

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

FUND TO ADDRESS PFAS CONTAMINATION

[RFA # PFNDM2025002](#)

Major Grants for the Study of PFAS in Agricultural Systems, Round 2

RFA COORDINATOR	<i>All communication regarding the RFA <u>must</u> be made through the RFA Coordinator, identified below.</i> Name: Sarah Wilcox Title: PFAS Fund Research Administrator Contact email address: PFASFund.DACF@maine.gov
INFORMATION SESSION	Teams Meeting: October 16, 3:30 pm EST
PRE-PROPOSAL DUE	<i>Mandatory pre-proposals must be submitted via online form by:</i> Deadline: November 10, 2025, no later than 11:59 pm EST
SUBMITTED QUESTIONS DUE	<i>The RFA Coordinator must receive all questions by:</i> Deadline: December 10, 2025, no later than 11:59 pm
APPLICATION SUBMISSION DEADLINE	The <i>DACF must receive applications by:</i> Deadline: February 13, 2026, no later than 11:59 pm EST <i>Applications <u>must</u> be submitted electronically to</i> PFASFund.DACF@maine.gov



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ACRONYMS

APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
AWA	Animal Welfare Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CSV	Comma Separated Values
CV	Curriculum Vitae/Curricula Vitae
DACF	Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
EST	Eastern Standard Time
FOAA	State of Maine Freedom of Access Act
F&A	Facilities & Administration
FSA	Farm Service Agency
IACUC	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
IP	Intellectual Property
MS/MSD	Matrix Spike/Matrix Spike Duplicate
MTDC	Modified Direct Total Cost
NICRA	Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate
PDF	Portable Document Format
PFAS	per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances
PI	Principal Investigator
QAP	Quality Assurance Plan
RFA	Request for Application
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

1 INTRODUCTION

The State of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF or Department) Fund to Address PFAS¹ Contamination (PFAS Fund) is seeking applications for **Major Grants for the Study of PFAS in Agricultural Systems, Round 2**. Please read this Request for Applications (RFA) document and accompanying attachments in their entirety, as they provide instructions for submitting applications, the procedure and criteria by which the awardees will be selected, and the general contractual terms that will govern the relationship between the State of Maine (State) and the awardees.

This grant funding will support research to help commercial farmers make informed decisions about utilizing agricultural property impacted by PFAS. Priority research areas are:

1. PFAS in Agricultural Settings: Water, Soil, and Plant Studies
2. PFAS in Agricultural Settings: Animals and Animal Product Studies
3. Understanding and Managing PFAS in On-Farm Agricultural Settings and Products

Section 2 discusses the priorities more fully. If you have any questions or want to request reasonable accommodations necessary to complete this application, please contact the RFA Coordinator, Sarah Wilcox, at PFASFund.DACF@maine.gov.

1.1 Award Information Overview

The Maine DACF PFAS Fund: Major Grants for the Study of PFAS in Agricultural Systems, Round 2 application is the second announcement of research funds by the DACF PFAS Fund. DACF anticipates awarding \$3,000,000 under this announcement, dependent on the availability of funds, quality of applications received, and other relevant considerations. The PFAS Fund will fund multiple projects with a minimum value of \$100,000 and a maximum value of \$500,000 each. Requests over \$500,000 (including indirect costs) will not be considered. Proposals should assume a project period of 24 months.

Requests of less than \$100,000 should be submitted under the RFA for Targeted Grants (see below).

Key dates for this RFA are presented in **Section 4. Mandatory pre-proposals** are due by November 10, 2024. Pre-proposals will be evaluated on the proposed project's competitiveness within the grant funding round. **Full proposals from applicants who did not submit a pre-proposal will not be considered.**

Full proposals will be assessed based on the scoring criteria included within this RFA. Final decision-making authority rests with the Commissioner of DACF based on an internal non-technical review for completeness and conformity with the terms of this RFA, the scoring criteria, and the peer reviewers' recommendations. If there is a tie among the highest-ranked proposals, the Commissioner may also consider the degree to which results of the proposed research have broad application to, or affect large segments of, the PFAS-impacted agricultural community; the degree to which the research is designed to produce data and methods that can immediately or with little to no translation be utilized by

¹ "PFAS" means per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

producers to better assess or manage PFAS in agricultural systems; and whether a proposal presents a duplication of effort.

An RFA for the first round of Targeted Grants for the Study of PFAS in Agricultural Systems is also available, with the same deadlines as this Major Grant RFA. Targeted grants can be funded for an amount less than \$100,000. See [RFA# PFNDT2025001](#).

Additional award opportunities, separate from the current targeted and major grant RFAs, will be available through at least State fiscal year 2027.

1.2 General Provisions

From the time this RFA is issued until award notification is made, all contact with the State regarding this RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified on the cover page of this RFA.

The issuance of the RFA does not commit the Department to issuing an award or paying expenses incurred by an applicant in preparing a response to the RFA.

All applications must adhere to the instructions and format requirements outlined in the RFA, as well as all written supplements and amendments issued by the Department. Applications must follow the format and respond to all questions and instructions specified within this RFA. All research proposals seeking funding from the PFAS Fund will be reviewed by the Department for completeness and conformity with the terms of the RFA. The Department has sole discretion to determine whether a variance from the RFA specifications will result in disqualification or a reduction in scoring.

Applicants should note that in evaluating an application submitted in response to this RFA, the Department will consider only the materials provided in the application.

The RFA and the awardee's proposal, including all appendices or attachments, will be the basis for the final contract, as determined by the Department.

Grant recipients who engage or assist in science-related activities funded by the Department are expected to uphold the highest principles of scientific integrity while conducting, supervising, managing, and reporting scientific work; analyzing and publicly communicating information resulting from scientific work; and utilizing information derived from scientific work in policy and decision-making.

Projects shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations, such as workplace safety standards and equal hiring opportunity laws. It shall be the applicant's responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them. All PFAS waste associated with projects shall be handled and disposed of in accordance with the appropriate standards at the time of disposal. Note that Maine does not permit the land application of sludge per 38 M.R.S. § 1304 sub § 13-E, and no proposals that include the spreading of sludge will be funded by the DACF.

1.3 Public Records

Following the announcement of an award decision, all submissions in response to this RFA will be public records, available for public inspection upon request under the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) (1 M.R.S. § 401 et seq.). If an applicant submits information that would provide competitors an

opportunity to obtain business or a competitive advantage over the person to whom the information belongs or pertains, or would result in loss or other significant detriment to that person, the applicant may designate such information as “Confidential Information” within their proposal pursuant to 7 M.R.S. §20.

1.4 Background of the DACF PFAS Fund and Governing Documents

Maine Governor Janet Mills created the PFAS Fund in 2022 to support farmers whose land and/or water are contaminated with PFAS. The PFAS Fund is a first-in-the-country coordinated effort to specifically address PFAS in agriculture and is governed by [7 M.R.S.A. c. 10-D](#). One goal of the PFAS Fund is to fund research that allows farmers to make informed decisions about how to adjust their operations in light of PFAS contamination. Additional goals of the PFAS Fund include direct financial support for affected farmers, the purchase and management of PFAS-contaminated agricultural land, and mental and physical health-related initiatives.

More information, including a [detailed timeline](#) of the PFAS response in Maine and the PFAS Fund rules, can be found online on the DACF webpage. The DACF PFAS Fund is part of the more extensive, integrated, multi-agency investigation of and response to PFAS throughout Maine. DACF’s primary focus is safeguarding human health and ensuring the viability of farms.

Applicants are advised to review the linked documents and websites before beginning the pre-proposal to ensure that the proposed project aligns not only with the priorities established in this RFA (**Section 2**) but with the goals of the DACF and the PFAS Fund as a whole.

2 RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The following research priorities have been developed and refined through a public process.

The example topics provided for each category are not considered an exhaustive list of topics suitable for funding within each category.

Priority 1: PFAS in Agricultural Settings: Soil, Water, and Plant Studies

This category examines the fate and transport of PFAS in agricultural soil, water, and crop systems.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Studies related to the influence of soil properties on PFAS contamination, including residence time and modeling;
- Changes in PFAS levels in soil over time; how different variables influence the rate of change;
- PFAS sorption and transport kinetics in soil;
- Irrigation-based PFAS migration pathways through soil-water systems;
- PFAS transfer factors (also known as bioconcentration factors) such as transfer from:
 - irrigation water to soil,
 - soil to groundwater, and

- soil or water to crops consumed or utilized by animals or humans (e.g., vegetables, fruits, forage, grain, or specialty crops such as Christmas trees).

Priority 2: PFAS in Agricultural Settings: Animal and Animal Product Studies

This category includes research to broaden the understanding of PFAS uptake and movement through livestock and poultry and their fate in animal products (e.g., milk, eggs, meat).

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Predictive models for soil to forage crop to livestock to food commodity pathways;
- Livestock and poultry transfer/bioconcentration factors and factors that affect them (e.g., forage/feed transfer factor for meat/milk/eggs, how transfer factors change seasonally);
- Livestock correlation studies (e.g., the correlation between PFAS in more readily sampled media, including blood, milk, eggs, or ear punches, and muscle or organ tissue);
- Livestock and poultry elimination kinetics studies;
- Influence of feed additives/binders on PFAS levels in animals and animal products;
- Accumulation of PFAS in various value-added dairy products (e.g., cream, yogurt, butter, cheese, etc.); and
- Pollinators: bioaccumulation of PFAS in pollen and nectar; assessment of pollinator and hive health; assessment of potential impact on crops that require pollination (e.g., blueberries)

Priority 3: Understanding and Managing PFAS on the Farm

This category includes research designed to 1) enhance the management and understanding of PFAS in agricultural settings and 2) develop tools to increase the speed and reliability of on-farm management decisions related to PFAS contamination.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Development of decision support tools (e.g., when it is safe to return farm products to the market? When can animals be safely released for slaughter post-depuration?);
- Soil management strategies and their relative effectiveness in reducing the impact of PFAS contamination (e.g., till versus no-till);
- On-field crop management strategies to reduce PFAS (e.g., harvest timing, forage species selection, pasturing strategies);
- Post-harvest investigations of how PFAS levels change throughout the life cycle of forage crops, from harvesting in the field to storage, and potential management practices related to those changes
- Alternative crop production potential on PFAS-contaminated land (e.g., grains, maple syrup, Christmas trees);
- Risks and benefits of animal fiber production on PFAS-impacted land;
- Use of biomass from impacted fields (e.g., construction, textiles, mulch); and,
- Treatment and/or low-risk disposal methods for PFAS-contaminated byproducts (biomass, manure, carcasses, milk, compost).

3 ELIGIBILITY

Participation in this RFA is open to US-based public and private nonprofit institutions/organizations, public and private institutions of higher education, state and local governments, and Tribal governments. If you have questions about whether you or your organization is eligible for this grant, please contact the RFA Coordinator.

DACF encourages applicants from all races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic classes, and career stages.

4 TIMELINE AND IMPORTANT DATES

The timeline and relevant dates for the 2025-2026 Research Grant Award Cycle are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Timeline for Round 2 Major Research Grant Award Cycle

DATE	ITEM
October 1, 2025	Call for pre-proposals opens via online form
October 16, 2025	Information session at 3:30 pm EST
November 10, 2025	Call for pre-proposals closes at 11:59 pm EST
November 21, 2025	Pre-proposal assessment forms sent to applicants
December 10, 2025	Questions on the full proposal due to RFA Coordinator
December 12, 2025	Responses to researcher questions posted online
February 13, 2026	Complete applications due by 11:59 pm EST
May 8, 2026	Anticipated notification date of project award decisions
Upon signed contract	Funding committed; 24-month period of performance begins
Two years post-award	The period of performance closes

5 PRE-PROPOSAL PROCESS AND APPLICATION DETAILS

The proposal process for the 2025-2026 grant cycle consists of a pre-proposal phase and a full proposal phase. Pre-proposals are submitted directly to the RFA Coordinator via this [online form](#) and evaluated using the Pre-Proposal Evaluation Form (**Attachment A**). Full proposals from applicants who did not submit a pre-proposal will not be considered for this RFA.

5.1 Information Session

There will be an information session on October 16 at 3:30 pm on [Teams](#) before the pre-proposal submission deadline, which will include an overview of the RFA and an opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions. Farmers and agricultural producers who have expressed interest in collaborating on a research proposal or participating in research will be invited to the information session. During the information sessions, researchers and farmers/producers will have an opportunity to share their research interests and contact information.

Questions and answers discussed during the information session will be collated and included in the document produced from the written Q&A process prior to the deadline for full applications (see section 6.2).

5.2 Feedback on Pre-Proposal

There will be no formal assessment of the project's intellectual or technical merit by peer reviewers at the pre-proposal stage. Rather, feedback to the principal investigator (PI) will focus on whether the full proposal is expected to be competitive within the round of grant funding addressed in this RFA. This non-technical screening will evaluate pre-proposals for relevance to the goals and priorities described in this RFA. Staff reviewing pre-proposals must attest that they have no conflicts of interest.

The review will include an advisory decision based only on relevance to the goals and priorities as follows:

- **The application is considered competitive.** This means that DACF has reviewed the pre-proposal and deems the project competitive for funding.
- **Application is not considered competitive.** This means that DACF has reviewed the pre-proposal and deems that the project is not competitive for funding. Receiving an adverse advisory decision does not preclude the applicant from completing a full proposal. Still, it indicates that the likelihood of project funding is low based on the information provided in the pre-proposal form.

Feedback will be provided to all applicants, regardless of the advisory decision. If a high volume of applications is received, DACF may limit the level of feedback to applicants.

6 FULL PROPOSAL PROCESS AND APPLICATION DETAILS

Section 6.1. provides details on the application content requirements. **Section 6.2** describes the question-and-answer process for this RFA. **Section 6.3** provides details on the submission process. Feedback for full proposals will be provided to applicants via the Proposal Review Form (**Attachment B**) and is included to guide the development of proposals.

It is the applicant's responsibility to provide complete and sufficient information in the full proposal and complete every mandatory application section.

Reminder: If you did not submit a pre-proposal, your full proposal application will not be considered.

6.1 Full Proposal Required Content

6.1.1 Content Overview

Full proposals must include the three parts detailed in **Sections 6.1.2—6.1.4**. An overview of the required documents and document parts is provided in **Table 2**. Applicants should not provide additional attachments beyond those specified in the RFA or Application Form.

Table 2: Full Proposal Overview

Item	Title	Type	Required?	File(s) to Submit	Section
Part I: Key Contacts and Project Information					
1	Part I Form	Fillable PDF	Yes	One (1) PDF Document 'MG_DACF_PFAS_PI NAME_PART I'	6.1.2
2	Curriculum Vitae(s) Attachment	Attachment	Yes		
3	Indirect Rate Documentation	Attachment	Include only if the applicant has an existing policy that defines the indirect rate for agreements with the State of Maine		
Part II: Project Narrative					
1	Introduction/Project Description	Section in Narrative	Yes	One (1) PDF Document 'MG_DACF_PFAS_PI NAME_PART II' Items 1-13 should be no more than 12 pages, single-spaced, with 1- inch margins and 11- point font. Excess pages will be removed prior to peer review. Required and optional attachments are not included in this page limit.	6.1.3
2	Roles and Responsibilities	Section in Narrative	Yes		
3	Literature Review	Section in Narrative	Yes		
4	Rationale, Significance, Outcomes	Section in Narrative	Yes		
5	Research Methodology	Section in Narrative	Yes		
6	Timeline	Section in Narrative	Yes		
7	Research Facility/Site/Resources	Section in Narrative	Yes		
8	Duplication of Efforts	Section in Narrative	Yes		
9	Quality Assurance Measures	Section in Narrative	Yes		
10	Deliverables, Data Management, Share Plan	Section in Narrative	Yes		
11	Additional Funding	Section in Narrative	Optional		
12	Future Work	Section in Narrative	Optional		
13	Other	Section in Narrative	Optional		
14	References	Attachment	Yes		
15	Letter(s) of Support	Attachment	Yes		
16	Letter(s) of Commitment from Collaborators		If applicable		
17	Animal Welfare Plan Documentation	Attachment	If project includes live animals		
18	Institutional Review Board Documentation	Attachment	If project involves human subjects		

19	Financial Review	Attachment	If not from an accredited research institution		
20	Proof of Funds	Attachment	If leveraging additional funds		
Part III: Budget Worksheet and Narrative					
1	Budget Worksheet	Excel Worksheet	Yes	One (1) excel workbook 'MG_DACF_PFAS_PI NAME_PART III'	6.1.4

6.1.2 Full Proposal Part I: Key Contacts and Project Information

To complete Full Proposal Part I, complete the form in **Attachment C** and attach Curricula Vitae (CV) and negotiated rate agreement documentation, if applicable. One PDF of the form and attachments should be submitted for this section as MG_DACF_PFAS_PI NAME_PART I. Note that 'PI NAME' is a placeholder and should be replaced with the name of the Primary PI.

The form will outline the following high-level information: all key individuals and their associated roles and institutions, a budget/funding overview, a research location overview, and the project description.

DACF requires any individuals named as a PI or co-PI on the application to submit a CV with relevant information for review. Upload the CV as an attachment to Full Proposal Part I. The length of each CV should not exceed ten pages. An applicant may include CVs of additional collaborators if the applicant believes doing so will add merit to the application, but they are not required.

Indirect costs are capped at 10 percent.² Notwithstanding the previous sentence, if an applicant is a Maine-based institution that has an existing policy that defines the indirect rate for agreements with the State of Maine as a percentage of that institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate, the indirect rate shall be no more than one-half of that institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate. Submit documentation if applicable.

When calculating indirect costs, the total cost of salary, fringe benefits, supplies, publication fees, and travel can be included; the first \$25,000 of each service or subaward can be included; and the cost of rentals, equipment, and tuition remission cannot be included.

6.1.3 Full Proposal Part II: Project Narrative

To complete Full Proposal Part II, submit a single PDF that includes narrative text and all required attachments, listed in **Table 2** and detailed within this section. The PDF document should be named 'MG_DACF_PFAS_PI NAME_PART II'. Note that 'PI NAME' is a placeholder and should be replaced with the name of the Primary PI.

The Project Narrative should be no more than 12 pages, single-spaced, with 1-inch margins and 11-point font, plus the required and optional attachments. Excess pages will be removed prior to peer review. DACF encourages applicants to be clear and succinct. No exact structure of the document is required

² The cap on indirect is included in a proposed revision to 01-001 C.M.R. c. 406 (2024). A notice of rulemaking is expected to be published on October 8, 2025. See <https://www.maine.gov/sos/rulemaking/notices/2025-rule-notices>.

beyond the format parameters discussed above. Tables or figures may be used, but using hyperlinks to add additional content beyond the 12-page limit is not allowed. The Project Narrative should be written for a scientifically literate reader.

Consider using **Table 2** as a checklist to ensure all requested information and attachments are included within the Project Narrative. Also, identify any “Confidential Information” within the project narrative as explained further in Section 1.3.

1. Introduction/Project Description

This section will help reviewers understand who is proposing the work and what it is. It will also provide the major expected outcomes and their relevance to Maine agricultural producers. Any research priorities being addressed by the proposed project should be clearly stated (**Section 2**).

2. Roles and Responsibilities of Key Staff and Collaborators

Briefly provide the qualifications of key staff and collaborators and define their roles and expected contributions to the proposed project. All staff roles necessary to carry out the research project should be described here, with the names, roles, and qualifications of the PIs and collaborators specified.

3. Literature Review

Describe how your research fits into the current body of science. The literature review should briefly identify where the proposed work fits into the larger realm of the discipline and identify what gaps in understanding it aims to address.

4. Rationale, Significance, and Outcomes

Describe why the proposed research is significant and the expected qualitative and/or quantitative outcomes. How does the proposed research fit within the framework of the DACF PFAS Fund? How will the proposed research meet the needs of agricultural producers impacted by PFAS contamination?

5. Research Methodology

This section should show how you will achieve the outcomes previously described. Fully describe research design and proposed methodology. Include the techniques and equipment that will be used, the expected results, and how data will be analyzed and interpreted.

6. Timeline

List and describe major benchmarks and estimated completion dates as if funds were awarded in May 2026.

7. Research Facility/Field Site/Resource Information

Description of where the proposed research will occur. Please include descriptions of the primary research facility as well as any other locations at which project activities will be performed, including field sites. Maps and photos can be included as attachments if appropriate.

If applying for significant equipment costs (\$5,000+), please include a description of how the equipment will be procured, where it will be housed (photos are welcome), and whether it will be project dedicated.

8. Duplication of Efforts

Applicants are responsible for reporting if this application will result in programmatic, budgetary, or commitment overlap with another application of award (i.e. grant, cooperative agreement, or contract) submitted to another funding source in the same fiscal year (the State of Maine fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30 annually).

1. **Programmatic overlap** occurs when substantially the same project is proposed in more than one application or is submitted to two or more funding sources for review and funding consideration and/or a specific objective and the project design for accomplishing the objective are the same or closely related in two or more applications or awards, regardless of the funding source;
2. **Budgetary overlap** occurs when duplicate or equivalent budgetary items (e.g. equipment, salaries) are requested in an application but already are provided by another source; and/or,
3. **Commitment overlap** occurs when an individual's time commitment exceeds 100 percent, whether or not salary support is requested in the application.

If the proposed project is chosen for funding, overlap, whether programmatic, budgetary, or commitment of an individual's effort greater than 100 percent, is not permitted. Overlaps disclosed in the Project Narrative must be resolved by the DACF with the applicant prior to award.

9. Quality Assurance Measures

A full Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) is **not** required for this application. However, this section serves as an opportunity for the applicant to communicate any measures being taken to ensure that data or conclusions produced are scientifically valid and reliable. Content and length will vary by project type, but examples of the kind of information to include are:

- Data quality check/validation procedure overview for lab results;
- Field data quality check procedures, such as field duplicate collection frequency, whether standard operating procedures are established and documented, and field audit frequency by key personnel if not the individual performing the fieldwork;
- The process for handling data corrections or for users to dispute and correct data;
- The in-laboratory data quality check procedures such as frequency of matrix spike/matrix spike duplicate (MS/MSD) samples and frequency of confirmatory split samples sent to other laboratories; and/or
- Other relevant quality assurance procedures or plans.

10. Deliverables, Data Management, and Share Plan

All applicants are expected to submit quarterly and final reports.

Furthermore, as a stipulation of the DACF rules governing this work, awardees are obligated to provide raw data and metadata to DACF in an open file format upon completion of the period of performance. Applicants should provide details on the intended type and amount of scientific data that will be generated; information on any software and code that may be required to access the data in the future; information on repositories where the scientific data/metadata will be archived; and any associated security/privacy concerns associated with the data. The applicant should note any potential intellectual property (IP) concerns within this section and how they may affect the ability to share data with both the DACF and the public. Potential IP concerns will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, summarize the plan to share research results with academic and lay audiences. This section should outline plans for academic publications and/or materials for distribution to impacted farmers or the public.

All publication deliverables associated with the funded research must be sent to DACF. Publications and/or presentations of research funded by this grant can be finalized after the end of the period of performance. However, DACF may request a written publishing/presentation plan as part of the final project closing documentation.

11. Additional Funding

There is no requirement for additional funding. Nonetheless, indicate whether the project has outside funding such as an institutional match, private funds, or additional grant funding. Provide an overview of the funding terms and any relevant details.

If the project is in the process of applying for additional funding, detail the timeline for acceptance. Alternatively, please indicate if no additional funding will be utilized.

12. Future Work (Optional)

If desired, discuss any future projects that the researcher envisions may build on the work funded by this grant.

13. Other (Optional)

If desired, the applicant may include other information that may strengthen the review or communicate the vision of the organization. Examples: collaboration plan if multiple institutions, mission statement, business/organization origin, etc.

14. Part II Attachment: References

Include a list of the references cited in the project narrative.

15. Part II Attachment: Letters of Support

Letters of Support from parties who are not named as investigators or collaborators in the proposal will help reviewers understand the importance of the proposed work to agricultural producers and community members. Written statements from agricultural community members, state or federal government organizations, or knowledgeable organizations or individuals are appropriate to include as attachments. DACF requests that no more than four letters of support be included with each application.

16. Part II Attachment: Letters of Commitment (if applicable)

Letters of Commitment from collaborators should express their commitment to participate in the proposed research and identify their tasks, time commitment, and whether they will be compensated if the proposal is funded. Collaborators include research collaborators, farmers who will provide access to their property and/or perform activities such as field maintenance and animal husbandry, and State agency staff who will support the research through their regular job responsibilities.

17. Part II Attachment: Animal Welfare Documentation (if applicable)

Proposals involving live vertebrate animals should attach documentation such as an approval from your Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) for this or a related project and an Animal and

Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) inspection report dated within the past 12 months. Additional equivalent documentation that shows the facility complies with the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) may be considered as well.

If research is occurring at a facility that has not yet gone through the licensing process for animal research or does not currently have an IACUC, please provide details on the path to licensure and IACUC establishment timeline.

Proposals involving live vertebrate animals will be reviewed without documentation of approval from an IACUC, but proof that approval is in place will be required prior to awarding funds.

18. Part II Attachment: Institutional Review Board Documentation (if applicable)

Proposals involving human subjects should attach documentation of approval from your Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this project.

If research is occurring at an organization that does not yet have an affiliation with an IRB, please provide details on the path to establish a relationship with an IRB and the timeline for IRB review.

Proposals involving human subjects will be reviewed without documentation of approval from an IRB, but proof that approval is in place will be required prior to awarding funds.

19. Part II Attachment: Financial Review (if applicable)

Any non-accredited research institutions (e.g. non-profit organization) must provide documentation that the applicant or associated group is in good financial standing. The attachment(s) may include a profit/loss statement from other grant activities, results of an external audit dated within the past 24 months, or a comparable document. If you are unsure if you need to provide a Financial Review document, please contact the RFA coordinator.

Accredited research institutions need not supply this information.

20. Part II Attachment: Proof of Funding (if applicable)

Any projects that will leverage additional funds must include proof that funding has been awarded or is available. An example of an appropriate proof of funding document is a letter of commitment from the funding organization. Applications without additional funding need not submit this attachment.

6.1.4 Full Proposal Part III: Budget

An itemized budget must be submitted by populating the budget workbook provided as **Attachment D**. The workbook should be titled 'MG_DACF_PFAS_PI NAME_PART III'. Note that 'PI NAME' is a placeholder and should be replaced with the name of the Primary PI. Applicants should note that instructions for completion and an example of a filled application are included as separate sheets within the budget workbook (**Attachment D**).

- Salary - fixed compensation paid regularly for services performed by individuals who will be working directly on the funded research project (include annual salary, percent time spent on project or multiplier being used, etc.)

- Fringe benefits - including but not limited to the costs of leave (e.g., vacation, family-related, sick or military), employee insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefit plans for individuals who will be working directly on the funded research project.
- Equipment -tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost which equals or exceeds \$5,000. Quotes for equipment must be included as an attachment.
- Supplies - all tangible personal property other than those defined as equipment; applicant may list general categories and estimated cost such as glassware, chemicals, or seeds (categories less than \$1,000 do not need to be itemized).
- Services - an action or activity performed for the grant recipient, often intangible and providing value by fulfilling a need or achieving a desired outcome. It can be a transaction, an activity, or a function provided by a person, company, or organization. Services include but are not limited to laboratory analysis, professional services, consulting, field support (e.g., operating farm equipment, managing crops, animal husbandry), and postage and shipping services. Quotes for services above \$25,000 must be included as an attachment.
- Subawards - the portion of an awardee's DACF-funded research grant that an awardee provides to a separate entity to carry out a component of the awardee's research project. It does not include payments to a service provider. A subaward may be provided through any form of legal agreement, including an agreement that the awardee considers a contract. Quotes for subawards above \$25,000 must be included as an attachment.
- Rental fees - monetary payments made for the temporary use of tangible or real property including but not limited to agricultural land.
- Publication fees - fees charged by publishers to authors for making their research articles open access. Publication fees are also known as article processing charges.
- Travel costs - including but not limited to costs associated with transportation, parking, lodging, meals, and conference registration fees; note how the travel will directly support the project.
- Tuition remission - the monetary value of instruction costs waived by an academic institution, typically in support of graduate students. Tuition remission does not include the value of scholarships or fellowships paid to students.
- Indirect costs for each budget category, except that indirect charges are not allowed for rentals, equipment, tuition remission, or the portion of each service or subaward in excess of \$25,000. The \$25,000 threshold is for the entire line item (year 1 PLUS year 2).
- Details of current or pending funding that may also support the project.

Indirect costs are capped at 10 percent of allowable costs unless the primary Principal Investigator's Maine-based institution has an existing policy that defines the indirect rate for agreements with the State of Maine as a percentage of that institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate, in which case the indirect rate is no more than one-half of that institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate.

There is no match requirement.

6.2 Submission of Questions and Amendments

It is the responsibility of all applicants and other interested parties to examine the entire RFA and seek clarification in writing if they do not understand any information or instructions.

An information session will be held prior to the pre-proposal deadline (See section 5.1). Questions raised and answered orally during that information session will be collated and incorporated with the written questions and answers described below.

6.2.1 Question/Answer Process

Applicants and other interested parties should submit any questions via email to the RFA Coordinator (PFASFund.DACF@maine.gov) using **Attachment F (Submitted Questions Form)**. Questions should be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than the date and time specified on the RFA cover page.

Submitted Questions must include the RFA Number and Title in the subject line of the email. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate, complete, and on time email transmission and receipt.

Responses to all questions will be compiled in writing and posted on the DACF PFAS Fund Research Website. All interested parties are responsible for going to this website to obtain a copy of the Question & Answer Summary. Only those answers issued in writing on this website will be considered binding.

6.2.2 Amendments

All amendments released regarding this RFA will be posted on the DACF PFAS Fund Research Website and emailed to all PIs who submitted a pre-proposal. All interested parties are responsible for going to this website to obtain amendments. Only those amendments posted on this website are considered binding.

DACF reserves the right to revise, suspend, or terminate this RFA at its sole discretion. In such an event, DACF will inform all applicants as soon as reasonably possible. DACF also reserves the right to extend the deadline for submission of proposals or to seek additional proposals under this RFA to ensure the objectives of 7 M.R.S.A. § 320-K(I-L) will be met.

6.3 Full Proposal Submission Instructions

Proposals for this RFA must be submitted to PFASFund.DACF@maine.gov by February 13, 2026, by 11:59 PM EST. Please include RFA # PFNDM2025002 Application Submission – [Applicant's Last Name] in the subject line.

Any emails containing original application submissions or any additional or revised application files received after the 11:59 p.m. deadline will be rejected without exception.

Please review the following delivery instructions to ensure successful submission of an application:

- Applicants are to insert the following into the subject line of their email submission: "RFA# PFNDM2025002 Application Submission – [Applicant's Last Name]".
- Only applications received by email will be considered. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate, complete email transmission and receipt.
- Application submission emails successfully received by the PFASFund.DACF@maine.gov inbox will receive a reply stating as such.

- Emails containing links to file-sharing sites or online file repositories will not be accepted as submissions. Only emailed application submissions that have the requested files attached will be accepted.
- Encrypted emails received, which require opening attachments and logging into a proprietary system, will not be accepted as submissions. Applicants are responsible for checking with their organization's information technology team to ensure that security settings will not encrypt their application submissions.
- File size limits are 25MB per email. Applicants may submit files across multiple emails, as necessary, due to file size concerns. All emails and files must be received by the date and time described above.

7 FULL PROPOSAL REVIEW

Section 7 provides information on the review process of full proposals and details the evaluation processes, including selection criteria and the process used to score proposals. An overview of the Selection Criteria and Associated Point Values are provided in **Table 3**. Reviewers will provide feedback via the form in **Attachment B**.

7.1 Evaluation Process – General Information

Proposals will be screened through: 1) an internal non-technical review; 2) a technical review by a panel of qualified peer reviewers; and 3) a final determination by the DACF Commissioner.³

Officials responsible for making decisions on the award selection will ensure that the selection process accords equal opportunity and appropriate consideration to all who can meet the specifications. The goals of the evaluation process are to ensure fairness and objectivity in the review of the applications and to ensure that all contracts are awarded to the applicants that provide the best value to the State of Maine.

7.2 Internal Non-Technical Review

Full proposals will be reviewed by the Department for completeness and conformity with the terms of the RFA. Failure to respond to all questions and instructions throughout the RFA may result in the application being disqualified as non-responsive or points may be deducted from the overall score that results from the peer review process.

Grounds for rejection include but are not limited to:

- Failure to submit a timely pre-proposal
- Failure to submit the full proposal by the application deadline
- Omission of the Principal Investigator's and the Contracting Body Representative's signatures
- Budget requests that fall outside of the funding parameters (i.e., requests that exceed the maximum project amount identified in this RFA)

³ The evaluation process included here is consistent with proposed revision to 01-001 C.M.R. c. 406 (2024). A notice of rulemaking is expected to be published on October 8, 2025. See <https://www.maine.gov/sos/rulemaking/notices/2025-rule-notices>.

One or more points may be deducted from an applicant's overall score for reasons that include but are not limited to the following:

- Failure to fully complete all applicable portions of Part I, Key Contacts and Project Information
- Omission of curricula vitae for all PIs and co-PIs named in the application
- The proposed timeline exceeds the project duration identified in this RFA
- Omission of mandatory narrative sections
- Failure to provide sufficient budget details or to correctly calculate indirect and other costs

The Department, and its evaluation team, has sole discretion to determine whether a variance from the RFA specifications will result either in disqualification or reduction in scoring of a proposal.

7.3 External Technical Peer Review

All eligible grant applications will be reviewed by appropriate external technical peer reviewers based on the criteria and process described below. This review is designed to evaluate each application according to its scientific merit. The individual external peer reviewers may include scientists, engineers, social scientists, policy makers, and/or economists who are accomplished in their respective disciplines and proficient in the technical subjects they are reviewing. Peer reviewers will be required to attest that they do not have a conflict of interest.

Each application will be assigned to at least two primary peer reviewers. Peer reviewers will read the entire application package for each application they are assigned. The peer reviewers will prepare a written individual evaluation (**Attachment B**) for each assigned application that addresses the peer review criteria described below and assign a numerical score using the same criteria. DACF will compile and consider the peer reviewers' recommendations. The score will be based on a 100-point scale.

7.4 Final Review

Final decision-making authority for awarding grants rests with the DACF Commissioner, based upon the internal non-technical review and the recommendations of the peer reviewers. If there is a tie among the highest-ranked proposals, the Commissioner may also consider 1) the degree to which results of the proposed research have broad application to, or affect large segments of, the PFAS-impacted agricultural community, 2) the degree to which the research is designed to produce data and methods that can immediately or with little to no translation be utilized by producers to better assess or manage PFAS in agricultural systems, and 3) whether a proposal presents a duplication of effort.

Written materials used in the review process, including peer-review worksheets, will be made available to the applicants when they are notified of funding decisions. The identities of unsuccessful or ineligible applicants will not be made public unless in response to a FOIA request (see Section 1.3).

7.5 Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated according to six selection criteria detailed in **Sections 6.7.1 – 6.7.5. Table 3** provides a simplified version of the six selection criteria categories and the associated point values for reference.

Table 3: Simplified Scoring Criteria

Criteria	Sub-Criteria	Description	Sub-Criteria Max Points	Total Criteria Points
1. Research Priority	1A	The proposal directly relates to one or more of the priorities identified in Section 2.	10	10
2. Identification of Need, Opportunity, and Justification	2A	The proposed project will fill an identified gap in the relevant scientific literature.	8	20
	2B	The proposal has potential importance and benefits, including economic, for the Maine agricultural community (i.e., it meets the needs of agricultural producers impacted by PFAS contamination).	6	
	2C	The proposal is supported by Letters of Support.	6	
3. Project Methodology and Schedule	3A	The proposed methodology is clear and scientifically valid.	20	25
	3B	The project timetable is realistic.	5	
4. Project Management	4A	The proposed work is consistent with the qualifications and abilities of the persons involved.	10	20
	4B	The proposed work includes collaboration with other institutions, farmers, and/or agricultural service providers.	6	
	4C	The project will be conducted within the State of Maine or by a Maine-based institution	4	
5. Deliverables	5A	The project's deliverables are clearly stated.	5	15
	5B	The proposal includes a plan to share data and distribute research results to academic and lay audiences.	5	
	5C	The proposal includes an intention and budget to publish results in an open access journal (Pass/Fail)	5	
6. Budget	6A	The proposal includes clear and realistic descriptions of how the funds will be allocated.	10	10
			TOTAL	100

7.5.1 Research Priorities (10%)

Research priorities are detailed in **Section 2**. There are 10 points total available for this category, with maximum points awarded to projects that address more than one priority. To summarize, research priority categories for this round of research funding are:

1. PFAS in Agricultural Settings: Water, Soil, and Plant Studies
2. PFAS in Agricultural Settings: Animals and Animal Product Studies
3. Understanding and Managing PFAS in On-Farm Agricultural Settings and Products

7.5.2 Identification of Need, Opportunity, and Justification (20%)

The proposal should identify a need in the scientific literature that will be addressed by the project (Subsection 2A). Novel studies and studies intended to reproduce past results will be scored equally; the purpose here is to show knowledge of the existing literature and how this project fits into work that has already been done.

Subsection 2B asks applicants to identify potential importance and benefits, including economic, for the Maine agricultural community. These are relatively broad categories, and DACF encourages applicants to be specific when addressing these. For example, projects designed to test a bioremediation process would meet the needs of agricultural producers impacted by PFAS contamination, but may not be potentially beneficial to the Maine agricultural community if the pilot or bench test does not include tests on soils typically farmed in Maine. The outcomes from the proposed work do not need to *guarantee* they will be successful or helpful for Maine producers to receive points in this category, but a project will score higher if the applicability to Maine farmers and the greater agricultural community has been highlighted.

To satisfy Subsection 2C, applicants should include Letters of Support from agricultural community members, state or federal government organizations, or knowledgeable organizations or individuals as attachments to Part I, Key Contacts and Project. Information

7.5.3 Project Methodology and Schedule (25%)

The project methodology must be clear and scientifically valid (Subsection 3A). Peer reviewers will assess full proposals for technical merit and feasibility. To ensure that the proposed work is scientifically valid, DACF requests that an outline of quality assurance procedures be included in the project narrative.

Additionally, the project timeline must be realistic for completion within the 24-month period of performance (Subsection 3B). Ideally, it should also be resilient to external influences or changing conditions. Clearly state whether additional funding is already committed for this project and whether such funding will affect the timeline of deliverables.

7.5.4 Project Management (20%)

This category includes three assessment criteria: the qualifications of the individuals proposing the research (Subcategory 4A), whether a collaborative approach is proposed with another institution, farmer, and/or an agricultural producer (Subcategory 4B). Additionally, projects conducted in Maine or by a Maine-based institution or collaborator will score higher (Subcategory 4C).

All staff roles necessary to carry out the research project should be described. Proposals must be consistent with the qualifications and abilities of the people involved, particularly the PI(s) and significant collaborators. The qualifications of the individuals proposing the research will be assessed using the curricula vitae included as attachments to Part I (Key Contacts and Project Information). Ideally, projects will include already trained and hired staff, given the short period of performance. If this is not the case, the proposal should include a brief discussion of the training plans, demonstrating that consideration has been given to the process.

Collaboration is important to DACF. Proposals that include substantive collaborations between multiple institutions and/or agricultural producers will receive higher scores.

Substantive collaboration involves intellectual participation in the research project, such as assisting in research design, development of new tools, or contributing to data analysis, interpretation of results or publication.

Procurement of goods and services from an entity that provides them to multiple different purchasers is not substantive collaboration. For example, purchasing supplies or standard laboratory testing of samples would be business relationships, not substantive collaboration. In contrast, a partnership with another organization that will develop new technology for use in the research project would be substantive collaboration.

Working with a farmer or agricultural service provider to develop a research question or refine research methods would be considered substantive collaboration. Obtaining access to a property for use as a research site is a form of collaboration but is not as substantive as a project that is jointly conceived and carried out by drawing from the expertise of both the farmer and the researcher.

The degree of collaboration will be assessed based on the project narrative and any Letters of Collaboration included as attachments to Part I.

Additionally, work within Maine will score higher. The highest score will be awarded to projects where the applicant or a substantive collaborator is a Maine-based institution or a Maine agricultural producer and the project will be conducted in Maine. (A Maine-based institution is one that is registered within Maine, such as an accredited institution or non-profit business.)

An intermediate score will be given to proposals where the project will not be conducted in Maine, but either the applicant or a substantive collaborator is based in Maine; or where the project will be conducted in Maine, but neither the applicant nor any substantive collaborators are based in Maine.

The lowest score will be given to proposals where the project will be conducted outside of Maine and neither the applicant nor any collaborators are Maine-based institutions or Maine agricultural producers.

7.5.5 Deliverables (15%)

The application narrative must clearly state project deliverables (Subsection 5A). A plan to provide data/metadata in open file format and to distribute research results to academic and lay audiences must be specified (Subsection 5B). Proposals that include an intention to publish results in an open access journal will score higher (Subsection 5C) and should factor open-access journal cost(s) into budget documentation.

7.5.6 Budget (10%)

Budgets must be realistic for the work and timeline being proposed in the project narrative (Subsection 6). Costs should be reasonable and justifiable. See budget guidance included in Attachment E.

8 PROJECT AWARD ADMINISTRATION

Project award notifications will be sent to the PI via email. Upon selection, the awardees must execute a State of Maine Service Contract with the appropriate riders as determined by DACF.

Following the award, a Contract Administrator from the Department will be appointed to assist with the development and administration of the contract and to act as administrator during the entire contract period. Department staff will be available after the award to consult with the awardee on finalizing the contract. A contract cannot be effective until at least 14 calendar days after award notification.

In providing services and performing under the contract, the awardee must act as an independent contractor, not an agent of the State of Maine.

The 24-month period of performance begins when contracts are fully executed. Upon execution of all contractual documents and the request of an awardee, up to 15 percent of the total grant may be awarded to cover initial costs. An accounting of up-front spending, including receipts, must be submitted within 60 days of the transfer of funds. All other funds will be disbursed based on the awardees' submission of billing statements to DACF.

Funded projects will be expected to provide short quarterly update reports and a longer annual report to DACF. The DACF expects PIs to communicate any changes in key personnel (e.g., parental leave or if a project team member departs for another institution). In some cases, awardees may be asked to provide a plan for continuing work in the absence of key individuals.

Deliverables such as peer-reviewed journal articles need not be finalized upon contract completion, but a publication plan will be required. Data and metadata included as deliverables must be supplied in an open exchange format (e.g., Comma Separated Values (CSV) for tabular data), and all published papers must be shared with DACF. DACF encourages researchers to publish in open access journals and will allow associated publishing costs as a budget line item.

9 CONTACTS

To ensure informational emails are received, prospective applicants should add the following contacts to their emails:

General PFAS Fund Contact: PFASFund.DACF@maine.gov

Beth Valentine, Director, DACF PFAS Fund

Beth.Valentine@maine.gov

(207) 313-0962

Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

Sarah Wilcox, PFAS Fund Research Administrator (RFA Coordinator)

Sarah.A.Wilcox@maine.gov

(207) 287-7601

Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

ATTACHMENT A – PRE-PROPOSAL FEEDBACK

Attachment A

Maine DACF PFAS Fund: Major Grants for the Study of PFAS in Agricultural Systems, Round 2
Pre-Proposal Feedback



PROJECT TITLE:	
PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR (PI):	
PI RESEARCH ORGANIZATION:	
PI EMAIL:	

Thank you for submitting your research pre-proposal to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) PFAS Fund. After careful review of your pre-proposal application, based only on relevancy to the goals and priorities described in the Maine DACF PFAS Fund: Major Grants for the Study of PFAS in Agricultural Systems, Round 1 request for applications, the DACF PFAS Fund has determined the following:

- ☐ **The application is considered competitive.** This means that DACF has reviewed the pre-proposal and deems the project competitive for funding.
- ☐ **Application is not considered competitive.** This means that DACF has reviewed the pre-proposal and deems that the project is not competitive for funding. Receiving an adverse advisory decision does not preclude the applicant from completing a full proposal. Still, it indicates that the likelihood of project funding is low based on the information provided in the pre-proposal form.

PROJECT FEEDBACK:

ITEM	YES	NO
Project goals and objectives are clear		
Project is relevant to one or more key research topics listed in the RFA		
Project has the potential to help farmers determine best options for maintaining/enhancing viability despite PFAS		
Proposal includes collaborations with multiple institutions, farmers, and/or agricultural service providers		
Project will be conducted within the State of Maine or by a Maine-based institution		

NOTES FROM DACF REVIEW:

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ATTACHMENT B – FULL PROPOSAL FEEDBACK

Full Proposal Feedback Form

RFA ID:	PFNDM2025002
Application ID:	
Application Title:	
Reviewer ID:	
TOTAL POINTS (Peer Review)*	

*This application has undergone a Non-Technical Screening Review by DACF staff. Final point values may differ from total points awarded during the peer review process because the final score will account for any points lost during the Non-Technical Screening Review.

OVERALL COMMENTS (Mandatory):

☐ Check box to indicate review is complete.

CRITERIA 1: RESEARCH PRIORITY (10 POINTS)

The proposal directly relates to one or more of the priorities established by the Commissioner based upon RAP recommendations.

Description: The research priority should be CLEARLY stated and included in the Abstract and Narrative to indicate its importance. Proposals that are somewhat related may be awarded partial points at reviewer's discretion. If unsure whether a proposal fits into a priority category, consider that priority categories were chosen specifically to help farmers determine their best options for maintaining and enhancing viability despite the presence of PFAS on their property.

Criteria 1: Research Priority (10 points total)	
0 points	Proposal is not related to one of the priorities listed in the RFA
2.5 points	Proposal is related to one of the priority categories listed in the RFA but would not help commercial farmers make informed decisions about how to utilize agricultural property impacted by PFAS, OR the proposal is only tangentially related to one of the priority categories
5 points	Proposal is not related to one of the priority categories listed in the RFA but would help commercial farmers make informed decisions about how to utilize agricultural property impacted by PFAS
7.5 points	The proposal addresses one research priority category

10 points	The proposal addresses two or more research priority categories
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SCORE: ____ / 10 points

Comments for Criteria 1:

CRITERIA 2: IDENTIFICATION OF NEED, OPPORTUNITY, JUSTIFICATION (20 POINTS)

Sub-criteria 2a: 8 points

The proposed project will fill an identified gap in the relevant scientific literature.

Description: The proposal should identify a need in the scientific literature that will be addressed by the project.

Sub-Criteria 2a (8 points)	
0 points	No scientific literature is cited in the proposal.
2 points	There are citations in the proposal, but a specific need for more research is not clearly identified or supported.
5 points	There is a clearly identified gap in the literature, but the connections between the outcomes of this research project and filling that gap are not clear or are not well supported.
8 points	There is a compelling argument in the proposal that shows how this project will build off of previous work and fill a need in the literature.

SCORE: ____ / 8 points

Comments for Criteria 2, Sub-Criteria 2a:

Sub-criteria 2b: 6 points

The proposal has potential importance and benefits, including economic, for the Maine agricultural community (i.e., it meets the needs of agricultural producers impacted by PFAS contamination).

Description: Since this grant is distributed by the Maine DACF, it's essential that proposed projects demonstrate specific benefits to Maine's agricultural community. For information on agricultural production in Maine, consider referencing the USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture for Maine. Producers

need to know what products they can safely raise on their property given the presence of PFAS in soil and/or water. They also need guidance on harvesting and storing crops to minimize PFAS transfer, recommendations for livestock feeding strategies, and advice on managing waste and byproducts.

Sub-Criteria 2b (6 points)	
0 points	Proposal will not meet the needs of producers impacted by PFAS and does not have any obvious importance or benefits for the Maine agricultural community.
2 points	Potential benefits to producers are described but insufficient details are provided to determine whether the project is potentially important or beneficial to the PFAS-impacted agricultural community in Maine.
4 points	The proposed research results will meet the needs of producers impacted by PFAS. The proposal has the potential to benefit a small number of niche PFAS-impacted producers in Maine.
6 points	The proposed research results will meet the needs of producers impacted by PFAS and have the potential to benefit a substantial portion of the PFAS-impacted agricultural community in Maine.

SCORE: ____ / 6 points

Comments for Criteria 2, Sub-Criteria 2b:

Sub-criteria 2c: 6 points

The proposal is supported by Letters of Support.

Description: Letters of Support from parties who are not named as investigators or collaborators in the proposal will help reviewers understand the importance of the proposed work to agricultural producers and community members. Written statements from agricultural community members, state or federal government organizations, or knowledgeable organizations or individuals are appropriate to include as attachments.

Sub-Criteria 2c (6 points total)	
0 points	There are no letters of support.
3 points	There is one letter of support.
6 points	There is more than one letter of support.

SCORE: ____ / 6 points

Comments for Criteria 2, Sub-Criteria 2c:

CRITERIA 3. PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND SCHEDULE (25 POINTS)

Sub-Criteria 3a: 20 points

The proposed methodology is clear and scientifically valid.

Ensure that the methodology is clearly defined, appropriate for the scope of work, and that there are no gaps in process. To ensure that the proposed work is scientifically valid, an outline of quality assurance procedures should be included in the project narrative.

Sub-Criteria 3a (20 points)	
0 points	The methodology is not clear and/or not scientifically valid
5 points	The methodology is relatively clear but there are gaps in the process or quality issues that may impact the reliability of the results unless addressed prior to the contract award
10 points	The methodology proposed is clear, but the validity of the scientific method described could be improved OR the methodology proposed could be improved but the validity of the scientific method described is clear
15 points	The methodology is clear and scientifically valid but some more minor details are not considered or explained and may need to be addressed prior to funding if project is chosen
20 points	The methodology is clear and scientifically valid

SCORE: ____ / 20 points

Comments for Criteria 3, Sub-Criteria 3a:

Sub-Criteria 3b: 5 points

The project timetable is realistic.

The project timeline should be realistic, ensuring completion within the designated period of performance (24 months from contract execution). Ideally, it should also be resilient to external influences or changing conditions.

Sub-Criteria 3b (5 points)	
0 points	The project timetable is not realistic
1.25 points	The project timeline proposed could be possible but seems either over or under ambitious considering factors such as budget, scope of work, staffing

2.5 points	The project timetable is realistic but could be easily impacted by outside factors in such a way that the project would be significantly incomplete at the end of the period of performance
3.75 points	The project timetable is realistic and somewhat resilient
5 points	The project timetable is realistic and resilient

SCORE: ____ / 5 points

Comments for Criteria 3, Sub-Criteria 3b:

CRITERIA 4: PROJECT MANAGEMENT (20 POINTS)

Sub-Criteria 4a: 10 points

The proposed work is consistent with the qualifications and abilities of the persons involved

All staff roles necessary to carry out the research project should be described in the proposal. The key personnel should be qualified through academic background or relevant experience, and any training for research or lab assistants should match the work required. Ideally, projects will include already trained and hired staff, given the short period of performance. If this is not the case, the proposal should include a brief discussion of the training plans, demonstrating that consideration has been given to the process.

Sub-Criteria 4a (10 points)	
0 points	The qualifications and abilities of the PI involved in this project are not appropriate for the proposed work
2.5 points	The qualifications and abilities of the PI are appropriate but other key staff lack qualifications.
5 points	The qualifications and abilities of the PI and all key staff on this project are appropriate for the proposed work but other staff may not be qualified or training of research/lab/field staff is not mentioned or the proposal does not clearly describe the staff roles responsible for each of the key tasks necessary for completing the project.
7.5 points	The qualifications and abilities of the PI and all key staff on this project are appropriate for the proposed work and other project staff appear qualified but significant training is discussed and will be required for accurate completion of the proposed project. All staff roles necessary to carry out the research project are described in the proposal.
10 points	The qualifications and abilities of all individuals identified in this proposal are appropriate and minimal training will need to occur. All staff roles necessary to carry out the research project are described in the proposal.

SCORE: ____ / 10 points

Comments for Criteria 4, Sub-Criteria 4a:

Sub-Criteria 4b: 6 points

The proposed work includes collaboration with other institutions, farmers, and/or agricultural service providers.

A collaborative approach is preferred. Each collaborator/institution should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, substantive collaboration should receive a higher score, and there should be a letter of commitment from each collaborator.

Substantive collaboration involves intellectual participation in the research project, such as assisting in research design, development of new tools, or contributing to data analysis, interpretation of results, or publication. Procurement of goods and services from an entity that provides them to multiple different purchasers is not substantive collaboration.

Working with a farmer or agricultural service provider to develop a research question or refine research methods would be considered substantive collaboration. Obtaining access to a property for use as a research site is a form of collaboration but is not as substantive as a project that is jointly conceived and carried out by drawing from the expertise of both the farmer and the researcher. Similarly, a State employee who provides support or collects data as part of their normal job responsibilities and is not involved in research design, analysis, or publications would be considered a collaborator, but not a substantive collaborator.

Sub-Criteria 4b (6 points)	
0 points	The proposed work includes no collaborators or collaboration is proposed but there is no letter of commitment
2 points	The proposal includes a letter of commitment from a farmer for access to their property or provision of services, but the proposal does not include substantive collaboration
4 points	The proposed work includes one substantive collaborator and a letter of commitment from them
6 points	The proposed work includes more than one substantive collaborator. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and a letter of commitment is included for two or more collaborators.

SCORE: ____ / 6 points

Comments for Criteria 4, Sub-Criteria 4b:

Sub-Criteria 4c: 4 points

Project is conducted within the State of Maine or by a Maine-based institution

This criteria evaluates whether the project will be conducted in Maine and whether the applicant or a substantive collaborator is a Maine-based institution or Maine agricultural producer. Conducted in Maine means that members of the research team will be in Maine conducting research for at least a portion of the project. A Maine-based institution is one that is registered within Maine, such as an accredited institution or non-profit entity.

Sub-Criteria 4c (4 points)	
0 points	The project will not be conducted in Maine, and neither the applicant nor any substantive collaborators are based in Maine
2 points	The project will not be conducted in Maine, but either the applicant or a substantive collaborator is based in Maine; or the project will be conducted in Maine, but neither the applicant nor any substantive collaborators are based in Maine
4 points	The project will be conducted in Maine, and the applicant or at least one substantive collaborator is based in Maine.

SCORE: ____ / 4 points

Comments for Criteria 4, Sub-Criteria 4c:

CRITERIA 5: DELIVERABLES (15 POINTS)

Sub-Criteria 5a: 5 points

Project deliverables clearly stated

Deliverables should be clear and realistic.

Sub-Criteria 5a (5 points total)	
0 points	Project deliverables are not stated
1.25 points	Project deliverables are stated but are unrealistic when considering the scope of work, timeline, and/or budget
2.5 points	Project deliverables are stated and appear appropriate when considering the scope of work proposed, timeline, and budget, but some deliverables may be missing or lack details

3.75 points	Project deliverables are stated and appear appropriate when considering the scope of work proposed, timeline, and budget, but some minor details may be missing
5 points	Project deliverables are clearly stated and appear appropriate when considering the scope of work proposed, timeline, and budget

SCORE: ____ / 5 points

Comments for Criteria 5, Sub-Criteria 5a:

Sub-Criteria 5b: 5 points

The proposal includes a plan to share data and distribute research results to academic and lay audiences.

The narrative should include plans for distribution of results through academic publications and outreach materials to the public and academic community, as applicable. Awardees are obligated to provide raw data and metadata to DACF in an open file format; the proposal should describe the data that will be generated, how the data will be formatted or stored, and whether any data will be held back due to intellectual property concerns. Projects that distribute results more widely and that do not limit the distribution of results or data will score higher.

Sub-Criteria 5b (5 points)	
0 points	Plans to distribute research results are not specified
2.5 points	Plans to distribute research results are specified but the plan is incomplete (e.g., academic publications are outlined but the data format is missing); or the proposal includes plans to distribute results but only to academic audiences <i>or</i> lay audiences, not both, or some key resources (which may impede the advancement of further research) will not be shared
5 points	Plans to distribute research results and raw data are complete, both academic and lay audiences are specified, and all key resources will be shared

SCORE: ____ / 5 points

Comments for Criteria 5, Sub-Criteria 5b:

Sub-Criteria 5c: 5 points

Proposal includes an intention and budget to publish results in an open access journal

Ensure that publishing in an open access journal is included in the relevant documents. This is a PASS/FAIL credit subcategory.

Sub-Criteria 5c (5 points)	
0 points	Proposal does not include the intention and budget to publish results in an open access journal.
5 points	The proposal includes the intention and budget to publish results in an open access journal.

SCORE: ____ / 5 points (This is PASS/FAIL)

Comments for Criteria 3, Sub-Criteria 3b:

CRITERIA 6: BUDGET (10 POINTS)

Sub-criteria 6a: 10 points

The proposal includes clear and realistic descriptions of how the funds will be allocated.

Budgets should be realistic for the work and timeline being proposed in the project narrative. There should be enough detail to show how the research project will be supported and how the funds will be allocated. Costs should be reasonable and justifiable. (DACF will review budget totals and calculation of indirect costs.)

Sub-Criteria 6a (10 points)	
0 points	The budget is unclear or very incomplete.
5 points	The budget is fairly complete but is missing some obvious elements or some cost estimates are unrealistic.
10 points	The budget is a complete, clear, and realistic portrayal of how the funds will be allocated.

SCORE: ____ / 10 points

Comments for Criteria 6, Sub-Criteria 6a

ATTACHMENT C – PART I FILLABLE PDF

Please access the fillable PDF form for Part I by accessing this link:

[Attachment C Fillable PDF](#)

ATTACHMENT D – PART III EXCEL BUDGET WORKBOOK

Please access the Excel Workbook by accessing this link:

[Attachment D](#)

Reminder: There are sheets within the workbook that provide examples and directions.

ATTACHMENT E – BUDGET NARRATIVE GUIDANCE

Attachment E: Budget Narrative Guidance¹



Overview

All costs must be allowable (see section 6.1.4 of the RFA) and reasonable in amount.

A thorough budget narrative will aid the administrative review and processing of a recommended award. Amounts included in a budget and budget narrative are estimates; in the event of an award, payments will be based on actual expenditures. The following is guidance for your use in preparing a thorough budget and budget narrative.

Many institutions' accounting systems have default cost categories aligned for their operational efficiencies that don't line up exactly with the guidance presented here. Use this guidance to facilitate agency review of your application where possible.

For each budget category:

- Use the level of detail indicated below for each category.
- Explain why the costs are necessary for the project.
- Round to the nearest dollar to avoid errors and add efficiency to the review process.
- Include a total for each category.
- Show costs for the life of the agreement. Provide individual costs for each year as well as annual subtotals for each category.
- Provide calculations where appropriate to substantiate the amounts requested.

Budget Categories

The guidance follows the order of the budget items.

Salary

Only include employees of applicant organization. Salary is fixed compensation paid regularly for services performed by individuals who will be working directly on the funded research project. For each individual, identify their role and describe their contributions to the project. Also include their annual salary, percent of effort, and the period of time they will contribute to the project along with the associated funds requested for support. The following format is an appropriate way to provide the information.

¹ Adapted from USDA Budget Narrative Guidance documents
RFA # PFNDM2025002

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Principal Investigator (0.2 FTE)	Lead the program execution, oversee the fieldwork, and oversee the scientific analysis behind the research and development. Work with employees to design and execute the field studies. Document and prepare all reports. 20% of full-time salary for 12 months per year, 3% COLA included for year 2	\$24,000.00	\$24,720.00	\$48,720.00

Fringe benefits

Only related to salaries identified under Salary. “Fringe benefits” include but are not limited to the costs of leave (e.g., vacation, family-related, sick or military), employee insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefit plans for individuals who will be working directly on the funded research project.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Principal Investigator (0.2 FTE)	Benefits as 30% of salary	\$7,200.00	\$7,416.00	\$14,616.00

Equipment

Equipment is tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost which equals or exceeds \$5,000. List each item of equipment along with the applicable cost. Include justification of its need in accomplishing the goals of the project.

Equipment acquisition costs include the net invoice price of the equipment, including the cost of any modifications, attachments, accessories, or auxiliary apparatus necessary to make it usable for the purpose for which it is acquired. Ancillary charges such as taxes, duty, protective in transit insurance, freight, and installation may be included in or excluded from the acquisition cost in accordance with the applicant’s or subrecipient’s regular accounting practices.

Quotes for equipment must be included as an attachment.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
MSE PRO Laboratory Low-temperature Mill (Cryogrinder)	For pre-processing of tissue samples related to this study only, University of Research lab doing in-house testing does not have one large enough for sample preparation. Necessary for increased volume of batches. Price per sample much lower at in house lab, see cost comparison in Attachment. Equipment will only be used for purposes of this project.	\$14,500.00	\$0.00	\$14,500.00

These costs should only include the costs to purchase new equipment. The cost of renting or leasing equipment is not to be included in this category but instead, include under the Rental Fees category. If equipment is costly, include a lease vs purchase comparison in the budget narrative in support of the chosen route.

Supplies

Supplies are all tangible personal property other than those defined as equipment; applicant may list general categories and estimated cost such as glassware, chemicals, or seeds (categories less than \$1,000 do not need to be itemized).

Indicate general categories of expendable supplies including an amount for each category. Caution: If a category is viewed as too general or the associated amount is too high, further itemization may be requested. Therefore, use good judgement in determining the level of detail to provide.

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Chickens	60 chicks per year plus feed, bedding	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$5,000

Services

A service is an action or activity performed for the grant recipient, often intangible and providing value by fulfilling a need or achieving a desired outcome. It can be a transaction, an activity, or a function provided by a person, company, or organization. Services include but are not limited to laboratory analysis, professional services, consulting, field support (e.g., operating farm equipment, managing crops, animal husbandry), and postage and shipping services.

For each service, provide:

- A description of the work or goods/services to be provided.

- An estimate of costs and basis for estimation. For example, quotes, competitive bids, historic data, research, etc.
- If the cost of the service will be above \$25,000, a quote must be included as an attachment.

See Appendix A for an explanation of the difference between a service and a subaward.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Tissue Sample PFAS Analysis via 1633	Analysis of up to 70 processed tissue samples, 70 serum samples, 20 feed samples, 35 soil composite samples, and 25 water source/equipment blank samples per field season. Expected 3% increase in operating costs year 2 due to inflation. Cost estimate based on quote from laboratory ABC.	\$44,000.00	\$45,320.00	\$89,320.00

Subawards

A subaward is the portion of an awardee's DAF-funded research grant that an awardee provides to a separate entity to carry out a component of the awardee's research project. It does not include payments to a service provider. A subaward may be provided through any form of legal agreement, including an agreement that the awardee considers a contract.

If the budget contains subawards, provide the subaward budget narrative using the same level of detail as the prime budget. If the subaward details are not yet determined, provide the nature of the work, estimated number of subawardees, and estimated dollar amount.

Quotes for subawards above \$25,000 must be included as an attachment.

See Appendix A for an explanation of the difference between a service and a subaward.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
University of Other State	Dr. Jones will conduct preliminary experiments, contribute to experimental design and data interpretation, and will co-author a journal article.	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$40,000.00

Rental fees

Rental fees are monetary payments made for the temporary use of tangible or real property including

but not limited to agricultural land.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Wild Wind Farm	Shed rental for storage of research equipment.	\$1,200.00	\$1,200.00	\$2,400.00

Publication fees

Publication fees are charged by publishers to authors for making their research articles open access. Publication fees are also known as article processing charges.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Open source publishing in "Agricultural Advances" or similar	Open source publishing of finalized results	\$0.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00

Travel costs

Travel costs include but are not limited to costs associated with transportation, parking, lodging, meals, and conference registration fees; note how the travel will directly support the project. All expected travel required to conduct/support this project must be listed in detail. This would include local travel to work sites and extended overnight travel.

For the budget narrative, clearly explain how the requested travel directly supports this project and identify the total funds requested for travel. If you are requesting travel to conferences/meetings, you must clearly explain how it benefits the project. If you are requesting multiple people to attend any conference/meetings, explain the benefit of sending each person.

Provide as much detail as possible including purpose, destination, dates of travel, and number of individuals for each trip. If the dates of travel are not known, specify estimated length of trip. Identify what policies will be followed (e.g., organizational travel policies or government per diem rates). If the exact cost cannot be provided at the time the proposal is finalized, provide the best estimate you can currently provide.

****Foreign travel must be listed separately from domestic travel****

For all travel, provide a purpose statement that explains why the travel is necessary to meet the objectives of the award and, ultimately, how it benefits Maine farmers and agricultural producers impacted by PFAS contamination.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Domestic Travel: 1 trip to attend PFAS in Farms conference in Los Angeles, CA for 2 people (PI and graduate student) (Cost per 1 trip = Airfare: \$1,200; 4 nights hotel @ GSA rate for 2025 FY of \$191/night: \$764; 4 days of per diem per GSA at \$86/day: \$344)	Purpose: Attending the PFAS in Farms conference supports this project in the following ways: 1) Symposium will discuss methodologies. The information gained from attending these sessions could improve our understanding of results interpretation across other poultry breeds. Specifically we will be meeting with a group of collaborators to discuss designs to optimize our approach and future work. 2) We will present our findings at this meeting to obtain feedback from the larger community. PI will be a speaker, grad student will present poster	\$0.00	\$4,616.00	\$4,616.00

Tuition remission

Tuition remission is the monetary value of instruction costs waived by an academic institution, typically in support of graduate students. Tuition remission does not include the value of scholarships or fellowships paid to students.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Tuition for one graduate student	Tuition remission is a part of compensation and is proportionate to the level of effort. 3% COLA included for year 2.	\$10,026.00	\$10,326.78	\$20,352.78

Indirect costs

Indirect costs mean any costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be readily identified with an individual project, program, or organizational activity. They generally include facilities operation and maintenance costs, depreciation, and administrative expenses.

Indirect costs are capped at 10 percent of allowable costs unless the primary Principal Investigator's Maine-based institution has an existing policy that defines the indirect rate for agreements with the State of Maine as a percentage of that institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate, in which case the indirect rate is no more than one-half of that institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate.

Applicants may voluntarily reduce or waive recovery of indirect costs, at their discretion. If an organization waives indirect cost recovery and requests only direct costs, the organization is required to include in the award budget only the costs defined as direct costs in the RFA.

Calculate indirect costs for each budget category, except that indirect charges are not allowed for rentals, equipment, tuition remission, or the portion of each service or subaward in excess of \$25,000.

Example: In this example, the indirect rate is 10%. Indirect costs are calculated on the first \$25,000 because the budget item is a service. The \$25,000 threshold is for the entire line item (year 1 PLUS year 2)

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Tissue Sample PFAS Analysis via 1633	Analysis of up to 70 processed tissue samples, 70 serum samples, 20 feed samples, 35 soil composite samples, and 25 water source/equipment blank samples per field season. Expected 3% increase in operating costs year 2 due to inflation. Cost estimate based on quote from laboratory ABC.	\$44,000.00	\$45,320.00	\$89,320.00
	DIRECT Total for Services	\$44,000.00	\$45,320.00	\$89,320.00
INDIRECT COSTS FOR SERVICES	Indirect is calculated on up to the first \$25,000 of each service.			\$2,500.00
	SERVICES TOTAL (DIRECT + INDIRECT)			\$91,820.00

Matching funds

There is no match requirement, but details of current or pending funding that may also support the project can be included in the budget.

Example:

ITEM DETAILS	NARRATIVE	AMOUNT YEAR 1	AMOUNT YEAR 2	LINE ITEM TOTAL
Undergraduate Fellowship grant	If this project is funded, departmental funds of \$1,000/year will be utilized to offset the cost of the summer research field support.	-\$1,000.00	-\$1,000.00	-\$2,000.00

Appendix A: Services Versus Subaward Determination

Recipients use a subaward to contribute to the goals and objectives of the project by carrying out part of the award. The terminology used by the recipient to refer to these relationships is of no consequence. The determining factor is the nature of the relationship. Determining how to characterize the relationship as either a service or a subaward is the responsibility of the recipient. In making this determination consider the table below. It demonstrates common examples of distinguishing characteristics.

Services	Subaward Used to contribute to the goals and objectives of the project (carry out a portion of the project)
Provides the services within normal business operations	Contributes to the goals and objectives of the project by carrying out part of the award
Provides similar services to many different purchasers	Responsible for programmatic decisions
Normally operates in a competitive environment	Reimbursed for actual costs/no profit allowed
Performance is measured based on services received	Performance is measured in relation to whether the objectives of the research project were met

ATTACHMENT F – SUBMITTED QUESTIONS FORM

Please access the Word Document to submit questions by opening this link:

[Attachment F Word Document](#)