Request for Proposals

Research Initiative for Northeast Grazing Soils (RINGS)

2026 Small Grants Program

Overview

The Research Initiative for Northeast Grazing Soils (RINGS) is pleased to announce a competitive Small Grants Program to support soil carbon research in the Northeast U.S., defined as the following states: CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, and VT. The 2026 RINGS Small Grants Program expands current research efforts and contributes to the development of a Northeast soil carbon inventory for lands impacted by grazing. This program supports the core mission of RINGS: to improve our understanding of soil carbon sequestration in Northeast grazing systems by aggregating new and existing soil carbon data, developing soil sampling recommendations, and filling geographic and measurement gaps in soil carbon data.

Funds are intended to support soil sampling and analysis costs for basic or applied research projects that involve field data collection of soil organic carbon (SOC), bulk density, other soil properties and nutrient data, and the collection of management information on the practices associated with the land. Adding soil carbon sampling to ongoing research or extension projects is encouraged. Novel, stand-alone projects are allowable if the individual can demonstrate effective use of funds for quantifying soil organic carbon stocks and the potential synergy with other datasets and/or programs that fill geographic and/or critical knowledge gaps and enhance regional understanding. For stand-alone projects, sampling across multiple management practices and/or including an appropriate control site is encouraged.

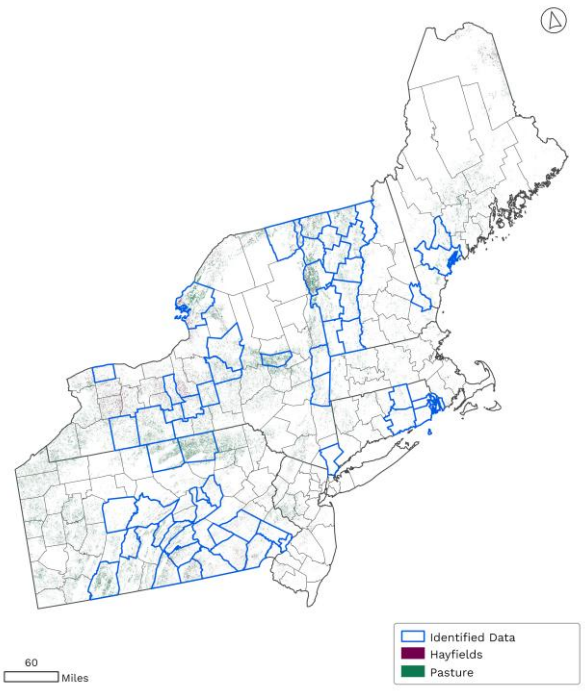

Fig. 1 Spatial distribution of pasture and hayfields in the Northeast (National Land Cover Database, USGS 2024). Blue-outlined counties contain soil organic carbon measurements from grazed lands. These counties were identified through a RINGS-led outreach survey.

Priority Areas

Data Gaps A priority of the Small Grants Program is to fill data gaps in our understanding of soil organic carbon in Northeast grazing soils. Gaps may relate to geography (see Fig. 1 showing the counties that RINGS has identified as having soil carbon data), gaps in management practices (e.g., conventional, organic, regenerative, silvopasture), gaps in representation of diverse soils or landscape attributes, and/or gaps in perspectives of diverse actors in the agricultural community. Proposals that address multiple gaps or provide strong justification for targeting a single critical gap will be prioritized.

Sampling Cost Efficiency Funding is intended primarily for SOC and bulk density analysis, which should comprise at least 60% of the proposed budget. This may include

costs associated with sending samples to an external lab and/or internal processing and analysis of soil samples. Other expenses (e.g., additional soil analyses, equipment, travel expenses) should not exceed 40% of the proposed budget. Applicants should describe the number of sampling areas and sampling density in their proposal.

Project Feasibility Priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate a strong likelihood of completion, including clear plans for data collection and analysis, a realistic timeline, and sufficient personnel. Budgets must confirm that necessary resources, such as travel, equipment, personnel, and laboratory analysis, are adequately included in the budget or confirmed as available resources.

Soil Sampling and Analysis To ensure data from this RFP can be harmonized and used to answer essential RINGS priority questions, we have developed a set of minimum sampling and analysis requirements (Attachment A). Grantees are expected to follow these guidelines, but other than the defined parameters, have control over their project/experimental design. Projects that include additional soil properties beyond SOC and bulk density (pH, texture, etc) should justify how these enhance project objectives.

Management Data Collection Plan Applicants must present a feasible plan for obtaining management data on sampled lands (e.g., land use history, stocking rates, and other relevant practices; see Grant Reporting Requirements). Applicants should demonstrate that producer relationships or partnerships are in place or can be readily established. Letters of support demonstrating producer buy-in are encouraged.

Eligibility

- Researchers from academic institutions, government agencies, or non-profit organizations are welcome to apply. We also encourage applications from technical service providers (TSP) and producers with research objectives.
- If you are a producer interested in partnering with a researcher or TSP to have your farm sampled, please complete the google form on our website; https://rings.tsip.org/get-involved
- For-profit companies may participate as partners and applicants should define this partnership in their proposal.
- Eligible study sites must be characterized as grazed land. This includes:
    - Actively grazed land or hayfield within the last 5 years
    - Land recently converted to pasture or hay production (not including silage corn)
    - Land planned for conversion to pasture or hay production in the near term
    - Agroforestry and silvopasture sites may be included

Funding

- Estimated award per project: $5,000-$10,000
- Total funding available: $50,000
- Expected number of awards: 5-10
- Award period: Funds will be distributed by May 1, 2026 and must be expended by December 31, 2026

Timeline

- RFP Release: March 2, 2026
- Application Deadline: April 1, 2026 by 12:00 PM EST
- Award Announcement: April 17, 2026
- Project Period: May–December 2026

Grant Reporting Requirements
All funded projects must adhere to the following requirements:

- **Soil data collection** – As a requirement of the grant, awardees will be asked to describe their soil sampling and analysis methods. Minimum sampling requirements are described in Attachment A. This information will be used to inform the development of a sampling protocol fit for Northeast grazing soils and accessible to diverse users and outcomes. This feedback will be collected primarily through an online survey and/or a brief interview before the end of 2026.
- **Management data collection** – Awardees must collect and report management information using a questionnaire developed by RINGS (see Attachment B). These data enable research linking management practices to soil outcomes.
- **Data sharing and database contribution** – All resulting soil and management data will be shared with RINGS via TSIP's *Fieldvision* web app (app.tsip.org) and incorporated into a regional database for RINGS research. Submit all data and metadata (minimum requirement: coordinates of sample locations, sample IDs, sampling depth, soil organic carbon, bulk density, and management information) by December 1, 2026. Data will be securely held by The Soil Inventory Project (TSIP) and subject to TSIP's data use policy (tsip.org/data-use-policy). Data will be made accessible to the RINGS working groups to fulfill stated objectives (see: rings.tsip.org). Data will only be published in aggregated and anonymized formats with other data from the RINGS database and never as a stand-alone analysis. This research is intended to advance regional soil carbon understanding and model development.

Submission Guidelines
Email lowery@tsip.org with subject line RINGS Small Grants Application and attach the 3 documents described below as well as any letters of support from producers.

1. **Proposal:** PDF attachment of applicant's proposal (2 page limit) including
    - Title
    - Project background describing research objectives
    - Site description and relationship of the land to grazing
    - Field sampling and lab analysis methods
    - Feasibility of capturing management data
    - Anticipated timeline
2. **Budget:** PDF attachment of applicant's itemized budget (1 page limit) and justification for how funds will be used, not exceeding $10,000 USD. Soil carbon and bulk density analysis costs should comprise at least 60% of the proposed budget. Other expenses (analysis of other soil properties, equipment, and travel expenses) should be less than 40% of the proposed budget. Please limit any overhead expenses to 10% of the proposed budget.
3. **Management Data Plan:** PDF attachment of applicant's management data plan that describes producer relationships or partnerships and feasibility of collecting management data (1 page limit). Letters of support are encouraged.

Additional Formatting Guidelines

- All documents should be single-spaced 12 pt. font (Times New Roman).
- Tables and figures are allowed and should be included within the page limit.
- References can be included and do not count toward the page limit.
- Margins should be one inch on all sides.
- Do not put your name on the proposal, budget, or management data plan. This is to ensure winners are blind selected with no bias from the selection committee.

For questions about this Request for Proposals, please contact:
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RINGS is supported by funding from the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR), Stonyfield Organics, and The Soil Inventory Project (TSIP). We are committed to building an inclusive research community and encourage applications from researchers of all backgrounds and career stages.