

## **APR IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Q. What is the APR Improvement Program?**

- A. The APR Improvement Program (AIP) provides technical assistance, business analysis, and grants to active commercial farms with land that has already been protected through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. The purpose of AIP is to help participating farms stay productive and profitable and keep APR land in active agricultural use.

### **Q. Who is eligible to apply to the Program?**

- A. Eligible responders must be operators of farmland that has been protected through funding from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program for at least the past 3 years and have been actively farming this APR property for at least the past 3 years. Farms owned by non-profit organizations are ineligible for this Program. Specific eligibility requirements may vary from year to year and can be found during open application periods in the Request for Response for the APR Improvement Program at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aip.html>

### **Q. Am I eligible to apply to the Program if I don't own the APR property that I am farming?**

- A. If you have been a farm manager or operator on an APR farm for at least the prior 3 years, but do not own the farm, you may co-apply with the landowner. Signatures of both the owner(s) and the operator must be on the application.

### **Q. Am I eligible to apply if I have already participated and received grant funding from the Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP)?**

- A. If you have already participated in FVEP and your covenant has expired, you may apply to AIP. However, your application will receive a lower ranking in the selection process than APR farms that have not received FVEP assistance and grant funding from the Department.

### **Q. How are applications reviewed and selected?**

- A. The AIP review committee reviews each eligible application based on a predetermined set of selection criteria that are listed in the current Request for Response. Those applications that best meet these criteria will receive the highest ratings for selection.

### **Q. How does the Program work?**

- A. Eligible applications are reviewed by a committee and applicants are notified in writing as to whether or not they have been accepted to the program. Selected farmers are expected to participate with program staff and consultants in a technical assistance and business analysis process to develop an APR Improvement Plan that identifies farm improvement strategies. Grant awards may be offered to active participants upon approval of their Plan for implementation of identified farm improvements that meet Program objectives, subject to the availability of funding.

**Q. How are grant award amounts determined for participating farms?**

- A. Technical and business assistance are provided at no cost to the participating farmer. Farmers who participate in completing a Plan through the Program that identifies farm improvement strategies that meet Program objectives may be eligible for one of 3 typical grant award levels: up to \$25,000; up to \$50,000; or up to \$75,000, depending on factors including the number of acres currently under APR and gross revenue of the farm. If funding is available in a given year, a \$100,000 grant award may be offered to a participating farm that qualifies and is willing and able to contribute matching funds of at least \$50,000 towards a total project cost of \$150,000. The provision of grants is dependent upon the availability funding each year and award levels are determined by the Department.

**Q. What can AIP grant funds be used for?**

- A. AIP grant funds must be spent on mutually agreed upon improvements to the land resource or farm buildings that will support or enhance the farm property. Some examples of eligible resource improvements include reseeding hay fields, reclaiming pastureland, establishing orchards or other perennial crops, improving drainage, or installing irrigation or manure management systems. Funds may also be used for new or improved farm structures, such as a processing facility, livestock housing, storage barn, or farm stand.

**Q. When do grant funds need to be spent?**

- A. Once a contract is signed, grant funds will be provided to eligible participants on a reimbursement basis. All grant expenditures must be spent by the end of the State fiscal year, June 30. Program Participants must provide the Department with receipts verifying expenditures have occurred during the contract period prior to receiving grant funds. Costs incurred prior to contract execution cannot be reimbursed and will not qualify as Program expenditures.

**Q. How do I apply to the Program?**

- A. A Request for Response containing an application to the program may be found on the program web page <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aip.html> during open application periods, which are typically around April to June each year, and are dependent upon available funding. Potential responders should read the Request for Response thoroughly, as the content including eligibility requirements and due date may vary from year to year, and mail a completed application to the address provided by the due date specified. Copies of applications may also be obtained by contacting the APR Improvement Program at (413) 268-8269 or [mdarfarmviabilityprograms@gmail.com](mailto:mdarfarmviabilityprograms@gmail.com).