Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs Program (SARA)

Frequently Asked Questions

Please note: these FAQs are not intended to be a substitute for a careful reading of the current year's Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs Program Request for Responses (RFR).

Q. My land was protected by a town or private APR - am I eligible?

A. No, only Massachusetts farmers who own or operate farmland placed under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction ("APR") held by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources ("Department") are eligible.

Q. Can SARA funds be used for seed, lime or fertilizer inputs to my fields?

A. Yes, if part of a grant restoration, i.e. such as replanting hayfields or field edges cleared by the project in current application. Normal ongoing operating costs of farming operations such as applying lime or fertilizer, rotating crops, or transitioning active farmland use from one crop or enterprise to another are ineligible as are normal operating expenses, payment of debt, purchase of livestock, or purchases of equipment or used materials.

Q. Can SARA funds be used to pay my farm manager to clear the field edges where they were allowed to grow in by the previous landowner?

A. Although the work you describe could be funded by SARA, you would need to hire a contractor to perform the work. Alternatively, you would be able to use SARA funds to rent equipment to do the work yourself, but SARA does not allow payment to farm owners, operators, or farm employees for their own labor.

Q. I received funding from SARA 2 years ago, may I still apply?

A. Yes, you can apply at any time but applicants who have received funding within the last 3 Fiscal years will have points deducted from their score. Applicants who have previously received SARA funds but are maintaining the restored acreage at the highest level may receive additional points in the scoring process.

Q. I took over ownership within a few months of closing from the land trust that originally held the restriction, can I apply for SARA funds?

A. Your application would be eligible only if the proposed restoration is clearly in response to damage caused by a natural disaster or damage perpetrated by a third-party (e.g., storm, abutter runoff, etc.). Applicant must not have been the original owner or be an owner who took possession within one year after the APR closed. If the owner took possession within one year after the APR closed or has owned the APR for longer than five years, the applicant must justify in detail how the project is addressing a need that is no fault of the Applicant. This program is meant to assist successor owners restore land which, due to circumstances out of their control, needs work to return it to a productive condition similar to how it was when the land was placed under the APR.

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

A. Yes, if you are a farm manager or operator on an APR farm that you do not own, you may apply for SARA funds. Signatures of both the owner(s) and the operator must be on the application. You may also apply if you are a farmer expected to be the successor to the current owner with a lease for 3+ years. A copy of the lease should be included with the application if the APR owner is the original grantor.

Q. If I cannot finish my project by June 30, can I be granted an extension?

A No, extensions are not allowed for SARA funds to be expended past June 30. All expenses must be incurred by June 30 of the contract year. All reimbursement requests must be submitted by July 31 of the contract year.

Q. My uncle and father placed this land under the APR. I have inherited the land from my father, but my uncle is still part owner. Can I apply for SARA funds?

A. Your application would be determined to be eligible if you are a farmer expected to be the successor to the current owner with a lease for 3+ years. A copy of the lease should be included with the application with the signatures of any APR owner that is an original grantor.

Q. I just purchased my APR land this year, can I apply?

A. Yes, there is no length of ownership requirement for SARA funding. APR must have closed at least 3 years prior to application.

Q. I have several projects planned; can I apply for all of them in one application?

A. Yes. It is best to submit a very detailed budget so that if one part of the project is deemed ineligible, the other portions may still be considered. The maximum award per application is $35,000.

Q. I have been unable to keep up with my pastureland now that I do not have as many animals grazing, can I apply for funds to clear this land?

A. No, this type of project would be ineligible for SARA funding, but you should contact the Stewardship Planner assigned to your area, who may be able to give you other ideas for addressing the concerns and prevent the land from falling into an abandonment violation.

Q. Does the grant work by line item? Or is it the entire bundle that is accepted or rejected? In other words, can one part of the application be rejected, and other parts be accepted for funding?

A. The proposal will be evaluated in its entirety. Reviewers may recommend partially funded projects depending on project scope, budget, ineligible items, or available funds. Detailed budgets are important.

Q. I want to clear woodland to plant more hayfields, can SARA pay for this clearing work?

A. Only if the land was in productive agricultural use at the time the APR was placed on your property, and you were not the owner of the property when it was allowed to become overgrown. The intention of this program is to help successor owners of an APR restore land to a productive condition similar to how it was when the land was placed under the APR.

Q. Please tell me what types of activities you mean by "Describe the time or resources invested in business, financial or succession planning".

A. Any type of formal succession planning such as setting up trusts or signing wills to insure smooth transition of the APR property. Classes, either online or in person, to assist the landowner or manager in the continued viability and success of the business supported by the APR land. These may include but are not limited to classes through land trusts, universities, MDAR, Land for Good, NOFA, CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture), New Entry Sustainable Farming Project.

Q. Can you share your scoring rubric and how many points you are assigning to each criterion in the review phase?

A. We are unable to answer this question while the RFR is open, applicants should refer to criteria described in the RFR and provide the best response possible using this information. Refer to Section 6D in the RFR for a list of Evaluation Criteria.

Q. Can SARA grant funds be used to pay for a consultant to develop project designs?

A. No, in order for a detailed budget to be included with the application, designs should be completed in advance. Funds may not be used for non-labor costs (e.g., management) or fees associated with project oversite or administration costs.

Q. Can I hand draw a map to show the location of project?

A. Yes, hand drawn maps are acceptable, but it must be very clear and detailed. Maps should include an aerial photo with the APR property boundaries outlined and the exact location of the project described in the application. Maps are available online at (https://maps.massgis.digital.mass.gov/MassMapper/MassMapper.html). See also the information in Section 2Cof the RFR for obtaining maps from NRCS.

Q. What is the timeline for the Program, and when do participants receive the grant funding?

A. After the RFR period closes, applications are reviewed and ranked by MDAR staff. Site visits to view the proposed project area may occur before and/or after the ranking meeting. Projects are recommended for funding and applicants are notified of acceptance usually in July or August. No work may begin on the project until after contract documents are signed by the applicant, returned, and countersigned by MDAR staff. Contract work can begin as soon as final MDAR staff signoff occurs, usually during September or October. All expenses must be incurred by June 30 of the contract year. All reimbursement requests must be submitted by July 31 of the contract year.

Q. I have a question that's not answered here. Who can help me?

A. Please contact the program coordinator, Julie Weiss, at 617-913-5217 or Julie.weiss@mass.gov.