



VERMONT FARM & FOREST VIABILITY PROGRAM

VHCB Water Quality Grant

Application Instructions

Applications due: ~~Friday, January 9, 2026,~~
Wednesday, January 14, 2026 11:59pm ET*

OVERVIEW

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, a program of the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), has grants of \$5,000 to \$50,000 available on a competitive basis to Vermont farmers for water quality related investments. These grants are designed to help farm businesses undertake projects that improve on-farm water quality, help farms comply with water quality regulations, and improve overall farm viability. All awards require a 1 to 1 match, meaning that VHCB funds cannot reimburse more than 50% of the total project costs. Grant funds will be reimbursed upon the completion of the project.

Timeline:

- Application opens November 14, 2025
- Information Sessions: [Wednesday, December 3, 2025 - 1:00pm-2:00pm](#), [Thursday, December 18, 2025 – 11:00am-12:00pm](#), [Monday, January 5, 2025 – 12:00pm-1:00pm](#)
- Applications are due ~~January 9, 2026~~ January 14, 2026. *Applicants also applying to the January NRCS deadline may take through January 16, 2026, and additional extensions are available to other applicants upon request.
- Decisions announced by April 2026
- Projects will have a compliance timeline of January 9, 2026- November 1, 2027. Extensions may be available depending on project circumstances

About VHCB Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program: The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program offers one-on-one, in-depth business planning, technical assistance and management coaching to Vermont farm, food and forest products enterprises to improve the economic viability of Vermont's working landscape. The Viability Program is a program of the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board.

Questions? Email Viability Program Coordinator, Betsy McGavisk at Betsy@VHCB.org or 802-828-5562

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AT A GLANCE

Project Goals	Long-term investments that will improve on-farm nutrient management and reduce agricultural runoff into state waters
Eligible Applicants	Farms required to meet the Required Agricultural Practices and have gross sales of \$15,000 or more per year Entities playing an integral role in water quality management on farms, such as custom operators or non-profits supporting farms
Eligible Projects	<u>Construction & renovation</u> including manure storage facilities, barnyard improvements, bedded pack facilities, and leachate or milkhouse waste collection and treatment <u>Equipment</u> including no-till, manure injection, cover cropping, compost management, and feed management <u>Conservation Infrastructure</u> including laneways and fencing and riparian buffers
Eligible Costs	<u>Construction, renovation, & infrastructure</u> : concrete and other building materials, hired construction labor, fees to design new structure <u>Equipment</u> : purchase of new or used equipment, including shipping and installation <u>Conservation Infrastructure</u> : cost of materials and installation costs
Award Amount	Awards are between \$5,000-\$50,000. Partial awards are unlikely but may be granted in competitive rounds.
Match Requirement	Funds have a 1-1 match requirement, meaning VHCB funds can only cover up to 50% of the total project cost. Waivers to this requirement may be granted in some circumstances.
Cost Share	VHCB funds may be used as cost-share for other state or federal programs
Project Period	Eligible costs can begin accruing as soon as the application deadline (January 9, 2025). The compliance date for awards made in 2026 will be November 1, 2027
Reimbursement	This is a reimbursed-based grant, meaning that payments will only be made upon providing project receipts to VHCB staff, typically once the project is complete. Partial reimbursements are available in some circumstances. Please reach out if you would like a referral to advising services or bridge lenders.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?

- Any farm that is required to meet the Required Agricultural Practices and has gross sales of \$15,000 per year or more is eligible to apply.
- Non-farm entities playing an integral role in water quality management on farms, such as custom operators or non-profits supporting farms. Please contact staff to ensure your entity is eligible prior to applying.
- Dairy and livestock farms are likely to be more competitive applicants. Produce farms will be eligible provided they can demonstrate that their project will have significant, positive impacts on water quality.
- Grantees are expected to comply with all labor, tax, and water quality laws and regulations, however farms that are out of compliance but working with Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, & Markets (VAAF) and/or Division of Environmental Conservation (DEC) staff to come into compliance may be considered a high priority for grant funds. Businesses that are currently the subject of a lawsuit brought by the Attorney General’s office, or otherwise not in good standing with our agency partners, will not be eligible.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE ELIGIBLE?

Projects must directly impact water quality and must be for long-term investments rather than annual practices or improvements with a short life span including construction or renovation projects, long-term infrastructure improvements, and equipment.

Our highest priority for funding will be projects that have a direct and substantial water quality benefit as well as other significant benefits to the business. See the criteria section of this document for more details.

Type of Project	Examples	Eligible Costs	Ineligible Costs
Construction & Renovation	New or upgraded manure pit, barn or barnyard construction including bedded pack, feed storage that will reduce runoff	Concrete, building supplies, hired construction labor, fees to design new structure	Applicant or farm employee labor, however this can be counted towards the 1-1 match requirement Soil or water quality analysis
Equipment	No-till seeders; manure injection equipment such as toolbars, hosing, tankers, and GPS systems; Precision Ag; compost management for bedded pack, feed-related equipment	New or used equipment that is a long-term asset, will be essential to the business, used frequently, and can’t be easily rented. VHCB funds can be used towards the full cost of the equipment, including shipping and installation	We are unlikely to fund equipment that is used infrequently or that could feasibly be rented or contracted
Conservation Infrastructure*	Long-term infrastructure or tree plantings that will reduce runoff, improve grazing, or other soil health improvements	Riparian buffer tree plantings, fencing, laneways, other long-term improvements	Annual practices or infrastructure that are short-lived and stewardship costs for any plantings

*These projects have been less competitive in previous years; we recommend that these applications outline clear and significant connection to improved water quality and reduction in nutrient runoff. Please contact staff for further questions.

MATCHING FUNDS & REIMBURSEMENT

Matching funds: Grantees must have matching funds **equal to or greater** than the amount of grant funding requested (also referred to as 1-to-1 or 50% match). The matching funds must be spent on the same project for which you are requesting funds and cannot be used for activities or purchases that occurred before this application deadline.

Eligible match sources include but are not limited to:

- Business cash or loans
- Farm Labor or other in-kind donations, including materials
- Grants from federal sources (USDA-NRCS), state sources (Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets), or other organizations

Cost-Share: VHCB Water Quality Grants may be used to cost share other state or federal programs, including Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets Best Management Practices (VAAFMP BMP) and Capital Equipment Assistance Program (VAAFMP CEAP), and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program (NRCS-EQIP). If these programs are paying 90% of a project’s cost, VHCB can be used towards the remaining 10%. VHCB funds may also be used towards costs outside of the scope of other state or federal programs but may be necessary for full implementation of a project or equipment purchase (such as hoop barn end walls, manure injection hosing or tankers, and equipment shipping).

Reimbursement: For approved applications, grant checks are disbursed on a reimbursement basis only, meaning that you will have to demonstrate that you have spent the grant and match amount before receiving funds. Please save all receipts related to the project. Grant funding is typically considered taxable income and you will receive a 1099 for the grant amount. The project cannot start before the application submission deadline and should be completed within 18 months of the award.

NOTE: Please inform the Viability Program if you are considering hiring a family member to work on any part of this project (funded by grant or matching funds). We define a family member as either an individual (sibling, spouse, parent, grandparent, child, or grandchild), or a company (corporation, partnership, LLC, or other entity) that is partially or fully owned by a related individual as listed above. Additional documentation will be needed to consider this request.

FUNDING CRITERIA

It is highly likely that we will receive more applications than we have funding for, this will be a competitive process. Applications will be reviewed by VHCB staff and a sub-committee of the VHCB Board to make funding decisions. Applications will be evaluated based on the criteria below. Viability Program staff will assess applications to make sure they are complete and are eligible and will reach out for any missing information.

Category	Criteria	Details
PROJECT IMPACT	The application demonstrates a clear and significant improvement to water quality by reducing agricultural runoff into state waters	These funds can be used for a variety of long-lasting projects that improve water quality. We strongly value when applications can articulate a clear water quality improvement to a permanent body of water (ex: x% reduction in runoff, X acres injected vs spread). Common projects that have a known water quality benefit include: - Equipment Requests that enable the following: manure injection, reduced/no-till when planting seed, reductions in nutrient application, or cover cropping

		- Infrastructure Requests that enable the following: improved manure management, transition to composting manure, barnyard runoff collection, clean water diversion, excluding animals from water sources, milkhouse waste collection, leachate reduction. Water Quality Impact is required for funding.
	This application demonstrates significant co-benefits	Examples include farmer working conditions, profitability, cash flow, a generational transfer, ability to adapt to climate change, soil health, other environmental benefits outside of farm water quality, animal health and well-being, impact on greater agricultural community
PROJECT & APPLICATION QUALITY	The application demonstrates that the project is financially viable	<i>50% project match is required for reimbursement</i> ; however, we will favor applications that have demonstrated a clear funding plan (e.g. through another grant agreement, an approved line of credit, or an application into another grant program).
	The application includes financial documentation	Full points for current balance sheet, current income statement (profit & loss), and a current/future cash flow statement. Partial/no points for tax returns. Application is ineligible without any financial statements.
	The application demonstrates that there is advising support for project implementation or planning	Does the application state that the business is receiving technical assistance? Is there a letter of support? Examples include other funders, Conservation District staff, Farm & Forest Viability Program advisors, UVM cohorts, etc.
	The application demonstrates that the project is thoroughly planned	Is there a plan to receive necessary permitting? Are any other risks and plans to mitigate them outlined in the application? Are engineering plans and/or quotes in place?
PROJECT NEED	Application demonstrates that other state and federal funding sources have been pursued	Full points may be awarded if other funds were applied for but not awarded
	The farm needs to complete this project to comply with RAPs	If otherwise in good standing with state and federal regulations, projects that bring a farm into compliance with RAPs are very competitive
	Application demonstrates significant barriers to this project	Will the business take on significant debt without VHCB funds?
OTHER	The business has not received other VHCB grants within the last 5 years	
	Application demonstrates that this is the farm's first large water quality upgrade	
	There is a particularly innovative approach to this project	
	The application includes a letter of support from an advisor or project stakeholder	

APPLICATION & SUBMISSION

This application will include an online application form and several attachments. Attachments can be uploaded via the online form or at the link below. Application questions are available at the end of this document for your reference. If you are unable to submit your application through the online form, please connect with Betsy McGavisk by email (Betsy@VHCB.org) or phone (802-828-5562) to request a fillable/printable PDF and create a plan that ensures we receive all application materials.

[Online Application Form](#)

This form includes a series of business and project questions, including narrative questions. These are available at the end of this packet for your reference. You may save and return to an application within 30 days by selecting the button at the bottom of the application. If you have internet connectivity issues, we recommend typing responses in a separate word document and pasting responses into the form. You will receive an email once the application form has been successfully submitted.

Attachments

Please upload the following attachments using [this secure upload link](#). In the text box titled "your name," please enter your last name - (dash) your farm's name. A green check mark next to the document means that has been uploaded successfully. **Please note that due to the security features of this system, you will not be able to review or access the documents once uploaded.**

Attachment	Status	Details
Project Budget	Required	Use the link in the application to download the blank budget and follow the instructions in the workbook. If you have already completed a project budget through a state or federal agency (for example, USDA-NRCS or VAAFM BMP), you may use that instead of the VHCB template. If using an alternate budget, clearly specify in the budget narrative which costs VHCB funds will cover.
Financial Statements	Required	Financial Statements Required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current Balance Sheet (snapshot of assets and liabilities) - Historical Income Statement or Profit & Loss (listing of farm income and expenses) - Projection or Cash Flow (projected income and expenses for 1–3 years) Tax returns may be submitted if you do not track income and expenses another way. Please black out your Social Security or EIN number. Submitting tax returns instead of financial statements will slightly decrease your application score. Support is available through UVM Extension for financials preparation. Contact Zac Smith at zachary.m.smith@uvm.edu or 802-656-7624 for assistance.
Map	Required	At least one map of your operation showing where the proposed project will be located and on-farm surface waters.
Quotes	Required for equipment requests; Strongly recommended for all others	Provide quotes from contractors/suppliers to support project costs.
Letters of Support	Strongly recommended	Letters can be from technical advisors, other funders, or project stakeholders. These are not required but are encouraged, especially for

		projects that are not receiving co-funding and technical assistance from a state or federal agency (VAAFMM BMP, CEAP, or NRCS EQIP).
Photos	Optional	Up to five photos showing the issue being addressed or project plans.
Business Plan	Optional	If you have completed a business plan, you may attach it to this application to provide complete picture of business

REVIEW TEAM, CONFIDENTIALITY & COMPLIANCE REVIEW

By submitting your application materials, you agree to allow them to be read by members of the Water Quality Grant Review Committee and by staff of the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program. In accordance with our program’s Confidentiality Policy, no other persons will have access to your application materials, and all copies will be collected for safekeeping following the meeting of the Review Committee. The Review Committee is made up of members of the VHCB board as well as farm business and water quality experts. The information they learn while reading applications is considered highly confidential. Review committee members will be held to our confidentiality policy as well as required to return all copies of applications and supporting documents.

By submitting your application materials, you agree to allow VHCB Viability Program staff to share the business name, location, project description and the funding request amount with USDA-NRCS and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets and Department of Environmental Conservation. This information will used to review standing with other funding programs, compliance status with the State of Vermont agencies, and may express project concerns. Farms that have not yet been inspected by VAAFMM or DEC may become a higher priority for inspection to ensure compliance with the RAPs.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

If you need assistance with the businesses or financial planning elements of the application, there is support available through UVM Extension. Please contact Zac Smith at zachary.m.smith@uvm.edu or 802-656-7624 for assistance.

VHCB staff will also be hosting 3 informational sessions which will provide a brief overview of the program and provide Q&A if you have eligibility or application questions. Register here:

- [Wednesday, December 3, 2025 - 1:00pm-2:00pm](#)
- [Thursday, December 18, 2025 – 11:00am-12:00pm](#)
- [Monday, January 5, 2025 – 12:00pm-1:00pm](#)

For questions about the application, please contact Betsy McGavisk, Viability Program Coordinator, at Betsy@VHCB.org or 802-828-5562

Updated 12/22/2025

VHCB WATER QUALITY GRANT APPLICATION QUESTIONS

The below questions are for reference only. Please submit your application through our online portal, instructions are on the first page of the instructions.

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Primary contact name

Phone number

Secondary phone number (option)

Email

If you are working with an advisor or technical assistance provider and would like for them to be included on application-related communication from VHCB, please provide their contact information:

Advisor name(s):

Advisor email(s)

How did you hear about the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Water Quality Grant?

- Event/conference
- From a business advisor/consultant
- From a friend/other farmer
- In a publication
- Website
- VAAF/ NRCS-USDA/Conservation District Staff
- Other: _____

Have you participated in the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program before?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

BUSINESS INFORMATION

Business Name

Business name as listed on most recent tax forms (if different than farm name)

Please select which best describes your business:

- Dairy Farm
- Livestock Farm
- Other farm required to comply with RAPs
- Custom Operator
- Non-Profit Organization
- Other: _____

All business owners/operators

Website

Business physical address

Business mailing Address (if different than physical)

Ownership structure:

- Partnership
- LLC
- Corporation
- Sole Proprietor
- Other: _____

Year began managing business or organization

All grantees must be in compliance with state and federal tax regulations. Please provide financial information for the most recent tax year available.

- Gross Sales
- Family FTEs (Full-time equivalent), including self
- Net Income
- Non-Family FTEs

Is your farm, or any of the land you own:

- Organic?
- Conserved?
- In Lake Champlain Basin?

If applicable, what is your farm size classification?

- SFO
- MFO
- CSFO
- LFO
- MFO
- Not sure or N/A

Please give current numbers of:

- Acres owned
- Acres Leased
- Acres in production

Major watershed drainage basin: if you are unsure, please refer to this map from Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Conservation: [Vermont's Major Drainage Basins | Department of Environmental Conservation](#)

- Connecticut River Basin
- Lake Memphramagog Basin
- Hudson River Basin
- Lake Champlain River Basin

For dairy farms – please provide

- Animals milked daily
- Primary animal type(s) (cow, goat, sheep, etc.)
- Total Herd Number
- Rolling herd average

- Pounds of milk shipped per year
- Where do you sell your milk?

For Livestock farms

- Cows
- Hogs
- Poultry
- Other (please specify)

GRANT REQUEST OVERVIEW

What are you requesting grant funds for?

What best describes this project?

- Construction/Infrastructure
- Equipment
- Other

VHCB Grant Funding Request: \$ _____

Total Project Cost, including all matching funds \$ _____

Please briefly describe the proposed project you are applying for, how it improves water quality, and how it fits in with long-term plans for your business.

BUDGET TABLES AND NARRATIVE

Please download and complete this budget sheet with all anticipated project expenses and fund sources.

- Please read the application instructions to ensure your expenses are eligible.
- If you have an existing project budget created with a state or federal agency, you may upload that instead of using the VHCB template. Please be specific in the budget narrative question below about which costs VHCB funds will be used for.
- **You will be directed to upload this budget with the rest of your application materials at the end of this application.**

If you have a completed project budget through a state or federal agency, you may upload that instead of using the VHCB template. *If this is your situation, please be specific in the budget narrative question below about which costs VHCB funds will be used for.* You will be asked to upload this budget worksheet at the end of the application.

Do you anticipate using any of the following other sources of funding for your project?

Vermont Agency of Agriculture Best Management Practices (BMP) Yes No Have not applied, but planning to
 - If yes, please provide: Amount _____ Grant agreement number _____

Vermont Agency of Agriculture Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP) Yes No Have not applied, but planning to

If yes, please provide: Amount _____ Grant agreement number _____

USDA NRCS EQUIP Yes No Have not applied, but planning to
 If yes, please provide: Amount _____ Grant agreement number _____

Other grant programs Yes No Have not applied yet, but planning to

If yes, please provide: Program Name(s): _____ Amount(s): _____
Grant Number(s) _____

Budget Narrative: Please provide any additional information about project funds (farm cash, line of credit, state, federal, or other grant program, etc) that may not be captured in the project budget or questions above, including whether sources have been secured or if VHCB must be used for particular project expenses. For projects that require state or federal funds to move forward, we will strongly prioritize projects that have already applied to these agencies and/or have contracts in place.

In some cases, we can offer a match waiver to applicants who cannot meet the 50% match requirement. If you would like to request a waiver, please explain.

NARRATIVE QUESTIONS - Business

1. Please provide a basic description of your farm business.
2. Please provide a brief overview of farm production, including herd size, field practices, pasture management, and production practices.
3. Please list all products produced on farm and a description of the markets you sell to.
4. Please list all farm owners and managers, and their areas of responsibility.
5. Please describe surface waters or wetlands on or near the farm, if any. Indicate if there is a wetland, ditch, or river near the proposed project area and distance.
6. Please describe your major short and long term goals for the farm, and any actions you plan to take to maintain, improve, or grow your business.

NARRATIVE QUESTIONS - Project

7. Describe how your project will have a positive impact on water quality. This can include improved nutrient management, reduced runoff, and/or compliance with RAPS. Where possible, please include specific anticipated outcomes (runoff is estimated to decrease by X%, # of acres will be injected instead of spread, # of acres converted to no-till, etc).
8. What other ways will this project benefit your business and/or community? Examples could include climate adaptation, soil health, economic viability, quality of life, improved or increased production, innovation that benefits ag community, etc. Where possible, please be specific (ex: # of labor hours saved, % increase in profitability, \$X reduction in input costs, etc).
9. List any technical advisors you are or plan to be working with for this project, including advisors from USDA-NRCS, Vermont Agency or Agriculture Food and Markets, the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, etc.
10. If applicable, do you have experience using this equipment or waste management system?
11. Describe what would happen if you don't receive this grant. Would you be able to complete this project?
12. What is the estimated timeline for the project?
13. If your farm has a nutrient management plan, please indicate when it was completed and by whom. Please summarize key components of the plan and whether any upcoming farm changes might impact nutrient management.
14. List any federal, state, or local permits or approvals that will be necessary for you to implement this projects, and the status of these processes. If your farm is conserved, please confirm that the proposed project does not conflict with the terms of the conservation easement. If your farm is on leased land, please confirm that this does not conflict with the lease agreement and describe lease tenure.
15. Is this the farm's first significant water quality investment?

ATTACHMENTS

How to upload your attachments:

- Please upload the following attachments using this secure upload link.
- In the text box titled "your name," please enter your last name - (dash) your farm's name. A green check mark next to the document means that has been uploaded successfully. You will not be able to review or access the documents once uploaded.
- Confidentiality: All materials will remain confidential -- see instruction section titled "Review Team, Confidentiality, & Compliance Review" for more information.

Once all documents are uploaded, please return to this application to finalize submission.

Application Attachments:

1. Project Budget - Required:

- Please download and complete this budget sheet with all anticipated expenses involved in this project, as well as the source of funds.
- If you have a completed project budget through a state or federal agency, you may upload that instead of using the VHCB template.

2. Financial Statements - Required:

- Current Balance Sheet (snapshot of assets and liabilities)
- Historical Income Statement or Profit & Loss (listing of farm income and expenses)
- Projection or Cash Flow (projected income and expenses for 1–3 years)
- Tax returns may be submitted if you do not track income and expenses another way. Please black out your Social Security or EIN number. Submitting tax returns instead of financial statements will slightly decrease your application score.

3. Map - Required:

- At least one map of your operation showing where the proposed project will be located and on-farm surface waters.

4. Quotes - Required for equipment purchases, strongly recommended for all other applications:

- Provide quotes from contractors/suppliers to support project costs

5. Letters of Support - Optional, but strongly recommended:

- Letters can be from technical advisors or project stakeholders. These are not required but are encouraged, especially for projects that are not receiving co-funding and technical assistance from a state or federal agency (VAAFMP BMP, CEAP, or NRCS EQIP).

6. Photos - Optional:

- Include up to five photos to show the issue you are addressing or the solution you plan to implement with this project.

7. Business Plan - Optional:

- If you have completed a business or transfer plan, you may attach it to this application to provide complete picture of business

SECTION F: CONFIDENTIALITY

Please review the section of the application instructions titled "Review Team, Confidentiality, & Compliance Review."

By submitting your application materials, you agree to allow all of your application materials to be read by members of the VHCB Water Quality Grant Review Committee and by staff at the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program. In addition, you agree to allow the project description and grant request amount to be shared with USDA-NRCS or Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets. Notwithstanding the terms and conditions of this section no other persons will have access to your application, and all copies will be collected for safekeeping and/or deleted following the meeting of the Review Committee.

Signature: The information provided in this application and all attachments is true to the best of my (our) knowledge. I/We agree to allow the above-mentioned committee and staff members to read our application. NOTE: Signatures typed within this PDF are acceptable.

Signature(s)_____

Date_____