

Call for Research Proposals

OVERVIEW

The Kentucky Horticulture Council (KHC) is pleased to announce funding opportunities for research projects that deliver measurable impacts on Kentucky's commercial farm operations. This competitive grant program supports applied research directly addressing challenges faced by Kentucky's horticultural producers. All projects must include specific metrics to estimate and track farm impact, such as the number of producers benefiting and measurable improvements achieved by participating operations.

The program emphasizes [high-priority research areas](#) essential to the success of Kentucky's horticulture industry. Focus areas for the 2025-26 program include:

- **Building Production Capacity:** Advancing production literacy through innovative systems, such as protected agriculture technologies (e.g., greenhouses, high tunnels) and open-field techniques, to meet growing market demand.
- **Maximizing Resource Efficiency:** Developing strategies to optimize water, energy, and other farm resources, improving operational efficiency and resilience.
- **Expanding Market Opportunities:** Identifying new markets and enhancing existing channels for Kentucky's specialty crops, helping producers improve access and market positioning.
- **Enhancing Food Safety and Nutrition:** Strengthening the link between food safety, nutrition, and health, with a focus on "food is medicine" principles to enhance producer profitability and consumer outcomes.
- **Driving Economic Development:** Investigating how horticulture fosters job creation, supports local businesses, and strengthens resilient communities across Kentucky.
- **Examining Policy Frameworks:** Exploring the social, legislative, and regulatory factors shaping Kentucky's horticulture industry, providing actionable insights for producers and stakeholders.

Available funding includes one-year (\$5,000) and two-year (\$10,000) research grants for research projects at participating Kentucky institutions. While multiple proposals may be submitted from a single institution, preference will be given to funding one proposal per institution per year. All proposals must align with KHC's strategic priorities. Successful proposals must include detailed plans for measuring and reporting farm impact, with input from participating producers and industry stakeholders.

Collaboration with Producers

Projects should be designed to maximize farm impact. Research teams are encouraged to partner with commercial producers in the research design and implementation process to ensure the practical application of outcomes to real-world farming operations. Projects in partnership with commercial producers or supported by producer testimonials will be prioritized.

Proposals should include:

- **Farm Impact Estimates:** Number of farms benefiting, projected operational improvements (e.g., yield increases, cost reductions, labor savings).
- **Broader Industry Adoption:** Plans for scaling findings to benefit additional producers.

Final project reports must document actual farm impact, supported by producer testimonials and quantitative measures of operational improvements.

Funding and Purpose

This program is made possible with funds from the Kentucky Agriculture Development Fund (KADF), demonstrating our commitment to supporting local producers in meeting buyer requirements and growing their businesses.

FUNDING TIERS AND ELIGIBILITY

Tier 1: One-Year Projects (\$5,000)

Eligibility Requirements:

- Personnel from participating institution oversee project implementation and serve as PI.
- Research objectives aligned with KHC's farm impact priorities.
- Detailed project timeline with clear milestones.
- Comprehensive budget and accompanying narrative.

Tier 2: Two-Year Projects (\$10,000)

Additional Requirements:

- All Tier 1 eligibility criteria.
 - Letter of support from a KHC member organization demonstrating industry value.
 - Collaboration with at least one member of the KY horticulture industry, including a letter of commitment from the commercial producer or related business.
 - Multi-county or regional scope of farm impact.
 - A strategy for industry adoption and scaling research outcomes.
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PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Research Focus

All proposals must demonstrate:

- Direct application to Kentucky commercial horticulture industry operations.

- A clear methodology for measuring farm-level impact.
- Integration of industry feedback throughout the research process (Tier 2)
- Scalable solutions for adoption by additional Kentucky farms or businesses.
- Definitions available here: [Scoring Rubric and Program Definitions](#).

Required Documentation

1. **Project Narrative (maximum 5 pages):**
 - Specific farm impact objectives and measurement methodology.
 - Details of producer partnerships and engagement strategies.
 - Research design and implementation timeline.
 - Economic analysis of farm-level benefits.
 - Strategy for industry adoption and scaling of results.
 - Comprehensive budget focused on producer benefit.
2. **Supporting Materials:**
 - Commitment letter emphasizing industry relevance.
 - Primary Investigator CV highlighting relevant qualifications.
 - Producer partnership agreements (if applicable).
 - For Tier 2 projects: KHC member organization support letter.
 - Institutional approval documentation.

FARM IMPACT MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

Required Metrics

Projects must track and report:

- Projected number of farms/ businesses to benefit from this research.
- Projected operational improvements (e.g., yield increases, cost reductions, labor savings).
- Projected economic impact of these improvements.
- Potential for broader industry adoption.
- Producer satisfaction and feedback.

Reporting Schedule

- Biannual update call with Kentucky Horticulture Council representatives.
- Annual comprehensive impact reports.
- Final project evaluation including producer testimonials and quantitative results. Poster/ presentation describing the research and outcomes, project abstract, and final statement of cumulative costs required upon closeout.

*No-cost extensions will not be permitted.

Outreach Requirements

All of the required final reporting materials plus any combination of the following (at least 2):

- Presentation at a KHC event (Kentucky Fruit & Vegetable Conference, Turf Short Course)
 - Field day demonstrations.
 - Research publication.
 - Industry workshop or training session.
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SCORING RUBRIC

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Farm Impact (40%):** Potential to deliver measurable benefits to Kentucky horticultural producers and businesses.
- **Innovation and Practicality (20%):** Novelty and feasibility of the proposed approach.
- **Scalability and Broader Application (20%):** Potential for findings to be adopted across regions or industries.
- **Engagement and Collaboration (10%):** Strength of partnerships and integration of industry feedback.
- **Clarity and Organization (10%):** Clear objectives, methodology, and metrics for success.

More detailed information on scoring and program definitions can be found here: [Scoring Rubric and Program Definitions](#).

IMPORTANT DATES

Key dates for proposal submission, awards, project start, and reporting are outlined below. Reporting deadlines for researchers are scheduled one month prior to Kentucky Horticulture Council (KHC) reporting deadlines to ensure timely submission to the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund (KADF):

- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** March 1, 2025
- **Award Announcements:** April 1, 2025
- **Project Start Date:** May 1, 2025

Reporting Deadlines:

- **Tier 1 Projects:**
 - **First Semi-Annual Report call:** June 25, 2025 (Covering May–June 2025)
 - **Second Semi-Annual Report:** December 30, 2025 (Covering July–December 2025)

- **Tier 2 Projects: (in addition to schedule above)**
 - **Third Semi-Annual Report:** June 30, 2026 (Covering January–June 2026)
 - **Final Report:** December 29, 2026 (Covering July–December 2026)

All reports must include detailed updates on project activities, metrics, and farm impact outcomes. Research teams should collaborate with stakeholders to meet these deadlines.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

All proposals must be submitted via this [Google Form](#).

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding this call for proposals or farm impact requirements, please email: info@kyhortcouncil.org

KHC MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

A full list of KHC member organizations is available on our website: kyhortcouncil.org/about/