



Soil & Water

DURHAM COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM

2026 Fiscal Year Guidelines

The Durham County Board of County Commissioners has approved an Agricultural Economic Development Grant Program and allocated \$250,000 for this fiscal year. The program's purpose is to offer cost share grants to assist farmers, nonprofits that impact the local food system, along with promoting Agriculture Development and Outdoor Environmental Learning Centers in schools.

The County has a successful economic development plan that offers cash incentives to businesses that create jobs in the community. This incentive program mimics the same outcome but is directed to support farms, new and beginning agricultural entrepreneurs, and agriculture education in schools.

This program will provide two types of grants:

- **Small grants for Agriculture Development in schools: Up to \$1,500.00**
- **Grants for farmers or nonprofits: Up to \$10,000.00**

This grant is administered through the Ag Economic Development (AED) Grant Committee. This is a subcommittee of the Durham Soil and Water Conservation District Board. It is made up of nine (9) members including:

- Two Soil & Water Conservation District Board Representatives
- Two Farmland Preservation Advisory Board Representatives
- Durham Cooperative Extension Director or their designee
- Executive Director of Farmer FoodShare Inc. or their designee
- One Durham County Farm Bureau Representative
- USDA Farm Service Agency Executive Director or their designee
- Durham Soil & Water Director or their designee

A **Training session** will be offered to assist interested applicants with the application process details:

Thursday, July 10 at 6 pm – Redwood Ruritan Building at 4803 Cheek Road

Please contact Sherry Scully (sscully@dconc.gov or 919-560-0558) to attend.

Application Deadline: August 25, 2025 at 11:59 pm

Notification: Award recipients will be notified by **September 19, 2025**.

Eligibility

- **The applicant/organization must reside in Durham County and serve Durham County residents and/or farmers.**
- **Applicants are not eligible to apply if they are currently under contract with this grant program**
- **Applicants are not eligible to apply if an active grant is not completed and fully paid before contract deadline. You will NOT be eligible to apply for two years.**

Application for Farmers or Nonprofits

The grant program assists farmers in developing new sources of agricultural income through the provision of 85% cost-share grants, or 95% cost-share grants for New & Beginning Farmers (see definitions on page 5). A 5% match is required for New & Beginning Farmer applicants, with a 15% match required for all other applicants; 25% match may be proposed for the purpose of increasing the ranking score of an Application. Applicants can be reimbursed for the cost of farm improvements or other eligible expenses listed in the grant.

Grants awarded for up to \$10,000.00 to Farmers or Nonprofits

The Grant funds to **farmers** would be used to assist in:

- ☐ Infrastructure improvements to the farm
- ☐ Food Safety Compliance
- ☐ New and beginning farmers small startup funds
- ☐ Specialized farm equipment
- ☐ Subcontractors and off farm services
- ☐ Supplies and Materials
- ☐ Outreach expenses associated with the production and marketing of farm enterprises, value-added and Agritourism endeavors

Application for Schools

The grant program assists by providing financial support for program implementation through the provision of 85% cost-share grants (15% match). Schools can be reimbursed for the cost of improvements or other eligible expenses listed in the grant.

Grants awarded for up to \$1,500.00 for Schools

The Grant funds to **schools** would be used to assist in:

- ☐ Ag Development in schools
- ☐ Build Outdoor Environmental Learning Centers or programming (Ag. Related)
- ☐ Support student recruitment for Ag Ed programs

Application Procedure

1. Find the application on the Durham Soil & Water Conservation Department website:
Ag Economic Development | Durham County (dconc.gov/swcd). Applications open July 1st, 2025.
*Paper copies available upon request by calling the office at 919-560-0558 or via email to sscully@dconc.gov.
2. Applicants should submit online application by **August 25, 2025 at 11:59 pm**. For questions or assistance contact Sherry Scully at 919-560-0558 or sscully@dconc.gov
3. All personal information is redacted from applications before being presented to the AED Committee for review.
4. Once all applications are received and redacted, Committee members will review and rank all applications.
5. At its scheduled meeting, the committee shall evaluate the applications to determine the disposition of each. Grant awardees are selected based on evaluation criteria listed in this document (pages 6&7).
6. The applicant will be informed in writing by County staff of the committee's determination of the disposition of application. If the committee denies a grant request, staff will provide feedback on the application to the applicant, upon request.
7. All applicants will be notified by mail of the funding outcome of their proposal by September 19, 2025.

Contract Procedures

At its discretion, the AEDG committee may impose any additional terms to a grant request. But in general, once an application has been approved for an individual or organization the following steps will be implemented:

- A) Installation and purchases made before having an approved contract and all necessary paperwork will not be eligible for reimbursement.
- B) A Durham Soil & Water Conservation District staff representative will visit the farm, school, or nonprofit organization to conduct a preconstruction meeting or site visit.
- C) Awardees will be provided with the required documents to become a Durham County Vendor. These documents must be complete and returned by November 14. Landowner or Executive Director of Nonprofit signatures required.
- D) Grant awardees may attend optional training on steps for reimbursement. Details of accounting necessary for reimbursement will be provided.
- E) The grant awardee will enter into a contract with Durham County signed by multiple positions within Durham County Government. DocuSign will be used to facilitate these signatures in a timely format. .
- F) Each individual or organization receiving a grant must provide a budget of how all funds will be used and key milestones reached **within 180 days of the** date of the contract.
- G) If an applicant fails to begin the work within **180 days of receipt of the grant award, the County reserves the right to rescind the grant award so that the funds may be reallocated to others in the community.**
- H) Once the project has been completed, contact Durham Soil & Water Conservation District staff to certify the project as complete.
- I) This is a reimbursement grant. After installation of the approved farm improvements are complete/installed according to the predetermined specification, the Applicant will submit all paid receipts to the Durham Soil and Water Staff.
- J) Staff will complete a request for reimbursement and submit the request to the Durham County Finance office. At that time, Applicant will be issued a payment reimbursing for the approved expenses stated on Application.
- K) A three-year Maintenance period of project begins at the time of final payment. If the project is not properly maintained or fails to be used for the intended use for the life of the project during this three-year period, the Grantee shall repair or reimplement the project within 60 days of issuance of a noncompliance notice from Durham Soil and Water Department OR repay Durham County a percentage of the Durham County AED Grant Payment at a prorated amount.
- L) Maintenance checks will be performed annually during the three-year Maintenance period on 5% of all projects to determine compliance.

The committee shall provide annual reports to the Soil & Water Conservation District Board and the BOCC of the number of grants requested and awarded, and an analysis of the program's success metrics.

Policies and Definitions

Statement of Confidentiality

Documents, including but not limited to financial statements, business plans, customer and supplier lists, description of inventory or assets, contractual obligations, and existing liabilities, submitted during the application process shall be treated as confidential information.

Specialized Farm Equipment

A farm implement that performs a specialized mechanical function, and which is identifiable as a specific piece of equipment that is not ordinary and customarily used on a farm.

Grant funds cannot be used for: purchase of livestock, general-use farm equipment or salary for the applicant.

ELIGIBILITY for 95% cost share:

New & Beginning Farmer-A Beginning Farmer or Rancher means an individual or entity who: has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years.

RANKING

This section is used for AED Committee Review. Participants may use for reference.

Schools Grant Program Evaluation Worksheet - Part I

	<u>Pts.</u>
▪ Agriculture Development in schools	____20
▪ Grant support FFA programs in schools	____20
▪ School supports intern opportunities for youth	____20
▪ Project related to NC EOG. Can be incorporated and/or enhance the NC DPI Standard Course of Study	____20
▪ School Partners with other Ag Agencies	____20

Farmer and Nonprofit Grant Program Evaluation Worksheet – Part I

Each applicant ranked on the following points:

Pts.

- | | |
|---|---------|
| ▪ Improvements for food safety compliance | _____15 |
| ▪ Infrastructure improvements | _____15 |
| ▪ New & Beginning Farmer | _____15 |
| ▪ Farmers purchasing specialized equipment | _____15 |
| ▪ Project Match: applicant match to the grant >25% | _____15 |
| ▪ Farmland is participating or applying for the VAD program | _____10 |
| ▪ The farm is following watershed rules | _____10 |
| ▪ Farm has a conservation plan | _____5 |

Farmer & Nonprofit Grant Program Evaluation Worksheet –Part II

- Purpose: (20 points) – Project is in line with the program goals.
- Feasibility: (20 points) – Applicant has a good plan in place and skills to successfully complete the project.
- Project Fit: (20 points) – Project has good fit with existing farm infrastructure.
- Project Viability: (20 points) – Likelihood that the project will enable successful agricultural production.
- Project Support: (20 points) – Potential of applicant to garner support to assist with project.

Updated 7/9/2025