



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

## 2026 Request for Proposal

### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-095

**Proposal Title:** Establishing a Regenerative Agriculture Demonstration Farm

### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Steve Donovan

**Organization:** FarWide Conservation Trust, Inc.

**Office Telephone:** (605) 695-4352

**Email:** sdonovan@farwide.com

### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** FarWide Conservation Trust (FWCT), working with several partners with expertise in promoting regenerative agriculture, will acquire and establish a long-term, regenerative agriculture demonstration farm in southwest Minnesota.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$1,730,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** November 30, 2029

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Land (F)

### Project Location

**What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?**

Region(s): SW

**What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?**

Region(s): SW

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Narrative

**Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.**

Current agricultural practices common throughout Minnesota often have significant, detrimental impacts to natural resources, including to water quality, and habitat for fish and wildlife. Regenerative agricultural practices have been shown to drastically reduce negative impacts while also being profitable and improving the quality of foods produced for human consumption. Unfortunately, the adoption of regenerative practices has been slow in many regions, including southwest Minnesota. For example, fall tillage is still employed on the vast majority of farms in Southwest Minnesota, despite the known impacts to increasing erosion, water quality, loss of nutrients and other harmful effects. Tillage is just one of many practices that are generally harmful to soil health. Drain tile is often used to deal with water issues in challenging soils, including within farmed wetlands, but is usually not the best tool, particularly when considering soil health and sustainability. Current soil health incentive programs are not focused on long-term change, but rather short-term contracts. These types of incentives and programs do little to "move the needle" and promote the adoption of regenerative farming practices. A different kind of approach is needed to encourage producers to adopt regenerative farming practices at a landscape level.

**What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.**

Soil health proponents understand that farmers learn from farmers, particularly farmers that operate in the same landscape and deal with similar soils and climate factors. Farmers often say that just because something might work elsewhere, "it won't work on my farm". FWCT believes that establishing a long-term, farm scale regenerative agriculture demonstration farm, operating the farm using regenerative practices, carefully monitoring changes to soil health, and making that data available to producers, is an excellent strategy to promote regenerative agriculture. FWCT will use the farm to host open house events, conduct tours of the farm, provide seminars on the benefits of regenerative practices, and open our books to inspection of operation costs, income generation, soil health changes and farm profitability. We will also use a portion of the farm to research new, experimental regenerative practices. We also believe that this must be a long-term demonstration farm. The benefits of regenerative agriculture to natural resources and "profitability" generally take many years to materialize. The Ecdysis Foundation will lead efforts to monitor changes in soil health following protocol they established through their "1,000 Farms Initiative", sampling soil each of the first three years and then every two years after that.

**What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?**

The establishment of a regenerative agriculture demonstration farm will help ensure that Minnesota's private lands, particularly agricultural lands, provide long-term benefits to fish, wildlife and people by promoting the conversion of conventional agricultural practices to profitable, regenerative practices that provide multiple, long-term environmental benefits to wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, soil health, and carbon sequestration while also protecting the importance of agriculture to Minnesota's economy. The project will help identify common hardships and barriers to adoption of regenerative practices, provide educational opportunities, technical assistance and outreach efforts to agricultural producers regarding the many benefits of regenerative agriculture.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Land Acquisition

**Activity Budget:** \$1,585,500

**Activity Description:**

Once the proposed grant is secured, FarWide Conservation Trust, working with project partners, will find a suitable farm to acquire within the project area, defined as the southern portion of the Prairie Pothole Region within the state of Minnesota. A suitable farm will be acquired from a willing seller at no greater than appraised value. We are targeting approximately 160 acres to be acquired, a size large enough to have four, or possibly five, different crops growing simultaneously on the farm which more easily demonstrates the crop diversity goals of regenerative agriculture and also serves to further enhance benefits to wildlife. The total acquisition cost is estimated to be \$9,812 per acre based on current land valuations and land sales within the project area. Grant funds are requested to pay for most of the fee acquisition cost, plus acquisition related costs, including a legal survey, appraisal, closing costs and title insurance.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Land Acquisition Completed	December 31, 2026

### Activity 2: Establishment of regenerative farm plan

**Activity Budget:** \$33,280

**Activity Description:**

FarWide Conservation Trust will collaborate with partners to establish a long-term, regenerative farm plan that also allows for adaptive management. We envision creating a technical advisory committee consisting of: USDA NRCS, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, local producers, local extension, U of M Office of Soil Health, Ecdysis Foundation and industry leaders to help guide the development and management of the demonstration farm. The farm plan will focus on the five principles of soil health: (1) soil cover, (2) limited soil disturbance, (3) diversity of crops and rotation, (4) maintain living roots 24/7, and (5) integrating livestock. Funding from the grant is also requested to pay for fencing and livestock water facilities on the farm likely required to incorporate livestock into management. Implementation of the farm plan will begin immediately upon development. An intensive, on-going monitoring program, including monitoring of "control" or "check" areas to provide comparisons to alternative farming practices, will provide the extensive data needed to verify improvements in soil health. Monitoring efforts will also include such things as ground nesting birds that may nest in small grain and cover crop fields and benefits to improving surface water quality in field run off water.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Establishment of the Farm Plan	May 31, 2027

### Activity 3: Implementation of Monitoring Program and "Open House" Events on the Farm

**Activity Budget:** \$111,220

**Activity Description:**

Beginning in the summer of 2027, upon successful acquisition of the farm and implementation of the regenerative agriculture farming program, FarWide and partners will implement a comprehensive monitoring program primarily using

soil health evaluation criteria developed by the Ecdysis Foundation through their "1,000 Farms Initiative". Additional monitoring components may be added as appropriate upon input from the Technical Advisory Committee. "Open House" types of public events will be held, at least annually, where local producers and other interested parties will be able to learn about regenerative agriculture, tour the farm, inspect soil health data from the on-going monitoring program, and examine the profit/expense books associated with the farm. During the first year, the presentations will focus on the farm plan, the goals of the farm, and proposed monitoring activities that will occur. In subsequent years, as data is obtained regarding farm costs, farm income and environmental goods and services produced on the farm, the "open house" events will focus on the actual data being produced on the farm, while also encouraging area producers to consider adopting these practices and, where applicable and appropriate, offer to provide technical assistance to interested producers.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
First Open House Event Held	July 31, 2027

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Dr. Jonathan Lundgren	Ecdysis Foundation	Dr. Lundgren founded the Ecdysis Foundation in 2016 as a research foundation to help transform agriculture with regenerative principles. Dr. Lundgren will lead efforts to develop the management and monitoring plan for the proposed demonstration farm.	Yes
Dr. Ryan Schmid	Ecdysis Foundation	Dr. Schmid is a research scientist and agroecologist at the Ecdysis Foundation. He will help lead efforts to develop and implement the farm plan and monitoring protocol on the demonstration farm.	Yes
Dr. KC Jensen	Ecdysis Foundation	Dr. Jensen is an avian ecologist and wildlife biologist with the Ecdysis Foundation. Dr. Jensen will help design and implement the wildlife monitoring protocol on the demonstration farm.	Yes
Dr. Anna Cates	University of Minnesota's Office for Soil Health	Dr. Cates will help develop the farming and monitoring plan for the regenerative farming demonstration farm. Dr. Cates may also participate and play a role in the implementation of the monitoring plan.	No
Stephanie McLain	U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service	Ms. McLain serves as the State Soil Health Specialist for the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service in Minnesota. Ms. McLain will provide technical assistance in developing, operating and monitoring the regenerative agriculture demonstration farm.	No

## Long-Term Implementation and Funding

**Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?**

The goal is to establish a regenerative agriculture demonstration farm. The farm will host a variety of educational events for many years to come (indefinitely). Farmers will be invited to attend these events and learn about regenerative farming, tour the farm, examine soil health change data, and review profitability data. "Net profits" from running the farm will be used to pay for on-going monitoring costs, conduct soil health research and host annual open house events. As applicable, we will also seek USDA EQIP funding assistance to conduct in-field soil health assessments in the future.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Steve Donovan

**Job Title:** Executive Director

**Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.**

Steve Donovan, Executive Director of FarWide Conservation Trust, will be the project manager for this project. Mr. Donovan has extensive experience in the field of conservation, including over 25 years working for Ducks Unlimited and 8 years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Mr. Donovan has prepared, submitted and managed countless grants over the years, including approximately \$30 million in grants through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Mr. Donovan was responsible for establishing DU's conservation easement program in Nebraska and has led numerous projects to acquire and restore wildlife habitat through DU's revolving habitat programs in Nebraska and South Dakota. Mr. Donovan was instrumental in creating DU's regenerative agriculture program in South Dakota and is keenly aware of the many environmental benefits resulting from the adoption of regenerative agricultural principles. FarWide Conservation Trust is a 501(c)(3) non-profit conservation group established over three years ago with stated goals of

conserving habitat for fish and wildlife while also looking for opportunities to promote outdoor recreational activities. Promoting regenerative agriculture is one of the main goals of FarWide Conservation Trust.

**Organization:** FarWide Conservation Trust, Inc.

**Organization Description:**

FarWide Conservation Inc., dba FarWide Conservation Trust, was established in 2021 and received our tax-exempt status letter from the IRS in June 2022. FarWide Conservation Trust (FWCT) has the stated goals of conserving habitat for fish and wildlife while also working to expand opportunities for outdoor recreational opportunities for people. FWCT will deliver conservation projects nationwide, but is currently focused in the Great Plains region, with active projects extending from the Dakotas down to the Rio Grande River in southern Texas. FWCT is particularly focused in these general areas and activities: (1) the Prairie Pothole Region, (2) Promoting regenerative agriculture, (3) wetlands conservation, and (4) Addressing the issue of landlocked public lands in the western states. FWCT will accomplish its' mission through a variety of strategies, including through the development of unique partnerships, designing and delivering conservation projects, acquisition and restoration of key habitats, and working with private landowners to conserve important natural resources.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Steve Donovan/Executive Director and Grant Administrator		Steve will provide 100% of the staff time from FarWide Conservation Trust for this project.			0%	0.3		\$37,780
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$37,780</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Ecdysis Foundation	Subaward	The Ecdysis Foundation has offered to conduct initial sampling of the farm, following their protocol established through the 1,000 Farms Initiative. Grant funds are requested to pay for the first three years of sampling. \$7,500/field X 4 fields X 3 years. See attached document.				0.3		\$90,000
TBD	Acquisition services	An appraisal to be secured for the property to be acquired				-		\$5,000
TBD	Acquisition services	closing costs, title insurance, attorney fees				-		\$6,000
TBD	Acquisition services	legal survey of property				-		\$4,000
TBD	Service Contract	Installation of livestock watering facility				-		\$15,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$120,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Equipment	Fencing Supplies	Fencing supplies are needed to allow the incorporation of livestock into the management of cropland on the regenerative demonstration farm.					\$10,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>

<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
	Fee Title Acquisition	Acres: 160 Parcels: 1						\$1,560,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$1,560,000</b>
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Approximately 10 trips, average of 200 miles per trip, one person, 6 nights lodging, meals	Travel to the region and farm site to evaluate potential land acquisition sites, meet with partners, establish farm plan, implement farm plan					\$2,220
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,220</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$1,730,000</b>



Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	FarWide Conservation Trust	FarWide will contribute \$10,000 cash towards the purchase price of the property.	Pending	\$10,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$1,740,000**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Acquisition and Restoration

### Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Decook	Dodge	The property is located within the prairie pothole region of Minnesota and connects directly with the Cedar River.	Fee Title	120.23	-	\$1,262,360	Private	FarWide Conservation Trust	Has Not Begun
Mitchell	Martin	The property is located within the prairie pothole region of Minnesota, contains wetlands including drained wetlands, and runoff from the property drains into Perch Creek and eventually the Watonwan River.	Fee Title	144	-	\$1,423,422	Private	FarWide Conservation Trust	Has Not Begun
Schmidt	Cottonwood	This farm is located in the prairie pothole region of Minnesota and is adjacent to the Des Moines River.	Fee Title	78.2	-	\$683,812	Private	Farwide Conservation Trust	Has Not Begun
Yegge Tract	Lincoln	The property is located in the Prairie Pothole Region of southwest Minnesota. It is almost entirely farmed with several small, drained wetlands. It would make an excellent site for a regenerative agriculture demonstration farm.	Fee Title	80	-	\$780,000	Private	FarWide Conservation Trust	Has Not Begun
<b>Totals</b>				<b>422.43</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>\$4,149,594</b>			

## Fee Acquisition

**1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including an explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.**

The purpose of the proposal is to secure a grant that would allow the acquisition and development of a regenerative agriculture demonstration farm in the prairie pothole region of southwestern Minnesota. This region of Minnesota was selected because it contains significant wetland resources, including tremendous opportunities to restore and enhance wetland resources that are vital to wetland wildlife species, while also being a landscape that is suffering from particularly significant water quality concerns. The landscape is intensively farmed and the vast majority of the original wetlands have been drained. Conventional farming practices, including extensive tillage operations and widespread use of fertilizers, combined with wetland drainage and the loss of native grasslands, are significant factors causing water quality concerns. The development of a regenerative agriculture demonstration farm in this landscape would potentially lead to significant changes in farming practices here, which could produce benefits to water quality, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and other benefits. The ultimate property selected will be the one that has the best opportunity to create a successful demonstration farm and lead to widespread adoption of regenerative farming practices in this landscape.

**2. List all adopted state, regional, or local natural resource plans in which the lands included in the parcel list are identified for the acquisition purposes you propose. Include the URL to the plan if one is available.**

We are not aware that any of the active farms identified for potential acquisition have been identified for acquisition purposes by any natural resource plans, which are generally focused on the acquisition and protection of intact wildlife habitats and not designed to demonstrate potential benefits to natural resources by changing farming practices on private land.

**3. For any parcels acquired in fee title, a restoration and management plan must be prepared. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for parcels acquired by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation, including how long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel will be financed into the future.**

For the parcel(s) successfully acquired through this proposal, a long-term, regenerative farm plan will be developed by FarWide Conservation Trust working closely with partners who have extensive experience in regenerative agriculture, including the Ecdysis Foundation and the University of Minnesota's Office for Soil Health. The Plan will be focused on demonstrating the long-term benefits achieved by farmers who adopt regenerative farming practices. These practices include such things as: reduced or eliminated tillage, maintaining soil cover and soil "armor", using cover crops, expanding the diversity of crops grown in an operation, incorporating livestock into the farm operation, and many others. These practices will lead to reduced runoff from agricultural lands, improved water quality, significant carbon sequestration, reductions in herbicide, pesticide and fertilizer applications, enhanced wildlife habitat, enhanced pollinator habitat, and many other environmental benefits. The farm plan will be kept on file by FarWide and partners, and will be the guiding principle moving forward when making decisions on property management, including the necessary opportunities for adaptive management as data is produced and new technologies developed. This is intended to be a long-term demonstration farm with no end date established. The farm is expected to produce "profits" that are comparable to profits achieved on conventional farms, which is necessary for this type of farm program to be of interest to other producers. The "profit" from the farm will be used to pay for on-going monitoring costs, maintenance costs, and running "open house" types of events for area producers.

**4. For each parcel to be conveyed to a State of Minnesota entity (e.g., DNR) after purchase, provide a statement confirming that county board approval will be obtained.**

not applicable

**5. If applicable (see M.S. 116P.17), provide a statement confirming that written approval from the DNR Commissioner will be obtained 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction.**

As applicable, FarWide Conservation Trust will request and receive written approval from the DNR Commissioner at least 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction undertaken as part of this proposed grant.

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Map*

File: [baee743b-1bd.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Map*

File with maps of project area, water quality issues and other biological issues, and proposed acquisition site(s)....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Form 990 FarWide	<a href="#">7289d1fa-ebf.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
FarWide Authorization letter	<a href="#">9b4d3327-34b.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

#### *Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other*

Title	File
Ecdysis Foundation letter of support	<a href="#">64cbeb47-567.pdf</a>
Support Letter from University of Minnesota	<a href="#">d84fa7cb-98e.pdf</a>
Regenerative Agriculture Demonstration Farm slides and photos	<a href="#">07a0f8e4-743.pdf</a>
Support Letter from USDA NRCS	<a href="#">9c7a6b4e-a3f.pdf</a>
Ecdysis Soil Sampling Budget Details	<a href="#">d5560314-4c2.pdf</a>

## Administrative Use

### **Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

Yes: Fee Acquisition,

### **Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?**

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

### **Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?**

Yes

### **Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?**

Yes

### **Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF? If so, describe here (1) the source and estimated amounts of any revenue and (2) how you propose to use those revenues:**

Yes, We propose to establish a soil health demonstration farm with the goal of demonstrating that regenerative agriculture is profitable, perhaps as profitable as contemporary farming practices. Any profits gained from the farm will be used to collect data on the farm, develop and implement regenerative farming practices research, pay on-going

operational costs, host open house events and other farm activities that will serve to promote the project and benefits of regenerative agriculture.

**Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?**

No

**Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?**

No

**Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?**

No

**Is the purpose of the acquisition for construction of a building(s), trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration, either now or in the future?**

No

**Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?**

No

**Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:**

Dr. Ryan Schmid, Ecdysis Foundation. Joe Brennan, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Dr. Anna Cates, University of Minnesota's Office for Soil Health (MOSH)

**Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements**

Yes, I understand

