

Alachua County Small Farmer Grant

Per the Board's February 9, 2021, direction, staff have developed a fast deploy, targeted capital grant program for small producers. This framework complements the County's strategic commitment to Achieving Social and Economic Opportunity for All and the Board's Comprehensive Plan Food System Goals in the Economic Element.

Background

This document returns updated project criteria and processes to fulfill the Board's direction and build synergy with other food system projects. The requirements and process align with the County Commission's strategic vision of "Achieving Social and Economic Opportunity for All".

Grant funding is limited to the capital equipment needs of Alachua County residents who have small agricultural operations producing food for people that are all contained within Alachua County. For the grant, a small producer (farm) is a commercial operation with an established gross cash income of at least \$1,000¹ but no more than \$250,000² per year from the regular harvest and sale of crop, livestock, or aquaculture products meant for human consumption. Examples are grain, honey, fruit, vegetable, dairy, and livestock operations.

To qualify, the funding request must be for capital improvements or equipment to assist the farm in producing, harvesting, cleaning, value-added processes, food safety, and pre or post-processing an Alachua County-produced farm product meant for human consumption.

Funds are limited to one award of up to \$5,000 per farm per county Fiscal Year. The

County may issue multiple awards depending on the availability of funds.

¹ \$1,000 is the minimum income requirement to be classified as a farm as defined by USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service.

² <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2010/05/18/small-farms-big-differences#:~:text=USDA%20defines%20a%20small%20farm,are%20commercial%20and%20noncommercial%20farms>. Top end of income to be a small farm by USDA standards.

Criteria

Goal: Promote local food system economic resilience that will:

1. Assists Alachua County residents.
2. Applicable to Alachua County-based small producers (farms, ranches, or other agricultural operations) producing foodstuffs for human consumption.
3. Prioritize funding for small producers with annual gross cash income of no more than \$75,000.
4. Support the immediate acquisition of capital infrastructure and equipment to enhance the farm's productive capability and financial expansion. This grant recognizes that small producers may not have adequate cash flow to acquire capital equipment and then wait for reimbursement by the County. This grant offers an immediate infusion of funds at the point of award by the Board of County Commissioners. This grant is not a cost reimbursement grant.
5. Improve the economic viability of these small producers.
6. Increase the resiliency of local food production and expand the production of related value-added farm products.
7. Achieves Board policies related to economic development, increases economic prosperity, and a diverse tax base.

Process

General Scope and Methodology

Applicants will complete the one-page application and submit it to Alachua County's Department of Tourism & Economic Development. Applications may be submitted by email to SMAACA@alachuacounty.us or by mail or in person to:

Attention: Small Farmer Grant
Alachua County's Department of Tourism & Economic Development
12 SE First Street, 2nd Floor County Manager's Office
Gainesville, FL 32601

A panel composed of County Staff will score the applications based on the quality of responses per the scoring criteria. The panel's scores will be averaged to a final total project score. A maximum score of 40 points (35 points from priority areas and five from bonus areas) is possible. The panel will prioritize awarding the full amount requested. If multiple qualified applications are received with the same average score, partial funding may be suggested to the Board of County Commissioners, depending upon the availability of County funds.

These highest-ranked proposals will be submitted for Board consideration for award at the earliest available meeting.

Outreach

Staff will work with County advisory boards, community representatives, and stakeholders to solicit applications. The outreach will also include, but not necessarily limited to, examples of permissible equipment and capital investments. Below is suggested guidance on eligible operations and capital equipment requests. These are examples of and are not meant to limit the eligibility of other operations and capital requests that meet the criteria and goals of this grant.

The outreach will emphasize that applications must be:

- Alachua County residents
- Alachua County farms
- For human food production only.
- Not applicable to hemp, medicinal, or pharmacological products
- Not applicable to food trucks, landscape nurseries

Examples of Eligible Operations and Related Farm Products

Eligible Food Operations:	Activity / Products:
Mushrooms from owned land or structure	Mushrooms for food
Cow, Pig, Chicken, Goose, Duck	Meat
Aquaculture, land tanks, on-farm ponds, saltwater farms	Cultured fish or shellfish, kelp for human consumption
Nurseries, greenhouses	Vegetables, fruit, berries, other food crops, or plants
Honeybees	Honey and honeycomb

Examples of Eligible Capital Equipment

Eligible Capital Infrastructure or Equipment:	Activity / Products:
Exterior Infrastructure	Fencing, Buildings, Greenhouse, and Storage Facilities, Signage, Temporary-Portable Covering (Tent Systems), Utility Connections and Expansion
Interior Capital Equipment	Point of Sale Systems, Display and Rack Systems, Refrigeration, Freezer, Food Processing Equipment, Sanitization Equipment, Packing/Sorting Equipment, Cooking Equipment,
Exterior Capital Equipment	Farm Equipment, Irrigation Systems, Lighting, Tractors, Harvesters

Examples of Not Eligible Operations and Related Products

Not eligible / Not a farm:	Activity / Products:
Food truck or Food truck kitchen equipment	Food truck activities
Horse breeding that is land-based with pasture and hay production	Sale of horses
Turf, nurseries, greenhouse, trees	Ornamental landscape products, Christmas trees
Composting company (not part of a farming operation)	Production and sale of compost, vermicompost, worms
Landscaping company	Installation or maintenance of plants
Horse stable	Training, boarding, lessons
Suppliers of animals or organisms to pet stores or pet owners	Ornamental fish, sea animals, coral
Fisheries	Wild-caught, marine, or freshwater
Woodlot (not part of a farming operation)	Biochar, pulpwood, firewood

Scoring Criteria

- **First-Time Applicant:** Applicants who have not applied before or who have not received a grant award in the past two years will be eligible for 5 bonus points.
- **Location Priority:** Funds are limited to Alachua County residents with small-scale agriculture operations within Alachua County. No points are associated with this priority. Projects may be within municipalities or in unincorporated Alachua County. Applications for funding outside of Alachua County will not be considered.
- **Economic Priority:** Applications from small producers with annual gross cash incomes between \$1,000 and \$75,000 will be given priority. The award will be 10 points for annual gross cash incomes between \$1,000 and \$75,000, 5 points for annual gross cash income between \$75,001 and \$150,000, and 2 points for annual gross cash income between \$150,001 and \$250,000.
- **Viability Priority:** Priority will be given to applications for capital equipment that demonstrate an enhancement, cost avoidance, or savings of the economic productivity of the small producer's operation. A maximum of 20 points may be awarded for projects that define the specific equipment needed, cost, how it will be utilized, and economic return to the operations. See below for specific questions to be answered.

Three Primary Questions to be Answered under the Viability Priority:

1. How will the grant maximize or contribute to the farm's overall business plan and grow the farm's profitability or avoid costs?

Example farmer response: These funds will help our farm package, sell, and distribute our blueberry crop to local restaurants. We estimate these funds will allow us to box and wholesale 500 lbs. of organic blueberries.

Example rancher response: This grant will help our ranch secure our herd by repairing and adding fencing, gates, and posts. We cannot move our cattle because of the inconvenient availability of slaughter facilities for small ranchers. We will need to hold them longer till the market turns around.

2. What are the estimated financial returns?

Example farmer response: 500 lbs. of wholesale organic blueberries is estimated to generate an additional \$1,045 per growing season for our farm.

Example rancher response: If we can securely hold our 30 head of cattle, we can wait till market conditions improve and send the herd to slaughter at the best time to make a profit. Without these grant funds, we would have to sell our herd at a loss of \$15,000 when the market is low. If we can hold them, our ranch estimates to make \$15,000 when the market rebounds.

3. What specifically will be purchased with the grant funds?

Example farmer response: The grant funds will be used to purchase a \$300 sanitation station, with a \$250 three-basin sink plumbed to the sanitary sewer, and for \$500 boxing and labeling equipment.

Example rancher response: These grant funds will purchase 3,960 Lf of barbed wire at \$330, \$500 in replacement fence posts, and \$2,000 in metal gating.

Incentive Points

To promote small farms' economic viability and financial sustainability, the County will award five (5) points to any application showing proof of completing the Agricultural Extension Office's Agricultural Entrepreneurship Series with a Farm Plan.

As an added incentive to take the course and create a Farm Plan, the County will offer to pay the cost (estimated cost \$135/applicant) for up to 50 small farmers in Alachua County. The course funds will not reduce the award amount if the applicant is approved for funding and takes advantage of the scholarship.

To receive the incentive points, the applicant must have completed the coursework and appended their farm plan to the application.

Tie-in to Other Food System Projects

- Applicant information will be shared with the Fresh Food Pathways non-profit administrator and other institutional food purchasing programs for potential food purchases.
- Food System Map. Data from the application will be put into the County's Food System Map.

Award and Reporting

Grant awards are distributed via purchase orders to expedite the disbursement of funds.

Up to 25% of the award amount may be disbursed without backup documentation. Before the county issues payment, any remaining amounts due must be supported with photos and receipts.

Awardees must claim their funds with all supporting reimbursement documentation within six (6) months of staff notifying them of their award. Any unclaimed funds will roll forward for future Small Farmer Grant application cycles. Full reimbursement of funds will require copies of receipts from purchased/installed materials and pictures of the equipment/capital investment in place and in operation.