

2026 New Innovator in Food & Agriculture Research Award Contingent on Funding Availability

Key Dates

Nomination Period Opens: February 11 at 12:00pm EST

Nomination Deadline: March 18 by 5:00pm EDT

Full Application Submission Period Opens: March 25

Note: An approved nomination application with an invitation to submit a full application is required for submission.

Full Application Deadline: April 29 by 5:00pm EDT

Contingent Award Notification: Early 2027

Contingent Anticipated Project Start Date: Early 2027

Unique Circumstances

2026 Awards Contingent on Funding Availability

FFAR's model requires federal funding from Congress to build public-private partnerships. Due to delays in passing a new Farm Bill, FFAR's funding is limited and all remaining program funds are currently committed and expected to be awarded in 2026. FFAR's ability to fund research is contingent on receiving additional funding. The 2026 New Innovator Award RFA, which would typically result in 2027 awards, is subject to this limitation.

FFAR wishes to advise potential applicants that it cannot fund any New Innovator Awards selected through this RFA until additional funds are allocated to the Foundation.



FFAR is proceeding with this RFA to ensure that the Foundation can quickly fund new research should funds become available. The award of any project selected from this RFA is contingent on the availability of funds.

FFAR strongly encourages potential applicants to consider our current funding situation when deciding whether to apply for the 2026 New Innovator Award.

I. Program Overview

The Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) seeks nominations for its 2026 New Innovator in Food and Agriculture Research Award. Through this program, FFAR intends to provide early-career scientists with the investment needed to propel them into successful research careers. The New Innovator Award program supports and promotes exceptionally talented new faculty who are conducting critical and highly innovative research addressing significant food and agriculture challenges. These awards allow grantees to focus exclusively on research without the pressure of securing additional funding.

The New Innovator Award is a flagship program of FFAR's Scientific Workforce Priority Area and seeks to promote career advancement of promising new scientists who intend to make a long-term career commitment to research in food and agriculture and bring innovative, ground-breaking research initiatives and thinking to bear on problems facing food and agriculture. Within the scope of the New Innovator Award program, investigators have the freedom to explore new avenues of inquiry that arise during their research. Therefore, FFAR is interested in the program of research to be explored and its impact as opposed to a list of very specific aims.

It is expected that, through this program, investigators will have the ability to pursue highly creative ideas, firmly establish their early lines of research into important food and agriculture scientific areas and provide funding stability in the critical early career years.

Application Requirements

Research Areas Supported

FFAR asks that applicants address how their proposed research program will address at least one of the following Priority Areas and clearly benefit the U.S. food and agriculture system.

Cultivating Thriving Production Systems

Production systems thrive when input providers and producers have the information and technologies (novel germplasm, digital tools, pest and disease solutions, etc.) to manage their enterprises efficiently and profitably—which includes selecting animals, crops and management practices that support site-specific environmental, social and business goals.

Sustaining Vibrant Agroecosystems

Tools, technologies and integrative models designed at scales needed for site-specific decision making allow producers to create, build and maintain healthy, productive agroecosystems that meet consumer expectations under changing climate conditions. Such solutions must provide flexibility to deal with future uncertainty, and clarify trends and trade-offs in environmental regeneration, productivity and resilience.

Bolstering Healthy Food Systems

In a healthy food system, food processors, distributors and retailers have the information and technologies needed to produce nutritious, environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate food for consumers. Likewise, consumers require convenient access to safe, nutritious, desirable foods with a balance of macronutrients, micronutrients and protective phytochemicals.

FFAR funds pre-competitive, hypothesis-driven research to fill critical gaps in the food and agriculture sector. More information about FFAR's Priority Areas and Research Strategy can be found on the [FFAR website](#).

Research Areas Not Supported

Research that is not directly relevant to the U.S. food and agriculture system will not be supported.

II. Eligibility

FFAR welcomes applications from all domestic institutions:

- Institutions of higher education (including public or state-controlled institutions and private institutions)
- Nonprofit and for-profit research organizations
- Government-affiliated research agencies



In keeping with FFAR goals to reach a broad range of institutions and individuals who participate in its programs, FFAR welcomes applications from the full range of higher education institutions, including colleges and universities of various sizes and across geographic regions.

Institutions may submit one nominee to the 2026 New Innovator Award program.

Faculty members at eligible institutions with the creative ideas, skills, knowledge and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research program as Principal Investigator (PI) are invited to work with their institution to develop an application for support.

FFAR welcomes applications from all applicants who meet the following eligibility criteria:

- The nominated faculty member must have been hired on or after **August 1, 2022**, for a tenure-track or equivalent position and may work in any discipline or any department within the institution.
 - Preference will be given to individuals near the onset of their independent research career and who are within eight (8) years of receiving a Ph.D. or equivalent degree.
- Individuals with significant research experience prior to obtaining their faculty position will not be considered for this award. For this funding opportunity, significant research experience is defined as a nominee that has been awarded a substantial research grant (three to five years of support) or has received project funding totaling over \$1M within the time of their tenure position or has been awarded similar career development awards with similar budgetary scopes.
- The proposed research application must directly benefit U.S. agricultural interests.

FFAR recognizes that agriculture and food sciences are highly complex, requiring individuals from a variety of disciplines to realize the potential in each field or research area. Particularly for early-stage investigators, collaborators are often essential for success. While this award is given to an outstanding early-career investigator, applicants should include information regarding any essential collaborators and include letters of support from those collaborators. In these letters, the collaborators should comment on the potential of the individual to achieve success.

III. Funding Availability & Award Information

FFAR requests up to \$450,000.00 are available for all proposed projects, contingent on funding availability. There is no maximum on the amount of matching funds that may be included in the total budget. Projects up to 36 months in length are eligible for funding. Contingent project start dates range from January 1, 2027 to March 1, 2027. Successful projects will receive disbursements contingent upon meeting reporting requirements (see Section VIII).

Key budget considerations are noted below, and additional budgetary guidelines can be found on FFAR's [website](#). Applicants are encouraged to contact FFAR's Grants Team at grants@foundationfar.org to discuss any concerns.

- **Matching funds are optional for this funding opportunity.**
 - Lack of matching funds will not influence the review of the application.
 - Matching funds must meet FFAR's [Matching Funds Guidelines](#), noting that they cannot be from a U.S. federal government entity.
 - No more than 50% of the required match may be in-kind contributions.
 - Funds already committed as a match or dedicated to another project cannot be offered as a match. Matching funds must correspond to project costs in the budget justification.
- Salaries of Principal Investigator(s) are allowed for time not covered by institutional or other grant funds.
- Tuition cannot be charged as a direct cost for FFAR awards.
- FFAR funds cannot be used for building construction and/or commercial scaling.
- A maximum of 15% of direct costs may be used for indirect costs (IDC), including subcontracts, if applicable. Please see FFAR's [Indirect Costs Policy](#) for more details.
- Reasonable budgets work in favor of the applicant. Budgets that are not commensurate with the proposed work or poorly justified will negatively affect the overall evaluation of the application.

FFAR anticipates granting up to ten (10) awards, contingent on receiving additional funding. The actual number of awards will depend on the quality and budgets of successful applications. FFAR reserves the right to negotiate all or none of the applications received for funding consideration under this opportunity.

IV. Application Components

All applicants must submit their application through FFAR's online Grant Management System.

Nomination Application

The nomination letter should be on institution letterhead, signed by an Authorized Organization Representative. The nomination letter must be submitted by the nominee through FFAR's Grants Portal. The letter should include the general information and justification outlined below.

Required Components

General Information

- Organization information
- Nominator's contact information
- Nominee's name
- Nominee's contact information
- Nominee's date of appointment to tenure-track or equivalent position (must be on or after August 1, 2022)
- Key personnel
- Program title
- Key topics or areas of research to be covered in the nominee's program (50-word limit)
- Nominee's research program overview (400-word limit)
- FFAR's Priority Area that aligns with nominee's proposed research program
- Geographic location where the proposed research will be conducted
- Preliminary budget and optional match information

Justification for the nomination must address all points below

- Explain how this individual is outstanding in their field (300-word limit)
- Explain how this individual was selected for the nomination among, what is likely, many meritorious individuals (300-word limit)
- Why should this nominee receive the FFAR New Innovator Award? (300-word limit)
- How would the institution benefit from this nominee receiving the New Innovator Award? (300-word limit)

- Explain how the institution is supporting and will continue to support the nominee (300-word limit)

Optional Attachments

- Additional key personnel
- Nominee biosketch or CV (5-page limit)

Full Application

Required Components

- Organization information
- Nominator's contact information
- Nominee's contact information
- Key personnel
- Program title
- FFAR Priority Area that aligns with nominee's proposed research program
- Key topics or areas of research to be covered in the nominee's program (50-word limit)
- Public abstract (500-word limit)
- Program duration
- Geographic location where the proposed research will be conducted
- Stakeholder groups to be served by this program (500-word limit)
- Research Program Description (2,000-word limit): The description of the scientific plan should be written at a level appropriate for reviewers who are broadly knowledgeable but may not be directly involved in the proposed area of research. The application should focus on the overarching goals of the research program and address the Review Criteria (see Section VII). It is not necessary to provide the proposed research as a series of specific aims. Do not provide a detailed experimental plan. Preliminary data are allowed but not required.

This section should include the following:

Program Description

Describe the scientific challenge or opportunity that you propose to address, its importance, and how anticipated outreach and outcomes would have a major impact on a broad area of research relevant to the Priority Area and how it will create deliverables which impact U.S. Agriculture. Provide the scientific context by summarizing the current landscape of the field and how

your research, if successful, would extend substantially beyond current boundaries. Describe the overall approach to be taken. A detailed experimental plan and extensive preliminary data are not required, but the applicant will need to clearly provide a description of the program being proposed. Applicants must also address how the research will be performed in a robust and rigorous manner, including addressing risks and challenges. If not providing a detailed experimental plan or extensive preliminary data, state prominently that this is done in compliance with the RFA. (1,000-word limit)

Innovation & Feasibility

State clearly and concisely what makes your project exceptionally innovative in the context of the current state-of-the-art of the field. Describe how this research has not been done elsewhere or how it accelerates a current research challenge or addresses it in a new or innovative manner. If applicable, describe how the proposed research will move the technology, tool, practice or approach under study from its current status further along the commercialization pipeline. Since the approaches may be highly innovative, and hence risky, what will you do if these approaches are not successful? (500-word limit)

Investigator Qualifications

Provide evidence to support your claim of innovativeness and creativity in your prior research. For example, what personal qualities and experiences demonstrate your inclination to question paradigms and work with intellectual uncertainties, develop unique collaborations, integrate diverse sources of information, or develop novel approaches when new challenges or opportunities arise? (500-word limit)

- Suitability for the New Innovator Award program: Why is the planned program fundamental to building your research career? (500-word limit)
- Data Management and Dissemination Plan (500-word limit)
- Facilities, Equipment and other Resources (500-word limit)
- Proposed Budget
- Budget Justification
- Optional Match Information
- Organizational Assurances for any type of research involving:
 - Human subjects

- Vertebrate animals
- Recombinant DNA
- National Security implications
- Hazardous materials
- Human fetal tissue
- NEPA review

Required Attachments

Templates* for FFAR forms can be found on the [Grants Resources webpage](#). Failure to provide these attachments will result in the application's disqualification.

- *Budget Form
- *Current and Pending Support (required for PI and Key Personnel)
- Project timeline (by year), with tasks organized by project objectives.
- References cited (will not count towards project description word limit)
- PI and Key Personnel Bio-sketches (five-page limit per individual, see [Biosketch Guidelines](#)).

Optional Attachments

This section should not be used to circumvent the page limit for the Research Program Description.

- Matching Funds Contribution Letter(s), if applicable (see [*Matching Funds Contribution Letter Template](#))
- Additional key personnel
- Graphics, Figures, Equations and Tables: The textbox for the Research Program Description does not support equations, tables, graphics and figures. Applicants may upload a PDF document with graphics, figures, tables or a list of equations to support the research program description (5-page limit).
- Letters of Support: Applicants may provide letters of institutional, collaborator or stakeholder support for the proposed program. Please combine all letters of support into a single PDF document before uploading as an attachment.

V. How to Apply

All applications must be submitted by the deadline date through FFAR's online application Grant Management System. Applications submitted outside of this system will not be considered. If you already have an account, you may [start a new application](#). If you are a



new user, register for an account by clicking the “Create Account” button located under the Sign In button on the bottom right side of the page.

Once you log in, you may begin working on your application. Please be sure to save your work often. To access a saved application, please do so through your [Grant Management Account](#).

Only applications submitted by the deadline through FFAR’s Grant Management System will be accepted and considered eligible for evaluation. To be fair to all our applicants, FFAR will not grant extensions to applicants who missed the deadlines posted in the Key Dates section.

FFAR will review nominations against eligibility criteria. Only those meeting the criteria will be invited to submit full applications. Email invitations will be sent to those eligible by March 25, 2026.

Nominator Instructions

Please be prepared to write a letter on institutional letterhead with the nominee’s name, department, institution, title, start date of current position, date they received their Ph.D., and justification for the nomination addressing all points provided in the Application Components section.

VI. Evaluation Criteria

Review Criteria

Only the review criteria described below will be considered in the review process. Questions are illustrative and not intended to be comprehensive. The overall assessment will not be an average score of the individual criteria; rather, it will reflect the reviewers’ overall impression of the application. Evaluation of the scientific merit of each application is within the sole discretion of the peer reviewers, and they may raise additional factors to consider that are not covered in the questions for each criterion.

The New Innovator Award supports innovative research that has the potential to produce a major impact on challenges related to FFAR’s Priority Areas. A New Innovator Award grant application does not require extensive background material. Preliminary data is not required

but may be included. Accordingly, reviewers will provide comments emphasizing the program's:

1. Innovation and strategic impact;
2. Feasibility;
3. Potential outcomes and outreach; and
4. The qualifications of the PI and team.

Please see the detailed review criteria below.

Innovation & Strategic Impact (30%)

- Does the research program address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress within a Priority Area?
- Did the applicant identify how FFAR is uniquely positioned to fund this research program? Does the application clearly address at least one of FFAR's Priority Areas?
- Did the applicant describe what makes the proposed approach(es) exceptionally innovative in the context of the current state-of-the-art of the field?
- If the program is successful, will it create new paradigms or challenge existing ones in the U.S. and/or global food systems?
- Will the applicant train the next generation of food and agriculture research scientists, and if so, how?
- Did the applicant clearly show how funding will result in deliverables that benefit the scientific community and/or other stakeholders in the food and agriculture value chain?
- If applicable, did the applicant show how the proposed research will move the technology, tool, practice or approach under study from its current status further along the commercialization pipeline?

Feasibility (30%)

Note that applicants are asked to focus on the overall program of research. Applicants are not required to provide a detailed experimental plan or list of aims and the program budget does not need to be associated with specific aims.

- Are the overarching goals of the proposed research program clear?
- Is the overall scientific approach well-reasoned and appropriate?
- Did the applicant identify potential risks to successfully complete the research goals and propose to address them?
- Is the data and results management plan outlined by the applicant adequate?

Potential Outcomes & Outreach (25%)

- Has the applicant sufficiently demonstrated that the proposed research program is expected to directly benefit the U.S. food and agriculture system?
- Does the application adequately discuss the significance of the challenge that is being addressed in the application and how the research will contribute to a solution?
- Has the applicant demonstrated that this research has not been done elsewhere, or that this research accelerates a current research challenge or addresses a challenge in a new or innovative manner?
- Will the PI share the data and research results with the food and agriculture community? If so, do they also effectively describe how they will share results?

Qualifications (15%)

- Is the PI well suited to the research program?
- Does the PI show the potential to have significant impact on their field? Does the PI have the appropriate experience and training?
- Is the effort committed sufficient to perform the proposed research?
- Will this research program serve as a platform for a successful scientific career?
- Will the PI be an inspiring mentor who will attract and motivate students and post-docs in their lab?
- Does the PI have institutional support to carry out the program being proposed?

VII. Award Administration

Review Process

Nomination Application Review

Submitted pre-applications undergo an internal review process to ensure that the nominee is eligible for the award. Only eligible nominees will be invited to submit a full application.

Full Application Review

Full applications undergo a two-stage peer review process, including primary and secondary review.

- During primary review, applications will be evaluated by an independent, external peer review panel of scientific experts. Reviewers will provide comments using the detailed Review Criteria below.

- During secondary review, applications judged to be most meritorious by external peer review panels will be evaluated and recommended for funding by the FFAR Advisory Council based on comparisons with applications from the same cycle and FFAR's program priorities.

All peer reviewers must agree and adhere to the terms outlined in FFAR's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#), [Non-Disclosure Agreement](#) and [Peer Review AI Policy](#). FFAR makes reasonable efforts to ensure applications are not assigned to reviewers with a real or apparent conflict with the applicant, institution or project personnel. Reviewers with a conflict of interest are recused from evaluating or participating in related discussions. All reviews are conducted confidentially.

Applications recommended for funding during secondary review will go to FFAR's Executive Director for the final funding decision after considering program priorities set by the FFAR Board of Directors, portfolio balance across programs and funding availability

Award Administration

Selection Notice

Following the full application review process, if additional funding is obtained, the PI and Authorized Organization Representative listed on the project will be officially notified by email of the Intent to Fund status of the application by FFAR's Grants Management Team. If an application is selected for funding, FFAR reserves the right to request additional or clarifying information for any reason deemed necessary. The Intent to Fund forms required at this stage can be found on [FFAR's website](#). Following notification of award, the grant agreement process with FFAR includes formalizing the terms and conditions of the award. This process also involves institutional review and approval, confirmation of budget allocations, project milestones, reporting requirements and compliance with FFAR's policies. Once both parties execute the agreement, the project may begin and funding is disbursed according to the agreed-upon schedule.

Requirement to Demonstrate Matching Funds

If selected for funding and match is acquired; the grantee will be required to certify matching funds before disbursement of award funds. The match share is intended to supplement, not supplant existing funding for the PI. The applicant must abide by FFAR's [Matching Funds Guidelines](#) to meet FFAR's matching requirements. To constitute a valid match, all matching funds on a FFAR grant must be expended during the grant period.

Grant Period(s)

Upon receipt of the Grant Agreement, the potential grantee should note the Start Date and End Date. Grantees may only use FFAR funds on program expenditures on or after the Start Date of the Grant. With prior approval, grantees may charge project expenditures up to 90 days prior to the Start Date of the Grant.

If grantees need additional time to complete their research at the end of their grant period, up to two No-Cost-Extensions (NCE) of up to twelve (12) months each can be requested. The request must be submitted to FFAR at least thirty (30) days prior to the End Date of the grant. The request must explain the need for the extension and include an estimate of the unobligated funds remaining and a plan for their use. Please see FFAR's [No-Cost Extension Request Instructions](#) for more information.

Post-Award Management

Annual Reporting Requirements

After FFAR confers a grant, the grantee must provide annual Narrative, Indicator and Financial Status reports within 30 days after the end of each funding year. Annual reports should include an accounting of actual vs planned activities performed, budget expenses incurred under the grant, any changes to the workplan and budget and highlights of project accomplishments (e.g., publications and other communications). Please see FFAR's [Annual & Final Reporting Requirements](#) for more details.

Final Report Requirements

Within 90 days of project completion, the grantee is required to provide a final project report. This report should address the project objectives outlined in the original grant application, describe any modifications to the project objectives and scope, describe the final project accomplishments and include an impact report and a final financial expenditure report. Please see FFAR's [Annual & Final Reporting Requirements](#) for more details.

Scientific Integrity

FFAR's ability to pursue its mission to build unique partnerships to support innovative science addressing today's food and agriculture challenges depends on the integrity of the science on which it relies. A fundamental purpose of FFAR is to facilitate the advancement of knowledge and the application of science to address challenges related to FFAR's mission. All FFAR grants must be conducted with the highest standards of scientific integrity.

VIII. Application Assistance

For questions related to the online submission system, please contact FFAR's Grants Management Team at grants@foundationfar.org. FFAR's Grants Office Hours are held the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 12:00pm ET; interested attendees should [register](#) in advance.

For questions related to the New Innovator Award program, please contact Dr. LaKisha Odom at lodom@foundationfar.org.

FFAR strives to respond to inquiries within two (2) business days, but our response time depends on the volume of questions received and the complexity of the questions asked. Please note that we do not monitor mailboxes in the evenings, weekends or federal holidays.