West Virginia DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER, KENT A. LEONHARDT

West Virginia Veterans & Heroes to Agriculture

West Virginia Department of Agriculture
Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture
Agribusiness Pitch Competition Request for Applications (RFA)

Application Due:
January 15, 2027 by 4:00pm

Overview:

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) is pleased to announce the FY2027 competitive Request for Applications (RFA) for the Veterans and Heroes Agribusiness Pitch Competition. The WVDA Agribusiness Pitch Competition aims to encourage law enforcement, fire fighters, emergency medical service, first responders, veterans, active-duty military, and/or their spouses and family to engage in agriculture, and agribusiness ventures. The initiative also aims to ensure the continuous creation of investible ideas and start up originators that will contribute to enhancing the Department of Agriculture's food security objectives and economic growth.

Contact:

West Virginia Department of Agriculture
Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture
304-538-2397
vetstoag@wvda.us

Legislative Authority:

The Commissioner of Agriculture is charged with the responsibility of devising means of advancing the agricultural interests of the state (W. Va. Code §19-1-4(a)) and promoting and encouraging the organization of such societies and associations as have for their object the improvement and development of the state's agricultural, horticultural and kindred interests, especially in production, processing for market, and distribution (W. Va. Code §19-1-4(b)). The Commissioner is also charged with developing a Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program to integrate veterans into the field of agriculture, and support veterans currently working in agriculture. These programs may include, but are not limited to, using post-mine land for agricultural development, promoting high tunnel crops and production, expanding the apiary industry, developing cottage industries, exploring niche crops, raising more livestock, increasing the aquaculture industry and helping veterans promote their agricultural products through farmers markets and cooperatives. W. Va. Code §19-1-12(b).

Pitch Application Review Process:

The Review Committee shall review, evaluate, and determine the entries that will advance to the in-person event on March 06, 2027 at Cedar Lakes Conference Center in Ripley, WV. Finalists will be notified by email by early February at the latest. All applicants will be contacted about application, regardless of advancement or not, by email on the application.

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Project Description & Judging Criteria:

1. The competition is open to individuals who are Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture program members. Employees of WVDA are not eligible to participate.
2. Participants must be a West Virginia resident, with the business residing in West Virginia.
3. Participants must submit a business plan that includes all the information listed on the business plan template page (see template attached). All submitted entries are considered final.
4. The participants will be notified via email if their agriculture/agribusiness pitch is selected in the next round.
5. The top competitors will be given 5 minutes each to present their agriculture/agribusiness pitch before a panel of judges who will act as venture capitalists, investors, and business executives for the Agribusiness Pitch Competition. Each competitor must answer all questions asked by the judges. Pitch coaches are available if needed. Please reach out for more information.
6. **Criteria for judging all submitted entries:**

a. Project Description
   i. Is the vision of the business specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bounded (SMART)?
   ii. Does the Mission coincide with the Vision?
   iii. Is the project description comprehensive, clear, and specific?

b. Market Aspect
   i. Does it have an identified agriculture-related product or service?
   ii. What is the competitive advantage of your product or service?
   iii. Does it align with market trends?
   iv. Does it have an identified supplier? (With information of suppliers)
   v. Does it have an identified buyer? (With information of buyer and volume requirements)

c. Management Aspect
   i. Does the applicant have a relevant experience/training to implement the project?
   ii. Does it have an identified labor requirement for the operation of the business (or organizational chart)?

d. Technical Aspect
   i. Does it have specific processes involved?
   i. How will the products be delivered to the buyers?
   ii. Does the project have a clear source of funds?
   iii. Does the project have a clear source of materials?
   iv. What kind of investment/materials/labor & other items is needed to start your agriculture/ agribusiness?
   v. What is the time frame of your proposed project?
   vi. Is the project venture suitable to the project location?

e. Financial Aspect
   i. Is the project profitable?
   ii. How will your business earn revenue or income?
   iii. When will you make a profit?
   iv. What will be the return on investment?
   v. What are the cash projections of your business over a 3-5 year period?
   vi. Have other funding sources been sought out (grants, etc.)?

f. Presentation
   i. Was the project delivery engaging?
   ii. Did the presentation stay on point?
   iii. Was it easy to understand?
   iv. Did it exhibit quality (neatness and professional)?

g. Question and Answer Session
   i. Preparedness

h. Bonus Section
   i. Does the project bring a "wow" factor? (a quality of feature that is extremely impressive)

Available Funding:

The WVDA will allocate approximately $80,000 in Veterans and Heroes Agribusiness Pitch Competition funds in FY 2027, from which multiple grants will be awarded.

Definition of a Project:

A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive, distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period of time and within specific confines (cost, performance/quality, etc.). Projects are different from other ongoing operations in an organization because they have a definitive beginning, and end-they have a limited duration. One way to think about this is that a project has an overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks.
Examples of projects include:

- Building a barn
- Installing a tiny house to offer on-farm accommodations
- Expanding pasture
- Website and marketing development

Activities or tasks that could be part of such projects might include:

- Purchasing building materials and/or equipment
- Attending educational workshops
- Earning certification or licensure

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Terms & Conditions:

- There is no entry fee to join the competition.
- WVDA reserves the right to amend the competition Terms & Conditions and dates without notice in the event of any unforeseen circumstance outside of the organizer's control. Participants will be notified of any changes to the competition.
- The Review Committee reserves the right to disqualify or reject any entry that does not meet the set eligibility and requirements of the competition.
- Participants accept that the decisions of the Review Committee, Judges, and Commissioner are as final and cannot be challenged or appealed.
- Participants agree to release WVDA from any liability related to the competition.
- Participants acknowledge that WVDA is a public agency that must comply with the West Virginia Freedom of Information Act (WVFOIA), and that all information provided by participants is subject to WVFOIA. Participants should not submit any information that is sensitive or confidential.
- Any of these terms and conditions found unenforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction will be severed and the remaining terms and conditions will remain in full force and effect.
- Entry into the competition will be deemed as acceptance of these terms and conditions.
- Participants agree to allow West Virginia Department of Agriculture to use images, videos, and recordings in media and promotional materials.
- Fully and partial funded projects from FY2026 Agribusiness Pitch Competition are not eligible to reapply until FY2028.





For inquiries, please contact:

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Business Plan Template

(Note: Business Plans should be at least 3-5 pages in length)

Include the following information:

- **Cover page:** Use this page to include your business information, such as your business's legal name, address, website URL, email, phone number and logo.
- **Table of contents:** Get organized by numbering each section of your business plan.
- **Executive summary:** Explain what your mission is for your business. Use this part to introduce your company and outline your goals.
- **Business overview:** Use this section to describe what your business is going to look like. Explain your industry, competition and your unique selling proposition.
- **Market analysis:** Prove that you have spent time analyzing your target market.
- **Sales and marketing plan:** Discuss how you're going to market your products or services to clients. You also want to include your pricing strategy and sales tactics.
- **Management plan:** Explain who is managing the different aspects of your business. Include the legal structure of your business and what staffing requirements you have.
- **Operating plan:** Include what resources you'll need to operate your business.
- **Financial plan:** Use this part to detail how you plan to fund your business. You want to show that you have the business savvy to make your company profitable.

Make sure to attach your business plan to the application before submission.
If you already have a business plan, ensure it includes the above information.



Veterans & Heroes to Agriculture

The Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program falls under the WVDA Agriculture Business Development Division. This Division also houses regionally located experts in the field, WV Grown, Agritourism, Farm to School and other programs and grants ran by WVDA. For more information about our division please reach out to:

304-558-2210

businessdevelopment@wvda.us

https://agriculture.wv.gov/