

Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Farmer Drought Resilience Program



Request for Applications (RFA) and Application

Workbook RFA#: ARDFDRF2026

Released January 5, 2026

RFA Coordinator	All communication regarding the RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified below. Name: Tom Gordon Title: Soil & Water Conservation Program Coordinator Email: Tom.Gordon@maine.gov
Written Questions Deadlines and Information Session See section 2.3	The RFA Coordinator will offer Zoom information sessions: 01/12/2026 from 1 – 2 p.m., ET. Register here 01/16/2026 from 9 – 10 a.m., ET. Register here All written questions must be submitted via this link by 01/20/2026 no later than 5:00 p.m., local time. The Department will post written responses to questions by 01/26/2026 here .
Application Submission Deadline See section 2.5	The Department must receive applications by: Submission Deadline: 02/13/2026, no later than 5:00 p.m., local time. Applications must be submitted electronically via this link , with additional requested material emailed to: Tom.Gordon@maine.gov
Further resources	Additional information and resources can be found on the program website linked here: https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/farmer-drought-relief-program.shtml For timely information about this RFA and related programs, enroll in the Maine DACF “Agricultural Grants and Loans” email listserv here .
Eligible Applicants	See page 3, section 1.2.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. OVERVIEW	3
1.1. Background and Purpose	3
1.2. Eligibility to Submit Application	3
1.3 Allowable Costs	3
1.4 Unallowable Costs	4
1.5 Funding and Duration	4
1.6. Statutory References	4
1.7. Appeal of Contract Awards	4
2. APPLICATION PROCESS	5
2.1. Timeline and Key Dates	5
2.2. Solicitation	5
2.3. Submission of Questions and Amendments	5
2.4. Amendments to the Request for Applications	6
2.5. Application Submission Instructions	7
2.6. Evaluation and Selection Process	8
3. DETAILED SCORING RUBRIC	8
APPENDIX A: RFA TERMS and DEFINITIONS	13
APPENDIX B: GENERAL PROVISIONS	14
APPENDIX C: GUIDANCE ON “UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY”	15
APPENDIX D: GUIDANCE ON “ANCESTRAL DISPOSSESSION OF LAND”	16

1. OVERVIEW

1.1. Background and Purpose

The Maine Farmer Drought Relief Fund (FDRF) was created by the Maine Legislature (7 M.R.S.A., Chapter 8-A, subchapter 4 § 220-A(3)) to assist farmers in the State to overcome the adverse effects of drought conditions by providing grants.

The Department will make up to \$ 930,000 available for installation of agricultural water sources from nonlapsing funding. An additional \$ 300,000 may be available from FY 27 funding after July 1, 2026 and may be used to fund additional projects at the discretion of the Department.

The Department reserves the right to determine the number of awards and modify, partially fund, or increase awards at the Department's discretion.

Category 1 – Agricultural Water Management Plans – up to \$ 7,500 as needed to support design and permitting for Category 2 projects

Category 2 – Agricultural Water Source Development – up to 90 percent of the cost for installation of:

- Installation or deepening of a dug water well – up to \$ 15,000
- Installation of a drilled bedrock well – up to \$ 25,000
- Installation of a gravel-packed well – up to \$ 50,000
- Installation of a water storage pond – up to \$ 50,000

1.2. Eligibility to Submit Application

Farmers that operate a farm in Maine are eligible to apply for funds to address agricultural water management of Maine cropland if they meet at least ONE of the following eligibility criteria:

- a. Have produced gross annual sales of agricultural products of at least \$10,000 in at least one of the previous three years; OR
- b. Have produced gross annual sales of agricultural products of at least \$2,000 annually in each of the previous three years and who can demonstrate that the farm provides unique benefits to the local food economy as determined by the Commissioner; OR
- c. Have an ancestral history of disinvestment or land dispossession in the State of Maine.

For more detail, the eligibility guidelines can be found in the rules governing the Maine Farmer Drought Relief Fund. If you have any additional questions about your eligibility, contact the RFA Coordinator.

1.3 Allowable Costs

Costs are only allowable for expenses that directly address agricultural water management of Maine cropland. Applicants must describe how their costs will improve the farm's cropland water management. The following are some examples of allowable costs:

- Development of an agricultural water management plan prepared by a Soil & Water Conservation District or other qualified technical service provider
- Installation or deepening of a dug water well
- Installation of a drilled bedrock well
- Installation of a gravel-packed well
- Construction or expansion of a water storage pond
- Water pumps and necessary appurtenant equipment, including storage tanks, pump houses, electrical connections, and related costs

1.4 Unallowable Costs

- Expenses not directly associated with agricultural water management of Maine cropland
- Field irrigation equipment such as center-pivot or micro-irrigation systems
- Water supply for livestock operations *
- Water supply for residential use *
- Water supply for commercial processing *

* (unless expressly waived by the DACF Commissioner to allow uses that do not impair cropland irrigation or result in increased environmental impacts)

1.5 Statutory References

All general instructions for submitting the applicable application are provided in this document in accordance with:

- Statute establishing the Maine Farmers Drought Relief Program (7 MRS Ch. 7 §220-A)
- Rules for Operation of the Maine Farmers Drought Relief Fund (01-001, Ch. 38)
- Rules for Departmental (DACF) Grant Awards and Appeals (01-001, Ch. 8)

1.6. Appeal of Contract Awards

In accordance with the Rules for Departmental (DACF) Grant Awards and Appeals (01-001, Ch. 8) an aggrieved person (hereinafter the "petitioner") may request an appeal hearing on a grant award decision by submitting a request for appeal to the Commissioner, in writing, no later than fifteen (15) calendar days from the date of the award decision. The written request for appeal must describe the specific nature of the grievance. The Commissioner shall grant an appeal hearing unless it is determined that: A. the petitioner is not an aggrieved person, or B. the written request for appeal was submitted more than fifteen (15) calendar days after notification of award.

The burden of proof within the hearing of appeal lies with the petitioner. The evidence presented must specifically address and be limited to one or more of the following appeal indicators:

- i. Violation of law.
- ii. Irregularities creating fundamental unfairness; or
- iii. Arbitrary or capricious award.

Notice of the appeal proceeding shall follow the requirements of 5 M.R.S. § 9051-A(2) and be provided to those entities as determined applicable by the Commissioner. The notification must include the date and location of the hearing and the name of the Hearing Officer. Appeal proceedings may be held in person, virtually, or in a hybrid format at the discretion of the Hearing Officer. Failure to appear for a scheduled hearing may be grounds for default.

2. APPLICATION PROCESS

2.1. Timeline and Key Dates

Date	Item
01/05/2026	Application opens
01/12/2026	Live Q/A session
01/16/26	Live Q/A session
01/20/2026	Written questions due via online submission
01/26/2026	Questions and answers posted on the program website
02/13/2026	Application Due date. Applications and accompanying documents must be submitted by 5:00 p.m.
04/15/2026	Anticipated completion of application review/scoring
05/15/2026	Anticipated notification date of project and award decisions. Upon signed contract, period of performance begins. Funds are accessible, and expenses from on or after this date are eligible for reimbursement

2.2. Solicitation Posting

This RFA and all relevant documents and forms were posted on the release date noted on the cover page and can be found at the [DACF Maine Farmer Drought Relief Fund webpage](#). It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain the Question-and-Answer Summaries and any amendments to this RFA.

2.3. Submission of Questions and Amendments

It is the responsibility of all applicants and other interested parties to examine the entire RFA and seek clarification in writing if they have specific questions. All written questions must be submitted via email to Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov. For technical questions concerning application submission, online form issues, supplemental file submission, or compatibility problems, please email Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov .

2.3.1 Question/Answer Process

We will offer a live question-and-answer session on the date listed on the cover sheet. This session will be recorded, and we will post a written summary of the questions within 7 business days after the live Q/A. Applicants and other interested parties may additionally submit any questions via email to Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov by 5:00 p.m. on the written

questions due date listed on the cover sheet of this RFA. Responses to all written questions will be compiled in writing and posted on the [DACF Maine Farmers Drought Relief Program webpage](#) within 7 business days after the written questions due date. All interested parties are responsible for going to this website to obtain a copy of the Question & Answer Summary. Only those answers issued in writing on this website will be considered binding. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate, complete, and on-time submission and receipt.

2.4. Amendments to the Request for Applications

All amendments (if any) released in regard to this RFA will be posted on the [DACF Maine Farmers Drought Relief Program webpage](#). It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this webpage to obtain amendments. For timely information about this RFA and related programs, an email listserv signup can be found on the [DACF Maine Farmers Drought Relief program webpage](#). Only those amendments posted on this website are considered binding.

The Department reserves the right to revise, suspend, or terminate this RFA at its sole discretion. In such an event, the Department will inform all applicants as soon as reasonably possible. The Department also reserves the right to extend the deadline for submission of proposals or to seek additional proposals under this RFA.

2.5. Application Submission

Applications Due - Applications must be received by the due date listed on the cover page of this RFA by 5:00 p.m. local time. Applications must be submitted via this [link](#), and all supplemental files must be emailed to Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov. Any emails containing application materials or any additional or revised application files received after the 5:00 p.m. deadline may be rejected. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete/on-time email/online form transmission and receipt.

Applications that do not comply with the instructions specified in this RFA, or failure to submit all required documents, may result in the proposal being disqualified or receiving a reduced score at the sole discretion of the Department. Applicants may not provide additional supplemental files beyond those specified in the RFA. Additional materials not requested will not be evaluated. Applicants may not submit more than one application. Submission of multiple applications may result in both applications being disqualified from consideration for an award.

Submission Instructions

All activities described in the instructions below must occur BEFORE 5:00 p.m. on the application due date listed on the cover page of this RFA.

1. Fill out and submit the [online application form](#) found at [this link](#).
2. Email your most recent IRS Schedule C or F form to Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov .

3. Email a map that outlines the farm to Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov. This can be a Google Map, Web Soil Survey map, or other map, so long as it shows the layout of the farm.
4. IF you are applying for establishment of a water source (a well or pond), you must include a copy of an existing agricultural water management plan for your farm in your supplemental files email.
5. IF you are applying for establishment of a water source (a well or pond), you must include a price quote from a well driller or excavating contractor in your supplemental files email. Quotes must be submitted in PDF format, and all quotes must be combined into a single file. If the quote exceeds the funding limit on this grant, you must also include a pre-qualification or pre-approval letter from a financial institution if you intend to use loan funds to fund the difference between the estimated cost and the grant award.

For submission of required supplemental files:

- E-mails containing links to file-sharing sites or online file repositories will not be accepted as submissions.
- Encrypted e-mails received which require opening attachments and logging into a proprietary system will not be accepted as submissions.
- Supplemental documents must be saved and submitted as PDF (pdf) or Word (.doc or .docx) file(s).
- File size limits are 25 MB per email. Applicants may submit files separately across multiple emails, as necessary, due to file size concerns. All emails and files must be received in accordance with all the instructions above.

3. EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

A review panel will evaluate and score project applications based on the program requirements and selection criteria found in the rubric below. Applications will NOT be scored question by question but instead based on how the whole application addresses the rubric criteria. Applications will be scored for completeness.

Members of the review panel will first score applications individually. The review panel will then meet to arrive at a consensus score. Applications that are ineligible, late, incomplete, or incorrectly formatted may be disqualified from panel review.

Based on the review panel's scoring and evaluation, the RFA Coordinator will make recommendations to the Commissioner. Final decision-making authority for awarding grants rests with the Commissioner, based upon the program requirements and selection criteria found in the rubric below. All applicants shall be notified in writing regarding their grant application and whether it was selected for funding.

3.1. Detailed Scoring Rubric: Agricultural Water Source Implementation Grants (Total: 100 Points)

1. Cost (0–25 points)

Goal: Ensure financial responsibility, leveraging of resources, and coordination with existing programs.

Sub-Criterion	Description	Scoring Guidance
1.1 Itemized and Reasonable Costs (0–10 points)	Project budget is complete, clearly itemized, and justified. Costs are consistent with comparable projects.	0–3 pts: Budget incomplete, lacks justification, or includes excessive costs. 4–7 pts: Budget mostly complete and reasonable; minor inconsistencies or omissions. 8–10 pts: Fully itemized and justified; demonstrates strong cost-effectiveness.
1.2 Applicant Contribution / Match (0–10 points)	Evidence of ≥10% match in cash or in-kind support (labor, equipment, materials).	0–3 pts: No match or insufficient documentation. 4–7 pts: Meets minimum 10% match requirement with moderate documentation. 8–10 pts: Exceeds 10% match and/or provides robust evidence of investment in irrigation infrastructure.
1.3 Coordination with NRCS Assistance (0–5 points)	Demonstrates coordination with NRCS programs (e.g., EQIP, CSP) for complementary conservation practices.	0 pts: No indication of coordination. 1–3 pts: Limited consultation or planning alignment. 4–5 pts: Active collaboration or NRCS technical assistance secured.

Total: 25 points

2. Physical Resource Base (0–20 points)

Goal: Ensure the project is technically feasible and appropriate for the physical characteristics of the farm.

Sub-Criterion	Description	Scoring Guidance
2.1 Farmland Suitability (0–10 points)	Soil type, slope, and land cover are well-suited to proposed water infrastructure or practice.	0–3 pts: Poorly suited soils or terrain; high erosion risk. 4–7 pts: Moderate suitability; some constraints manageable through mitigation. 8–10 pts: Highly suitable conditions for long-term viability.
2.2 Physical Condition of Infrastructure (0–5 points)	Existing buildings, wells, ponds, or irrigation systems are in functional condition or clearly identified for improvement.	0–1 pts: Infrastructure deteriorated or poorly described. 2–3 pts: Basic infrastructure in fair condition; upgrades justified. 4–5 pts: Well-maintained or strategically targeted for high-impact upgrades.
2.3 Capacity for Field Irrigation (0–5 points)	Field irrigation systems are in place or planned with clear plans for acquisition and financing of all needed field equipment to utilize increased water supply.	0–1 pts: Infrastructure deteriorated or poorly described. 2–3 pts: Basic infrastructure has been identified; upgrades justified. 4–5 pts: Well-maintained or planned with identifiable funding.

Total: 20 points

3. Economic Impacts (0–30 points)

Goal: Prioritize farms most affected by drought and those at risk of significant economic loss without support.

Sub-Criterion	Description	Scoring Guidance
3.1 Evidence of Prior Adverse Impacts (0–10 points)	Application demonstrates clear drought-related impacts (e.g., yield loss, reduced herd, income decline, or well depletion).	0–3 pts: Minimal or anecdotal evidence of impact. 4–7 pts: Some quantitative or documented evidence provided. 8–10 pts: Clear, well-documented data showing significant past drought impact.
3.2 Potential for Economic Damage (0–10 points)	Project mitigates risk of future economic loss (crop failure, herd reduction, lost revenue).	0–3 pts: Minimal link between project and future loss prevention. 4–7 pts: Reasonable potential to reduce economic risk. 8–10 pts: Strong evidence project prevents major losses or ensures business continuity.
3.3 Local Economic Importance (0–5 points)	Farm contributes significantly to local or regional agricultural economy (employment, local markets, food supply) as demonstrated by annual sales.	0–3 pts: Limited local contribution. 4–7 pts: Moderate role in local economy. 8–10 pts: High-impact enterprise central to local or regional food systems.

Total: 30 points

[see [Economic Benefit Evaluation Framework](#) for additional guidance]

4. Environmental Impact (0–20 points)

Goal: Support projects that protect water quality, soil health, and ecological function.

Sub-Criterion	Description	Scoring Guidance
4.1 Avoided Use of Sensitive Water Resources (0–10 points)	Reduces withdrawals from low-flow streams, overdrawn aquifers, or stressed water bodies.	0–3 pts: No environmental benefits or risks unaddressed. 4–7 pts: Moderate reduction of water stress; some environmental consideration. 8–10 pts: Clearly reduces withdrawals from sensitive water resources.
4.2 Adoption of Soil Health or Conservation Practices (0–10 points)	Integrates practices like cover cropping, mulching, rotational grazing, or efficient irrigation.	0–3 pts: No additional conservation practices described. 4–7 pts: Includes some soil or water-saving practices. 8–10 pts: Strong integration of multiple, proven soil and water conservation methods.

Total: 20 points

5. Commissioner's Priority (0–5 points)

Goal: Reward alignment with state-level strategic priorities or designated areas.

Sub-Criterion	Description	Scoring Guidance
5.1 Priority Geographic Area or Crop Sector (0–5 points)	Project is located in a Commissioner-designated priority area (e.g., drought hotspot) or focuses on a priority crop/livestock sector.	0 pts: Not in a priority area or sector. 1–3 pts: Indirectly related to a priority area/sector. 4–5 pts: Directly serves a Commissioner-designated priority.
Total: 5 points	* NO PRE-ASSIGNED PRIORITIES FOR THIS ROUND	

TOTAL MAXIMUM SCORE: 95 POINTS

Category	Max Points	Weight (%)
Cost	25	25%
Physical Resource Base	25	25%
Economic Impacts	25	25%
Environmental Impacts	20	20%
Commissioner's Priority	0*	5%
Total	95	100%

APPENDIX A: RFA TERMS and DEFINITIONS

1. “Agricultural products” means food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops that are useful to humans, including forages and sod crops, grains and food crops, fruits, berries, vegetables, flowers, seeds, and grasses.
2. “Agricultural Water Management Plan” means a plan for the development and use of water resources to sustain the growth of agricultural products on a farm.
3. “Cropland” means land that is used for the production of adapted crops for harvest, alone or in a rotation with grasses and legumes, including cultivated cropland in row crops, small grain crops, hay crops, nursery crops, orchard crops, and non-cultivated cropland, such as permanent hay land and horticultural cropland.
4. “Department” means the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.
5. “Farm” means the aggregate of all agricultural land, equipment, and all related facilities and crops, regardless of their location or ownership within the State of Maine, that form part of an integrated agricultural business or enterprise.
6. “Farmer” means the owner or operator of cropland, which may include one or more individuals, partnerships, corporations, or associations that produce gross annual sales of agricultural products of at least \$10,000 in at least one of the previous three years. This term may also apply to an owner or operator of a farm that produces gross annual sales of agricultural products of at least \$2,000 and who can demonstrate that the farm provides unique benefits to the local food economy as determined by the Commissioner, or that the owner or operator has an ancestral history of disinvestment or land dispossession in the State of Maine.
7. “NRCS” means the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, its Maine State Office, and associated Field Offices.
8. “Soil health practices” means the use of conservation cover, contour buffer strips, cover crops, crop rotation, no-till or reduced tillage, or similar practices as specified by NRCS.
9. “Water conservation practices” means the use of drip irrigation, water storage, compost and mulching, water-conserving plants, or similar practices.

APPENDIX B: GENERAL PROVISIONS

- 1) From the time this RFA is issued until award notification is made, all contact with the State regarding this RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified on the cover page of this RFA. No other person/State employee is empowered to make binding statements regarding this RFA. Violation of this provision may lead to disqualification from the application process at the State's discretion.
- 2) Issuance of the RFA does not commit the Department to issue an award or to pay expenses incurred by an Applicant in the preparation of a response to the RFA. This includes attendance at personal interviews or other meetings, where applicable.
- 3) All applications must adhere to the instructions and format requirements outlined in the RFA and all written supplements and amendments (such as the Summary of Questions and Answers) issued by the Department.
- 4) Applicants will take careful note that, in evaluating an application submitted in response to this RFA, the Department will consider materials provided in the application, information obtained through interviews/presentations (if any), and internal Departmental information of previous contract history with the Applicant (if any). The Department also reserves the right to consider other reliable references and publicly available information in evaluating the Applicant's experience and capabilities.
- 5) The application must be signed by a person authorized to legally bind the Applicant and must contain a statement that the application and the pricing contained therein will remain valid and binding for a period of 180 days from the date and time of the RFA deadline.
- 6) The RFA and the awarded Applicant's application, including all appendices, attachments, or updated documents requested by the Department will be the basis for the final contract, as determined by the Department.
- 7) Following the announcement of an award decision, all submissions in response to this RFA will be public records, available for public inspection pursuant to the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) (1 M.R.S. § 401 et seq.).
- 8) The Department, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to recognize and waive minor informalities and irregularities found in applications received in response to the RFA.
- 9) All applicable laws, whether or not herein contained, shall be included by this reference. It shall be the Applicant's responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them.

APPENDIX C: GUIDANCE ON “UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY”

A Maine farmer may assert that their farm provides **unique benefits to the local food economy** by showing measurable or documented contributions that distinguish their operation from typical agricultural enterprises in the region. These benefits may include one or more of the following:

1. Strengthening Local Food Access and Markets

Supplying Maine-grown products directly to local consumers through farm stands, CSAs, farmers markets, or local retail outlets.

Expanding market diversity by offering products or value-added goods not widely available from other local farms (e.g., heritage grains, culturally significant crops, or climate-resilient varieties).

Creating or maintaining year-round local supply chains, such as investing in season-extension infrastructure or local aggregation and distribution hubs.

2. Supporting the Regional Economy

Purchasing inputs and services locally, thereby circulating revenue within the Maine economy.

Providing local employment opportunities and fair wages to residents of the community.

Participating in cooperative marketing, processing, or transportation ventures that reduce costs and expand opportunities for other Maine producers.

3. Advancing Food Security and Community Resilience

Donating or discounting farm products to local food pantries, schools, or hunger-relief programs.

Partnering with community organizations to increase access to fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate food.

Practicing climate-smart agriculture that supports long-term food system resilience—such as soil carbon sequestration, efficient water use, and adaptation to extreme weather.

4. Contributing to Education, Innovation, or Public Engagement

Hosting educational programs, farm tours, or apprenticeships that enhance agricultural literacy and workforce development.

Engaging in on-farm research or pilot programs with universities, nonprofits, or government agencies to advance sustainable practices.

Demonstrating innovative production or business models that strengthen Maine’s agricultural sector (e.g., cooperative ownership, renewable energy integration, or circular resource use).

5. Stewardship and Cultural Value

Preserving farmland or working landscapes through conservation easements or sustainable land management.

Maintaining traditional or heritage agricultural practices that contribute to Maine's cultural identity and rural vitality.

Documentation Examples

To substantiate these claims, a farmer may provide:

- Business records showing local sales or sourcing;
- Partnership letters or testimonials from community organizations;
- Participation records from markets or food hubs;
- Evidence of educational events or cooperative memberships;
- Conservation or certification documentation (e.g., MOFGA organic certification, NRCS participation, or Climate Smart pilot projects).

APPENDIX D: GUIDANCE ON “ANCESTRAL HISTORY OF LAND DISPOSSESSION”

A Maine farmer may assert **an ancestral history of disinvestment or land dispossession in the State of Maine** by providing: tribal records, land-claims documents, federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) files, evidence of denial of land title or lending, bank acquisition of land through default or land taken by eminent domain.