

Funded Training Opportunity

California Association of Resource Conservation Districts Solicits Applications for the Agricultural Management Systems Learning Collaborative

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1. Summary of the Funding Opportunity

Chico State's [Center for Regenerative Agriculture and Resilient Systems \(CRARS\)](#), in collaboration with the [California Association of Resource Conservation Districts \(CARCD\)](#) [1] and other project partners, has received funding for the **Agricultural Management Systems Learning Collaborative ('The Collaborative')** through a grant from the USDA National Institutes of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) program. The Collaborative is developing a comprehensive approach to train and support producers, agricultural professionals, and students to become leaders in systems-based agricultural management.

As part of the project's activities, CARCD is currently **accepting applications through September 5, 2022 at 11:59 pm**, from regional technical assistance providers (TAPs) and other agricultural professionals to work in partnership with agricultural producers to help establish and participate in a peer mentoring network centered in systems-based agricultural management. Full tuition support will be offered to 20 individuals for Fall 2022-Spring 2023 (Cohort 2).

Selected Tuition Support Recipients will:

- Enroll in their choices of four online courses in Agricultural Management Systems. The fourth class on Holistic Farm and Ranch Planning and Design is required. The first serves as foundational work for all the others and is recommended. Courses have been developed by CRARS and are offered through Chico State's Office of Regional and Continuing Education (RCE). Cohort 2 **courses will be starting on September 21, 2022**.
- Work together to create conservation management plans on California farms and ranches.
- Participate in community mentoring activities (see Participant Commitments below).

The purpose of this Funding Opportunity and the subsequent review and selection process are to:

- Solicit proposals from various candidate organizations and agricultural spaces.
- Conduct a fair and extensive evaluation based on the criteria embedded in the application.
- Select a diverse cohort of participants who best represent, have experience working with and/or
- Demonstrate intentions to support California producers, including members of the State's diverse agricultural communities.[2]

Agricultural professionals who are bilingual, multilingual, within the [geographic region](#) of the CRARS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and/or have experience in/a desire to work with historically underrepresented agricultural communities and producers are highly encouraged to apply.

2. The Collaborative: Project Background

Rationale: California is the nation's leading agricultural producer by total receipts, generating over \$50 billion in 2019, far exceeding the number two leading state of Iowa (\$27.5 billion) and representing 13.5% of U.S. total receipts. By sheer size and productivity, California has significant potential to contribute to working lands conservation efforts; however, there are several barriers to producer adoption of conservation practices, which can be addressed through systems-based approaches. These barriers include cultural stigma; lack of producer-driven knowledge sharing of the transition process and risk management; number of context-specific field demonstrations; and lack of knowledge and/or access to information, training and assistance with systems-based agricultural management. It is equally important that agricultural professionals providing assistance to producers (e.g., extension, RCD and NRCS staff) have access to the latest information and training. Currently, producers and agricultural professionals must piece together various workshops and online materials.

Purpose and Approach: This opportunity addresses these barriers through a comprehensive approach to outreach and training of producers, agricultural professionals, and the students who will become the nation's next generation of agricultural leaders. The project design attends to the identified need for information and assistance to improve productivity through sustainable resource management strategies, and the need for strong community building and support to address real and perceived practical, cultural and economic barriers. Flexibility in the activities and delivery system provides access to multiple audiences, in which the interactions of these audiences are mutually beneficial. The approach is designed to foster conversation and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, creating conditions that support innovative and collaborative strategies to address current and future threats and opportunities for California agricultural production.

Participant Commitments: Program participants are expected to engage in the following activities:

- Enroll in four online courses in Agricultural Management Systems.
 - Each 6-week course is self-paced during the week, followed by a one-hour discussion per week. You should expect to devote 5-6 hours per week on average in course work, plus an additional 4 hours of project-related work outside of the course, for a total of about 10 hours per week. Courses will be offered sequentially, one course at a time.
- Work with other partners to create conservation management plans on California farms and ranches.
- Participate in community mentoring activities.
- Participate in the California-focused Soil Health Academy. This is an optional 3-day, grower-focused, soil health intensive workshop (highly encouraged).

- Be willing to present on your experiences of systems-based learning, planning and implementation in a dedicated session at the virtual CARCD Annual Conference (in fall or early winter), if possible.
- Complete project pre/post surveys administered by CRARS to collect, compare and measure change in participants' expectations and outcomes from course learning experiences.

Coursework:

- Course 1: Systems Theory in Regenerative Ag Management
- Course 2: Soil Health Systems Management
- Course 3: Science & Practice of Ecological Forest and Range Management
- Course 4: Holistic Farm/Ranch Planning and Design

3. Application Timeline

- [Application portal is open now.](#)
- Applications will be accepted through **September 5, 2022** via the submission portal. Any proposals received after this date and time will be given second priority in the cohort selection process.
- Tuition Support Recipients will be notified on or before **September 12, 2022**.
- Registration is required after grants have been awarded by **11:59 pm, September 14, 2022**.
- NOTE: Tuition support will be provided directly to the CSU, Chico Office of Regional and Continuing Education on your behalf. Support will be provided on a course-by-course basis, up to four courses.

4. Application Questions and Evaluation Criteria

Criteria/necessary commitments are embedded in the application questions. Each question will be evaluated and scored by a review team and totaled for a complete score. If information is considered incomplete, CARCD reserves the right to follow up for missing information before submitting a final score for consideration of award, or disqualify the application.

[The application and submission portal are accessed here:](#)

QUESTIONS that are asked within the application portal:

1. Are you currently providing technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, or growers? Y/N
2. If yes, in what county(ies) are you providing agricultural technical assistance?
3. The intention of this course is for students to create conservation plans/soil health management plans/ carbon farm plans for at least one operation. Please describe at least one identified site, including general goals and resource concerns.

4. Will your project take place on land owned or operated by a historically underserved farmer, rancher, or grower? Y/N NRCS defines historically underserved producers as minority, women, veteran, beginning, or limited resource producers. More information can be found [here](#).
5. Are you likely available and willing to participate as a discussion panel member at one session during the virtual CARCD Annual Conference, to be held in spring 2023? Y/N
6. Project dissemination efforts include Producer/Project Profiles that will be posted on the CRARS and CARCD websites. Are you willing to participate in this effort (e.g., provide data, participate in interviews)? Y/N
7. As additional agricultural professionals become interested in the project, are you willing to serve as a mentor contact (i.e., share your experience, provide advice)? Y/N
8. CSU Chico and CARCD strive to serve the diverse agricultural communities in the state. How might your team help us accomplish that goal? (e.g. languages other than English spoken, experience working with historically underrepresented producers, etc.)
9. What courses are you planning on taking? Select all that apply. This is a binding question, you must take the classes you select.

Course #1 Systems Theory in Regenerative Agriculture Management (Recommended)
Course #2 Soil Health Management Systems

Course #3 Science & Practice of Ecological Forest and Range Management

Course #4 Holistic Farm & Ranch Planning and Design (Required)

[1] CARCD is the membership organization for 95 Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) in California, who have been specializing in on-the-ground conservation work for the past 75 years. This Opportunity is directed not just to RCDs: CARCD welcomes all qualified entities from around the state of California to respond to this Opportunity. CARCD can be found on the web at carcd.org

[2] As defined by the NIFA NLGCA program, diverse agricultural communities include small-scale producers, Historically Underrepresented (HU) groups, and beginning farmers/ranchers.

[3] As defined in the 2018 Farm Bill, historical underrepresented producers include limited resource, socially disadvantaged, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers. For more information see:

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/people/outreach/slbfr/?cid=nrcsdev11_001_040

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