Welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. In this episode, I talk with Linda Naeve, Iowa SARE coordinator about farmer rancher grants facilitated through the north central SARE. I will also talk with Ray Hanson who has received a farmer rancher grant in the past. I'm Christa Hartsook, small farms program coordinator, and we hope you enjoy the show. Linda, thanks for being on here.

You're welcome! It's nice to be back.

In a previous podcast, Linda, we talked about SARE and a lot of the specific resources that SARE has for producers. But at this point, I would really like to talk about a specific grant program. So what is a farmer rancher grant?

Well, I'm gonna back up just a minute and talk about what SARE is S-A-R-E. SARE is an acronym that stands for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. Our SARE program here in Iowa, comes through this sustainable ag program in the north central region. So with that all of our grant funding from the SARE program comes through the north central region and the farmer rancher grant is one of six grants that goes through this program. Great opportunity for farmers and ranchers to investigate ideas. The farmer rancher grant really is a competitive grant program for farmers and ranchers, who really want to explore sustainable...
solutions to problems on their farm. And you know, nobody does problem solving better than a farmer. They’re entrepreneurs, they have critical insight when it comes to improving what their system needs. And chances are, what they need and what their problems are on their farm are the same problems and very similar problems to what other farmers and ranchers are having. So by having farmers and ranchers conduct on Farm Research, it does help everyone out there. And it solves certain specific problems. And they keep records of all these grants that have gone out. So the really neat thing about this is, is any farmer who's interested in investigating a problem they have on their farm, can go online and see what's been done. Maybe that particular project that they looked at on the SARE website, which is northcentralsare.org. If the project that they looked at hasn't carried out to the depth, investigating exactly what they need, they can build on that particular project. So it's a real neat opportunity for ranchers, by ranchers, they handle the funding, they receive the funding, they write the grants, and they write the reports and they hold the field days.

Christa Hartsook 02:28
Linda, we should stress that this is not just free money to add to your enterprise.

Linda Naeve 02:32
That's right, it does not fund brick and mortar so to speak. And it does not fund large equipment. But it does help you the farmer put a little bit into your time, so you can charge off a little of your time on it and small equipment that you need. For example, in the project we're going to emphasize this morning, it helped provide fencing materials help rent the goats and things like that. So it does provide some resources that can get the project going that ordinarily if you're investigating something, you don't want to put a lot of your own money into that. So the grants themselves are up to $7,500 for one farmer. And the project can last up to a couple years, up to 25 months actually. And if you have another farmer who's also interested in that project, so you're on farm research will include more than one farm. And that is a farm that's not owned by a family member. It's a totally different entity farm, you can receive up to $15,000 for that particular grant project. And about 40 to 50 grants are funded a year for farmer rancher grants.

Christa Hartsook 03:37
Great, great. When should we expect a call for proposals to come out?

Linda Naeve 03:41
The call for proposals usually comes out in early August. And the proposals then are due in early December.

Christa Hartsook 03:48
Okay. So is it too early to start working on a project?
Linda Naeve 03:52
Absolutely not. Now's the time as you go through the summer to be thinking about how what your issues are, what your concerns are, how it can be implemented in a research grant project. And we do have resources available to help you plan on Farm Research. We just had a new publication revised, and it talks about onfarm research, how you lay out the design, how you investigate and how you report.

Christa Hartsook 04:17
So if our proposal is due in December, when could we expect some actual grant money?

Linda Naeve 04:23
Well, they go through the process of selecting the proposals that should be recommended to the administrative council, and then they approve them. So by the time when the money is available, it'll be spring so proposals are due in early December. The money will be available in the spring for summer activities.

Christa Hartsook 04:42
Okay, great. Linda, can you give us a little example or maybe what types of projects have been funded in the past?

Linda Naeve 04:48
They have funded a variety of projects pest disease management, crop and livestock production, education and outreach for other farmers and other educators networking quality of life issues, marketing, soil quality, energy, vast amount of different things related to sustainable agriculture. And these all relate to what we define as the three pillars of sustainability. And those three pillars include stewardship of our land, air and water, profitability over the long run for our farmers and ranchers. And the third is quality of life for our communities and our farmers. So those three things are very important in writing your SARE grant that they meet those three, sustainable ag definitions.

Christa Hartsook 05:34
Sure. Linda, am I writing pages and pages in my grant application? What does this process entail?

Linda Naeve 05:40
That's a really good question, because people are a little bit afraid of writing grants, because
That's a really good question, because people are a little bit afraid of writing grants, because they've maybe never even written a grant or considered one in the past. It is an online application process, they do have word limits, and it is really relatively easy to apply for. But you do it's very important before writing the grant proposal, that you have a clear project goal, and you explore what previous research has been done. With that said, you can include some of those background information into your narrative. And then it's the budget, and then how you're going to accomplish the outreach. That is a field day and the report itself. So actually, it's one of the more easy grants to apply for.

Christa Hartsook 06:21
Great, that sounds great. What other recommendations would you have for somebody looking to start working on a proposal?

Linda Naeve 06:28
Well, whether they're in Iowa or anywhere in the North Central Region, I suggest they contact their state coordinator and pass their idea through me to see if it's something that would be feasible to be funded. That's probably the first step. And then take a look online and see what the requirements are. Online being northcentral.sare.org, we will put all of these call for proposals and information available on the Iowa SARE their website. And all my contact information is iowasare.org. You can find me there.

Christa Hartsook 07:04
Great. Thank you. I'd like to bring Ray into the conversation. Ray, you are a farmer in central Iowa. Tell us a little bit about what your operation entailed. Why did you apply for a SARE farmer rancher grant?

Ray Hanson 07:15
Sure. Not a traditional farming operation by any stretch of imagination, it's mostly timber and hay ground on the Des Moines River Valley. And about 10 years ago, I had taken on a timber stand improvement project, where I was cutting out some scrub trees, undesirable trees, trying to improve my timber stand so that I did eventually do some harvesting of some quality walnuts and oaks that I have in the property. Right after I removed a lot of scrub trees, just due to environmental conditions, I just had tremendous growth of invasive species, primarily bush honeysuckle, and multiple floral rose. And it just got out of control immediately. And so I was looking for ways to control that, especially in some pretty steeply sloped grounds and ravines. And at the time, I had seen that goats were pretty successful in controlling those invasive species. But I thought there might be some other ways to approach it. And so I applied for a SARE grant to look at the comparative control between goats grazing, invasive species, chemical control, or mechanical control of those invasives. And also, what would be the impact if I did a combination of those different ones. So I wrote a SARE grant to research the effectiveness of the individual methods as well as combined methods of controlling invasive species.
Christa Hartsook  08:44
Sure. And so your SARE grant was obviously funded, right? You conducted your research, then over how long of a period?

Ray Hanson  08:51
Right. It was a two year process. And it's actually still going on. I'm a couple of years out of it now, in fact, doing a presentation next week on the outcomes. And so these projects have a continued life, but the funding was a two year period, and use the funding both to work with the owners of the goat service. Also used it to work with a professional conservation planner, who helped me set up the plots, collect the data, rewrite my conservation plan, and also to hire a certified prescribed burn agent, because we also did a burning experiment following the grazing with burning and so actually use the funds to hire other people to do an evaluation so I can decide what to do ongoing throughout the rest of my timber.

Christa Hartsook  09:35
Sure, sure. So outcomes, Ray, what would you say this grant really enabled you to understand or utilize on your operation?

Ray Hanson  09:43
Yeah, well, it allowed me to probably be a little more intensive in all three of those projects that I would have. Initially, I probably would have done one at a time over a period of time share and not been able to really do a fair comparison. So it allowed me to condense my own personal research over a shorter period of time. It allowed me to bring in professionals to help to make sure I was doing the data collection and the burning the grazing, right? So it just allowed me access to those resources where I could have done on my own, but I probably still be working, working on it.

Christa Hartsook  10:13
Sure. And then at the end of the project, Ray, did you have any kind of final report or a field day?

Ray Hanson  10:19
Yeah, we had several field days over the course of the grant, one, following it, hosted by one of my partners that we hired through the project. And we're doing a community based presentation next week at a conference. So it's, it's ongoing, the reports were pretty minimal. And online reporting with photos to show all the activities that we did and still have calls
occasionally from people say, Well, hey, you know, I'm thinking about doing this. What can you tell me about it? So I don't know, we probably had close to 100 people at three different workshops, and then they still still still contact me.

Christa Hartsook 11:00
Great. That's great. Are there recommendations or things that you would you know, give us as pieces of advice, I guess, to somebody looking at a SARE farmer rancher?

Ray Hanson 11:10
Yep. I think my main takeaway is the hint given within the name, it's SARE's, you know, research and education. So I think if you write the grant with those two things in mind, you know, what problem are you trying to solve? And how are you going to help others learn from that project? I think that they're gonna score a lot better than if you're gonna say, Well, I'm looking for a grant to help me with my operation. It's about sharing that information and getting it out so that other people can make better decisions.

Christa Hartsook 11:40
Great. That's great. Ray and Linda, I'd like to thank you both for being on the show today. And we will look forward to seeing those call for proposals. Come on soon. That's good. Thank you. Thank you.