



FARMERS DROUGHT RELIEF FUND SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is required for a water management plan to be acceptable for consideration for a Category 2 water source grant application? Can we move immediately to a Category 2 grant application without first having a Category 1 planning grant?

A water management plan should be submitted with the application for a Category 2 water source installation grant. The plan should contain information equivalent to the items specified in the Rules for a Category 1 water management planning grant. A water management plan may have been prepared by NRCS, a Soil & Water Conservation District, a consulting engineer, hydrologist, soils scientist, agronomist, or other technical service provider, an irrigation equipment supplier, or by the applicants themselves. The goal is for applicants to demonstrate that they are familiar with the water needs for their crops and have evaluated the options for new water sources in terms of cost-effectiveness and environmental impacts. This information will be evaluated by the Review Committee in scoring applications.

For farms with no water management plans, the Department encourages applications for Category 1 water management planning grants. The Department anticipates offering a second round of grants in early 2026, which may allow successful Category 1 applicants to apply for a Category 2 water source grant.

2. Does a water management plan for a Category 2 water source grant application have to be prepared by NRCS?

No. An existing water management plan can be submitted; it should contain equivalent information as specified in section 3.3. of the Rules.

3. How long will funding be available?

The Farmer Drought Relief Fund was funded by the Maine Legislature with a one-time \$1 million nonlapsing appropriation and with an annual appropriation of \$ 300,000 which will be ongoing unless the Legislature amends its appropriation. The program is not contingent on federal funding.

4. Can the grant be used for washing crops in the field in addition to drip irrigation?

The Rules specify that the primary purpose for the grant should be for irrigation of crops. The Department may allow additional use for processing provided that such use

does not adversely affect water supply for irrigation or create adverse environmental impacts.

5. Would a new community garden be eligible for a grant?

The program is intended for existing farms. The Rules specify that an applicant must demonstrate some level of annual sales of produce to be eligible or have an ancestral history of disinvestment or land dispossession in the State of Maine.

6. Is there a maximum or minimum word count for narrative questions in the application?

There is no word count requirement for applications.

7. Is there an example for an agricultural water management plan?

A sample plan is contained in the Maine Irrigation Guide, pages 95-105. A copy of the Guide is available at: <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/docs/maine-irrigation-guide-2024.pdf>

8. Is an engineered design required to apply for a storage pond grant?

No. Design and permitting costs can be included as part of a Category 2 grant for an agricultural water storage pond. Ponds must comply with federal, state, and local environmental requirements to be funded.

9. If the Department finds that a submitted agricultural water management plan is inadequate for a Category 2 water source application, can the applicant be considered for a Category 1 planning grant?

Yes. The Department may recommend that an applicant for a Category 2 water source grant request a Category 1 planning grant instead.

10. Are existing farm ponds grandfathered regarding environmental permitting?

Any alteration or expansion of an existing water storage pond would be required to comply with all relevant federal, state, and local requirements.

11. What happens if source water installation costs are higher than estimated in the grant application?

The Department may reserve funding up to the maximum allowed in the Rules to provide for contingencies.

12. Is there any chance that grants will be announced sooner than August 1st?

Category 1 planning grants may be announced sooner than August 1st. After the Review Committee completes its scoring, the Department must allow for a 14-day appeals period before initiating contracts for awards.

13. What will be required for project reporting and inspections?

The grantee must submit invoices and evidence of project completion (such as photographs, well driller's report, or other information specified in the contract). By rule, the Department reserves the right to visit completed projects for up to 10 years to verify compliance with intended use and to document the effectiveness of the project.

14. Do projects have to be completed by June 1, 2026, as referenced in Question 24 of the application?

No. This question is intended to assist the Department in allocating funds from various fiscal years. Agricultural water management plans prepared by Soil & Water Conservation Districts must be completed by June 1, 2026. All other projects will have completion deadlines specified in award contracts.

15. What happens if a drilled well does not yield adequate water supply?

The Department will pay for the cost of well drilling regardless of the yield produced by the well. In accordance with section 5.2. of the Rules, the Department may consider an application for a second drilled well if funding permits.