

Chiara Bolton
Bolton Bees
1130 Charles Ave,
Saint Paul, MN 55104

Redactions per Minn. Stat. 13.643

February 25, 2020

Dear Chiara,

Thank you for submitting your application to the AGRI Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program in December of 2017. As promised we have compiled some of the review panel's comments regarding your proposal. I hope that this feedback will help you to develop a successful proposal in the future.

Nine outside reviewers evaluated and scored your application. Below are some comments that the reviewers made about your organization's application while they were scoring your application in the following evaluation profile categories.

- Project Leader is a farmer or group of farmers: Average score was 4.11.
The Solar Honey Company is mentioned as the entity doing the objectives, which is separate from the applicant's farm. The project leader is a farmer, but the majority of the work is being done by a consultant according to the budget.
- Potential for environmental benefits: Average score was 3.78.
Yes, but on a very small amount of acres. I think increasing pollinator habitat around solar arrays is positive, along with a market for local honey. However, I doubt that solar array projects will be approved because solar honey is being sold. Barely addresses environmental benefits. Mostly talks about business/monetary goals in objectives.
- Potential for economic benefits, cost savings, or increased income: Average score was 3.78.
Increased income by selling at a premium. Expanding the money market.
- Potential for energy savings: Average score was 1.78.
Same amount of work, just able to sell product at a higher price. Solar arrays are in place; this project won't improve energy savings.
- Project Rationale / compelling reason for project: Average score was 5.44.
Looking for niche market; I think there is a compelling reason for planting pollinator friendly habitat and placing bees next to solar arrays. Project seems to primarily benefit the applicant by building the applicant's business. It's an interesting business idea, but does not align well grant program objectives as it does not appear to benefit other farmers.
- Project Design and Methods: Average score was 6.44.
It appears grant funds will be for a consultant to find corporate sponsors for honey and then the grant pays for the hives to place next to the solar arrays, which does not fit for a research and demonstration grant. Project isn't for research purposes - basically to buy hives and continue growth of a project they already know is working. I don't see how their plans match up with pollinator friendly solar arrays; how do the arrays become "pollinator friendly"?
- Evaluation of project's progress: Average score was 5.89.
Some of the objectives make sense and have measurable outcomes, there was no indication of a control, or an objective stating that a difference in production yields would be measured between different treatments. No evaluation of any pollinator friendly testing and on the

ground side of things. It seems like the evaluation is if Bolton Bees can sell its own honey to the solar corporations.

- Outreach: Average score was 5.56.
Good, but not one specific idea in mind. The applications says it will present at regional beekeeping conferences, local beekeeping clubs, local township meetings and hearings. It's not very specific. There's no field day. I think her plan for outreach would work, but she includes no budget for outreach--which indicates to me that she's not serious about it.
- Budget: Average score was 2.78.
There is no testing or research being done, just the purchase of supplies and consulting fees. No money has been built in for outreach either. No money allocated for analyzing if this project is economically feasible. There's [REDACTED] that isn't mentioned by name in the grant application. Project is focused on market development but includes money for bees and hives, which appear to be start-up/expansion costs, which are not eligible.
- Transferability: Average score was 3.78.
This could potentially increase a market for beekeepers. Funding a business plan is not a transferable activity/practice.
- Applicant Qualifications: Average score was 3.33.
Definitely qualified for being a beekeeper; not sure for expanding the market. The majority of the work (in terms of hours) is done by a consultant.
- Technical or Farmer Cooperators: Average score was 3.22.
The director of the Farmers' Union renewable energy isn't in the budget. [REDACTED] consultant with no letter of support. I think having more technical cooperators would be useful. MFU will be key to making this happen.
- Commitment letters: Yes, from the Farmers' Union director of renewable energy.
- Outreach event: 7 yes's

The review panel did not discuss your application because its score was below the line from which all the applications were discussed and a committee member did not advocate it for further review.

I hope this information is helpful to you. I also wish you the all the best at pursuing answers to your agricultural questions, your future projects, and in the success of your agricultural business.

Though your proposal wasn't funded during this round, we invite you to apply for the next round of grants, which will be opened in August, 2018 and due to be submitted by early December, 2018. The next round of grants will be for on-farm research and demonstration projects that will start in or after March of 2019. The next application and Request for Proposal will be similar, but not identical to the previous year's grant program. The RFP and application can be accessed from the MDA website at: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/demogrant.aspx>.

If you would like to discuss the review panel's comments, please feel free to contact me.

Kind Regards,





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