



AGRICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

Competitive Grant Program for Innovative Equipment and Technology

Information for Applicants

Eligible Applicants: West-of-Hudson WAP Participants

Submission Deadline: Friday, February 27, 2026

Grant Term: 3 years

For Questions, contact: agprogram@nycwatershed.org

This summary may be updated periodically to include additional information and clarifications.

Overview

The Agricultural Environmental Innovation Demonstration Program (AEIDP) is a new grant opportunity for farmers interested in demonstrating innovative equipment or technology that can improve air and water quality, serve as an educational opportunity, and improve overall farm performance.

The program is administered by the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) with funding from the Office of the New York State Attorney General Letitia James following an environmental settlement in the Town of Delhi. These funds are being reinvested locally to support demonstration projects that deliver measurable air and water quality benefits and advance knowledge across the state.

This is a *one-time opportunity* designed to help farms try new tools, test promising ideas, and share results with the broader agricultural community.

Program Purpose

AEIDP supports forward-looking equipment and technology projects that:

- Improve water quality and/or air quality
- Demonstrate technology that other farms can learn from
- Introduce or test new technologies in the NYC Watershed region
- Strengthen farm viability

Projects funded through this program should offer value to the farm and wider agricultural community by helping understand how new tools and approaches work under real conditions. Diversity in projects will be a priority in the evaluation process to this end.



Program Goals

AEIDP is designed to:

- Support demonstrations that integrate regionally innovative technology and digital and precision agriculture equipment.
- Demonstrate measurable or clearly anticipated improvements to air and water quality
- Generate real-world data and lessons that can be shared with other farmers, researchers, and partners.
- Help farms adopt new tools and practices that may otherwise be financially or operationally out of reach.

Grant Funds Available to Farms

There is **\$1,347,680.79** available for this competitive grant.

While exact awards will depend on proposals, the following category caps ensure diversity and balance across eligible projects:

- **Soil Health & Cover Crop Equipment**

Maximum Awards Granted: \$200,000 total, with up to \$50,000 per award.

This category is intended for farmers wanting to transition to no-till cover crop management and mechanical termination. Precision agriculture components are not required.

- **Agricultural Drones & Drone Services**

Maximum Awards Granted: \$300,000 total, two grant options

Includes up to 3 drone purchases (\$50,000 each) with the remaining category funds (approximately \$150,000) available for custom drone service for agricultural applications.

- **Innovative Equipment & Precision Agriculture Technology**

Target allocation: All remaining grant funds

Supports a broader range including but not limited to sensor-based, automated, GPS-guided, or data-integrated technologies.

These funding allocations may be adjusted based on application quality, geographic distribution, and demonstrated environmental benefit.

Single Application Round with Ranked Choices

The AEIDP will have a single application round.

Eligible farmers may submit up to three projects in the same application with no more than one idea per category. Applicants must rank their projects as first, second and third choice which will inform which eligible projects will be funded first.



This approach allows WAC and the Independent Review Committee (IRC) to:

- Review, score, and rank all proposals at the same time.
- Fund the highest-ranked projects first.
- Fund second- or third-choice proposals if funding remains available.

If projects are withdrawn, delayed, or cost less than expected, WAC may use remaining funds to support additional high-scoring projects from the same application round.

Award Size Expectations

Final award amounts will vary based on the proposed budget, project scope, and review criteria. Applicants do not need to request the maximum award to be competitive, and applicants are encouraged to request only the amount necessary to implement a strong, well-defined demonstration.

As a planning reference:

- **Category 1** (Soil Health & Cover Crop Equipment) and **Category 2** (Agricultural Drones & Services) have a maximum award of **\$50,000 per project**.
- **Category 3** (Innovative Equipment & Precision Agriculture Technology) has a maximum award of **\$75,000 per project**.

Awards may be made below the maximum, and WAC may partially fund a project, adjust the approved scope or budget, or request revisions to ensure that funds are used efficiently and to support a diverse mix of projects across categories and locations.

Project Term & Engagement Period

AEIDP projects include a three-year engagement period, beginning in the first year of operation following award, and structured as follows:

- **Year 1: Award, Procurement, and Initial Operation**
 - Grant agreements are executed following approval by the Independent Review Committee (IRC) and the Office of the Attorney General.
 - Equipment is procured consistent with WAC's Nutrient Management Credit process. Special circumstances may include but not are limited to:
 - Drone purchases will only be made following proof of applicable licensure.
 - Custom Drone Service Credits will be paid on a per-acre rate following an agricultural application event, similar to WAP Cover Crops.
 - An Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Agreement is executed.
 - The equipment enters active operation, and baseline documentation and data collection begin.



- **Years 2–3: Continued Operation, Demonstration, and Outreach**
 - The equipment remains in active use on the farm consistent with the O&M agreement.
 - The awardee participates in agreed-upon monitoring, data sharing, and outreach activities (e.g., site visits, case studies, photos or educational materials).
 - WAC and Cornell Farmers DataLab may conduct periodic follow-up to document performance and lessons learned.

Conclusion of the Grant

At the end of the three-year engagement period:

- All program monitoring, reporting, and outreach requirements conclude.
- The grant is formally closed.
- Full ownership of the equipment rests entirely with the farm/awardee, with no further program obligations beyond those already satisfied under the O&M Agreement.

Who Can Apply?

This program is available to farms participating in the Watershed Agricultural Program that:

- Are located in the New York City West-of-Hudson Watershed,
- Meet basic Watershed Agricultural Program (WAP) eligibility for an active farm status in good standing.
- Active Conservation Participants enrolled in the Cover Crop program may apply for custom drone services for acreage within the NYC watershed.
- Attest that they:
 - Are not engaged in any legal proceeding with WAC, any subcontractors (e.g., Cornell), or any IRC members.
 - Do not owe past-due federal, state, or local taxes, unless they are making payments under a government-approved agreement with appropriate taxing authority.
 - Are in compliance with applicable environmental, agricultural, and other laws, including (as applicable) local tax, housing, agricultural, and environmental requirements.
- Are willing to:
 - Participate in monitoring, demonstration and outreach activities.
 - Share project-related data and management information with WAC and the research partners.
 - Operate and maintain the funded equipment according to the grant agreement.

If you are unsure whether your farm is eligible, contact agprogram@nycwatershed.org



What Types of Projects Are Eligible?

AEIDP will fund innovative equipment and technology projects across the three defined categories. Applicants may submit up to three project ideas, ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice, with no more than one proposal per category.

Final awards will be based on application quality, scoring, geographic priorities, and available funding.

Category 1: Soil Health and Cover Crop Management

Maximum Funding: \$200,000

This category is meant to support farms attempting to convert and successfully incorporate no-till and mechanical cover crop management into their operation by reducing disturbance and maintaining continuous soil cover.

Herbicide equipment is not eligible. Like-for-like replacement/purchase or upgrades that do not represent a meaningful step forward in management are less likely to be awarded.

Examples of eligible equipment include:

- No-till or high-residue drills and seeders
- Interseeders for cover cropping in standing crops
- Mechanical termination tools (roller crimper)

Category 2: Agricultural Drones, Aerial Monitoring & Application Services

Maximum Funding: \$300,000

DRONE PURCHASES

- Maximum of three drone equipment purchases by farmer-operators.
 - Costs associated with obtaining required licensure are eligible, including approved training courses and testing fees.
 - Equipment purchases for awarded projects will not be processed until proof of licensure is provided for the farm applicant or another approved operator who is listed on the farm's WAP Whole Farm Plan.
 - Only agricultural-grade drones are eligible for funding. General monitoring drones or add-on multispectral camera units are not eligible. Proposed packages may include one complete agricultural drone system, including battery packs, dry and wet application payloads, remote controller, charging and power equipment, protective cases, and software or subscription services required for operation during the grant term.

Because of licensing, training, and regulatory requirements, some drone projects may require longer lead times and coordination within a reasonable limit.



CUSTOM DRONE SERVICES

- Proposals must cover at least **100 acres**. Both cropland and pasture are eligible.
- The same acres may be counted more than once if multiple service events are proposed. *For example, a 50-acre field with one pesticide application and one cover crop seeding would count as 100 acres.*
- Awardees will receive a **flat \$50 per acre rate** for every application event. For example, that same 50-acre field with two proposed events will receive \$50/acre for the pesticide application and \$50/acre for the cover crop.
- Reimbursement will be based on verification of the acreage covered by the service provider consistent with the proposed activity at the \$50 per acre rate.
- Farms participating in the WAP Cover Crop program may use drones, but must meet required application rates and certification standards to receive the full BMP payment through the Whole Farm Plan. The \$50 per acre provided by this grant will offset the BMP payment. *For example, if the BMP rate is \$130 per acre, the farm would receive \$80 for the BMP and \$50 from this grant. If acres do not meet certification standards, only the \$50 per acre grant payment would apply.*

Additional Requirements:

- Drone service credits may be used to contract licensed drone service providers for ag applications only, such as cover crop seeding, or targeted crop protection.
- Agronomic imaging and mapping or general drone services will not be awarded funds.
- Service providers must hold all required federal and state licensure and certifications, and documentation will be required prior to approval and payment.
- Drone service credits must be utilized in the year they are awarded. No carry-over expenses will be eligible. Failure to use the credit may result in a relinquishment of the award with unused funds reallocated to other projects.

Category 3: Innovative Equipment & Precision Agriculture Technology

Largest funding category (remaining grant funds after Category 1 and 2 allocations). Awards capped at \$75,000 per project.

This category supports regionally advanced equipment and technology that improves environmental performance through data, automation, sensing, or precision control, and that has strong potential for learning and replication.



Eligible projects must demonstrate clear connections to water quality protection, air quality improvement, or resource efficiency, and provide strong demonstration and learning value.

Examples of eligible equipment and technologies include (not exhaustive):

- Precision guidance and efficiency systems (one tractor outfit per project)
 - GPS guidance and auto-steer systems that reduce overlap, compaction, and fuel use
 - Machine control technologies that improve field efficiency and reduce unnecessary passes
- Sensors and environmental monitoring
 - Yield monitors
 - In-field soil moisture, temperature, or compaction sensors
 - Micro/climate sensors supporting improved management
- Remote, Automation and Robotics
 - Remote grazing collars and digital fence
 - Autonomous or semi-autonomous equipment
 - Robotic or automated systems
- Integrated data, mapping, and decision-support tools
 - Field mapping, analytics, and visualization tools that improve planning, logistics, or conservation outcomes
- Other innovative equipment with environmental and demonstration benefits

Projects under this category should clearly explain what is new, why it matters, and how lessons learned will be shared with other farms and partners.

What is Ineligible?

While final eligibility will be determined through the review process and contract requirements, the following will generally not be supported:

- No equipment or technologies directly related to manure handling and application (e.g., spreaders, injection units, scales, flow meters). Manure storage improvements or compost treatment may be eligible.
- Routine, like-for-like replacement of existing equipment without clear innovation or environmental benefit.
- Equipment or technology that is not tied directly to the agricultural operation.
- Items already funded or items approved for funding through other government grants
- Equipment or practices already facilitated by the Watershed Agricultural Program.



- General purpose equipment with no clear linkage to the program's water/air quality and demonstration goals.
- Land purchases/rentals, building construction, and other capital projects outside the scope of this program.
- Livestock, semen or embryos
- Root stock or nursery stock (e.g., Christmas trees, annual bedding plants, container plants)
- Refinance debt, taxes, penalties or fines
- Bank charges and/or loan fees
- Insurances or bonding expenses
- Fuel
- Ongoing operating costs unrelated to the demonstration project.
- Equipment or technology that the farm cannot feasibly implement upon being awarded.
- Equipment purchased prior the grant award.

How Applications Are Evaluated

All eligible applications are reviewed and scored by an Independent Review Committee (IRC) convened by WAC, using a standardized scoring rubric.

Those members include:

1. **Ryan Naatz**, WAC Executive Director
2. **Michael Vander Werff**, NYC DEP Deputy Director Bureau of Water Supply, Source Water Protection, Watershed Agricultural, Forestry & Streams.
3. **Dr. Dwight Bruno**, WAC Council Member, Retired NYS Veterinarian
4. **Greg Albrecht**, Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Coordinator and Principal Environmental Analyst, NYS Dept. Agriculture and Markets, Division of Land and Water Resources, New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee
5. **Kirsten Workman**, Nutrient Management and Environmental Sustainability Specialist, Cornell Pro-Dairy, Animal Science.

In addition to project merit, the following priority scoring will be applied to all applications:

- Proximity to Delhi, NY
 - Applications receive points based on the distance from the farmstead location to the incident site in Delhi, using distance bands (within 5 miles, 10 miles, and 20+ miles).
 - Distances are calculated by WAC using geospatial measurements - applicants are not required to calculate distance themselves.



- Community Priority (Environmental Justice/Disadvantaged Communities)
 - Additional points are awarded for farms located within a DEC Commissioner’s Policy 37 (CP-37) Potential Environmental Justice Area (PEJA) and/or a Disadvantaged Community (DAC). WAC will verify eligibility using official state mapping at the time of review.

To ensure fairness and integrity of the process:

- Applications are anonymized prior to IRC review using farm identification numbers.
- IRC members cannot also be applicants or financially benefit from any awards.
- WAC conducts a preliminary eligibility review and may flag incomplete or ineligible applications before scoring.

Review Criteria

While the full scoring rubric will be based on the application materials, applications are generally evaluated based on:

- Application Completeness and Quality
 - Submission is thorough, all sections are completed, and the review committee can fairly and accurately assess your project without knowing your farm.
- Environmental Benefit
 - Clear connection to potential water quality and/or air quality with anticipated impacts
- Innovation and Demonstration Value
 - How new or advanced the equipment or technology is for the farm and region
 - Strength of the project to help educate others
 - Diversity in projects will be a priority
- Feasibility and Readiness
 - Realistic scope, budget, and timeline
 - Appropriateness of the equipment for the farm operation
 - Capacity to implement, operate, and maintain the project
- Data and Learning Potential
 - Ability to collect meaningful data and impact of on-farm knowledge gain
 - Alignment with WAC and Cornell Farmers DataLab evaluation capacity and scope
- Farm Viability and Community Benefit
 - Expected impact on farm resilience, efficiency, or economic performance
 - Potential to inform other farms facing similar challenges
- Budget Reasonableness
 - Costs are well justified and clear and tied to expected benefits
 - Reliance on cost share, other equipment purchases or outside funding to make the project feasible



Final award recommendations from the IRC are submitted to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for approval. No funding is awarded until OAG approval and execution of a grant agreement.

Funding Structure

AEIDP is administered as a reimbursement-based or two-party check grant program, following procurement and payment practices similar to WAC's Nutrient Management Credit (NMC) or agronomic BMP Programs.

- All purchase and reimbursement documentation must follow WAC procurement requirements with the exception of the Whole Farm Plan forms (i.e., WFP-3, WFP-5C).
- Payments are made through reimbursement or direct/two-party payment to vendors, as approved by WAC.
- No equipment may be purchased prior to execution of a grant agreement or approved purchase (e.g., drone purchases before licensure)
- Equipment must be owned, operated and maintained throughout the grant term otherwise may be subject to relinquishment or reimbursement.

Application Process

Step 1: Explore Your Idea

- Review this webpage, program resources (e.g., attend a workshop or view the recording) and the Application Form.
- Talk with your WAP technical staff, vendors, precision agricultural experts, other farmers.
- Consider how your project will:
 - Be successfully implemented
 - Positively impact your farm viability
 - Improve water and/or air quality
 - Provide demonstration value for others

Step 2: Develop Your Project Concept & Budget

- Identify the equipment or technology to be proposed.
- Obtain price quotes or maximum cost estimates. Solicited quotes are ideal, but not required for the application if other means of justification can be provided.

Note - no additional funding will be awarded beyond the proposed amount, and partial funding may be awarded if aspects of the project are not eligible or deemed reasonable in accordance with the scoring rubric.



- Consider:
 - Where and how the equipment will be used
 - What operational improvements are expected
 - What environmental outcomes can be anticipated or measured
 - How the project will advance knowledge or adoption within the agricultural community

Step 3: Complete the Application

Applications will request:

- Farm contact information and basic operation details
- Project description and goals
- Environmental and farm viability benefits
- Budget and justification
- Supporting maps, photos, or materials, as applicable

Step 4: Submit by the Deadline

- Submit the completed application and all required attachments by February 27, 2026 by 5PM.
- Applications may be submitted electronically or by other methods identified in the application instructions.

Email: agprogram@nycwatershed.org

Mail:

Watershed Agricultural Council
Attn: AIDEP
44 West Street
Walton, NY 13856

After You Are Awarded

If your project is selected:

1. Grant Agreement
 - Execute a grant agreement outlining approved scope, budget, procurement, reporting, and equipment ownership and operation requirements.
2. Procurement and Purchase
 - Complete all purchases in accordance with WAC procurement procedures.
 - Coordinate with WAC on payment method (reimbursement or direct vendor payment).
3. Implementation and Data Collection
 - Begin operating the equipment and collecting agreed-upon data.
 - Participate in scheduled monitoring and site visits.



4. Reporting and Outreach

- Provide periodic updates and a final summary of your experience.
- Be willing to participate in at least one outreach or demonstration activity annually.

Support & Technical Assistance

Applicants are responsible for developing and submitting their applications. Support is also available from:

- Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC)
Program questions, eligibility, application logistics, and contract requirements
- Program Technical Staff (Whole Farm Planners, Nutrient Management, Precision Feed)
Assistance aligning projects with existing plans and clarifying environmental impacts
- Equipment Vendors - expertise, pricing and implementation considerations
- County economic development offices and local extensions.
- FarmNet and other farm support organizations

Reservations

The Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) reserves the right to:

- Reject any or all applications received under this program, in whole or in part.
- Determine applicant eligibility, completeness, and compliance with all program requirements prior to review by the Independent Review Committee (IRC).
- Disqualify any applicant whose application, conduct, or prior program participation fails to conform to program requirements or contractual obligations.
- Request additional information or clarification from an applicant as needed to evaluate eligibility, feasibility, or compliance.
- Amend, clarify, or supplement program requirements, application materials, timelines, or guidance, with appropriate notice to applicants, consistent with the executed contract.
- Waive non-material irregularities or minor deficiencies in an application when such waiver does not affect fairness, scoring integrity, or contract compliance.
- Select only certain portions of an application or proposal for funding, including funding a second- or third-ranked proposal instead of a first-ranked proposal, where appropriate.
- Make awards in amounts less than requested, or condition awards on revisions to scope, budget, or implementation schedule.
- Maintain and manage a ranked list of eligible but unfunded projects, and issue future awards from that list if funding becomes available due to project withdrawal, cost underruns, or non-execution.



- Modify reporting, monitoring, or outreach requirements during the course of a funded project, as necessary to meet program objectives or contractual obligations with the New York State Office of the Attorney General.
- Monitor funded projects, including conducting site visits and requesting documentation to verify compliance with grant agreements and Operation & Maintenance requirements.
- Negotiate the terms of grant agreements, including scope, budget, procurement approach, and payment timing, prior to execution.
- Suspend, terminate, or rescind an award if an awardee fails to execute required agreements, comply with procurement or reporting requirements, or otherwise violates program or contract terms.
- Make final determinations regarding funding decisions, payment timing, and disbursement, subject to approval by the New York State Office of the Attorney General where required under the contract.
- Conduct follow-up evaluations of funded projects during and after the project term to assess environmental outcomes, farm viability impacts, and long-term program effectiveness.

All applications and supporting materials submitted in response to this program become part of the program record and may be retained by WAC in accordance with recordkeeping, audit, and reporting requirements under the contract.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q1. Do I have to be a participant in the Watershed Agricultural Program to apply?

A1. Yes, the program is focused on farms that participate in the WAP. Refer to the current eligibility section in the application materials and contact WAC if you are unsure.

Q2. Is there a minimum or maximum grant amount?

A2. There is no minimum award. The maximum is \$50,000 for Categories 1 and 2, and \$75,000 for Category 3.

Q3. When is the application deadline?

A3. The deadline for applications is Friday, February 27, 2026 at 5:00PM by mail or email. No late submissions will be accepted.

Q4. Are the workshops mandatory to apply?

A4. No, they are not required. They are being held for farmers to learn more about the grant and to ask questions. Any questions can be submitted in writing to agprogram@nycwatershed.org. Some may be added to this FAQ list.



Q5. How long is the grant term and what happens to the equipment after?

A5. The grant period is three years following the awarding of your project. If the awardee operates and maintains the equipment consistent with the project requirements, they will retain ownership of the equipment at the end of the commitment.

Q6. What happens if I decide to stop mid-way through the grant term?

A6. The Operation and Maintenance Agreement that awardees must sign before the purchase of the equipment will outline these details. In short, and depending on the circumstances, the equipment shall be relinquished back to WAC. Reimbursement for certain payments made by WAC, including but not limited to software fees or lost/broken equipment, may be required.

Failure to implement in a reasonable timeframe, or at all, will result in the award being rescinded and funding re-allocated to another project.

Q7. Can I use this to replace old equipment?

A7. Unlikely. Unless the replacement results in clear, documented improvements to environmental performance and demonstration value, simply replacing like-for-like equipment with no innovation is generally not eligible.

Q8. Can I apply if I'm already receiving WAC or government funding for other projects?

A8. Yes, but if there is direct overlap in the projects being proposed, you must clearly explain how this project is distinct and complementary, and how funding will be coordinated. Double-funding for the same item or activity is not allowed.

Q9. What if my idea is experimental or unproven?

A9. That can be a good fit, as long as the risks are clearly described and the project still supports the overall goals of the program. Learning from both successes and failures is part of the demonstration value.

Q10. Who makes the final decision on awards?

A10. The Independent Review Committee scores and recommends projects to WAC. WAC then submits those recommendations to the Office of the New York State Attorney General for final approval, consistent with the program contract.



How to Get Started

1. Download and review the Application Form, when available on the WAC website
2. Begin outlining your project, gathering quotes, and identifying how you will demonstrate and measure outcomes.
3. Complete and submit your application by the stated deadline.

If you have questions at any point in the process, please reach out to agprogram@nycwatershed.org, or contact Connor Young, Agricultural Program Manager at cyoung@nycwatershed.org or 607-865-7090.