

# Maine Farms for the Future

## What is the Farms for the Future Program (FFF)?

FFF is a two-phase business assistance program that helps Maine farmers plan for the future of their agricultural enterprise. FFF is a program of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources and is administered by CEI. [Learn more](#) about the history of this program.



### Who is eligible?

Farmers are eligible if they...

- Own and operate five or more acres of productive farmland.
- Have an idea for change that will increase the long-term economic viability of their farm.
- Commit time to the research and writing that a good plan requires.

### Why develop a business plan?

Many farmers recognize the need to improve their farm operations, transfer the farm to the next generation, or start a new enterprise in addition to, or as a replacement for, the current operation. A written plan will guide the farmer through these changes. A good business plan is farm-specific. It describes everything from the number of employees and types of equipment to the farm's annual operating costs and profits. It also covers the marketing strategy and the farm family's short and long term goals. It is a way to analyze when to make changes that may improve the farm's bottom line and farmer's job satisfaction. It is a tool that changes with the farm, not a one-time "report." Many banks and commercial lenders require farm owners to submit a business plan as part of a loan application.

### How do I know if I'm a good match for this program?

You need to own at least 5 acres of productive agricultural land that you are actively farming. (Those who are thinking about starting a farm, but aren't yet farming, are not eligible.) You need to have an idea for how to make the farm more viable in the long term. (It can be a rough idea.) If you are accepted, you will be spending a lot of time working on your business plan. You will be meeting with your team, coming up with numbers, doing market research, talking with specialists, and writing the text of the plan. You may also be taking courses, attending trainings, or visiting producers in other areas. This is all on top

of running your farm and family and perhaps even working off the farm. It's doable, and highly rewarding, but it's a commitment. Please consider how you will make room in your schedule to do this work.

## How does it work?

*In Phase 1: Business Planning*, farmers receive support to develop a detailed business plan with a team of skilled professionals. Farmers help determine the membership of their planning team. Team members often include: other farmers who have made similar changes on their farm, specialists from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, specialists from Maine's Small Business Development Centers, market researchers, accountants, or other financial advisors. Farmers in Phase 1 also have the opportunity to take business planning classes, improve their skills with financial software, visit farms in other areas, or develop specialized production skills. In some cases, farmers will meet with legal consultants and estate planners to discuss a generational transfer or conservation easements. Most of the research and writing of the business plan takes place during the fall and winter months.

*In Phase 2: Implementation Grants*, farmers who have completed business plans during Phase 1 are eligible to apply for a competitive cash grant to implement the changes identified in their business plans. Grants cover 25% of the cost of the projects outlined in the plan. Grants are limited to \$25,000. The remaining 75% of the financing may include cash, loans, other grants, and in-kind services provided by the farmer. Farmers must demonstrate the source of the 75% match financing before receiving any grant funds. Farmers who accept the Phase 2 grants must sign an agreement stating that they will not convert their farmland to non-agricultural uses for five years. At any time, a farmer can repay the amount of the grant to buy back this agreement.

*The application deadline for the 2007-2008 round of assistance has passed.* The next deadline is expected to be in October 2008. You may view and download a copy of last year's application below. You may request more information or an application by mail. You may also request to be placed on a mailing list for next year's program. Call or e-mail Kerri Sands at 207-772-5356, ext. 114 or [kcs@ceimaine.org](mailto:kcs@ceimaine.org)

In November, approximately 20 farms will be selected for this year's program. Planning teams will be formed in November and December. Regular meetings and research take place January through April. The first deadline to apply for Phase 2 funding will be in mid-to-late April 2008. Those who do not apply in April will continue working on their business plans through the busy summer season, and will have an opportunity to apply for the second Phase 2 deadline, in November 2008.