

**Request for Applications
2011 Organic Research Initiative
The Ceres Trust**

Introduction

The Ceres Trust, a privately administered charitable trust based in the Midwest, has as its main focus the support and promotion of organic and sustainable agriculture. This Request for Applications is provided for the third year of our Organic Research Initiative. Our commitment to a third year of Organic Research Initiative grantmaking was announced in January.

Program Description

Grants totaling at least \$500,000 will be awarded again to universities and other nonprofit applicants in the North Central Region. Grants of up to \$60,000 per year for up to three years will be awarded. Applicants must be based in the 12-state region to be eligible. The states in the region are Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Application Deadline

The deadline for applications is October 1, 2011.

Grantmaking Cycle

It is anticipated that the application review process will be completed in late October, decisions made in early November, applicants notified of decisions in late November, and grant funds dispersed to successful applicants after grant agreements are signed and returned. Multi-year projects are eligible for automatic extension and dispersal of grant funds upon submission of a satisfactory interim report two months before the end of each project year.

Proposal Format

Proposals containing no more than 14 numbered pages of double-spaced 12-point type printed on one side only will be accepted. This includes a title page that identifies the applicant and the principal investigator and includes the mailing address, phone numbers, and electronic contact information for both.

Proposal Content Categories

Applicants should respond fully to each of the following content categories, which reflect the organic research priorities of The Ceres Trust. The maximum points that can be scored in each of the nine categories is in parenthesis at the end of each content category description.

Significance of Project to Organic Agriculture. Proposals should demonstrate the significance of the project to organic agriculture and explain why the proposed research is needed. They should show how the research proposed will achieve one or more of the following objectives: 1) improve organic farming systems; 2) facilitate the transition of conventional farms to organic methods, and 3) help make existing organic farms more productive and profitable. Objectives of the proposed research and anticipated measurable outcomes should be clearly stated. The proposal should include a brief discussion of the potential of the proposed project to make a difference. (15 points).

Literature Review. A literature review is required to show that the research proposed is unique and has not already been done. It should demonstrate that the researchers involved in the proposed project are familiar with research underway elsewhere and that the research proposed will build on, rather

than duplicate, the efforts of others. The application also should demonstrate how duplication of research efforts of others will be avoided. (10 points).

Institutional/Organizational Capacity to Do the Proposed Research. The organic research experience and capability of the applicant organization or institution to conduct this kind of project should be described. This should include a brief description of recent and ongoing organic research. It also should show how the proposed project would contribute to other organic research the applicant has underway. (10 points).

Description and Qualifications of Project Personnel. Applicants should describe the experience and credentials of the principal investigator responsible for the project and of other researchers who will be involved. This description should include information regarding their familiarity with organic agriculture and involvement in organic research. The application also should describe what each researcher involved in the project would do and the time commitments involved. (10 points).

Project Methods and Materials. Applicants must provide detailed information on the methodology of the proposed research project. This includes information on experimental design, materials, treatments, and measurements. An important priority of The Ceres Trust is basic and applied research on soil microbial life and other aspects of the soil that contribute to the ability of organic growers to evaluate and enhance soil health, choose input strategies that match crop needs while reducing nutrient losses, and choose fertility strategies that manage microbial communities and nutrients effectively. The applicant should provide specific information on how the results of the proposed research will be analyzed, assessed, and interpreted. (15 points).

Organic Farmer Involvement. Applicants should describe input from organic farmers in the design of projects. Field research must be conducted on working organic farms or on certified organic land. Both the certification status and the identity of the certifier must be provided when certified land is involved. The project budget should include stipends for organic farmers contributing time or providing land or other project inputs. (10 points).

Project Work Plan. A work plan that includes project milestones and realistic timelines for project activities must be provided. For multi-year project proposals, a year-by-year breakdown of the project timelines must be included. (10 points).

Dissemination of Results. Applicants must provide an outcome-oriented plan for dissemination to farmers of information developed by the research proposed. They should include plans for publication of research results, methods of distribution of materials produced, and the organization and timing of information dissemination events. Organic farmers should be involved to the extent possible in evaluating and disseminating project results and outcomes. (10 points).

Budget Breakdown and Narrative. The applicant must describe a well-justified budget that is appropriate and provides the funds needed to carry out the work proposed. For multi-year projects, a year-by-year budget breakdown must be provided. The budget also must be in compliance with The Ceres Trust budget guidelines provided in the general budget information section below. (10 points).

Overall Research Initiative Limitations

The Trust will not fund organic and conventional farming yield comparison studies, research that attempts to identify or assess organic food safety or nutritional benefits, surveys or other socio-economic research, or research relating to the development of organic markets. It also will not fund conference proposals or project planning grants.

Proposal Evaluation Process

The Organic Research Initiative is a competitive grants program. After screening to ensure that proposals meet the general requirements of this Request for Applications, qualified reviewers will be selected to evaluate and score proposals. The reviews may be ad hoc or, if necessary due to submission of a large number of proposals, the reviewers may be convened as a panel. The Trust will be guided by the results of the evaluation and scoring process but reserves the right to take its own priorities into consideration in making final decisions.

Reporting Requirements

Successful applicants will be required to submit 1) a progress report at the end of the 10th month of each project year and 2) a final report when the project is completed.

General Budget Information

Cost sharing or matching is not required. The funds provided may be used only for expenses directly related to the research project proposed. Grants awarded may not be used for international travel, construction, renovating or refurbishing research space, purchasing or installing fixed equipment in research space, or building or facility repairs. The funds provided also may not be used for student tuition. Allowed expenses include rental of equipment needed for the proposed project, stipends and expense reimbursement for farmer cooperators, and mileage for field travel. The recovery of indirect costs under this program may not exceed 20 percent of the total funds awarded for the project work required.

Additional Requirements

Applications must include 1) a copy of the Internal Revenue Service determination letter or other document showing the applicant's tax exempt status; 2) a copy of the most recent audited financial statement (501(c)(3) organizations only), and 3) any existing policies applicable to research grants. Applicants must provide contact information for the person responsible for grant award contracts. Applications from universities should be endorsed by the university's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs/Contract and Grant Administration or similar office.

Special Considerations

Although the overall quality of the proposals submitted in response to our Request for Applications process in 2009 and 2010 was very good, failure to respond fully in three specific categories resulted in critical reviewer comments and lower scores. The most problematic category continues to be literature reviews that fail to meet the stated requirements. Other problem areas include failure to provide all the required information related to organic certification of land involved in proposed research projects and lack of detailed budget information. Reviewers also will be requested to provide lower scores in any instances where project personnel fringe costs appear to be inflated.

Where to Send Proposals

Applicants must mail four copies of their proposal to: Jessica King, Organic Research Initiative, The Ceres Trust, P.O. Box 2965, Milwaukee, WI 53201-2965. The proposals must be postmarked on or before October 1, 2011.