



THE CERES TRUST

Request for Applications Organic Research Initiative

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 Organic Research Initiative announced by the Trust on May 9, 2009. It is the first specific grantmaking program established by the Trust to implement its commitment to supporting and promoting organic agriculture.

Program Description

Grants totaling \$500,000 will be made later this year to universities and other nonprofit organizations in the 12-state North Central Region for organic research projects. Grants of up to \$60,000 per year for up to three years will be made to successful applicants. 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 for Organic Research Initiative grants is September 15, 2009.

Grantmaking Cycle

It is anticipated that the application review process will be completed in October, decisions made in early November, applicants notified of decisions in late November, and grant funds dispersed to successful applicants in December. 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 will be accepted. This includes a title page that identifies the applicant and principal investigator and includes the mailing address, phone numbers, and electronic contact information for both. Proposals should begin with a one-half page project abstract. This should be followed by 1) narrative addressing each of the nine designated proposal content categories and 2) the project budget. Curriculum vitae of one or two pages for all important project participants are encouraged and should be included as attachments.

Proposal Content Categories

Applicants should respond fully to each of the following content categories, which reflect The Ceres Trust priorities for organic research. The maximum points that can be scored in each of the nine categories are 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 there is a need for the research proposed. 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, or 3) help make existing organic farms more productive and profitable. The objectives of the proposed project and its 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 also 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 should demonstrate how duplication of effort with similar activities by others will be avoided. (10 points)

Description and Qualifications of Applicant. Applicants should describe their organic research experience and demonstrate their capacity to carry out the research project proposed. This should include a brief description of any recent and ongoing organic research. It also should show how the proposed project would contribute to organizational or institutional organic research the applicant already has underway. (10 points)

Description and Qualifications of Project Personnel. Applicants should describe the experience and credentials of the principal investigator with responsibility for the project and of all other researchers who will be involved. This description should include information regarding their familiarity with organic agriculture and their involvement in organic research. The application also should describe in some detail what each researcher would do in completing the research proposed 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. Basic and applied research on soil microbial life and other aspects of the soil system 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 is an important Trust priority. The applicant should provide specific information on how the results of the proposed research will be analyzed, assessed, or interpreted. (15 points)

Organic Farmer Involvement. Applicants should describe input from organic farmers in the design of projects proposed. Projects should be carried out on working organic farms or on certified organic land where applicable. Both the certification status and the identity of the certifier should be provided when certified land is involved. The project budget should include stipends for 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 each project activity must be provided. For multi-year project proposals, a year-by-year breakdown of the project timelines must be provided. (10 points)

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

Budget Narrative. The narrative must describe in detail 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, or research relating to the development of organic markets. It also will not fund conference proposals or project planning grants.

Project Evaluation Process

This Organic Research Initiative is a competitive grants program. After screening to ensure that proposals meet the general requirements of this Request for Proposals, the Trust will select qualified reviewers to evaluate and score proposals. The reviews may be ad hoc or, if necessary due to the 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 multi-year project year, and 2) a detailed final report when the project is completed.

General Budget Information

This program does not require cost sharing or matching. The Ceres Trust funds may be used only for expenses directly related to the research project proposed. Grants awarded may not be used for international travel or for renovating or refurbishing research space, purchasing or installing fixed equipment in research space, or building or facility repairs. Allowed expenses include rental of equipment necessary to the project, stipends 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 from nonprofit organizations must include 1) a copy of the Internal Revenue Service letter documenting their tax-exempt status, and 2) a copy of their most recent audited financial statements.

Additional Requirements

Applicants must mail three copies of their proposal to: Organic Research Initiative, Attention: Michael R. Smith, The Ceres Trust, P.O. Box 2965, Milwaukee, WI 53201-2965. They must be postmarked on or before September 15, 2009, to be accepted.