

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

OFFICE OF AGRICULTURAL RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

## **BIOLOGICALLY INTEGRATED FARMING SYSTEMS**

### **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)**

Release date: June 3, 2026

**Grant Proposals Due Date:** June 30, 2026 by 5 pm

CDFA does not accept late grant proposals

<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oars/opca/bifs.html>

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## About the program

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The California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Office of Pesticide Consultation and Analysis (OPCA) is now accepting applications for the Biologically Integrated Farming Systems (BIFS) program. Funding for this solicitation comes from OPCA's allocation of the pesticide mill assessment. For the current request for proposals (RFP), CDFA will award up to \$2 million for two projects, and applicants may request the full amount. This program develops projects that demonstrate, refine, and outreach innovative, biologically integrated farming systems that reduce chemical pesticide inputs. For this RFP, we have identified five priority areas (see Project Priorities below).

Proposals should advance the goals of [California's Sustainable Pest Management \(SPM\) Roadmap](#), including efforts to 1) enhance knowledge, research, and technical assistance; 2) align pest control advisors (PCAs) with SPM; and 3) reduce economic risk for growers transitioning to SPM.

The BIFS application process will occur in two stages: 1) concept proposal submission and 2) full proposal development. This RFP is to solicit concept proposals. After concept proposal review and scoring is complete, OPCA will select up to four applicants to develop full proposals, which include a detailed workplan, budget, budget justification, and letters of support. We anticipate funding two proposals at the full \$1 million. Prior to full proposal development, OPCA scientists will meet with the selected applicants to discuss reviewer comments as part of a pre-project consultation.

### Background

The Biologically Integrated Farming System (BIFS) program initially ran from 1995 to 2010. Projects focused on fostering farmer-to-farmer information exchange and on-farm demonstration of integrated farming practices that promote IPM and biological systems, while allowing growers to maintain profitable businesses. Originally a project of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), BIFS transitioned to a grant program administered by the University of California (UC) Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP), based at UC Davis. The SAREP BIFS program funded twelve projects in eleven different farming systems. The adoption of BIFS practices was found to reduce pesticide use, improve soil fertility, decrease erosion and nitrogen leaching, and increase populations of beneficial insects, fishes, birds, and game.

In 2019, OPCA received funding to revitalize the BIFS program. Since this time, approximately \$10 million has been awarded to 10 projects in diverse cropping systems, including almond, walnut, grape, lettuce, cole crops, strawberry, and hemp. BIFS projects have included the use of areawide mating disruption, natural enemy releases, bio-pesticides, insectary plantings, cover

crops, non-fumigant soil disinfestation, rogueing of diseased plants, rapid diagnostics, and other SPM approaches.

## Project Priorities

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The focus of this RFP is to help growers transition away from non-selective, biologically disruptive pesticides, especially those of high regulatory concern. The BIFS program supports the demonstration, refinement, and outreach of SPM-based farming systems that are economically viable and protective of human health and the environment. All aspects of the farming system may be considered as they relate to pest management, including factors such as adjacent landscapes, whether they are farmed or not.

**For the current solicitation, CDFA has identified five priority topics based on recent or proposed regulatory actions and grower needs; however, projects focusing on other topics are welcome to be submitted.**

### Priority topics:

- Areawide management
- Monitoring that informs pest management
- Post-harvest disease control
- Neonicotinoid alternatives in tomato
- Paraquat alternatives

BIFS projects typically include all the following elements:

1. On-farm demonstration/evaluation of an innovative, biologically based farming system that employs SPM strategies;
2. A collaborative outreach effort for sharing technical information about the farming system with growers, PCAs, commodity groups, and others engaged in pest management, and;
3. An organized program for monitoring key biological and economic variables to inform on-farm decision making and evaluate project success.

### Farming System

Proposals should describe a farming system that integrates key technical elements such as biological and cultural control of pests, habitat management on-farm and at the landscape scale (including adjacent agricultural and non-agricultural land where applicable) to reduce pest problems, and reduced reliance on pesticides that pose greater risks to human health or the

environment. Preference will be given to projects that incorporate multiple practices to address various pest types. Proposals should describe the inherent links between the components of the farming system to pest management where applicable (e.g., tillage practices, crop rotation, irrigation) and the larger landscape or watershed. One means of demonstrating the potential effectiveness of the alternative practices would involve a side-by-side comparison of the current versus alternative farming system with corresponding monitoring of key biological and economic variables. While a key component of the project should be outreaching established SPM based methods (field days, websites, social media, etc.), applied experimental components can be used to refine BIFS practices.

### **Outreach Efforts and Management Team**

Proposed projects should utilize existing partnerships or build new partnerships that are voluntary and collaborative in nature. Outreach efforts should bring scientists, farmers, and consultants together in a collaborative, "co-learning" environment that enables farmers to learn and adapt integrated farming practices to local conditions. CDFA encourages project teams to provide outreach materials and workshops in languages other than English to ensure that all growers have access to project information. Industry partners can participate by providing matching funds, infrastructure for project support activities, and/or cost sharing rebates for farming system inputs such as cover crop seeds, beneficial organisms (arthropods and micro-organisms), insectary shrubs and trees, insect traps, laboratory services, and/or farm implements. CDFA encourages matching funds from industry partners.

Proposals should describe a management team of individuals experienced in the farming system that will be responsible for tasks such as hands-on field days, monitoring of key biological and economic parameters, and written and online materials. The management team should include an array of knowledgeable individuals/organizations including but not limited to growers, extension specialists, farm advisors, grower representatives such as PCAs, and commodity boards. The role of the management team is to implement the proposed outreach program and to serve for its duration as resources for participating farmers.

### **Funding and Grant Term**

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CDFA will select proposals based on the criteria presented below in the Evaluation Criteria section. This cycle, the total funding available is \$2 million, and the maximum project budget is \$1 million. Projects should begin in January of 2027 and last for approximately four years.

Funding must supplement, not supplant, existing activities/programs. CDFA defines supplement as adding to existing funds to enhance or expand existing activities, and supplant as replacing existing funds for an activity because grant funds are to fund the same activity.

CDFA reserves the right to offer an award different than the amount requested.

## Project Eligibility

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Public or private colleges and universities, local, state, and federal government entities including tribal governments, non-profit organizations, and commodity groups are eligible to apply. The project lead(s) and their institutions must be based in California; out-of-state collaborators are allowed. California state agencies may not submit proposal applications but may be subcontractors on other proposals. A state agency's share of funding may not exceed 30% of total funding. State agencies may not take the lead in project management.

## How to Submit a Grant Proposal

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CDFA cannot assist in the preparation of concept proposals; however, applicants may submit general questions to [cdfa.opca@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:cdfa.opca@cdfa.ca.gov). In order to ensure all potential applicants benefit from all submitted questions and answers, CDFA will post all questions and responses on the BIFS webpage (<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oars/opca/bifs.html>) within five business days of submission. CDFA will not accept questions within five business days of the application deadline.

[Submit the application via the online portal system here](#). To develop the application, please use the Applicant Guide that is provided on the [BIFS webpage](#) and attached to the opportunity in the online portal. **CDFA encourages applicants to review the Applicant Guide before beginning the application process.**

### Proposal Review and Evaluation

A committee consisting of scientists and specialists at CDFA and other state agencies, California universities, non-governmental environmental organizations, and/or grower representatives will review the merits of the proposals and provide feedback for concept proposals and full proposals. Any member of the committee connected to a submitted project will recuse themselves from the process. The evaluation criteria are found at the end of this document. CDFA will make final funding decisions.

## Award Notification

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CDFA will notify all applicants regarding the status of their concept proposal and full proposal (if applicable) and provide comments. Successful applicants will complete a grant agreement

following the award announcement. Grant recipients may not begin project activities until both parties have executed the grant agreement. This program requires recipients to submit annual progress reports and a final report to demonstrate project accomplishments and address problems and delays. This program requires quarterly invoices and may consider more frequent invoices on a case-by-case basis.

## Disqualifications

Applications that do not meet the following requirements may be disqualified:

- (1) The applicant is not an eligible entity.
- (2) The application includes activities with dates outside the allowable grant duration.
- (3) The funding amount requested is less than the minimum award amount allowable or exceeds the maximum award amount allowable.
- (4) The application is incomplete, including an application with one or more unanswered questions or missing, blank, or unreadable attachments.
- (5) The application includes unallowable costs or activities.
- (6) The application does not meet the purpose as defined in the Request for Proposal.
- (7) The application would provide an improper benefit if funded.
- (8) The application is submitted after the submission period has ended.

## Appeal

Applicants may appeal any disqualification taken by CDFA during the administrative review for the preceding reasons within 10 calendar days of receiving a notice of disqualification. The appeal must be in writing and signed by the responsible party name on the grant application or his/her authorized agent. It must state the grounds for the appeal and include any supporting documents and a copy of the CDFA decision being challenged. The submissions must be sent to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Office of Hearings and Appeals, 1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 or emailed to [CDFA.LegalOffice@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:CDFA.LegalOffice@cdfa.ca.gov). Submissions received outside of this timeframe will be denied.

## Grant Proposal Requirements

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**Concept proposals are short.** They should provide a concise overview of project justification, goals, workplan, and participants.

The Applicant Guide provided on the [BIFS webpage](#) and attached to the opportunity in the online portal has all the detail requirements. **CDFA encourages applicants to review the Applicant Guide before beginning the application process.**

## Allowable and Unallowable Costs

A cost is allowable if it directly relates to the project and is incurred solely to advance work under the Grant Agreement. Allowable costs include, but are not limited to, salaries and wages, release time (California State University researchers), indirect costs, fringe benefits, consultant services, travel, telephone, equipment (lease/rental), subcontractors and materials, data processing, land rentals, training and communications. Unallowable expenses include, but are not limited to, costs for hospitality suites, alcoholic beverages, costs of entertainment, and costs for organized fund raising including financial campaigns and solicitation of gifts. CDFA does not reimburse non-allowable costs.

More information about allowable and unallowable items of cost can be found here:

[https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Regulations/General/FinalSelectedItemsofCost\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Regulations/General/FinalSelectedItemsofCost_Guidance.pdf)

## Executive Order N-6-22 – Russia Sanctions

On March 4, 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom issued Executive Order N-6-22 regarding Economic Sanctions against Russia and Russian entities and individuals. “Economic Sanctions” refers to sanctions imposed by the U.S. government in response to Russia’s actions in Ukraine, as well as any sanctions imposed under state law. By submitting a proposal or application, the applicant represents that it is not a target of Economic Sanctions. Should the state determine the is a target of Economic Sanctions or is conducting prohibited transactions with sanctioned individuals or entities, that shall be grounds for rejection of the applicant’s proposal/application any time prior to agreement execution, or, if determined after agreement execution, shall be grounds for termination by the state.

## Indirect Costs

Indirect costs are facilities and administrative costs that cannot easily be tied directly to the activities of the grant. Examples of common indirect costs include administrative/clerical services, rent, utilities, internet and telephone service, maintenance, and general office supplies. **Because this solicitation is Agricultural Industry-Funded, this RFP restricts all applicants including UC and CSU to a maximum indirect cost rate of 10%.** Applicants should calculate indirect costs as 10% of the modified total direct costs (MTDC) and MTDC as all total direct costs minus excluded costs such as tuition and equipment in excess of \$10,000. Subawards are also subject to the 10% indirect cost cap and may not be included in the MTDC calculation for the full project budget. See OPCA’s Indirect Cost Policy document for more information: [https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oars/opca/docs/opca\\_indirect\\_costs\\_policies.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oars/opca/docs/opca_indirect_costs_policies.pdf)

## Evaluation Criteria

EVALUATION CRITERIA	Max points
<p><b>Proposal Quality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Summary: Concisely defines the issue, describes the approach to be used, and identifies objectives and criteria that will be used to evaluate the project's success.</li> <li>• Work Plans and Methods: Clearly explains project tasks and how they will be executed.</li> <li>• Project Management and Evaluation: Provides metrics that will be used to evaluate project success.</li> <li>• Additional information: includes information for project leaders, cooperators, and supporters.</li> </ul>	30
<p><b>Project Justification</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance to Project Priorities: Clearly states how growers can reduce high risk pesticides in an economically feasible manner.</li> <li>• Justification: Defines/describes the issue, particularly how the alternative farming system will maintain yields and quality, provide suitable pest management, and reduce chemical pesticide inputs in an economically effective manner. Describes how the alternative farming systems will be outreached to growers.</li> </ul>	30
<p><b>Project Team and Resources</b></p> <p><i>Team</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the project leaders, management team and other cooperators well-suited to the project?</li> <li>• Does the team have complementary and integrated expertise and the leadership approach/governance and organizational structure appropriate for the project?</li> </ul> <p><i>Resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are matching funds provided by industry partners?</li> </ul>	15
<p><b>Feasibility and Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project is manageable within proposed framework of budget, time and personnel.</li> <li>• The overall strategy, work methodology, and analyses methods are well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the objectives of the project. Potential problems, alternative strategies and benchmarks for success (changes in pesticide usage, grower participation/adoption) are included.</li> <li>• Does the project have clear strategy for outreach to interested farmers and agricultural consultants beyond the project duration?</li> </ul>	25
<p><b>Total Points</b></p>	100