A logo for a farmers market

Description automatically generated

**NM Healthy Soil Program**

**Application Narrative**

**COLOR GUIDE**

YELLOW – IMPORTANT

GREEN – WORD COUNT MINIMUM/LIMIT

TURQUOISE – POINT VALUE OF THAT SEGMENT

GREY – TIPS & EXPLANATION

**OPTIONAL: The Healthy Soil Act (on which NMDA's Healthy Soil Program is based) states that "grants shall be awarded equitably and priority may be given to...young producers, veterans, small farms or ranches or for projects that benefit economically or socially disadvantaged communities". If you identify with this statement, please explain below.**

If you are a young, new (less than 10 years), Indigenous, veteran, black, Latinx, or female farmer or rancher state that here. If you sell at a NM farmers’ market which accepts SNAP/DUFB state that here. If you sell into nutrition programs such as schools or food hubs, list that here.

**Land Management: The next prompt is worth 10 points.**

**As you best understand it, how has the land involved in the project been managed in the past?**

You only have 150 words to describe this so be brief but thorough. Also be honest – note past tillage, crop management, grazing practices, chemical uses, etc. If the land is new to you and you don’t know, briefly explain that.

**Briefly describe the current management practices on the project site. For cropland, this includes current cropping sequences, tillage operations, irrigation type, and other management that will clarify the current status of the land. For grazed rangeland or forest land, explain your current grazing system. If forests are managed for timber or tree production, explain your current management and products.**

You only have 200 words so be brief but thorough. Also be honest – note tillage practices, crop management, grazing practices, chemical uses, etc.

**Project Title**

10 words only

**Project Summary**: The next prompt is worth 5 points.

Project Summary: Briefly describe the project, making sure to note the following:

* **amount of land**on which the project will occur
* **land type**(cropland, rangeland, etc.) on which it will occur
* **soil health-related resource concerns**it will address
* **agricultural/conservation practices**it will implement

If your project is selected for funding, NMDA will utilize your summary in promotional materials related to NMDA’s Healthy Soil Program.

You only have 50 words so make bullets. For example:

* 10 acres
* Irrigated cropland
* Compaction, low carbon, lack of diversity.
* Cover cropping, reduced tillage, intensive grazing

(Use the [Guidance Document](https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/media/pdf/HSP-Project-Development-Guidance-Document-FY26.pdf) language to fill this in)

**What soil health-specific resource concerns, identified during conservation planning, does the project address?**

Hopefully, your Conservation Planner gave you the answers to this on your plan. They should be the same as what you outlined in your Project Summary. Remember, Resource Concerns are the problems/issues you are observing on the land. A bulleted list is good.

**In the box below, list the most important soil health-specific concern(s) that your project addresses most extensively. This will have been identified in your conservation planning with NRCS, and may include concerns such as:**

* Low Soil Organic Matter
* Soil Compaction
* Poor Soil Structure
* Lack of Biodiversity
* Any of the other examples found in [NMDA's FY26 Project Development Guidance Document](https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/media/pdf/HSP-Project-Development-Guidance-Document-FY26.pdf)

Pick your top 1-3 concerns and elaborate a bit; physical examples are good. “Poor soil structure – I have deep rivulets from erosion when it rains hard and I can see the dust blowing up in the winter when I fallow.” The reviewers need to “see” the land and the concerns without being there on it.

**Project Narrative: The next prompt is worth 20 points.**

**The project narrative should take a comprehensive approach to describing the project, weaving together basic details that will help NMDA and other audiences, whether technical or general, to clearly understand all aspects of the project. Applicants should use the following questions to guide them in their writing:**

* **Why are you applying for a Healthy Soil Program grant?** Talk about why you need support for improving the soil quality of the land you steward.
* **What are the soil health-related resource concerns on the land involved in the project?** This is a repeat question from above, just restate it.
* **What are the soil health principles and agricultural/conservation practices your project will focus on?** Remember, PRACTICES are what you plan to do – take the information from the conservation plan and use the same language from the plan and guidance document and put it here.
* **What are the soil health-specific objectives of this project?** Basically, your objective should be the opposite of the concerns. If you have compaction, you want to reduce compaction. If you have low organic matter, you want to increase organic matter.
* **What are your contingencies for possible water shortages?** You know best what you’re able to do – shift timing on seeding, give grazed lands a longer rest until it rains, etc.
* **Why is this project important?** Again, you know best why the land you work with is precious, tell that story in one sentence.

**Provide your project narrative below. (250-500 words) This is the only narrative with a minimum requirement.**

This is one of the most important sections. It’s where you tell your story. For some, it will be difficult to keep it to the 500 word limit. Write down everything you want to say then ask someone else to read it and offer edits. Think about the *Messy First Draft.* Answer each question beginning with the question turned into a statement. “I am applying for a HSP grant because…”

**Laboratory-Based Soil Testing: The next prompt is worth 10 points.**

**Laboratory-based soil testing (specifically for a chemical analysis) is required at the start of every project. Describe the approach you will take to meet this requirement, including:**

* **the name of the laboratory you will utilize** You need to provide this in your budget/timeline as well
* **how you chose the site(s) where you will pull samples** There are lots of great resources online that can help you determine this, most labs have guidance as well.
* **how many sites you believe are you appropriate for your project** This relates closely to the how to choose the sites and you’ll probably have a good instinct for it. If all the land is pretty equal and not a lot of acreage, one is probably sufficient. If you have numerous types of soil and geography spread over a large area, more would be appropriate.
* **how the soil map you uploaded above informed the soil sampling you will conduct** If your soil map revealed only one type of soil or very similar soil types, it would tell you one test should be sufficient. However if you have three vastly different soil types, it would inform you that you need three tests. The map will help direct you for the sampling sites.
* **Provide your laboratory-based soil testing approach below.** The lab should give you directions on how to take samples and send them in. Put that information here.

**Other Evaluation Techniques**: The next prompt is worth 5 points.

In addition to laboratory-based soil testing at the beginning of the project, what other evaluation techniques will you use to measure project success? How will these techniques help you evaluate project success?  At what point(s) during the grant period will you use these evaluation techniques?

If you are working with an agronomist, soil health scientist, or other professional/contractor/organization mention who that is here and what they intend to study or observe. You could ask the NRCS to return to the land after you’ve implemented your activities to reassess the soil quality. Simple observations over time are invaluable, especially if you record them (and save them in your HSP\_FY26 folder). If you see improvements in the concerns listed above, that’s success. You should use your powers of observation at least seasonally after implementing your practices.

**Project Outcomes:**The next prompt is worth 10 points.

What are the project's expected *agricultural* outcomes? Do you anticipate greater produce or grain yields, being able to increase herd size?

*Economic*outcomes? If you are a for-profit producer, you may expect to earn more farm income. If you grow for subsistence, you may expect to spend less on purchased foods. Non-profits may expect to provide more nourishment for their audience.

*Social*outcomes? How do you think this will make you and your neighbors/community FEEL afterward and will it improve your lives?

What are the specific outcomes and how do you plan to measure whether they come to pass? This could be increased food production, less stress on plants and animals during droughts, bringing more acres into a protected/productive state, or even more dollars in your pocket.

**Timeline/Budget Template:** The next prompt is worth 40 points. THIS IS THE HIGHEST VALUE – SPEND TIME MAKING SURE YOUR NUMBERS ARE ACCURATE AND IN THE RIGHT PLACES

Download the combined timeline/budget template from the website for NMDA's Healthy Soil Program: [Requirements for Individual Applicants (nmsu.edu)](https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/hsp/requirements-for-individual-applicants.html) ([FY26-HSP-timeline-budget-template](https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/media/pdf/HSP-timeline+budget-template-for-INDIVIDUAL-APPLICANTS-FY26.xlsx))

Acceptable file types: .xls, .xlsx EXCEL ONLY!!! Go to the library, borrow a friend’s computer, do what you need to do to turn this in correctly.

**NMDA's Healthy Soil Program is a competitive grant program, and available funding may be limited. Briefly explain which activities and/or budget items you would scale back or forego from your project if granted only partial funding.**

This is hard – your projects likely all work together in a system and leaving out something would affect other parts. Do your best to either reduce the entirety of the project by scale/acreage, rent a piece of equipment rather than purchase it, or figure out what you might be able to afford without the full funding.

**OPTIONAL: Other supporting documents**

Such materials could include but are not limited to:

- links to videos of the project site

- letters from project supporters, participants, beneficiaries, etc.

While no points are associated with the materials you opt to upload via this page, be advised that reviewers may consider such materials and elevate your application accordingly.

You may upload up to five (5) pages of supporting material. Out of respect for reviewers' time, supporting documents submitted in excess of this threshold will not be considered.

This is the final chance to tell your story. If you have a young person in your live, ask them to help you make a 30-second video clip. The land is probably quite brown and gray right now, if you have photos from when it’s green and alive, include those. Ask friends, neighbors, other farmers, non-profit organizations for a letter of support. A little extra effort can go a long way.