

STEWARDSHIP MATCHING GRANT

OVERVIEW

Purpose

The intent of this program is to increase farmland protection in the state of Maine by providing a land trust with grant funds to help cover the costs associated with stewarding an agricultural conservation easement. Many land trusts seek to raise stewardship funds from the easement grantor; however, some landowners may not be in a financial position to make a sufficient contribution. This program aims to lessen the financial burden associated with stewardship of agricultural conservation easements for landowners and/or land trusts.

Project Eligibility

Eligible projects must involve the placement of a permanent agricultural conservation easement on a property that is farmland or is suitable for a viable farm operation. Projects on properties that are not currently farmed are not precluded, as long as the application materials demonstrate how those properties are well-suited to farming. The easement to be placed on the property must be structured with adequate flexibility to enable commercially viable agriculture to occur. In most instances, the easement is expected to either follow MFT's boilerplate for agricultural easements or to follow another easement model which also ensures that the property is well-positioned for future farm use, including provisions that allow a farmstead area and new agricultural structures. The project must be expected to be completed within 12 months of the application.

Holder Eligibility

The land trust receiving a grant must be a qualified conservation organization with a 501(c)3 designation from the IRS with a service area within the state of Maine.

Grant Awards

MFT offers grants of up to \$5,000 or 50% of a land trust's typical stewardship requirement, whichever is lower. An application must document the land trust's commitment to match the grant with a cash sum that meets or exceeds the amount of the grant award. The match may be a gift provided by the landowner or a sum contributed by the land trust. Funds will be dispersed directly to the holder land trust following the project's successful completion. A signed and recorded conservation easement and documentation of match (acceptable to MFT) must be provided prior to funds being dispersed. Stewardship grants may be used in conjunction with MFT's project transaction grant. The total amount that MFT will award from the combination of both grants will not exceed \$10,000.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

The land trust who will hold the easement should complete the following application materials and submit via email to:

Adam Bishop, abishop@mainefarmlandtrust.org

1. **Completed Project Application Form**
2. **Property Maps (all of which should indicate property boundaries):**
 - a. Soils map (for maps, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit the USDA Web Soil Survey at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm>)
 - b. Aerial map (Google Earth map is suitable)
3. **Copy of proposed agricultural conservation easement**, if available or copy of organization's easement boilerplate.
4. **Signed Available Cash Match Form** executed by the land trust, verifying that the required cash match will be available upon project completion. This verification form can be found at the end of this application.

You may also mail your application materials to:

Maine Farmland Trust
97 Main Street, Belfast, ME 04915
Attn: Adam Bishop

Deadline

Applications will be accepted at any time, and MFT will respond as soon as possible (with the goal of responding within six weeks). Since this program has limited funding, it is possible that MFT will disperse all of the funds available for a given year prior to the receipt of a grant application. In such an instance, MFT may invite the applicant to re-apply for the subsequent cycle of funding.

Evaluation Criteria

- Importance of this funding to the successful placement of an easement on the property;
- Current activity level of farm and potential future use;
- Presence of good agricultural soils;
- Likelihood that, if not protected, the property will be converted to non-farm use;
- Proximity to other active farms;
- Proximity to other protected land (not necessarily farmland);
- Project readiness;
- The land trust's demonstrated organizational capacity to draft, monitor, and enforce a suitable conservation easement (or willingness to partner with MFT to do so).

Grant Agreement

The land trust must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that describes each party's roles and responsibilities and will serve as a grant agreement. A sample MOU is attached.

STEWARDSHIP MATCHING GRANT APPLICATION FORM

1. LAND TRUST INFORMATION	
a) Land Trust Name	
b) Land Trust Address <i>(Street Address)</i> <i>(Town, State Zip Code)</i>	
c) Land Trust Contact/Project Manager	
d) Does land trust currently use a boilerplate agricultural easement document? If so, does it cover the following?	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, it includes the following (check all that apply.): <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to construct new farm-related buildings and infrastructure. <input type="checkbox"/> Allows for construction of farm worker housing. <input type="checkbox"/> Allows reconfiguration into 2 separate farm parcels (if suitable). <input type="checkbox"/> Requires Forest Management Plan. <input type="checkbox"/> Designates Farmstead Areas.
2. PROJECT SUMMARY	
a) Project Title (or Farm Name)	
b) Landowner Name	
c) Farm Location <i>(Street address)</i> <i>(Town, State Zip Code)</i> <i>(County)</i>	
d) Acreage	Total Acreage: _____ Open/tillable acres: _____ Wooded acres: _____
e) Farmland Soils	Acres in Prime Farmland Soils: _____ Acres in Soils of Statewide Importance: _____ Acres in Soils of Local Importance (as available): _____ Acres in Unique Farmland Soils (e.g., blueberries): _____
f) Estimated Closing Date	
3. DESCRIPTION OF FARM OPERATION	
a) Briefly describe the current or proposed farm operations. Document commercial activity	

<i>on the farm, including what products are being raised, how the products are marketed (e.g., sold to processor/wholesaler, direct sales via farmers markets and/or farm stand).</i>	
b) Does the property meet the State's definition of a current farm (by raising crops or livestock with an average annual value of at least \$2,000)? If not, please describe why this property is well suited for farming in the future.	
c) Discuss whether the property is threatened by conversion to non-farm use. (For ex., is the property going through generational transfer? Is the farmer struggling to stay in business? Is there high development pressure in the area?)	
d) List active farms and any protected land (not farmland) in close proximity to the property. List property name and town (if different from the town in which applicant property is located). OPTIONAL: attach a map indicating farm locations.	
4. DESCRIPTION OF LAND TRUST'S STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM	
a) Does land trust maintain dedicated funding for legal defense of easements (either in addition to or as part of an established stewardship fund)?	
b) Does land trust maintain easement insurance that would provide funding for legal defense?	
5. AWARD REQUEST	
a) Amount of Award Request	
b) Has the required cash match already been secured (either raised or pledged)?	

Proposal prepared by:

Signature of Land Trust Board President or Executive Director: _____ Date: _____

AVAILABLE CASH MATCH VERIFICATION FORM

Land Trust Name:

Land Trust Address:

On behalf of _____ I, _____ do hereby verify that
(Land Trust) (Authorized Representative)

_____ has raised/will raise stewardship funding in the amount of \$_____ for the
(Land Trust) (circle one)

_____ project, and that the required matching funds will be available
(Name of Farm)

upon completion of the project. My signature on this form indicates that [Land Trust] will be able to secure the required matching funds, and that we understand that any grant award will not be released to us until we can provide evidence that the required matching funds are in hand.

Signed:

Land Trust Representative, Title

Date

**STEWARDSHIP MATCHING GRANT
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING [SAMPLE]**

Date

Holder Land Trust Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear [LT],

Congratulations on your recent Stewardship Matching Grant award of \$_____ from Maine Farmland Trust. This grant has been awarded to support the project identified in your application.

Grant funds will be available once the [Land Trust] has confirmed with MFT that: 1) the easement has been signed and recorded; and 2) the required matching stewardship funds have been raised.

NOTE: Grant funds will not be distributed until Maine Farmland Trust has received notification from your organization of the items listed above.

Please **review and initial** the following requirements to ensure that you understand the grant guidelines:

- _____ The Land Trust agrees to credit MFT in any publicity about the grant and in broader publicity about the project (wherever appropriate).
- _____ The Land Trust shall notify MFT in writing if there are substantive changes in the project from what was detailed in the grant application. A substantive change would include anything that affects the project timetable or the overall terms of the easement.

Please sign and date below to indicate your agreement with the above requirements. Return the letter to MFT at your earliest convenience, but no later than 30 days from the date of this letter. Failure to return a signed agreement to MFT within 30 days could result in the loss of grant funds being put aside for your project. If you have questions or comments, please contact Adam Bishop at abishop@mainefarmlandtrust.org or 207-338-6575.

Sincerely,

Adam Bishop
Farmland Protection Program Director

REVIEWED AND AGREED TO:

Land Trust Representative, Title

DATE