2025 Autonomous Agriculture Grant Program

Request for Proposal

The North Dakota Department of Commerce is requesting proposals for grant funding of up to $7,500,000.00, which may be awarded as a single grant or divided among multiple grants, to support transformational initiatives that advance autonomous agriculture in North Dakota. This competitive award will support the planning, development, and deployment of next-generation agricultural technologies, infrastructure, and workforce solutions.

North Dakota is uniquely positioned to be a global leader in autonomous agriculture, and this program seeks a bold, collaborative proposal that integrates technology, research, commercialization, and rural economic impact.

Proposals are due by October 2, 2025, 5 p.m. CST. All applications must include the concept, any capital the applicant is contributing as well as a timeline for deployment. Funding must be expended by June 30, 2027.

Program Goals

The proposed project should:

- Develop or expand a physical or virtual Autonomous Agriculture Proving Ground.
- Accelerate commercialization of autonomous agricultural technologies and practices.
- Support a robust autonomous agriculture workforce and upskilling strategy.
- Promote collaboration across academia, industry, startups, and rural communities.
- Enhance North Dakota's global competitiveness in agricultural innovation.

Eligible Uses of Funds

- Facility acquisition, construction, or retrofit
- Field testing infrastructure and demonstration plots/zones
- Workforce development and training programs
- Project management and staff salaries
- Research, development, and deployment of automation technologies
- Equipment for autonomous and precision agricultural applications
- Industry engagement and technology transfer initiatives

Funding Structure

- Total available funding: $7,500,000
- A single grant or multiple grants will be awarded to the highest scoring proposal(s)

- Funds will be disbursed upon execution of a grant agreement
- Project timeline: Funds must be expended by June 30, 2027

Proposal Requirements

Proposals must:

- Be no more than 10 pages (not including cover page, letters of support, or appendices)
- Include a project narrative describing scope, goals, timeline, and evaluation metrics
- Address each evaluation criterion listed below
- Include letter of support or partnership, especially from North Dakota-based entities
- Include a budget with detailed funding allocations and any matching contributions

Evaluation Criteria (100 points total):

1. **Advancement of Autonomous Agriculture**- Strength of concept in accelerating adoption of automation in planting, maintenance, harvesting, and logistics. 20 pts
2. **Workforce Development** – Demonstrated strategies for training, education, and career readiness in ND's ag-tech workforce. 15 pts
3. **Commercialization and Infrastructure** – How well the project advances market-readiness of autonomous ag technologies and builds permanent value in the state. 15 pts
4. **Innovation and Research** – Incorporation of cutting-edge technologies, university or private R&D, and potential for tech transfer. 10 pts
5. **Collaboration and Ecosystem Engagement** - Partnerships with early-stage companies, research institutions, or industry consortia 10 pts
6. **Use of Unmanned Systems** – Integration of aerial, satellite, and ground-based unmanned systems to enhance ag outcomes. 10 pts
7. **Economic Impact in ND** – Measurable impact on North Dakota's rural economy, job creation, ag productivity, and capital attraction. 15 pts
8. **Readiness and Feasibility** – Timeline, site control, management capacity, and ability to execute by June 30, 2027. 5 pts

Eligibility

Eligible applicants include:

- Nonprofits
- Public-private partnerships
- Industry consortia

Applicants must demonstrate:

- Permanent presence in North Dakota
- Capacity to manage large-scale projects with public reporting and accountability

Proposal Deadline

Please submit your proposal no later than 5:00 CT on October 2, 2025 via email to: Shayden Akason | sakason@nd.gov. Any questions may be submitted to Mr. Akason.

Award Process

Proposals will be reviewed by a selection committee consisting of:

1. Commissioner of Department of Agriculture (or designee)
2. Commissioner of Department of Commerce (or designee)
3. Chair of the State Board of Higher Education (or designee)
4. 2 Governor appointed
5. President of BND (or designee)
6. President of EDND (or designee)

The awardee will be selected based on overall score and alignment with program goals. The Department of Commerce reserves the right to negotiate deliverables and budget details with the selected applicant before final award.