



FARMERS DROUGHT RELIEF FUND SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Can the Fund pay for pumps in addition to drilling the wells, or only for the drilling expenses? Is buried pipeline an allowable expense in the scope of this grant?

Under section 4.3.F. of the Rules, pumps can be funded as appurtenant equipment to a well or pond; this may include portable pumps. Piping from the water source to a central distribution point is considered as appurtenant equipment to the water source. Field irrigation systems are not eligible at this time.

2. Can the Fund be used for livestock watering?

The Farmers Drought Relief Fund law (7 MRS c. 8-A, sub-c. 4 §220-A, §§2.) specifies that “a farmer in the State may apply for a grant under the program if the farmer needs to establish a source for irrigation water to alleviate the risk of crop losses due to drought”. The Rules specify that the primary purpose for the grant should be for irrigation of crops. The Department may allow additional use for livestock watering or processing provided that the Commissioner determines that such use does not adversely affect water supply for irrigation or create adverse environmental impacts.

3. Can the grant be used for washing crops in the field in addition to drip irrigation?

The Rules specify that the primary purpose for the grant should be for irrigation of crops. The Department may allow additional use for processing provided that such use does not adversely affect water supply for irrigation or create adverse environmental impacts

4. Is leased land eligible for well drilling and water storage ponds, or if we would be scored low for this grant due to being lessees? Would our eligibility change if we had a long-term lease?

Farmers with leased land are eligible. Landowner consent for the proposed water source should be included in the application. The Department will consider the length of the lease in considering the investment risk for a water source.

5. Would wild blueberries be considered for funding under this grant. And if not, would you have other grant ideas for water ponds?

Wild blueberry operations are eligible for funding. USDA NRCS may have some financial assistance available from their AMA or EQIP programs.

6. Does a flower farm qualify for the program?

Yes, horticultural products meet the definition of “crops”.

7. Does a water management plan for a Category 2 water source grant application have to be prepared by NRCS?

No. An existing water management plan can be submitted; it should contain equivalent information as specified in section 3.3. of the Rules.

A water management plan may be prepared by USDA NRCS staff, a Soil & Water Conservation District, a consulting engineer, hydrologist, soils scientist, agronomist, or other technical service provider, an irrigation equipment supplier, or by the applicants themselves.

The goal is for applicants to demonstrate that they are familiar with the water needs for their crops and have evaluated the options for new water sources in terms of cost-effectiveness and environmental impacts. This information will be evaluated by the Review Committee in scoring applications.

8. Is an engineered design required to apply for a storage pond grant?

No, however, engineering guidance is advisable to ensure that a proposed pond will be structurally sound and will hold sufficient water for anticipated needs. Design costs may be included as part of a Category 2 grant for an agricultural water storage pond. Ponds must comply with federal, state, and local environmental requirements to be funded.

9. Are existing farm ponds grandfathered regarding environmental permitting?

Any alteration or expansion of an existing water storage pond would be required to comply with all relevant federal, state, and local requirements.

10. Can we apply for a well to supplement an existing water storage pond?

Yes.

11. How does a farmer know if they meet this eligibility requirement: "(farm provides unique benefits to local food economy as determined by Commissioner"?

Guidance on “unique benefits to local food economy” is included as Appendix C of the 2026 Request For Applications.

12. How long will funding be available?

The Farmer Drought Relief Fund was funded by the Maine Legislature with a one-time \$1 million nonlapsing appropriation and with an annual appropriation of \$ 300,000 which will be ongoing unless the Legislature amends its appropriation. The program is not contingent on federal funding.

13. Is there an example for an agricultural water management plan?

A sample plan is contained in the Maine Irrigation Guide, pages 95-105. A copy of the Guide is available at: <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/docs/maine-irrigation-guide-2024.pdf>.

14. What happens if source water installation costs are higher than estimated in the grant application?

The Department may reserve funding up to the maximum allowed in the Rules to provide for contingencies. Funding limitations will be discussed with successful applicants.

15. How soon will awards be announced?

After the Review Committee completes its scoring, the Department must allow for a 14-day appeals period before initiating contracts for awards. The contracting process can take 30 to 60 days.

16. What will be required for project reporting and inspections?

The grantee must submit invoices and evidence of project completion (such as photographs, well driller's report, or other information specified in the contract). By rule, the Department reserves the right to visit completed projects for up to 10 years to verify compliance with intended use and to document the effectiveness of the project.

17. What happens if a drilled well does not yield adequate water supply?

The Department will pay for the cost of well drilling regardless of the yield produced by the well. In accordance with section 5.2. of the Rules, the Department may consider an application for a second drilled well if funding permits.

18. Do projects have to be completed by June 1, 2027, as referenced in Question 39 of the application?

No. This question is intended to assist the Department in allocating funds from various fiscal years. All projects will have completion deadlines specified in award contracts.

19. Is there more weight given to a larger producer, as opposed to a small-scale farmer?

The Department is committed to the viability and success of farms of all sizes. The scoring rubric gives up to 30 points for economic factors. An Economic Benefit Evaluation Framework document is available to assist applicants in addressing economic factors. See: <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/documents/economic-benefit-evaluation-framework.pdf>

20. How will funds for this project be administered? Will it be a reimbursement or will contractors be paid directly? If it is a reimbursement, is proof of available funds required in the application?

The Department will reimburse 90 percent of the approved eligible expenses, based on invoices submitted. Invoices are paid in approximately 30 days. The application requests financial information (IRS Schedule F or C or equivalent reports) to allow reviewers to assess the viability of a proposal.

21. Where can we obtain information regarding yields for drilled wells?

The Maine Geological Survey maintains a Water Well Database which may provide location and drilling data for wells:

<https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mgs/pubs/digital/well.htm> . Local well drillers may be available to provide information and estimates on local groundwater availability.

22. How can we go about obtaining a soils map?

Soils survey maps are available for download from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Web Soil Survey at:

<https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mgs/pubs/digital/well.htm> . Additional assistance can be requested from the NRCS Field Offices and local Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

23. Where can we find data on evapotranspiration rates?

Contact the National Weather Service offices in Gray or Caribou. Additional information may be available from the University of Maine's Maine Climate Office at:

<https://mco.umaine.edu/about/contact/>

24. Are submitted price quotes binding for the grant, or can costs be adjusted during the project?

The Department will negotiate contracts for selected projects. Subject to the availability of funds, changes in costs may be approved through contract amendments.

25. What would you like to see on the quote for the irrigation grant? Specifically for digging a pond. The irrigation management plan recommendations have a range on the pond size, and many factors will contribute to depth, and total size. How specific or vague does the quote need to be?

26. Are water storage tanks eligible for funding?

Yes, within the specified limits in the Rules for water source grants.

27. Can we see a complete copy of the grant application form?

A sample application form is on the Farmers Drought Relief Fund webpage:
<https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/farmers-drought-relief-program.shtml>

28. Can we review the video recordings of the Question & Answer Sessions?

Email Tom.Gordon@Maine.gov to request links for the Question & Answer Sessions.