

**Truterra Climate SMART  
Request For Applications: 2024-USDA-SMART-002  
Conservation Agronomy Program  
Modified July 11, 2024**

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Truterra, the sustainability business of Land O’ Lakes, Inc. a farmer-owned cooperative, has been awarded a grant from the USDA to build markets for climate-smart commodities and to scale production of climate-smart corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton and milk in the United States. Over the course of five years, Truterra will support rapid scaling of its full system approach to help farmers plan, adopt, quantify, and market climate-smart commodities. One facet of this grant is to provide Conservation Agronomy support to farmers through Truterra’s ag retailers (“Retailers”). This will include initiatives to connect farmers with conservation program funding; enhance sustainability expertise within the Retailer’s organization; and provide outreach and education to farmers, including Historically Underserved farmers. These efforts will assist farmers in building healthy, resilient, and highly functioning soil systems, and put Retailers in a position to provide technical and operational support to farmers that are transitioning to climate smart practices. After the subaward is complete, it is anticipated that the Conservation Agronomist will have established meaningful relationships with farmers and add enough value to the Retailer for the Retailer to continue funding the position independently.

This Conservation Agronomist opportunity is part of a USDA funded project that aims to assist Truterra Retailers to fund a Conservation Agronomist position. This program is funded under USDA Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities (CFDA 10.937) Award No. NR233A750004G016.

<b>RFA Number:</b>	RFA- Climate SMART - 2024 -002
<b>Issuance Date:</b>	06/05/2024
<b>Modified Date:</b>	07/11/2024
<b>Deadline for Questions:</b>	06/26/2024
<b>Information Session:</b>	06/06/2024, 10:00am CST
<b>Deadline for Submission:</b>	08/21/2024, 11:59pm CST
<b>Anticipated Award Mechanism(s):</b>	Fixed Amount Subawards
<b>Eligibility:</b>	Truterra Retailers located in the United States (excluding AK, HI, and NM)
<b>Submit Applications to:</b>	<a href="https://www.truterraag.com/conservation-agronomist-rfa">https://www.truterraag.com/conservation-agronomist-rfa</a>

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this Request for Applications (RFA) is to invite Truterra Retailers to develop and submit applications for a Conservation Agronomist funding opportunity through a call for applications. There is a total funding pool of \$6M, which will be offered across two separate RFAs. This is the second RFA.

This RFA describes the type of grant and activity for which applications will be considered; describes the funding available, applicant eligibility requirements, the application process and requirements; and explains the criteria for evaluating applications.

The RFA provides prospective applicants with a fair opportunity to submit applications to Truterra for funding opportunities in the conservation agronomy sector.

Under this RFA, Truterra intends to fund approximately \$3.4 million in subawards for a maximum period of 3 year(s). We anticipate issuing subawards up to \$250,000 over the course of the 3-year grant term. The retailer is expected to co-invest in this award by investing in Conservation Agronomist recruitment, onboarding, and capacity building. These applications are designed to provide conservation agronomy services by a single Conservation Agronomist. Applications are limited to funding the climate smart commodity production support activities that can be reasonably delivered by one Conservation Agronomist per Truterra Retailer. **Truterra reserves the right to make a single award, multiple awards, fund parts of an application, or not make any awards. Applicants selected by Truterra must also be approved by USDA. Issuance of this RFA neither constitutes an award commitment on the part of Truterra nor does it commit Truterra to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of any application.** All costs incurred in the preparation of an application are the sole responsibility of the applicant.

## **B. PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

### **1. Program DESCRIPTION AND OVERALL OBJECTIVE**

Truterra's years of experience delivering sustainability insights has led to important findings about what motivates producers to adjust their management systems to favor regenerative production. Key among these learnings is that farmers must see and learn firsthand the compelling reasons to change their current practices. They must experience the co-benefits of climate-smart farming such as enhanced resilience, improved natural resources quality, greater long-term profitability *and* additional market-based revenue streams. To make and continue climate-smart practice changes, farmers require ongoing assistance and support from trusted and well-informed allies with agronomic and farm operation expertise, resources to identify financial assistance opportunities, and support for data management to both document and reinforce the co-benefits of the climate-smart practices.

Truterra will facilitate climate-smart practice adoption through co-investment in conservation agronomy activities and deployment of Conservation Agronomist positions. As experts in farmer connection and sustainable agronomy practices, Conservation Agronomists will provide educational resources to farmers, facilitate peer network opportunities, and educate farmers on the availability and requirements of sustainability programs. Conservation Agronomists, as influencers for climate smart systems adoption, will be integral in Truterra's mission to provide all farmers access to practices and programs that promote increased adoption of sustainability practices. Conservation Agronomists will support producers as they implement climate smart solutions on cropland acres by implementing practices such as cover crops, reduced tillage, and precision nutrient management.

### **2. OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF GRANTS OPPORTUNITY**

Truterra will provide fixed amount subawards to Retailers to implement and deploy Conservation Agronomy support to farmers starting in FY2024. Retailers are responsible for hiring a Conservation Agronomist and deploying that individual to provide the support services identified in the negotiated subaward. These uniquely trained individuals will bridge the gap between ag retail agronomy and traditional soil and water conservation.

## **C. SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES TO BE FUNDED**

Fixed amount subaward funds will be used to fund costs associated with implementation and deployment of Conservation Agronomy support at the Retailer's organization for up to three years. Conservation Agronomists will create and implement a plan to engage farmers, initiate practice change, and educate farmers about public and privately funded conservation programs - including USDA and Truterra programs. This subaward will enable the conservation agronomist to provide outreach and education to farmers **and the agronomy professionals that support them**. Required skills and experience of the conservation agronomist performing work under this subaward include 1) experience consulting with farmers to successfully produce corn, soy, cotton, and/or wheat, 2) excellent one-on-one technical assistance skills, presentation skills, facilitation skills, and communication skills to enable them to become a member of an expert cohort of influencers built by this project, who facilitate peer-to-peer connections and farmer adoption of better management systems, 3) experience with successful implementation of soil health building conservation agronomic practices such as reducing tillage, cover cropping, precision nitrogen management, and developing improved crop rotations.

Reporting of metrics under this award include, but are not limited to:

- Farmer outreach measured by targeted campaigns informing farmers about the support provided under this subaward (email campaigns, e-newsletter, direct mail, etc.)
- Farmer outreach to historically underserved communities and farmers measured by number of farmers reached who self-identify as meeting the definition of historically underserved groups. ([Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/nrc/historically-underserved-farmers-and-ranchers))
- Farmer engagement measured by total number farmers engaging in individualized Climate Smart Commodity planning. (Note, you must not require a farmer to purchase materials or services from your retail location; farmers must receive technical support regardless of where they choose to source materials.)
- Climate Smart Commodity (CSC) plans delivered (e.g. annual plan providing agronomic and conservation recommendations on a given field or operation for a specific commodity(ies)).
- Farmer education about the availability of public, commercial and non-profit climate smart and regenerative agriculture programs including public, non-profit and private commercial programs – measured by number of farmers reached through email, direct mail, workshops, and field days. This does not include enrollment, data collection or verification in Truterra programs, but it does include education about the availability of these programs.
- Field day and workshop participation measured by number of events and number of participants.
- Number of training events for Truterra network provider staff (cross functional internal training).
- Truterra-sponsored event participation measured conservation agronomist attendance at specific training events: Partners in Excellence, Truterra Field days, Conservation Connections webinars, WinField United Professional Agronomy Training course, etc.
- Participation in American Farmland Trust's Advanced Soil Health Training, and complete associated evaluation surveys and focus group discussions.

#### **D. INSTRUCTIONS TO APPLICANTS**

### 1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Truterra seeks applications from Truterra Retailers who wish to employ a Conservation Agronomist that will provide the technical support described in Section C., above. Applicants may only apply for one subaward under this RFA; applicants that were selected under the preceding RFA Climate SMART-2023-001 are not eligible under this RFA. Retailers must be committed as an active Truterra Network Provider by the application deadline. The subaward will only cover costs associated with one Conservation Agronomist per Retailer providing this support.

### 2. PROGRAM DURATION

A total of up to \$6 million of funding for Conservation Agronomy support will be funded through this Conservation Agronomy opportunity. Approximately \$3.4 million will be funded through this RFA. The subawards issued to applicants under this RFA will last up to three (3) years.

### 3. TECHNICAL & BUDGET APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applications are to be presented in following format, while making clear reference to activities and measurable outcomes referenced in Section C.:

**a) Cover Page (one page):** The cover page must include:

- Retailer and primary contact person
  - ✓ Retailer's name
  - ✓ Primary contact person's name
  - ✓ Primary contact person's title or position within the organization
  - ✓ Primary contact person's email address
  - ✓ Primary contact person's telephone number
  - ✓ Primary contact person's office address
- Full legal name, address and phone number of individual with authorization to sign any potential subaward on behalf of the retailer
- State(s) and counties(s) serviced by the Retailer
- Number of agronomy locations and approximate acres serviced
- Average annual acres where you are providing service on corn, soybeans, wheat and/or cotton (approximate)
- The Retailer's headquarters location

**b) Milestone and Budget Workbook:**

Provided at <https://www.truterraag.com/conservation-agronomist-rfa>

- A detailed budget, supporting milestone activities (see attached template).
- Offer clear detail and value to show the Truterra network provider's proposed contribution to delivery of conservation agronomy support.

**c) Technical Narrative** (4 pages or less. Page limit does not include cover page or milestone and budget workbook):

#### Duties and Role

- Describe the Retailer’s need to employ a Conservation Agronomist to support their clients and communities, focused on facilitating climate smart practice adoption.
- Describe the general duties that a Conservation Agronomist would fulfill.
- Describe a training plan to develop understanding of both agronomic and sustainability aspects of this position.
- Confirm your commitment to fund Conservation Agronomist attendance at Truterra sponsored meetings and events designed for the network of Conservation Agronomists. We anticipate a minimum of 8 events annually, to include:
  - Conservation Connections (6 times annually, 0.5 days each)
  - Partners in Excellence (Travel costs covered by Truterra)
  - Regional Field Days (once annually)
- Confirm your commitment to Conservation Agronomist completion of the American Farmland Trust Advanced Soil Health Training course, which will include four (4) two (2)-day sessions held regionally.
- Confirm your commitment to attend and cover participation costs for the WinField United Professional Agronomy Training course, a 5 day, in-person training course.
- Describe how a Conservation Agronomist will execute the proposed deliverables. Please include a detailed description of 1) development and delivery of outreach materials 2) when and where workshops and field days will occur – and how plan to facilitate peer to peer connections at these events, and 3) farm level data collection for individual CSC plans.
- Describe how a Conservation Agronomist will interface with various parts of your organization to provide cross functional training and value (e.g. buy-in for conservation agronomy practices and services): sales agronomy, precision agronomy, marketing, etc.

### **Growth Opportunities**

- Describe how your organization would successfully transition the Conservation Agronomist position to a role fully funded by your organization at the conclusion of the subaward.
- Describe how this position will enable your business to integrate and offer additional regenerative ag services or reach.

### **Education, Outreach and Monitoring**

Describe how your organization would utilize a Conservation Agronomist to:

- Provide education and outreach to growers;
- Provide education and outreach to rural communities, educational organizations, conservation groups, etc.;
- Reach historically underserved producers ([Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/historically-underserved-farmers-and-ranchers));

- Engage farmer customers in Truterra sponsored events (field days, Partners in Excellence, etc.);
- Identify growers to participate in a Truterra peer network group and create relevant content to educate farmers and network providers on sustainability practices; and
- Measure and report progress against the goals stated in the applicant questionnaire.

#### **4. NOTIFICATION OF PRE-AWARD SURVEY & APPROVAL OF CONSERVATION AGRONOMIST**

Truterra must perform a pre-award survey to assess the applicant's management, technical and financial capabilities, as applicable. If notified by Truterra that a pre-award survey is necessary, applicants must prepare, in advance, the required information and documents. Please note that a pre-award survey does not commit Truterra to make any subaward.

Based on assessment and reviews, applicants will be selected to receive a subaward. Successful applicants will be required to obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number from SAM.gov and must be approved by USDA. Truterra will work with the selected applicants to develop a final Scope of Work and budget, which will be included in the subaward agreement.

#### **E. EVALUATION CRITERIA**

##### **Minimum selection criteria**

Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria, and clearly articulate a commitment to participate in Truterra meetings and events (either in person or virtually) designed for the Conservation Agronomist network, will not be considered. Applications that do not clearly articulate a commitment to attend the Advanced Soil Health Training and Winfield United Professional Agronomy Training course will not be considered.

##### **Other selection criteria**

All compliant applications that meet the minimum selection criteria will be evaluated by the Truterra Grant Evaluation Committee against the following criteria:

- **Design and Plan for Execution of the Proposed Activity (50 points)**
  - Demonstrate the need and role of Conservation Agronomist.
  - Degree of reach of Conservation Agronomist as demonstrated by proposed adoption of conservation agronomy practices within serviced area.
  - Describe a sustainability plan such as your post-award transition plan of Conservation Agronomist to position fully funded by Retailer.
  - Demonstrate alignment with the Scope of Activities and designated milestones.
  - Demonstrate a detailed plan to engage and support targeted groups and farmers in the adoption of climate smart practices and services.
- **Budget (35 points)**
  - Cost reasonableness (including proposed salary relative to qualifications, provider labor market and proposed outcomes).
  - Demonstrated ability to show how funds will be used to support activities proposed in the technical narrative.

- **Project Management and Provider Capacity (15 points)**
  - Demonstrated experience and track record of the organization and personnel in the proposed area of work.
  - Demonstrates that the organization is appropriate in size and scope for proposed activities.
  - Demonstrated ability to monitor and report on the proposed activities.

## **F. GRANT APPLICATION SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

If your organization believes it has the background described above and meets all the eligibility criteria, we encourage your organization to submit an application for the grant funding. Please submit the following documents as an attachment to the application.

- Cover page: item D.3.a;
- Technical Application: D.3.c;
- Milestone and Budget workbook: item D.3.b;
- Organization chart, including the position to which the Conservation Agronomist will report, accompanied by a list of full names and titles of essential staff and the number of years/months the individuals have served in the organization

## **G. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION AND QUESTIONS**

The application should be submitted to: <https://www.truterraag.com/conservation-agronomist-rfa>

Should you have any questions regarding this RFA, please submit your questions through our website (<https://www.truterraag.com/conservation-agronomist-rfa>) by 06/26/2024, 11:59pm. Truterra anticipates reviewing and disseminating questions and answers to all interested applicants 07/10/2024. Truterra may modify questions to preserve anonymity of the individual or Truterra network provider submitting questions.

An information session will be held on 06/06/2024 via Zoom. The session will be recorded and shared with all potential applicants.