



ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Conducting an Information Search for Your OFRF Grant Proposal

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In your grant application to OFRF, it is important to demonstrate knowledge of the currently existing literature on your subject area. You will need to show that you are aware of previous work on the topic and that the problem you are working on has not already been solved. A review of the literature also should help you successfully plan and implement your project.

This guide is intended to help you find some of the resources that have valuable information. In your grant proposal, be sure to describe the efforts that you made to find applicable literature.

Because of the large volume of information readily available over the internet, this guide emphasizes resources that are electronically available. Non-electronic contact information is provided when available.

Remember that a literature search is generally only as good as the search terms used; otherwise, you might come up with a number of irrelevant citations and/or miss those that are most useful. Mary Gold with the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center has compiled a set of *Organic Agriculture Search Tips*, on the web at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/ofp/ofpsearch.htm>

It is not necessary for you to contact all of, or to limit your search to, the resources listed below in order to write a successful grant proposal.

1. Local agricultural extension agents

Your own extension agents may have access to libraries and internet-based resources that can access the scientific literature. In addition, they may be able to help you with experimental design and data analysis. Consider asking your extension agent to cooperate with you on the project. Besides having expertise in experimental design and analysis, they often can loan you useful equipment such as weigh wagons.

2. Colleges and Universities

Colleges have extensive libraries and computer access to reference materials. Availability of agriculture-specific materials will vary widely. Ask the librarian for help in locating agricultural resources.

3. Appropriate Technology Transfer to Rural Areas program (ATTRA)

<http://www.attra.org/>

1-800-346-9140 (English)

1-800-411-3222 (Spanish)

Queries may also be submitted on-line at <http://www.attra.org/ask.php>

ATTRA is a national sustainable agriculture information service that has compiled information on numerous alternative agriculture topics, from overviews of sustainable

soil management, to guides on growing specific organic crops, to marketing guides. In general, ATTRA is a very useful resource for finding answers to production and marketing questions on alternative and organic agriculture topics.

ATTRA provides tailored written responses, free of charge, to U.S. farmers and ranchers currently raising and selling agricultural products commercially. Staff members research, summarize, and compile supporting literature and personal contacts on specific topics and techniques. Because of potential lag time in providing a written response to your inquiry, we recommend that you contact ATTRA as soon as you have identified your topic area.

4. National Agricultural Library and the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center

The National Agricultural Library (NAL) was established by the United States Department of Agriculture "to acquire and diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture." This massive library has just about every agricultural text in existence.

Their database is called Agricola, and can be accessed through the NAL website at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/>, or you can go directly to Agricola at <http://agricola.nal.usda.gov/>. (*Tip: Disregard the area that says "Log in here before requesting materials" and focus on the search function.*)

You can submit a question to the NAL reference desk via a web-based form at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/services/ask.php>, or you can call the reference desk at 301-504-5755.

Queries may also be sent by mail to:
Research Services, National Agricultural Library
10301 Baltimore Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705

The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC), part of the NAL, specializes in documenting alternative agricultural information. The center can provide you with bibliographies relevant to your topic that will help direct you to useful papers and publications. Their website is at http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=2&tax_level=1

You can also contact AFSIC by telephone at 301-504-6559.

5. OrganicAgInfo.org

<http://www.organicaginfo.org/>

This searchable website contains current, accurate, scientifically-based or practically validated information about organic agriculture. The site contains information on production, economic data, research results, farmer anecdotes, certification information, transition strategies, as well as many other subjects related to organic agriculture. (*Tip: This site is not yet well populated with literature citations, so use it in conjunction with a literature database such as Agricola or Google Scholar.*)

6. Google Scholar

<http://scholar.google.com/>

The power of the Google search engine focused on the scientific literature. Will provide citations to references that match the search terms, and links to any abstracts of the articles when available.

7. Research databases

There are some databases listing projects that have been funded with federal monies that contain descriptions of organic research projects. These include:

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program:

<http://www.sare.org/projects/index.htm>

Integrated Organic Program: abstracts of funded projects

http://cris.csrees.usda.gov/cgi-bin/starfinder/0?path=icgpoplink.txt&id=anon&pass=&search=CG=*-51300-*;*-51106-*%20and%20gy%3e1999&format=WEBTITLESG

Current Research Information System (CRIS): USDA's documentation and reporting system for ongoing and recently completed research and education projects in agriculture, food and nutrition, and forestry.

<http://cris.csrees.usda.gov/>