Western North Carolina Agricultural Options
2027 Application for Individual Farm Businesses

Instructions for Applying

Thank you for your interest in the WNC Agricultural Options Program. *WNC AgOptions builds sustainable farming communities in our mountain region by providing resources directly to farmers who are diversifying or expanding their operations.*

WNC AgOptions is funded by the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission and works in partnership with WNC Communities and N.C. Cooperative Extension. For more information on the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, visit: http://www.tobaccotrustfund.org

Members of the WNC AgOptions steering committee include representatives from N.C. Cooperative Extension, N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, and other agricultural business leaders.

Who should apply? Applicants are residents of North Carolina* who demonstrate the economic viability of farms in Western North Carolina. Support is provided to individual farmers/farms that are diversifying or expanding their operations to increase farm income and encourage the sustainability of the farm businesses. The farm must be one in which the family holds the financial responsibility, takes the risks, and makes the majority of the management decisions for the farm business. Nonprofits and corporately owned farms are not eligible. WNC AgOptions awards grants to a variety of farm operations, including fruits & vegetables, livestock, nurseries, agritourism, beekeeping, and value-added processing. Farm businesses that add value and/or sell products that are made from items produced or grown on the applicant's farm are eligible to apply. While agriculture is a varied and diverse industry that can be defined in many ways, WNC AgOptions funds applicants who operate a business and manage land for the purpose of producing crops for harvest and sale. Any funding requests should be for items directly related to the growing and harvesting of crops for sale, including livestock. WNC AgOptions also funds agritourism operations that are for the purpose of inviting the public on-farm to increase sales of farm products.

*Eligible applicants must reside and the project must be located in the West District of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service, which encompasses the following 22 counties/areas: Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Clay, Cherokee, Cleveland, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (projects on tribal land), Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga and Yancey.

Applicants (including farm business partners) are not eligible to receive WNC AgOptions grants if they fall into any of the following categories: current employees of N.C. Cooperative Extension, NCSU, NC A&T, NCDA&CS, or WNC Communities, including their spouses; members of the WNC AgOptions Steering Committee, including their spouses; board members of WNC Communities or NCTTFC, including their spouses.

Priority will be given to applicants who:

- Are diversifying or expanding their operations to remain sustainable for this and future generations;
- Are current or former NC commercial tobacco growers or former quota holders in North Carolina;
- Show they follow typical procedures of a legitimate farm business, such as acquiring a NC Department of Revenue Tax Exemption number, having a Farm Service Agency farm number, obtaining appropriate insurance, and filing a Schedule F or equivalent Schedule C (or equivalent) with the Internal Revenue Service;
- Generate more than one-half of their household income from crops or products produced on-farm;
- Have sufficient experience and expertise to accomplish the projects and/or have identified the proper cooperators to supplement gaps in their skills and abilities;
- Actively participate in grower associations or other commodity group meetings;
- Have sufficiently researched the production methods, markets, expenses, and timeline for their projects;
- Are proposing projects that demonstrate successful farming practices, methods, and/or markets to the agriculture community;
- Exhibit working relationships with their local Cooperative Extension Agents;
- Have included two qualifying letters of support from purchasers, advisors, consultants, agricultural specialists, other granting agencies, loan officers, or others that are providing support to your project (see details in Section III of the application);
- Have received fewer than five total grants and less than $30,000 in combined funding from WNC AgOptions and RAFI-USA's Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund. Applicants who have received five total grants or $30,000 in combined funding from these programs are ineligible for additional WNC AgOptions grants.

How to apply:

1. *Attend an informational session.* WNC Communities will conduct informational sessions in August and September 2027. Although not required, attendance provides helpful information and allows applicants to ask questions and potentially prepare a stronger application. Find dates and locations on the WNC AgOptions website: https://wncagoptions.org.

2. *Meet the Intent to Apply deadline*. By October 9, talk to your local N.C. Cooperative Extension agent about the project you intend to apply for to receive assistance in developing your project proposal. If your agent is familiar with your farm and operation, a phone call may suffice. If you have not worked closely with your agent before, they may need to visit your farm to better assist you with your project. Those who do not meet the Intent to Apply deadline may not receive all points possible in the review process. **Once you have talked to your Extension agent about your intent to apply, fill out this form by October 9**: https://go.ncsu.edu/wncagopt27.

3. *Prepare your application.* Stay in contact with your N.C. Cooperative Extension agent as you prepare your application. Prior to completing your application, please ensure you are using the most current version, available on the AgOptions website: https://wncagoptions.org. Review the full application, noting due dates, times, and submission requirements. Review the Grant Writing Tips on the WNC AgOptions website: https://wncagoptions.org/grant-writing-tips

4. *Submit your application.* Only one application per farm will be accepted. Review the Submission Checklist in the application to ensure your electronic file or hard copy contains all the required elements before submitting. *Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.* Mailing address and email requirements are listed on the following page.

All applications, whether hard copy or digital, must be received by 11:59 p.m. on November 9, 2026.

To submit a hard copy application:
Mail or hand-deliver (a drop slot is located next to the mailbox) to:

WNC AgOptions Project Coordinator
WNC Communities
594 Brevard Rd.
Asheville, NC 28806

To submit application by email:

- All application documents, including attachments, must be in PDF format.
- All sections of application must be submitted; including SECTIONS V and VI (scans are acceptable).
- Application and attachments should be submitted as a single PDF file if possible. If the file is too big, attachments can be sent as one document and the application as a separate document.
- Email application to **agoptions@wnccommunities.org** with "**2027 WNC AgOptions Application"** in the subject line.

All applications, whether mailed, hand-delivered, or emailed, will receive an email confirmation. If you do not receive a confirmation, please contact our office.

How are applications reviewed? Projects are ranked via a numeric scoring system. Approximately 25 leaders in the agriculture field throughout Western North Carolina participate in the review process, and a team of reviewers scores each application. The WNC AgOptions Steering Committee uses these scores as the primary guide in determining final grant recipients.

How can the grant be spent? We recognize that many farm operations across Western North Carolina have been significantly impacted by recent natural disasters. However, WNC AgOptions grant funds may not be used to cover expenses that are directly related to disaster recovery. AgOptions remains focused on funding strategic investments that promote farm diversification and long-term sustainability, rather than emergency response or recovery costs.

Suitable expenses are those associated with the production and marketing of diversified farm enterprises and agritourism endeavors. Examples include, but are not limited to: seeds, fertilizer, plants, amendments, livestock, training, advertisements, packaging, fences, signage, facilities, supplies, tools, and specialized equipment. Items that *cannot* be funded by the award include: farmer labor, pre-existing farm debt, purchase of land, and expenses that are dated outside of the grant period from January 4, 2027 through December 31, 2027.

Funds must be used as stated in the applicant's proposal. Use of funds inconsistent with the proposal will result in forfeiture of the award and repayment of funds.

How much is awarded? The award for 2027 is $10,000. WNC AgOptions will provide cash awards to projects with budgets that are at least 10% higher than the amount of the award request. A $10,000 award request requires a budget of at least $11,000.

How is the grant money distributed? All recipients are required to attend a grantee orientation, where they will receive their first allotment of funds. All recipients are also required to submit a business plan during the course of the 2027 cycle, at which point a second allotment will be released. Recipients receive a third and final payment upon completion of the grant requirements.

Timeline for 2027 WNC AgOptions Proposals

- October 9, 2026: Intent to Apply Deadline. All applicants *must* contact their county Cooperative Extension Agent by this date to discuss their projects. Once that contact is made, fill out this form by October 9: https://go.ncsu.edu/wncagopt27
- November 9, 2026 at 11:59 p.m.: Application deadline – completed hardcopy or digital applications must be received by the deadline to be considered for review.
- December 1 - 3, 2026: WNC AgOptions representatives may contact finalists for phone interviews if additional information is required.
- The week of January 4, 2027: Letters of acceptance or regret will be sent to all applicants.
- Thursday, January 28, 2027: Recipients are required to attend a one-day orientation/educational workshop. Details will be sent with an acceptance notification.

Requirements of 2027 WNC AgOptions Grant Recipients:

1. Recipients must attend the WNC AgOptions orientation and will receive their first grant allotment there.
2. Recipients must provide a financial contribution of 10% or more of their total grant award towards their total project budget.
3. Recipients must keep accurate production and financial records on the project and supply a copy of those records at the completion of the project. Copies of receipts for project expenditures at least 10% higher than their award amount will be required.
4. Recipients must submit a business plan to WNC AgOptions by May 31, 2027 to receive their second allotment of grant funds.
5. Recipients must be present for a farm visit, during which a WNC AgOptions representative will observe, document, and discuss progress on the project.
6. To receive the final $500 allotment, recipients must have their farm visit completed, submit year-end reporting including final income, expenses and receipts, the North Carolina Grants compliance reporting form, and complete a survey collecting feedback about the program and results of their project, by December 31, 2027.
7. Recipients must be available via mail and/or phone calls throughout the year. Email access is helpful.
8. Recipients will recognize WNC AgOptions and the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission as the funders/supporters of the project in all materials/marketing/advertising used to promote the project (WNC AgOptions will provide appropriate logos, usage guide and yard sign).
9. WNC AgOptions will include the recipients' projects in public relations, outreach, demonstration and education in 2027 and future years.

Applicants should direct all questions regarding this application to:
WNC AgOptions
(828) 252-4783
agoptions@wnccommunities.org

North Carolina Cooperative Extension WNC AgOptions

Western North Carolina Agricultural Options

2027 Application for Individual Farm Businesses

Please fill out all sections of this application. Typed applications are highly recommended and preferred.

Project Name: _____

COUNTY of Project Location: _____

Who is your local Cooperative Extension Agent that will be working with you on this project?

Name: _____County (if different from above)_____

Total project budget amount (from Budget table on pg. 9**): $**_____

Section I. APPLICANT INFORMATION

Note: The grant funds are considered taxable income, and WNC Communities will file a 1099 with the IRS in the name of the recipient at the end of 2027. You will be required to fill out a W-9 form requesting an Employer Identification Number or a Social Security Number if you are awarded the grant.

Applicant Name:_____

Farm Business Name:_____

Mailing Address:_____

City:_____State:_____Zip Code:_____

Phone and/or Cell Phone:_____ Email:_____

Website/Facebook/other social media address:_____

Physical Location of Proposed Project (if different than above):_____

1. Was your average annual income from farming operations for the three preceding taxable years $10,000 or more? YES □ NO □
2. If applicable, what is your Farm Service Agency number?_____
3. Do you file a Schedule F or equivalent Schedule C to the IRS? YES □ NO □
   If so, which years did you file?_____
4. What percentage of your household net income is generated from farm products produced on your farm?_____%
5. Do you carry insurance for your farm business? Examples: Farm Liability, Product Liability, Workers Comp. YES □ NO □
6. Does your farm participate in a Present Use Value program? YES □ NO □
7. Briefly describe your participation/ leadership in grower associations, commodity meetings or other agricultural events. If possible, name the last three activities (or affiliations) in which you actively participated, including dates. *Examples: ASAP Business of Farming Conference February 28, 2026, Member North Carolina Tomato Growers Association, NCSU Egg Grading School for Small Flock Producers, Organic Growers School workshops, Local Extension Programs, County Cattlemen's Associations, Beekeepers Associations, etc.*

    1. _____
    2. _____
    3. _____

8. Farming History

(Feel free to add or delete rows in the table depending on the number of ventures at your farm.)

Farm Venture: Products and/or Services ***Include # of acres and/or livestock***	**Description of Markets or No. of Customers***	**Dates of Business**

****If you have not sold agriculture products thus far, please state the year you expect to do so. Feel free to elaborate in the space provided for question #9.*

9. Elaborate on the farming history listed in the previous question, along with the applicant's other relevant professional and educational experience. How significant an impact does your farm have on you, your family, and your community, including food supply, quality of life, and income? What is the applicant's participation in the project? Which years, if any, has the applicant farmed full-time? (375 words maximum)

10. Please answer the following questions about the applicant's tobacco-growing history as an owner/operator or quota holder in North Carolina.

Is the applicant currently growing tobacco for commercial sale, or did the applicant hold a quota?

YES □ NO □

Was tobacco grown on land the applicant is now farming?

YES □ NO □

Did the applicant's family grow tobacco for commercial sale in North Carolina?

YES □ NO □

Section II. THE PROJECT AND PROPOSAL

1. Please provide a description of your proposed farm project. How will the project fit into your existing farming operation? How will you handle the additional workload? Include any research on production methods you will be introducing to your operation. (750 words maximum)

2. What are the anticipated outcomes of your project? (500 words maximum)

3. How do you plan to market or sell your farm business, product and/or experience? (250 words maximum)

4. How will this project enhance or increase your capability to continue farming and increase the long-term economic viability of your farm? (250 words maximum)

5. Explain how your project could provide demonstration of exemplary practices to your county's agriculture community, including transitioning tobacco farmers. Examples of demonstration include farm tours, Extension field days, workshops, etc. Provide context for your project, i.e., how unique is your operation in your county? (250 words maximum)

6. Please provide a timeline for your project. Indicate the project activities you will accomplish.

Month	***2027 Project Activities***
January	Attend WNC AgOptions orientation.
February	
March	
April	
May	Submit business plan
June	
July	
August	
September	
October	
November	
December	Submit final reporting

7. **Proposed Financials**: Please use the following worksheet (or include a format of your choice) to outline the financial plan for your proposed project. A financial plan should include your estimated expenses, any in-kind contributions, and your expected income for years one and two of your proposed project. If there are cost savings to your operation because of your project, please provide an explanation for the savings. Use these calculations to provide a detailed list on the charts provided on the following two pages.

Project Name			
Income	2027	2028	Explanation of income *i.e.*, number of head, quantity of product sold, events/services
	$	$	
Sale of products			
Sale of services			
Savings			Explanation for savings
Money saved because of project			
Expenses			Explanation of expenses
Examples:			
Seeds/Plants			
Fertilizer/amendments			
Pest control			
Energy			
Equipment			
Labor			

Budget: List all proposed expenses and income for this project/proposal only. You do not need to submit a budget for your entire operation (unless it is applicable), but if you wish to do so, attach it as a separate spreadsheet. If labor is included, please indicate "contractor labor" or "employee labor." The applicant's or their immediate family's labor is considered in-kind and should not be included in the expense section. You may list all in-kind contributions, such as the value of your (or your immediate family's) labor, supplies, equipment, land, etc. in the Estimated In-kind Contributions section on the following page. In-kind contributions do not count towards the project budget.

Estimated Expenses for 2027 Grant Project

Line Item	***Estimated Expenses***
****TOTAL GRANT PROJECT BUDGET***	***$***

**Budget total must be at least 10% higher than the requested award amount. A $10,000 request requires a budget of at least $11,000.*

Your **TOTAL GRANT PROJECT BUDGET** must exceed your requested grant award amount by at least 10%. How will you fund the balance of the project budget not covered by the grant? Include any other grants, cost-shares, loans, or personal or business savings.

- □ Self-fund through personal or business savings
- □ Loan
- □ Another grant
- □ Farm income
- □ Other

Please provide a short description of your funding source(s) (100 words maximum).

Estimated In-kind Contributions for Grant Project

In-Kind Item	*Estimated Contribution*
TOTAL IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION	***$***

Income: Please list expected income as a direct result of your proposed project. If your project is not expected to generate income in the next two years, please provide an explanation and estimated income for the first two years when you expect to make a profit.

Expected Income for Year One (2027)

Product/Market	*Estimated Income*
TOTAL	***$***

Expected Income for Year Two (2028)

Product/Market	*Estimated Income*
TOTAL	***$***

If not referenced elsewhere in your application, please provide an explanation and/or supporting information to show how the above income numbers were estimated.

Section III. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR YOUR PROJECT

You will receive points for two qualifying letters of support that **clearly state the letter writer's participation in the project, e.g., production assistance, marketing assistance, etc.** Provide the names of people who are providing a letter of support for you and state their role in your project. You may submit more than two letters, but you can only receive a maximum of 2 points.

Please note:

- Letters may be written by purchasers, other farmers, marketing and production specialists, crop consultants, non-profit organizations, businesses and other agriculture advisors. Neighboring county or Area Extension Agents, with whom you may be working in addition to your cooperating agent, may write a letter of support. Cooperating agents should not submit letters of support.
- Letters should not be character references only.
- If mailing your application, letters should be attached to your application.
- If emailing, letters should be scanned and added to your application file.
- Do not have letter writers send the letters directly to WNC Communities/WNC AgOptions.

Name	Role in Project	Phone/Email
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Section IV. FORMER WNC AGOPTIONS AND RAFI, USA (Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund) RECIPIENTS

Have you, your spouse, or your farm business partner received a WNC AgOptions grant or a grant from RAFI, USA's Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund?

YES □ NO □

If yes, please answer the following questions.

1. Which year(s) did you receive the WNC AgOptions Grant?_____

Which year(s) did you receive the RAFI, USA Grant? _____

2. Briefly describe your previous grant project(s). What did you learn from your successes and your challenges? Did you achieve your intended goals? Did your income increase as a result of the project? (400 words maximum)

3. For your previous AgOptions/RAFI grant project(s) describe your outreach activities to farmers in your community. Outreach includes field days, articles, one-on-one mentoring, Cooperative Extension workshops, etc. (250 words maximum)

Section V. SUB-GRANTEE STATE CERTIFICATION

Applicants must sign and have notarized the form on page 15 (**emailed applications can include a scan of this form):**

ATTACHMENT A:
State Grant Certification – For Sub Grantees
No Overdue Taxes and Conflict of Interest

Section VI. VERIFICATION

The applicant **MUST** sign the following statements:

- Applicant is a resident of North Carolina and resides within the 22 unit/county area served by WNC AgOptions.
- Applicant possesses all legal rights/permissions to use resources (including land, equipment, etc.) as indicated in this application to complete the proposed project.
- Applicant will follow all applicable state and federal laws regarding the sale of farm products.
- Applicant currently possesses all required legal certifications, permits, registrations, etc., necessary for producing and selling farm products.
- Applicant holds the financial responsibility, takes the risks, and makes the majority of the management decisions for the farm business.
- The funds granted will be used exclusively for the project as described in this request. The Requirements of 2027 WNC AgOptions Grant recipients (on page 4 of the Instructions for Applying) have been read and agreed to.
- Applicants being considered for funding may be contacted for more information about their projects. Site visits and/or telephone interviews may be requested.
- The applicant understands that should they be awarded a grant, it will be made public through announcements in print and on web pages.
- The applicant(s), including farm business partners, does not fall into any of the following categories: Current employees of NC Cooperative Extension, NCSU, NC A&T, NCDA&CS, or WNC Communities, including their spouses; Members of the WNC AgOptions Steering Committee, including their spouses; Board members of WNC Communities or NCTTFC, including their spouses.
- I am applying for a $10,000 grant from WNC AgOptions.
- I understand that my completed application must be received by WNC Communities no later than 11:59 p.m. on November 9, 2026. Late or incomplete applications will not be reviewed.
- The information provided in this application is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Applicant's Signature:_____

Signed by (Please Print): _____Date:_____

SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Prior to submission, we recommend that you review your hard copy or digital application to ensure the following items are included. Applications with incomplete information will not be considered for review.

- ☐ Section I. APPLICANT INFORMATION
- ☐ Section II. THE PROJECT AND PROPOSAL
- ☐ Section III. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR YOUR PROJECT
- ☐ Section IV. FORMER WNC AGOPTIONS/RAFI GRANT RECIPIENTS
- ☐ Section V. SUBGRANTEE STATE CERTIFICATION FORM (**signed and *notarized***)
- ☐ Section VI. VERIFICATION (**signed and dated**)

Please do not use notebooks or other binders. Typed applications are preferred.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: You may also include additional information such as photos, drawings, quotes, etc. Please limit additional information to no more than 5 pages.

All applications, whether hard copy or digital, must be received by 11:59 p.m. on November 9, 2026.

To submit a hard copy application:
Mail or hand-deliver (a drop slot is located next to the mailbox) to:

WNC AgOptions Project Coordinator
WNC Communities
594 Brevard Rd.
Asheville, NC 28806

To submit application by email:

- All application documents, including attachments, must be in PDF format.
- All sections of application must be submitted; including SECTIONS V and VI (scans are acceptable).
- Application and attachments should be submitted as a single PDF file if possible. If the file is too big, attachments can be sent as one document and the application as a separate document.
- Email application to **agoptions@wnccommunities.org** with "**2027 WNC AgOptions Application"** in the subject line.

All applications, whether mailed, hand-delivered, or emailed, will receive an email confirmation. If you do not receive a confirmation, please contact our office.

Instructions: Grant applicants should complete this certification and conflict of interest statement. The completed, signed, and notarized form should be attached to your application.

ATTACHMENT A:
State Grant Certification – For Sub Grantees
No Overdue Taxes[1] and Conflict of Interest

_____ **[*Insert Date of Certification*]**

To: NC TOBACCO TRUST FUND COMMISSION
WNC COMMUNITIES & WNC AGOPTIONS PROGRAM

Certification:

I certify that I, _____ **[*Insert Your Name]***, do not have any overdue tax debts, as defined by North Carolina G.S. 105-243.1, at the federal, state, or local level. I further certify that I will not use funds awarded by this grant to satisfy any subsequent tax obligations.

Additionally, I _____ **[*Insert Your Name]***, certify that I do not have any personal and/or professional relationships with the NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, WNC Communities, WNC AgOptions program and/or any of its' employees or governing Board, as defined by North Carolina G.S. 143C-6-23(b) (c), that have been used to in any way influence the potential of an award or an official award of funds to me. I further understand that a false statement made is in violation of North Carolina G.S. 143C-6-23 and such false statement would be a criminal offense punishable as provided by North Carolina G.S. 143C-10-1.

Sworn Statement:

I, _____ **[*Insert Your Name*]** certify that I am a resident of _____ **[*Insert Name of Town or City*]** in the State of North Carolina. I also acknowledge and understand that any misuse of State funds will be reported to the appropriate authorities for further action.

_____
[***Signature of Individual***]

Sworn to and subscribed before me on the day of the date of said certification

_____
[*Signature of Notary*]

My Commission Expires: _____

[1] G.S. 105-243.1 defines "Overdue tax debt. – Any part of a tax debt that remains unpaid 90 days or more after the notice of final assessment was mailed to the taxpayer. The term does not include a tax debt, however, if the taxpayer entered into an installment agreement for the tax debt under G.S. 105-237 within 90 days after the notice of final assessment was mailed and has not failed to make any payments due under the installment agreement."