

Western North Carolina Agricultural Options

2027 Application for Individual Farm Businesses

Instructions for Applying

Thank you for your interest in the WNC Agricultural Options Program. *WNC AgOptions builds sustainable farming communities in our mountain region by providing resources directly to farmers who are diversifying or expanding their operations.*

WNC AgOptions is funded by the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission and works in partnership with WNC Communities and N.C. Cooperative Extension. For more information on the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, visit: <http://www.tobaccotrustfund.org>

Members of the WNC AgOptions steering committee include representatives from N.C. Cooperative Extension, N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, and other agricultural business leaders.

Who should apply? Applicants are residents of North Carolina* who demonstrate the economic viability of farms in Western North Carolina. Support is provided to individual farmers/farms that are diversifying or expanding their operations to increase farm income and encourage the sustainability of the farm businesses. The farm must be one in which the family holds the financial responsibility, takes the risks, and makes the majority of the management decisions for the farm business. Nonprofits and corporately owned farms are not eligible. WNC AgOptions awards grants to a variety of farm operations, including fruits & vegetables, livestock, nurseries, agritourism, beekeeping, and value-added processing. Farm businesses that add value and/or sell products that are made from items produced or grown on the applicant's farm are eligible to apply. While agriculture is a varied and diverse industry that can be defined in many ways, WNC AgOptions funds applicants who operate a business and manage land for the purpose of producing crops for harvest and sale. Any funding requests should be for items directly related to the growing and harvesting of crops for sale, including livestock. WNC AgOptions also funds agritourism operations that are for the purpose of inviting the public on-farm to increase sales of farm products.

*Eligible applicants must reside and the project must be located in the West District of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service, which encompasses the following 22 counties/areas: Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Clay, Cherokee, Cleveland, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (projects on tribal land), Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga and Yancey.

Applicants (including farm business partners) are not eligible to receive WNC AgOptions grants if they fall into any of the following categories: current employees of N.C. Cooperative Extension, NCSU, NC A&T, NCDA&CS, or WNC Communities, including their spouses; members of the WNC AgOptions Steering Committee, including their spouses; board members of WNC Communities or NCTTFC, including their spouses.

Priority will be given to applicants who:

- Are diversifying or expanding their operations to remain sustainable for this and future generations;
- Are current or former NC commercial tobacco growers or former quota holders in North Carolina;
- Show they follow typical procedures of a legitimate farm business, such as acquiring a NC Department of Revenue Tax Exemption number, having a Farm Service Agency farm number, obtaining appropriate insurance, and filing a Schedule F or equivalent Schedule C (or equivalent) with the Internal Revenue Service;
- Generate more than one-half of their household income from crops or products produced on-farm;
- Have sufficient experience and expertise to accomplish the projects and/or have identified the proper cooperators to supplement gaps in their skills and abilities;
- Actively participate in grower associations or other commodity group meetings;
- Have sufficiently researched the production methods, markets, expenses, and timeline for their projects;
- Are proposing projects that demonstrate successful farming practices, methods, and/or markets to the agriculture community;
- Exhibit working relationships with their local Cooperative Extension Agents;
- Have included two qualifying letters of support from purchasers, advisors, consultants, agricultural specialists, other granting agencies, loan officers, or others that are providing support to your project (see details in Section III of the application);
- Have received fewer than five total grants and less than \$30,000 in combined funding from WNC AgOptions and RAFI-USA's Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund. Applicants who have received five total grants or \$30,000 in combined funding from these programs are ineligible for additional WNC AgOptions grants.

How to apply:

1. *Attend an informational session.* WNC Communities will conduct informational sessions in August and September 2027. Although not required, attendance provides helpful information and allows applicants to ask questions and potentially prepare a stronger application. Find dates and locations on the WNC AgOptions website: <https://wncagoptions.org>.
2. *Meet the Intent to Apply deadline.* By October 9, talk to your local N.C. Cooperative Extension agent about the project you intend to apply for to receive assistance in developing your project proposal. If your agent is familiar with your farm and operation, a phone call may suffice. If you have not worked closely with your agent before, they may need to visit your farm to better assist you with your project. Those who do not meet the Intent to Apply deadline may not receive all points possible in the review process. **Once you have talked to your Extension agent about your intent to apply, fill out this form by October 9:** <https://go.ncsu.edu/wncagopt27>.
3. *Prepare your application.* Stay in contact with your N.C. Cooperative Extension agent as you prepare your application. Prior to completing your application, please ensure you are using the most current version, available on the AgOptions website: <https://wncagoptions.org>. Review the full application, noting due dates, times, and submission requirements. Review the Grant Writing Tips on the WNC AgOptions website: <https://wncagoptions.org/grant-writing-tips>
4. *Submit your application.* Only one application per farm will be accepted. Review the Submission Checklist in the application to ensure your electronic file or hard copy contains all the required elements before submitting. *Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.* Mailing address and email requirements are listed on the following page.

**All applications, whether hard copy or digital, must be received
by 11:59 p.m. on November 9, 2026.**

To submit a hard copy application:

Mail or hand-deliver (a drop slot is located next to the mailbox) to:

WNC AgOptions Project Coordinator
WNC Communities
594 Brevard Rd.
Asheville, NC 28806

To submit application by email:

- All application documents, including attachments, must be in PDF format.
- All sections of application must be submitted; including SECTIONS V and VI (scans are acceptable).
- Application and attachments should be submitted as a single PDF file if possible. If the file is too big, attachments can be sent as one document and the application as a separate document.
- Email application to agoptions@wnccommunities.org with “**2027 WNC AgOptions Application**” in the subject line.

**All applications, whether mailed, hand-delivered, or emailed, will receive an email confirmation.
If you do not receive a confirmation, please contact our office.**

How are applications reviewed? Projects are ranked via a numeric scoring system. Approximately 25 leaders in the agriculture field throughout Western North Carolina participate in the review process, and a team of reviewers scores each application. The WNC AgOptions Steering Committee uses these scores as the primary guide in determining final grant recipients.

How can the grant be spent? We recognize that many farm operations across Western North Carolina have been significantly impacted by recent natural disasters. However, WNC AgOptions grant funds may not be used to cover expenses that are directly related to disaster recovery. AgOptions remains focused on funding strategic investments that promote farm diversification and long-term sustainability, rather than emergency response or recovery costs.

Suitable expenses are those associated with the production and marketing of diversified farm enterprises and agritourism endeavors. Examples include, but are not limited to: seeds, fertilizer, plants, amendments, livestock, training, advertisements, packaging, fences, signage, facilities, supplies, tools, and specialized equipment. Items that *cannot* be funded by the award include: farmer labor, pre-existing farm debt, purchase of land, and expenses that are dated outside of the grant period from January 4, 2027 through December 31, 2027.

Funds must be used as stated in the applicant’s proposal. Use of funds inconsistent with the proposal will result in forfeiture of the award and repayment of funds.

How much is awarded? The award for 2027 is \$10,000. WNC AgOptions will provide cash awards to projects with budgets that are at least 10% higher than the amount of the award request. A \$10,000 award request requires a budget of at least \$11,000.

How is the grant money distributed? All recipients are required to attend a grantee orientation, where they will receive their first allotment of funds. All recipients are also required to submit a business plan during the course of the 2027 cycle, at which point a second allotment will be released. Recipients receive a third and final payment upon completion of the grant requirements.

Timeline for 2027 WNC AgOptions Proposals

- October 9, 2026: Intent to Apply Deadline. All applicants *must* contact their county Cooperative Extension Agent by this date to discuss their projects. Once that contact is made, fill out this form by October 9: <https://go.ncsu.edu/wncagopt27>
- November 9, 2026 at 11:59 p.m.: Application deadline – completed hardcopy or digital applications must be received by the deadline to be considered for review.
- December 1 - 3, 2026: WNC AgOptions representatives may contact finalists for phone interviews if additional information is required.
- The week of January 4, 2027: Letters of acceptance or regret will be sent to all applicants.
- Thursday, January 28, 2027: Recipients are required to attend a one-day orientation/educational workshop. Details will be sent with an acceptance notification.

Requirements of 2027 WNC AgOptions Grant Recipients:

1. Recipients must attend the WNC AgOptions orientation and will receive their first grant allotment there.
2. Recipients must provide a financial contribution of 10% or more of their total grant award towards their total project budget.
3. Recipients must keep accurate production and financial records on the project and supply a copy of those records at the completion of the project. Copies of receipts for project expenditures at least 10% higher than their award amount will be required.
4. Recipients must submit a business plan to WNC AgOptions by May 31, 2027 to receive their second allotment of grant funds.
5. Recipients must be present for a farm visit, during which a WNC AgOptions representative will observe, document, and discuss progress on the project.
6. To receive the final \$500 allotment, recipients must have their farm visit completed, submit year-end reporting including final income, expenses and receipts, the North Carolina Grants compliance reporting form, and complete a survey collecting feedback about the program and results of their project, by December 31, 2027.
7. Recipients must be available via mail and/or phone calls throughout the year. Email access is helpful.
8. Recipients will recognize WNC AgOptions and the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission as the funders/supporters of the project in all materials/marketing/advertising used to promote the project (WNC AgOptions will provide appropriate logos, usage guide and yard sign).
9. WNC AgOptions will include the recipients' projects in public relations, outreach, demonstration and education in 2027 and future years.

Applicants should direct all questions regarding this application to:

WNC AgOptions
(828) 252-4783
agoptions@wnccommunities.org