



CENTER *for* INTEGRATED AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Research Division, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

1535 Observatory Drive
Madison, WI 53706
608.262.5200
www.cias.wisc.edu

Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems 2026 Graduate Student Summer Research Mini-Grant Program Call for Proposals Deadline: March 27, 2026, at 5:00pm

The Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) invites UW-Madison graduate student applications for our summer research mini-grant program, which is made possible through a generous donation from the Single Step Foundation. These awards will provide up to \$3,000 for at least six graduate student research projects aligned with the work of [CIAS](#). We are particularly interested in proposals regarding local and regional food systems, soil health, continuous living cover, equity and food sovereignty, and animal health and welfare. Projects may use funding to facilitate stakeholder engagement and partnerships through participatory action research (PAR). See the next page for detailed descriptions of these priority areas.

Undergraduate research is not eligible for funding through this program. While previous awardees may apply to fund new projects, priority will be given to first-time applicants. **Grant-funded work must be completed by September 4, 2026.** Previously awarded projects can be viewed [here](#).

Funds may be used for student salary (up to a maximum of \$1,750), travel required to conduct research and outreach, and farmer honoraria and supplies. Funds cannot be used for travel to conferences and meetings. Funds will be distributed into a 233 account created for the student. **The applicant's faculty advisor must currently be, or must be willing to become, a [faculty associate of CIAS](#).** Please see the drop down on our website via the link to learn more about how to become a faculty associate. Contact Regina Hirsch (rmhirsch@wisc.edu) for more information.

Successful applicants are required to fulfill the post-award requirements described on the next page. Submission of a proposal indicates that you agree to complete these post-award requirements.

Applications must include:

- 1) A one to two-page project narrative including:
 - a. Name, email address, student ID, citizenship status, degree program
 - b. Faculty advisor's name and department
 - c. Departmental administrative AND financial contact information
 - d. Project title, justification, work plan, description of project alignment with one or more of the priority areas on the next page, and a description of participatory approaches and practitioner involvement in your work.
- 2) A detailed budget and budget narrative explaining how the funds will be used and where you will procure the items/services. If salary is included, it may not exceed \$1,750. If you are already on the UW payroll, please detail your appointment type and percent effort, department, and departmental administrative contact.
- 3) Your resume or CV

- 4) Your faculty advisor must send an email confirming support of your project directly to Regina Hirsch, rmhirsch@wisc.edu, with the subject line “[applicant name] CIAS proposal approval” (no additional text or details are necessary). This should be submitted separately from your application.

Please save items 1-3, above, as a single PDF document with your first and last name in the file name (for instance: Bucky-Badger.pdf). When your full application is ready, please email your application to. The confirmation of support from your faculty advisor should be emailed separately.

Post-award requirements

All students receiving mini-grants will need to fulfill the following requirements:

- Attend a mandatory, day-long environmental leadership training at the Aldo Leopold Foundation near Baraboo in the fall/winter of 2026/2027 (details TBA)
- Provide a high-resolution photo of yourself, preferably doing field work, and a summary to be used for our website (details TBA)
- Submit a 1-2-page report of your research at the end of the summer
- Present your research during a CIAS-sponsored event during the 2026 fall semester
- Write a thank-you letter to the Single Step Foundation. CIAS will provide guidelines for writing the thank-you letter.
- Acknowledge CIAS in all presentations and publications related to the project. We will provide language and logo.

If for any reason you are unable to fulfill the requirements of the grant, please reach out to us immediately. Failure to fulfill the requirements of the grant will result in forfeiture of all remaining funding and may result in you and your advisor’s ineligibility to apply for the mini-grant program in the future.

CIAS mini-grant priority areas

Animal health and welfare: This new priority area considers several aspects of on-farm animal rearing and harvest, and places high priority on the wellbeing of farm animals by providing for their basic needs. Research could include but is not limited to innovations in grazing systems, stress reduction strategies, on-farm processing options, and record keeping approaches.

Local and regional food systems: This priority area includes sustainable and organic activities from farm to table at local and regional scales. Labor and fair trade, land access, market structure and access for local food, agriculture of the middle and multi-farm collaboration on value-added agriculture are other areas of interest. Topics related to economics and farm viability are of particular interest.

Soil health. This priority area focuses on research related to our understanding and development of metrics and practices supporting soil health, including the use of cover crops,

perennial crops (including perennial grain), agroforestry, pasture, and other practices supporting soil health and water quality. Research could include but is not limited to the following topics: metrics and related evaluation of ecosystem services provided by cover crops and continuous living cover, economics of perennial cropping systems, managed grazing for livestock production, cover crops in organic production systems, and strategies for incorporating cover crops into agricultural landscapes.

Equity and food sovereignty: This priority area focuses on participatory action research (PAR) by forming partnerships with farmers, community-based organizations, tribal communities and others working on issues related to food sovereignty and equity in the food system. Project topics could include, but are not limited to urban agriculture, community-based food production, equitable access to healthy food, seed saving, foodways, and land access.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): We are NOT looking for projects that merely use a farmer's field or livestock to do your research. What we ARE looking for in your proposals with respect to PAR is how you plan to engage with all your partners (stakeholders). How have you identified your partners? What activities/meetings are you planning to build your partnerships and facilitate collaboration? Are you actively collaborating with them from project inception through conclusions? How are you planning to continually engage with your partners to facilitate collaboration, decision-making, and potential action? See below for examples of PAR to help you frame your research project.

Proposal awards will be announced via email on or before April 15, 2026.

If you have questions about the application process, contact Regina Hirsch, rmhirsch@wisc.edu.

Participatory Action Research Resources

Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U. *et al.* Participatory action research. *Nat Rev Methods Primers* 3, 34 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-023-00214-1>

<https://cias.wisc.edu/participatory-action-research/>

<https://pacificfarmers.com/farmer-led-participatory-action-research/>