



# Soil Health and Optimizing Water Grants

## Colorado Soil Health Program

Healthy soil is the foundation of Colorado agriculture and a key to managing water in our State's arid and variable climate. Improved soil structure and organic matter increase infiltration and water-holding capacity, allowing producers to make the most of limited water supplies. These improvements also reduce runoff, erosion, and evaporation losses - keeping more water available for crops, replenishing groundwater, supporting local moisture recycling, and contributing to more consistent stream flows. By maintaining soil health, Colorado producers enhance resilience to drought and extreme weather while protecting the long-term stability of their operations and the health of their watersheds.

### **Purpose of the Grant**

This grant will provide funding to establish or expand projects that enhance soil function, focus on optimizing water resource management on working lands, and provide educational opportunities to the agricultural community. Projects should emphasize innovative, scalable approaches that improve soil function and strengthen water management on farms and ranches.

### **Eligible Entities**

- Individual Farmers and Ranchers
- Producer-Serving Organizations
- NGO's
- Research Institutions
- Local Governments, Conservation Districts

### **Eligible Project Types**

Eligible Projects must meet both of the following requirements:

1. Implement one or more practices on a farm or ranch or multiple farms/ranches to demonstrate a tie between soil health and water resource management.
2. Incorporate demonstrations, peer-to-peer learning, or other outreach components to share project outcomes with agricultural stakeholders.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) encourages you to be creative and explore water utilization strategies that are innovative and most essential for your operations. Your project will have the greatest impact when the broader community can learn from your efforts, particularly for those facing similar challenges.



## Maximum Award and Eligible Expenses

Each project may submit one application with a maximum award per project of **\$50,000**.

All expenses must be directly related to the goals and outcomes in the grantee application. Eligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Equipment purchases that are essential and/or innovative for monitoring and data collection
- Rental or lease of agricultural equipment necessary for project implementation
- Project-related supplies, materials and labor
- Construction and fabrication costs, including materials and labor
- Costs associated with grazing management
- Salaries and labor ([CSU Custom Rates](#) if needed)
- Travel expenses (aligned with the rates defined by the [US General Services Administration](#))
- Permitting costs, project assessments and feasibility studies
- Indirect costs (maximum 15% of grant award)

CDA has the full discretion to approve or deny expenses. Individual pieces of equipment purchased under this grant agreement must be less than \$10,000. **All equipment purchases, leases, or rentals must be approved in advance by CDA on a case-by-case basis.**

## Project Evaluation

An Evaluation Committee will review and evaluate applications using these metrics and recommend awards to the state Soil Health Advisory Committee for final approval.

- Soil Health Practice Adoption and Water Optimization
  - Projects with a clear focus on the relationship between soil health practices and water management will be rated more favorably. Proposals should clearly describe measurable outcomes and how the selected practices address specific water-related concerns on working lands. Stronger proposals will provide evidence of impact and scalability.
- Peer-to-Peer Learning or Knowledge Sharing
  - Projects that incorporate opportunities for producer-to-producer learning - such as field days, workshops, demonstration events, or participation in producer networks - will be rated more favorably. These activities should maximize the impact of knowledge sharing, encourage adoption of best practices, and support collective improvement across the agricultural community.
- Monitoring and Testing
  - Projects that employ comprehensive measurement tools to evaluate soil health practice effectiveness and track changes over time will be rated more favorably. Stronger proposals clearly describe the monitoring plan, including what will be measured, how often, and how the data will be used to evaluate success and share lessons with the broader community.



- Establish baseline measurements before implementation.
- Use consistent, scientifically valid methods to assess soil health indicators (e.g., soil organic matter, compaction, infiltration, nutrient levels).
- Conduct regular follow-up assessments to measure change over time.
- Collect data that can be analyzed and reported to demonstrate outcomes and inform future management decisions.

**Budget and Timeline**

- Projects should have a clear, well-defined budget
- Projects should include a detailed timeline of proposed activities
- Indirect costs should not be more than 15% of the award

**Project Timeline**

Grantees must include a proposed project timeline and estimated budget in their application. All grant funds must be fully expended no later than September 30, 2027, with all final reports and deliverables submitted by November 1, 2027.

This Schedule of Activities is for information purposes only. This Schedule of Activities is “Estimated” and may be subject to change depending on the needs of the State. Grants are paid on a reimbursement basis; goods purchased or any work performed prior to issuance of a formal commitment voucher from the state are not eligible for reimbursement.

<b>Schedule of Activities</b>	
<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>
Grant Application Period Opens	December 11, 2025
<a href="#">Grant Informational Webinar</a>	December 17, 2025 at 10am MT
Grant Submittal Deadline	January 20, 2026 5:00 pm MT
Applications Reviewed by Evaluation Committee	Jan 21 - February 18, 2026
Final Grant Approval by the Soil Health Advisory Committee	February 24, 2026
Estimated Issuance of Commitment Vouchers to Grantees (POGG1s or Contracts)	Starting March 31, 2026
End of Grant Period	September 30, 2027
Final Grant Report Due	December 1, 2027



## Funding Awards

Following application submission, CDA has the discretion to collaborate with applicants to refine budget requests as needed. Awardees are expected to participate in CDA-led outreach and communications for Soil Health and Water Resilience projects and to showcase their projects within their peer communities.

## Application Process

Applications must be submitted via [this form](#) by 5:00 pm MT on January 20th, 2026. Questions? Contact [cda\\_soil@state.co.us](mailto:cda_soil@state.co.us) with “Soil Health and Optimized Water Grant” in the subject line.

## Grant Evaluation Rubric

Category	Description and Considerations	Points
<b>Practice Implementation</b>	Projects with a clear focus on the relationship between soil health practices and water management will be rated more favorably. Proposals should clearly describe measurable outcomes and how the selected practices address specific water-related concerns on working lands. Stronger proposals will provide evidence of impact and scalability.	40
<b>Peer-to-Peer Learning</b>	Projects that incorporate opportunities for producer-to-producer learning - such as field days, workshops, demonstration events, or participation in producer networks - will be rated more favorably. These activities should maximize the impact of knowledge sharing, encourage adoption of best practices, and support collective improvement across the agricultural community.	30
<b>Monitoring/ Testing</b>	Projects that employ comprehensive measurement tools to evaluate soil health practice effectiveness and track changes over time will be rated more favorably. Stronger proposals clearly describe the monitoring plan, including what will be measured, how often and how the data will be used to evaluate success and share lessons with the broader community. Good monitoring includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishing baseline measurements before implementation.</li> <li>- Using scientifically valid methods to assess soil health indicators (e.g., soil organic matter, compaction, infiltration, nutrient levels).</li> <li>- Conducting follow-up assessments to measure change over time.</li> <li>- Collecting data that can be analyzed and reported to demonstrate outcomes and inform future management decisions.</li> </ul>	20
<b>Budget Justification</b>	The budget is clear, reasonable and well justified, aligning with the proposed activities, outcomes and project timeline.	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>



## Invoicing & Reporting Requirements

### Quarterly Invoices:

Grantees may submit invoices quarterly using the CDA grant progress report template, including:

- A brief narrative on progress toward grant deliverables.
- Budget updates (spent and remaining).
- Estimates of acres and producers impacted, including how the impact occurred.
- Additional supporting information as requested.

### Final Report:

Grantees must submit a final report within eight weeks of the grant's end date using the template, including:

1. **Project Narrative**
  - Description of all progress funded by this grant including any deviations from the original proposal.
2. **Project Outcomes, Performance Metrics, and Insights**
  - **Producers Engaged or Impacted:** Total number of producers reached, with a description of engagement or impact.
  - **Impacted Acres and Practices Implemented:** Total acres affected and details of soil health practices applied.
  - **Data, Results, and Interpretation**
3. **Public Materials Developed with Grant Funding**
  - Attach outreach or educational materials (e.g., fact sheets, presentations).



## Application Questions

Please submit your application using [this form](#)

### Applicant Info

- Email
- Applicant Name
- Applicant Phone Number
- Applicant Address
- Project County
- Estimated Number of Acres That Will Be Impacted by the Project

### Project Summary

Detailed responses to these questions will enhance your proposal.

- Briefly describe your operation or project.
- What soil health practice(s) will you implement and how will they improve water utilization or management on your operation?
- What specific water-related concern will this project address and what metrics will be used to determine success?
- How will your project incorporate peer-to-peer learning opportunities (e.g., field days, workshops, or producer networks) to facilitate knowledge sharing and collective improvement?
- How will this project impact other producers?
- How do you plan to conduct monitoring and testing of your proposed soil health practice? What key metrics will you use and how will baseline and follow-up testing track changes in soil health?
- List any project partners.
- List any potential conflicts of interest that may occur from your application for these funds (including any connection with CO Dept of Agriculture, the Soil Health Advisory Committee, other related grant funds).
- Describe the project timeline including major milestones.
- Please download the budget template and attach a complete budget. Budget Attachment ([template](#))