



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 23-00640

Agenda Date: 11/14/2023

Agenda Item Name:

Small Farmer Grant Review and Methodology Update

Presenter:

Sean McLendon, Economic Development & Food System Manager, 352 548 3765

Description:

Hear a review of program activity on Small Farmer Grants and approve an update to the program methodology.

Recommended Action:

Approve updated methodology and direct staff to solicit new applications in 2024.

Prior Board Motions:

At the Board's September 12, 2023, regular meeting, Commissioner Alford moved to approve the budget amendment JE# 2023-3547. The motion carried 5-0.

At the Board of County Commission's (Board) August 24, 2021, meeting, Commissioner Prizzia moved the following: 1. To provide up to an additional \$100,000 for grants that were in this program out of the local food funding that was set aside that scored a 30.0 or higher as well as \$100,000 for next year. The motion carried 3-1 with Commissioner Wheeler voting "Nay" and Commissioner Alford out of the room. 2. Award three pilot grant applications to Dominic Purcell \$3,245 (score 39.0) and Raquel Penabella \$5,000 (score 39.0) and a partial funding award of \$1,755 to Karen Pierce (score 38.7). The motion carried 4-0 with Commissioner Alford out of the room. Mr. McLendon stated that if additional funding is granted the staff will fully fund Karen Pierce's request.

Fiscal Note:

A second round of small farmer grants and fee assistance for small farmers going to the Extension Office classes to create a farm plan will be paid from 052.17.1770.552.82.53. The budget is already established.

Strategic Guide:

Social and Economic Opportunity

Background:

This agenda item brings back a review of the Small Farmer Grant program and brings recommendations on improving the grant methodology on lessons learned from the pilot project.

As of October 2023, 17 applicants who scored 30.0 points or higher were issued a payment.

Ten (10) received full payment.

Seven (7) received partial payment. Staff are awaiting final documentation to pay the remainder of the grant awards.

Six (6) have not responded to staff attempts to contact them.

One applicant is no longer farming and declined the funds.

Staff will keep the funds allocated by the Board but not yet distributed to awarded applicants.

Staff recommends the following methodology clarifications to solicit high-quality responses and minimize confusion about what would be an acceptable application.

Summary of Grant Methodology Updates

The grant will be called the "Small Farmer Grant". All documentation, website, and application materials will be updated with the following:

Clarifying Language

- Clarify and emphasize: "for human food production only!"
- Not applicable to hemp, medicinal, or pharmacological products
- Not applicable to food trucks
- Not applicable to hobby farms – the grant supports bonafide small-scale farms with agricultural exemptions on the parcel growing the food.

Incentives

- Encourage a farm plan to increase the financial sustainability of the operations.
 - (5-point bonus) The applicant has taken the Ag Extension Office's Agricultural Entrepreneurial Series (AES) and has a Farm Plan.
 - If the applicant does not have a farm plan, direct them to Ag Extension for workshop/assistance.
 - Budget \$6,750 for scholarships from 052.17.1770.552.82.53 for up to 50 small farmers (\$135/farm) for the AES.

Tie-in to Other Alachua County Food System Projects

- Applicant information will be shared with the Fresh Food Pathways non-profit administrator for food purchases.
- Create a tie-in to the Food System Map. Data requirement for type/units produced, size of farm.
- Applicants will be asked to provide the farm's mailing address and parcel number.

Scoring change

- Farm Plan Agricultural Entrepreneurial Series (5 points) bonus
- Allow for previously funded farmers to apply but give a (5 points) bonus for first-time applicants/previously not rewarded.

The Small Farmer Grant (Small-Producer Agriculture Capital Support Grant) is aligned with the Commission's strategic vision of "Achieving Social and Economic Opportunity for All" and desire to "promote the economic prosperity of all citizens, address economic equity, and diversify the tax base."

Small Farmer Grant funding is limited to capital equipment needs of Alachua County residents that have small producer agricultural operations wholly contained within Alachua County. A small producer (farm) is a commercial operation with an established gross cash income of at least \$1,000 but no more than \$250,000 per year from the regular harvest and sale of crops, livestock, or aquaculture products meant for human consumption.

To reduce inequity in marginalized communities, this grant prioritized small-producer operations owned by black, women, indigenous, and persons-of-color.

The grant review panel looks at the farms Viability, Economic, and Equity Priority scores to achieve a final total project score. A maximum score of 50 points (40 regular points plus ten bonus points) is possible.