

## Application for funding of agri-food research and development (Makera) projects for 2026

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is accepting proposals for research and development (R&D) projects for 2026 that benefit the agriculture and food economy (agri-food) in a broad sense in accordance with the priorities specified. R&D appropriations may be granted in case the allocation scheme of the Development Fund for Agriculture and Forestry allocates funds for this purpose for 2026.

The agri-food R&D appropriations of the Development Fund for Agriculture and Forestry (Makera) primarily fund R&D and other projects that promote the profitability and competitiveness of the industry in a sustainable way or produce essential information necessary for the performance of the tasks of the administrative branch. We primarily fund projects that match the priorities. A project that is not in the priorities is likely to be rejected unless it is a very topical and addresses an unforeseen situation.

All projects must present in their plan how the results will be put into practice in concrete terms. The evaluation of applications pays special attention to this. Already at the preparation stage, projects must involve key stakeholders, utiliser parties and possible external funding providers in the planning. When selecting projects for funding, attention is paid to ensuring that the projects take into account biological, technical and economic preconditions (for example, examining the cost impact of biological and technical solutions). If the results of the project will directly benefit an industry, it is important that the industry is involved in funding the project.

The application process has two stages, and approximately twice as many projects are admitted to the second stage as can be funded, probably up to 30. In the first stage, the ministry may also propose changes to the project plan, such as combining two projects or pruning parts of the project, as a precondition for admittance to stage two. The project plan or other attachments should NOT be included in the first-stage application (they will not be taken into consideration), but a research plan is a required attachment in the second stage.

Applicants will be informed by the end of June 2025 of the conditions (as-is/combined with another project/pruned down) under which the project idea can be admitted to the second stage. Up to half of the proposals submitted in the call for ideas, approximately twice the estimated amount of available funding, are invited to stage two. Applications admitted to the second stage will be asked for supplementary information and the application system will be reopened, enabling them to edit their application on the basis of the idea proposal. Applicants must update the text and budget of the idea proposal as needed, answer any questions presented for the second stage and attach a project plan.

As a rule, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry uses a total cost model in all research projects, so, applications should be prepared according to this funding model. We accept the computational overheads of all universities, universities of applied sciences and research institutes but, correspondingly, they must also finance a specific share of the costs themselves. As a rule, we require a self-financing share of at least 30% if the overhead costs amount to at least 80% of the wage costs. In other words, the ministry's contribution cannot exceed 70% of the total cost of the project. If the overhead costs amount to clearly less than 80% of the wage costs, the self-financing rate can be 20–25% or, very rarely, lower.

Important dates:

- 1) Preproposal phase will open on Friday 31 January 2025 and **dead line for applications si Monday 24 march 2025 at 16.15**. Project applications that best meet the priorities of the call for proposals and meet the objectives of Makera's R&D funding will be approved for the second phase.
- 2) Applications admitted to the second stage will be asked for supplementary information and the application system will be reopened. **The second application round (the supplementary application round) will end on Monday 15 September 2025 at 16.15.**

## Topics/priorities of the call

### 1. Sustainability and competitiveness in the food system

#### *Sustainability*

The sustainability requirements concerning the food sector include the requirements laid down in the Deforestation Regulation and Corporate Due Diligence Directive CSDDD, reporting under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive CSRD, banking regulation, and requirements of consumers and trade. How can the food sector respond even better to the requirements of consumers and the constantly changing environment regarding sustainability, responsibility, productivity, quality and higher price competitiveness in the increasingly pluralistic world? The research applications should focus on themes that produce concrete solutions for the reconciliation of sustainability requirements and competitiveness.

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#### *Technology*

Sustainable development and economic growth can be influenced by developing technologies. Despite the favourable trends in the technologies, further development is needed in many sectors in order to reduce harm caused by the production and achieve sustainability, and to increase the profitability of farmers' production. Farms are individual. When new technologies are introduced gradually, it must be possible to work together with earlier technologies, which brings different kinds of challenges to the development and introduction of smart farming solutions. Agriculture is a technology-intensive sector with environmental impacts. It lays the foundation for new technology, but on the other hand technology also poses challenges especially for practical actors in primary production. The topics to be considered include the various kinds of technologies related to the sustainability of agriculture and their development needs, what are the drivers associated with the introduction of new technologies that promote sustainability, and what are the costs and benefits related to these. And how can farmers and the whole value chain benefit from the digitalisation of primary production? Or, will the competitiveness and transparency of the food chain improve?

In terms of data management, the data capabilities of primary producers must be ensured to be able to prepare for the requirements of the future at the start of the food chain as well. The use of new technologies and data will be an increasingly important part of the common agriculture policy as it aims to respond to the serious environmental and climate challenges. Primary production must be ready for this. The data services used by farmers must be interoperable.

The role of digitalisation will become increasingly important in food production as well and it can help farmers make better use of resources, including energy and time. In addition, it is advisable to take into account the ownership of farm data in the value chain and the possibilities of reselling data from the farmer's perspective. When considering the possibilities of artificial intelligence to plan joint purchases or sales by farmers, it would be good to explore ways to implement digitalisation

extensively on farms. The call for applications calls for projects that would enable technological development and innovations to move towards more sustainable and profitable production. More information: Tero Sarkala (tel. 02951 62210), Tiina Hartman (tel. 02951 62271), Eeva Saarisalo (tel. 02951 62366), Johanna Nykyri (tel. 02951 62452). e-mail: [name.familyname@gov.fi](mailto:name.familyname@gov.fi).

### *Plant protection and food safety*

The environment for plant production is changing as climate change proceeds. The changes can be seen in the growth conditions (drought, changes in precipitation, high temperatures), new plant pests, and mutations of the pests already present in a way that makes them more challenging to control. Crop yield variations may increase. The diminishing range of plant protection products in the market may also lead to changes. Various kinds of things will be required to adapt to the changes, including more diverse crop production, changes to and development of cultivation techniques and maintaining a good soil condition. Research in support of adaptation is needed for better management of crop yield variations especially concerning oilseeds and pulses. In addition, new data and knowledge is needed to support the development of integrated plant protection methods (pests, impacts of the diversification of crop rotations and new crops on pests, and forecasting models related to pests). More information: Tove Jern (tel. 02951 62318) and Kati Lassi (tel. 02951 62070). e-mail: [name.familyname@gov.fi](mailto:name.familyname@gov.fi).

### *One Health*

A sustainable food system also includes the One Health approach. The priorities of Makera's call for applications for research funding related to One Health are, first, animal welfare based on the needs of animals, meeting these needs and the related supervision. The second priority concerns disease epidemics threatening animals and humans. Their spreading is influenced by both climate change and the changing production structures in animal husbandry. The third priority is research projects concerning the extent of damages caused by salmonella and how they affect different types of farms in the cattle and poultry sectors. Studies on this are needed as there is less willingness to offer group insurances against salmonella infections. In the pig sector a central government fund is being prepared to replace group insurances. In the future, solutions based on central government funds may be needed in the cattle and poultry sectors as well.

More information: Katri Levonen (tel. 02951 62385), Susanna Ahlström (tel. 02951 62436), Eero Rautiainen (tel. 02951 62049), Eveliina Palonen (tel. 02951 62345). e-mail: [name.familyname@gov.fi](mailto:name.familyname@gov.fi).

**Please note!** In early 2025 the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will open another call for applications for R&D projects that is also related to the Food2.0 project and, in particular, supports its themes 3 (Regenerative production) and 4 (Circular economy and resource efficiency). In the application process of the Development Fund for Agriculture and Forestry (Makera), themes that could fall within the scope of the Food2.0 project will not be eligible for funding. Read more (in Finnish) at Food2.0 (<https://mmm.fi/-/mmm-avaa-tutkimus-ja-kehittamishankehaun-joka-tukee-food2.0-ohjelmaa>).

## **2. Healthy soil to ensure good growth condition (research programme on the environmental impacts of agriculture MATO 2)**

The priority is one of the themes of the research programme on the environmental impacts of agriculture MATO 2. A multi-annual research programme was needed to improve the environmental sustainability of agriculture. The research programme supports and promotes the environmental objectives of Finland's CAP Strategic Plan (Promoting climate change mitigation and adaptation and sustainable energy; Promoting sustainable development and efficient management of natural

resources such as water, soil and air; Promoting biodiversity protection and ecosystem services and preserving habitats and landscapes). The research programme promotes the national target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 29% by 2035 and measures that aim to achieve a good status for waters and reduce emissions with impacts on air quality. The research programme supports the target to halt the loss of biodiversity and to put biodiversity on a path to recovery. Topics related to soil as the research theme are also linked to the national restoration plan that is under preparation and its EU-level targets.

In theme 3 of the research programme on the environmental impacts of agriculture MATO 2, the focus is on soil and its topics have been described in the programme (in Finnish) (<https://mmm.fi/mato2>). Under this theme, applications are also sought concerning the development of erosion models and assessment of wind erosion risks. Applications related to the following topics will not be considered: Comparison of the results of the EU LUCAS monitoring with the national VALSE monitoring, differences between the two with respect to the amount of soil carbon. More information: Eero Pehkonen (tel. 02951 62217) and Heini Lehtosalo (tel. 02951 62059). e-mail: name.familyname@gov.fi.

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## Evaluation criteria

### RELEVANCE AND POTENTIAL IMPACT OF RESULTS

What is the economic and societal significance of the project, such as relevance to the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, suitability for the priorities of the call, the plan for the utilisation of the results and their applicability in practice, the estimated impact in terms of administration and legislative drafting, industry and production, advice, trade and consumers, as well as other environmental and societal impacts of the projects, such as employment, quality of life and ethical aspects? Weighting 40% in the pre-proposal phase and 20% in the second phase.

### QUALITY OF THE PROPOSAL/PROJECT QUALITY

What is the quality of the project, such as clarity, realism and measurability of project objectives, background information and utilisation of existing information, research and other methods, and innovation and interdisciplinarity? Weighting 20% in the pre-proposal phase and 35% in the second phase.

### PROJECT INTERACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESULTS

When building a project, it is worth paying special attention to the impact of the results and the exploitation plan. The application should highlight how the project will promote the industry or the needs of the administration and what practical measures are planned to take the results forward. Who are the key actors in terms of the project results and how will they be engaged (for example, as funding providers or members of the steering group)? Representatives of the industry should be involved already at the project planning stage to ensure real commitment and

good practical implementation of the results. Weighting 20% in the pre-proposal phase and 25% in the second phase.

#### ORGANISATION OF IMPLEMENTATION

What is the implementation and organisation of the project, such as the competence and experience of the authors, the cooperation of the project and its added value, the coverage of expertise, the management of the project, as well as the project implementers' own resources and financial commitment, the realism and cost-effectiveness of funding in relation to the plan, and the financial and other commitment of the beneficiaries of the results, for example, the funding received from the industry of the project and the commitment of other public funding providers? Particularly in projects where the beneficiary is an industry, it should be reflected in the funding of the project. This is also emphasised in the evaluation of projects, above all in the second stage, where a project plan including the CVs of the researchers must be submitted with the application. Weighting 20% in the pre-proposal phase and 20% in the second phase.

General information on the call: Suvi Rynnänen (tel. 02951 62126), e-mail: name.familyname@gov.fi.