from year to year.

Contact: mega.coordinator@gmail.com

Federal EQIP PROGRAM (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) – through USDA NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service)

NRCS Contact Information:

*Greenfield Field Office, Serving Franklin County, 55 Federal Street, Greenfield, MA 01301
413-772-0384 ext. 3*

Hadley Field Office, Serving Hampden and Hampshire Counties, 195 Russell Street, Hadley, MA 01035, 413-585-1000 ext. 3

*Holden Field Office, Serving Worcester County, 52 Boyden Road, Holden, MA 01520
508-829-4477 ext. 3*

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers through contracts up to a maximum term of ten years in length. These contracts provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. In addition, a purpose of EQIP is to help producers meet Federal, State, Tribal and local environmental regulations.

Who Can Apply

Owners of land in agricultural or forest production or persons who are engaged in livestock, agricultural or forest production on eligible land and that have a natural resource concern on the land may participate in EQIP.

How EQIP Works

Payments

Farm Bill legislation provides NRCS with authority to provide financial assistance payments through EQIP to eligible producers, to help implement approved conservation practices on eligible land. Farm Bill legislation also combined the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) into EQIP and incorporated priorities to assure that EQIP will support wildlife related projects.

Additional financial assistance may be available to help producers develop conservation plans required to support EQIP projects.

Historically Underserved Producers

Historically underserved producers (limited resource farmers/ranchers, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged producers, Tribes and Veterans) may be eligible for increased practice payment rate to support implementation of conservation practices and conservation plans.

Historically underserved producers are also be eligible for advance payments up to 50 percent of the cost needed to purchase materials or contracting services to begin installation of approved conservation practices. Historically underserved producers can find definitions for each category and additional information [here](#).

Payment and Benefit Limitations

Payments received by producers through EQIP are subject to limitations established by legislative authority, as follows:

Program participants may not receive, directly or indirectly, payments that, in the aggregate, exceed \$450,000 for all EQIP contracts entered into during the period 2014 to 2018. Unlike the previous Farm Bill, this maximum payment limitation may not be waived. Additional payment limitations apply to producers enrolled in the EQIP Organic Initiative.

In addition to payment limitations, Farm Bill legislation also established that conservation program benefits to are limited to individuals or entities with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of \$900,000 per year or less. The limit is based on the 3 tax years immediately preceding the year of the original contract obligation.

Conservation Plans

Program applications are required to be supported by an NRCS approved conservation plan which provides documentation of the practices that could be used to address natural resource concerns. NRCS will develop and provide program applicants with an approved a conservation plan. Producers may also apply for financial assistance to hire Technical Service Providers (TSP)

to develop specialty plans called [Conservation Activity Plans](#) (CAP) to address certain land use activities or specific resource needs on your land.

NRCS works with the producer to develop a plan of operations that:

1. Identifies the appropriate conservation practice or activities needed to address identified natural resource concerns on agricultural lands
2. Helps approved participants implement conservation practices and activities according to an approved EQIP plan of operations. Developed in conjunction with the producer that identifies the appropriate conservation practice or activities needed to address identified natural resource concerns. Conservation practices installed through EQIP are subject to NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions.

Producers may also use NRCS certified Technical Service Providers (TSP) for technical assistance needed for certain eligible activities, services and the development of Conservation Activity Plans. For more information about TSP services, contact your local NRCS office or [visit the TSP website](#).

How To Apply

Information about how to apply for assistance through EQIP [is available online](#).

Applications for EQIP are accepted on a continuous basis, however, NRCS establishes application "cut-off" or submission deadline dates for evaluation and ranking of eligible applications. To obtain an EQIP application, visit or contact your local NRCS field office.

Depending upon annual appropriations, NRCS will allocate specific amounts of EQIP funding to meet legislative requirements, address certain national priorities, and also make funds available for NRCS State Conservationists to help address resource priorities identified by State Technical Committees.

National EQIP Initiatives

The table below identifies the national initiatives supported by EQIP that may be available to producers engaged in specific kinds of agricultural activities, located in specific geographic locations, or opportunities associated with agency approved initiatives. In addition to the following EQIP initiatives, interested producers should also check with their local or State NRCS offices as described in the "how to apply for assistance" link above.

Program Name	Program Description
EQIP	Provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers through contracts up to a maximum term of ten years in length. These contracts provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.
National EQIP Initiatives	
Air Quality Initiative	<p>Provides financial assistance to implement approved conservation practices to address significant air quality resource concerns for designated high priority geographic locations throughout the nation.</p> <p>Priority States are designated each fiscal year based upon Agency priorities to address air quality issues such as particulate matter and ozone pollutants. Legislation requires that \$25 million of EQIP be targeted to this initiative each fiscal year.</p>
On-Farm Energy Initiative	Enables the producer to identify ways to conserve energy on the farm through development of Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) also known as an on-farm energy audit; and by providing financial and technical assistance to help the producer implement various conservation practices recommended in these on-farm energy audits.
Organic Initiative	<p>Provides financial assistance to help implement conservation practices for organic producers and those transitioning to organic to address natural resource concerns</p> <p>It also helps growers meet requirements related to National Organic Program (NOP) requirements and certain program payment</p>

	limitations.	
Seasonal High Tunnel System For Crops	The purpose of the “Seasonal High Tunnel System for Crops” conservation practice (code 798) is to assist producers to extend the growing season for high-value crops in an environmentally safe manner. The practice has the potential to assist producers to address resource concerns by improving plant quality, improving soil quality, and reducing nutrient and pesticide transport.	
National Landscape Initiatives		
Landscape Initiatives	These initiatives enable NRCS to more effectively address priority natural resource concerns by delivering systems of practices, primarily to the most vulnerable lands within geographic focus areas.	

Other EQIP Programs

Program Name	Program Description	Who Can Apply
Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)	Using EQIP financial assistance, CIG awards competitive grants to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production.	Non-Federal governmental or nongovernmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals.

Colorado River Basin Salinity Project	Helps producers in this river basin reduce salinity preventing salts from dissolving and mixing with the river's flow. Different States apply varying criteria. Contact your local NRCS field office to find out more.	
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