



FARMER RESOURCE NETWORK  
RESOURCE GUIDE

# SUSTAINABLE FARMING

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**Regenerative agriculture, sustainable growing, conservation farming and agroecology are just a few of the many terms out there that describe farming practices that prioritize soil health and work with the natural environment to create an agricultural product. In recent years, there has been more attention paid toward the environmental, financial, health and social benefits that this kind of farming can yield, and there is now more available support than ever to incorporate such practices on the farm. Whether you're already engaged in these farming practices or just starting, this guide will point you toward resources that can support you and your farm to improve your capacity to farm sustainably, no matter what term you decide to use.**

## EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

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It can be tremendously helpful to know where to go to learn about sustainable agricultural practices. There are many organizations working to provide online libraries, live training opportunities and even mentorship programs to support farmers to grow crops and raise livestock sustainably.

[ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture](#), a program of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), provides a wealth of educational resources for farmers engaged in sustainable production. Their [Publication Library](#) is rich with technical information about farming practices and other related topics. Their [Events](#) page lists workshop and webinar opportunities across the country, many of which are virtual and/or offered for free. The Media Hub houses blogs, videos and their [Voices From the Field Podcast](#). ATTRA's [Ask an Ag Expert](#) service provides farmers with free and direct access to experienced, knowledgeable producers who can answer questions about sustainable production one-on-one. If you are interested in connecting with their experts, you can call 1-800-346-9140, use the chat function on their website or send them an email through the form on the above linked page.

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, better known as [SARE](#), offers research opportunities and educational materials created in collaboration with farmers for farmers. To learn about sustainable production practices, check out their [Resources and Learning](#) page, as well as the catalog of [reports from SARE-funded research](#). SARE is administered [regionally](#) with [state-level staff coordinators](#). Later in this guide we'll discuss their grant opportunities for farmers who are interested in conducting on-farm research.

[Holistic Management International \(HMI\)](#) helps farmers, ranchers and other land stewards to implement sustainable land management practices through education, consultation and peer mentorship. This organization is especially valuable for folks looking to incorporate regenerative grazing into their operations. Some of HMI's [downloadable resources](#) and webinars are free, while most trainings and consultant offerings have an associated fee.

When you are looking to transition to (or further develop) organic practices in particular, [Rodale Institute](#) should be one of your first stops. They provide organic farming education including webinars, field days, workshops and more. For more hands-on instruction, folks can take part in [Rodale Institute's Farmer Training \(RIFT\)](#) or [Veteran Farmer Training](#) programs. One of their most unique programs is their [organic consulting service](#), through which a Rodale staff member can provide one-on-one technical assistance for adopting

organic practices and pursuing organic (or regenerative organic) certification. Consultation services are free for farmers in Pennsylvania, and farmers in all other states can get in touch with Rodale's team to inquire about pricing.

Another valuable educational resource is the Extension Service of the Land Grant University in your state. Many Extension websites house information and training related to sustainable practices, often with an eye toward the nuances of your specific climate and other local details. The agents at your local County Extension office may also be able to provide you with more information through one-on-one consultation and technical assistance.

Your local Conservation District can support you with projects that preserve the natural resources on your farm. Many offer programs and services specifically for farmers, and some even offer equipment rentals for sustainable agriculture production (a seed drill or roller crimper, for example). Visit the linked site to learn what support is available through your local district.

Check out the educational resources available from Soil Health Institute which include articles, videos and access to technical specialists. Soil Health Institute is also working on big picture initiatives to help farmers build soil health on their land.

## REGIONAL SUPPORT

There are numerous organizations working both regionally and locally to help farmers develop a sustainable framework on the farm. Reach out to your community networks to learn what other resources are available in your state and region.

Quivira Coalition focuses on helping farmers build resilience on Western working lands by fostering ecological, economic and social health through education and conservation efforts. In addition to their New Agrarian Program and Carbon Ranch Initiative, be sure to check out the educational resources on their website, which include a podcast, technical guides and more. Quivira Coalition also hosts the Regenerate conference annually, which provides education and networking opportunities for farmers and ranchers in the Southwest.

Marbleseed offers robust support to regenerative and organic farmers in the Midwest. Their programs include peer mentorship and networking, access to training and funding, mental health support and technical assistance with incorporating climate smart and organic practices. They also host a large annual conference rich with educational opportunities and diverse exhibitors.

Pasa Sustainable Agriculture is a valuable resource for sustainable farmers in several Mid-Atlantic and Northeast states. They provide farmer education and training, technical assistance and farm-based research opportunities as well as policy and advocacy work on behalf of farmers. Like Quivira Coalition and Marbleseed, Pasa also hosts an annual conference for education and networking.

Future Harvest promotes sustainable agriculture in the Chesapeake region. Among their many resources for farmers are a beginning farmer training program, pick-your-own consultant program, tool share, job bulletin and soil health research opportunities. Don't miss their web-based resources, which include webinars and more. Future Harvest holds an annual conference each winter.

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute supports Midwest Sustainable Farmers through research, policy and education. They run the collaborative Wisconsin Women in Conservation program, offering guidance on sustainable grain production (including running Midwest GRIT) and administering the Milwaukee Urban Ag Network. Additionally, the Agricultural Institute offers a grant advising service, through which farmers can receive assistance identifying and applying for well-matched funding opportunities.

Savanna Institute provides Midwest farmers practicing agroforestry with robust educational opportunities through online resources with webinars, a podcast and more, as well as educational events.

## FUNDING FOR SUSTAINABLE/REGENERATIVE PRACTICES

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Transitioning to sustainable practices may come with upfront costs such as infrastructure, equipment, inputs for building soil health and more. Many farmers look toward funding opportunities to help offset these costs when possible. There are a growing number of grant and loan programs that prioritize farmers practicing sustainable farming.

### COST-SHARE GRANTS

Cost-share grants require that the farmer contribute a certain percentage toward the cost of a given project. Often, but not always, cost-share grants are paid on a reimbursement basis, meaning that the farmer fronts the full cost of the project and then is reimbursed by the percentage or amount covered by the grant. Before applying for a cost-share grant, it's important to be aware of — and realistic about — what your farm can cover financially. Some farmers choose to take on low or 0% interest loans to meet the up-front costs of a reimbursement-based grant.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is well-known for providing technical and financial assistance to producers for implementing conservation efforts on their land. An NRCS agent can visit your property and help you understand what opportunities there are for improved conservation efforts based on the current resource concerns and your farm goals. NRCS provides financial assistance through a few programs. Most popular among them is their Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), which provides cost-share grants to implement a very wide variety of conservation practices. Eligible practices vary by state, but a few of the many popular practices among farmers tend to be drip irrigation, cover crops, rotational grazing and the High Tunnel Initiative. Historically underserved farmers are eligible for the Advanced Payment Option (meaning they receive more money up front vs. reimbursement). Additionally, through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), NRCS helps farmers build on existing conservation practices on the farm. Producers receive an annual payment for implementing

and maintaining these new practices. Keep in mind there is set funding for these programs and there are specific funding deadlines the NRCS offices must work within. You can inquire about the above programs (and all other programs offered by NRCS) by contacting [your local NRCS office](#) for more information and to request a visit.

The [Rural Energy for America Program](#) (known as REAP) is a program of the USDA Rural Development agency. This program provides funding to producers and other rural business owners to make energy efficient improvements or install new renewable energy systems. Awards take the form of guaranteed loan financing (up to 75% of total project cost) or grants (up to 50% of total project cost). The linked website contains all eligibility, approved use and timeline information.

## CLIMATE SMART COMMODITIES PROJECTS

In 2022, USDA announced it would be funding projects through the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities program to support farmers and ranchers implementing climate smart practices on their land. While climate smart practices are not specific to sustainable agriculture, many sustainable agriculture practices are inherently climate smart. Organizations across the country received grant funds for a climate smart project, and most of those will involve incentives for — and participation from — farmers. You can see a list of organizations in your state and their upcoming projects on the [Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities Projects Dashboard](#) and check what funds may become available in your area.

## TIME-RESTRICTED GRANTS

Most grants available through nonprofits tend to become available on an annual or periodic basis. We've noted the typical window for each of the opportunities below, but you can also sign up for each organization's email list and/or check their website frequently for new opportunities.

SARE offers a number of competitive [grants](#) for sustainable agriculture research and education projects. Grants are administered at the regional level ([Northeast](#), [North Central](#), [South](#), [West](#)) at different points throughout the year, so visit your region's website for more information on their grant programs, eligibility, deliverables and more.

The [FruitGuys Community Fund](#) (national) provides grants to farmers and agricultural nonprofits who are working to improve ecological and social diversity through sustainable farming practices. This grant program typically becomes available in the winter.

The [Food Animal Concerns Trust \(FACT\) Fund-A-Farmer Grant](#) (national) provides grant funds to farmers for projects that improve livestock welfare or support a farm's efforts to acquire a welfare certification. This grant program typically becomes available in the fall or winter.

[American Farmland Trust's Brighter Future Fund](#) (national) provides \$5,000 grants to farmers for projects that help improve farm viability and resiliency. One of their grant

priorities includes supporting farms that use sustainable practices. This grant program typically becomes available in the summer.

The Zero Foodprint Restore Grant (available in California and Colorado, and coming soon to the Northwest) provides grants of up to \$25,000 for farmers to implement projects or practices that will increase soil health and sequester carbon. Awardees must use technical assistance providers (such as NRCS, Conservation District staff, etc.) to ensure projects are carried out in alignment with NRCS practice requirements.

## LOANS

Slow Money is a nonprofit organization made up of lending groups that either lend to farmers or connect farmers to local investors to fund projects that support farms and communities. Many of the loans made through Slow Money have low or no interest. You can find all Slow Money chapters around the U.S. listed [here](#).

Steward lends to small-scale sustainable farmers via a network of mission-motivated lenders who can participate in the project.

Mission Driven Finance's Regenerative Harvest loan provides flexible funding to farms with an emphasis on farms that practice sustainable farming.

Mad Capital provides a variety of loan products for farmers using or transitioning to sustainable practices.

Agroforestry Partners supports sustainable farmers by working with private and public funders to increase access to capital on the farmer's terms. Qualifying farms can cover up to 100% of the cost to plant and manage tree crops.

Companies like Iroquois Valley REIT and Dirt Capital Partners work with sustainable farmers to decrease barriers to farmland ownership through alternative means such as lease-to-own arrangements.

Potlikker Capital funds BIPOC farmers who operate at the intersection of racial and climate justice. The use of sustainable practices that benefit the environment (or desire to transition to such practices) is one of Potlikker Capital's funding priorities.

Foodshed Capital provides 0% interest loans and no-cost business consultation services to small-scale regenerative farmers. Their programs also prioritize historically underserved groups such as BIPOC and LGBTQ farmers. While FoodCap's lending is generally limited to farmers on the East Coast, business consultation services are available to farmers across the country.

## FUNDING GUIDES

ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture offers several guides that can help you make the best funding and financial management decisions possible as you build your sustainable farm. Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities provides details on available federal

programs, while [Planning for Profit in Sustainable Farming](#) tackles the financial viability side of the equation.

Finally, don't forget to check out Farm Aid's [Farm Financing Resource Guide](#) for more funding ideas and tips.

## CONNECT WITH FARM AID

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Not finding what you need? Request one-on-one assistance from our Farmer Services Team by filling out our [Online Request for Assistance form](#) or by calling **1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243)**. Farm Aid staff are happy to listen and help you in all the ways we can.

## FARMER RESOURCE GUIDES

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Check out our [Farmer Resource Guides](#) for straightforward information created by our Farmer Services Team to help with topics that come up frequently on our 1-800-FARM-AID hotline.