



EXCELSIOR-KINGS RIVER RCD HEALTHY SOILS GRANT PROGRAM

SPRING 2025

REQUEST FOR GRANT APPLICATION

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Funding by California Department of Food and
Agriculture (CDFA) HSBGP

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Grant Overview

Program Background:

The Healthy Soils - Block Grant Pilot Program is part of the Healthy Soils Program (HSP), which stems from the California Healthy Soils Initiative, a collaboration of state agencies and departments that promotes the development of healthy soils on California's farmlands and ranchlands. The Block Grant Pilot Program is designed to facilitate financial assistance to California agricultural operations through regional block grant administrators.

Project Background and Purpose:

This block grant is led by Excelsior Kings RCD. The total award is \$5,000,000.00 in funding. Which will be utilized to provide Healthy Soils Grants to Fresno, Kings, and Tulare County producers. The block grant expects to assist and award 33 on-farm projects to grant beneficiaries in four distinct funding pools to encourage a wide variety of practices and scenarios implemented.

General Project Guidelines:

The Excelsior-Kings River RCD Healthy Soils Grant Program has been modeled and adheres to the program requirements and eligibility found in the 2024 CDFA Healthy Soils Program Incentives Grants, Request for Grant Application, unless otherwise specifically mentioned in the project guidelines

https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/healthysoils/docs/2024/2024_hsp_incentives_rga2.pdf . In the case of a dispute that should arise between the project and program requirements, the executed grant agreement 23-0720-000-SO between CDFA and EKRCDC will be referenced as the guiding document.

Funding Pool Definitions

The General Fund Pool: The General Fund Pool will have a \$200,000.00 funding cap, allow all practices, and have a cost share requirement based on producer land ownership. 5 projects are estimated to be funded in the General Fund Pool.

The On-Farm Produced Compost Fund Pool: The On-Farm Produced Compost fund pool will be capped at \$125,000.00, require the producer to produce and apply compost on farm following an approved protocol. 8 projects are estimated to be funded in the OFPC fund pool.

SDFR Fund Pool: SDFR Fund Pool will be limited to SDFR producers, no restrictions on HSP practices, \$200,000.00 funding cap, no match required. 10 projects are estimated to be funded in the SDFR fund pool, reflecting smaller farm sizes.

Small and Medium Producer Fund Pool: The Small and Medium Producer fund pool will be open to all practices, have a \$100,000.00 funding cap, and is restricted to producers with less than 500 acres owned or leased. 10 projects are estimated to be funded in the SMP fund pool.

Eligibility:

General Eligibility:

All applications will be submitted to CDFA for applicant eligibility as a part of the grant approval process and follow the requirements and exclusions contained in the 2024 CDFA Healthy Soils Program Incentives Grants, Request for Grant Application.

Per the 2024 Healthy Soils Program RGA “Awards are limited to one per agricultural operation using a unique tax identification number per round of funding, including applications submitted to Block Grant Recipients. Elements including, but not limited to, unique tax identification number, personal name, business name, or field, cannot be used for multiple applications.” Applications that have been applied for, but not yet awarded, to either the CDFA HSP Direct or other Block Grant programs are allowed. If funding is received from another HSP source, only one may be selected.

Projects must be located within the counties of Kings, Tulare, and Fresno Counties.

Definitions regarding Eligibility

First-time applicant: The Healthy Soils Program will define this as an applicant who has not been awarded a grant and implemented practices for that grant through the Healthy Soils Program in past solicitations. Eligible applicants are defined under the [Grant Recipient eligibility](#) requirements.

Priority Populations: [SB 535](#) and [AB 1550](#) define Priority Populations. The [CDFA HSP RePlan Tool](#) automatically identifies projects benefitting Priority Populations based on project location and pre-determined net criteria air pollutant emission reductions, consistent with the CARB Healthy Soils Quantification Methodology and Co-Benefits Calculator Tool.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher (SDFRs): The [Farmer Equity Act of 2017 \(AB 1348\)](#) defines an SDFR as a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. A “socially disadvantaged group” means a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination. Neither the [USDA definition](#) nor the Farmer Equity Act include gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation in their covered groups. The covered groups include the following: African Americans, Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

Small and Medium Producer: For the purposes of the EKRCDC HSP grant, a small and medium producer is a producer who owns, leases, controls, or has a partnership interest directly or indirectly (in the case of a spouse or trust,) in less than 500 acres in totality. Partnerships where the producer has less than 5% of total ownership directly or indirectly **and** does not contribute to the decision making for all lands controlled by that partnership may disregard those acres.

Practice Eligibility

All funding pools, with the exception of the on-farm composting fund pool are eligible for all HSP projects following the same Eligibility and Exclusions for implementation as found in 2024 CDFA Healthy Soils Program Incentives Grants, Request for Grant Application,

https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/healthyssoils/docs/2024/2024_hsp_incentives_rga2.pdf

The on-farm composting fund pool is limited to Compost application: Compost Application (USDA NRCS CPS 808) On-farm Produced Compost for all crop types. Compost must be made from feedstock or materials generated by the operation.

Cost Share

The General, Small and Medium Producers, and On Farm Compost fund pools will have additional cost share requirements by entity land ownership size.

0% cost share for producers who own less than 40 acres
10% cost share for producers owning 41ac < 100 acers
15% cost share for producers owning 101ac to 500ac
25% for producers owning 500+ acres

Cost share does not require proof of matching funds, for instance a producer who has 200 acres, and wishes to apply 6 tons compost an acre on 100 acres would receive $\$115,776.00 \times .85 = \$98,409.60$ after cost share is factored in.

Producers will be required to provide verification via receipts or weight tickets that the project meets contracted rates, but not prove personal expenditures.

Grant Application Process

How to Apply

The application consists of a one page application located at <https://ekrcd.org/healthy-soils-grant-program/>, a written description of the proposed project (not to exceed 1000 words) and the completion and submission of the CDFA HSP Replan tool: <https://replan-tool.org/cdfa/>

All application documents, and links to planning resources will be housed at <https://ekrcd.org/healthy-soils-grant-program/> and be available to applicants.

Application windows will be announced publicly and accept applications for 60 calendar days before closing. 2 hours of technical assistance will be available free of charge and can assist with the completion of all parts of the application.

Training and Technical Assistance

The EKRC D HSP Project and Application training will be provided in both meeting format, online recordings, and in person one-on-one consultations. No fees or subsequent commitments (financial or otherwise) are required to help submit applications and assist project implementation. Assistance may include technical aspects of the application process such as practice selection, project design, or availability of a computer and internet to prepare the application.

Review and Selection Process

Once a completed application is submitted to the EKRC D, it will be reviewed for completeness of all required application components by the Project Manager or technical assistance provider. If any deficiencies are noted, the TAP will notify the applicant within 2 business weeks and give guidance on what needs to be revised.

Grant beneficiaries will be selected for an award through a competitive solicitation process for the four fund pools. Applicants in each fund pool will be ranked utilizing a 90-point scoring rubric. A three-person technical review committee will review the projects for feasibility, assign a ranking score based on the rubric for each fund pool, and compile a list of the projects in order from the highest to lowest scoring.

Scoring Rubric

The scoring rubric will consist of 90 possible points and be broken down into the following Criteria Sections: Merit and Feasibility, Soil Health Practices Selected, GHG Reductions, Budget, and Additional Considerations.

Category	Sub Category	Sub Category Points	Category Point Total
Merit and Feasibility			
	Application completion	5	
	Acres effected	5	
	Crop selection	5	
			15
Soil Health Practices Selected			
	Utilizing on farm compost	10	
	Multiple practices	5	
	Including 590 Nutrient Management	5	
	Cover crops	5	
	Compost applications	5	
			30
GHG Reductions			
	GHG reduction over baseline	20	
	CDFA Replan tool	5	
			25
Budget			
	MTCO ₂ e per \$1000.00 dollars	3	
	Cost share inclusion	2	
			5
Additional considerations			
	Exceeding the cost share requirement (50% cap)	8	
	Applicants never selected for HSP	2	
	SDFR status	3	
	NRCS conservation plan	2	
			15

Award Process

Projects will be selected in the order in which they rank, until all funds within the pool for the application cycle are appropriated.

The list of projects selected for prefunding will be provided to the EKRCB Board for final approval, once the board votes to approve the selected projects, the Project Manager will notify the potential Grant Beneficiaries to gather the Letter of commitment and On-Farm Project summaries and submit them to CDFA for review.

After award approvals are returned by CDFA, EKRCB will initiate the Grant Agreement Process. The Technical Assistance Provider will spend 2 hours reviewing the project, and discussing the producers' goals at the pre-project consultation, as well as recording a project timeline with the producer to determine practice implementation windows. This will allow them to keep track of project milestones as the project progresses and ensure that the grant beneficiary is assisted in completing the project. After ensuring that the project matches the awarded application and its scope, the TAP will sign off on project start.

Project Implementation

The producer will work with the EKRCB Tap to implement and document the project. The TAP performs quarterly phone check-ins with the grant beneficiary to ensure that they are made aware of the practice implementation timeline so they can schedule their sampling and verification tasks. They will also be making annual visits to project sites to record progress in person, schedule soil analysis, review compost analysis with the producer, perform project verification, geotagged photos, conduct spot checks of compost and identify and advise about any technical issues that arise. If the beneficiary is creating on farm compost, the TAP will be inspecting quarterly to ensure that composting protocols and recordkeeping is being completed.

On-farm verification will be completed in several ways. First, as outlined previously, the TAP will be making visits to project sites to record conditions pre and post practice in person, take the geotagged photos to ensure completion, in addition to scheduling the producers soil analysis for soil carbon. The TSP will review the compost analysis prior to spreading to ensure it meets guidelines and take random spot samples to ensure materials meets standards. If on-farm compost is utilized, quarterly spot inspections will be conducted by the TAP to ensure the composting is following protocols. A bound project summary will be prepared for each project by the TAP and grant administration team and contain the project design, map of completed practices, copies of all the lab analysis, invoices, inspection, and verification records.

If the grant recipient needs to make a scope of work revision, the TAP will work with them to revise the calculators and budget, advise if it meets program guidelines, write the request, and submit it to the technical review committee. If the technical review committee deems the SOW request because it reduces the project criteria, and is not sufficient, the TAP will assist the grant recipient in exploring solutions that will meet the producer's needs, as well as the grant agreement. SOW revisions will be allowed, as long as they: equal or increase GHG reductions from the grants original "after scenario", do not eliminate committed practices, (will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and will consider land sales or SGMA regulations reducing water availability,) and maintain or increase the funded to cost share ratio of the project. These SOW criteria ensure that the project will maintain its rubric score it was selected at and avoids any situation where the grant beneficiary does not meet their obligations.

Additional Considerations

All project rules and requirements not listed in the above text can be found in the following document: 2024 CDFA Healthy Soils Program Incentives Grants, Request for Grant Application,

https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/healthysoils/docs/2024/2024_hsp_incentives_rga2.pdf

Payment rates, implementation guidelines, and CDFA policy can be found in this document. Any dispute will be decided by EKRCB board decision, following CDFA guidelines and in consultation with CDFA staff.