

1. Background

Enterprise Ireland is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. Enterprise Ireland works in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and win export sales on global markets. In this way, Enterprise Ireland supports sustainable economic growth, regional development and secure employment.

Enterprise Ireland recognises the importance of the Agri-Business Sector to the Irish Economy. In 2010, Irish agricultural machinery exports were worth an estimated €100m to the Irish Economy. To encourage and support a new generation of agri-business start-ups, Enterprise Ireland is launching a new Competitive Feasibility Fund for Agri-Business.

The Competitive Feasibility Fund for AgriBusiness is part of the on-going roll-out of Competitive Feasibility Funds designed to accelerate entrepreneurship development throughout the country.

This initiative supports the Government's National Action Plan for Jobs.

The total Fund size is up to €250,000. Applications for funding are considered on a Competitive basis.

2. Objectives of the fund

The objective of the Competitive Feasibility Fund for Agri-Business is to assist a new start-up company, or individual entrepreneur, to investigate the viability of a new growth-orientated agri-business proposition which has the ability to become a High Potential Start-up (HPSU). These are companies that can develop scalable innovative technologies, products or services for sale on world markets. We are seeking to support projects that are likely to achieve significant growth within three years (sales of €1m per annum and employment of 10 or more) or, where a company is required to have FDA or CE approval, to have €1 million in sales within three years of approval to sell.

The aim of this funding call is to:

- Accelerate entrepreneurship in the Agri-Business sector;
- Support entrepreneurs with business ideas that have the potential to create jobs and significant growth within the broad Agri-Business Sector;
- Stimulate the pipeline of High Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs)¹ with products or services applicable to the Agricultural sector.

The purpose of the Feasibility Grant is to enable the promoter (and Enterprise Ireland) to reach firm conclusions regarding the project's viability and set out investor-ready plans and financials associated with developing and commercialising the product or service on international markets. The fund is open to applications from individuals, early stage companies or prospective businesses operating in the agri-business sector including; machine design & manufacturing; fabrication, engineering & technical activities; life sciences products with application in the agri-sector; farm related software and related services; vet-pharma, animal health & chemical products.

3. Legal Basis

The Competitive Feasibility Fund for AgriBusiness is administered in accordance with the Industrial Development Act 1998, Section 7 (as amended).

4. State Aid Basis

Commission Regulation No. 1998/2006 de minimis.

5. Eligibility Criteria

The applicant must have a business start-up that has the potential to create jobs and generate export growth. Applications should not be submitted in a business or trading name. An application may be submitted in the name of an individual(s) or a legally registered company and the new business must:

- submit their application no later than 3 p.m. on Tuesday, September 6th 2016;
- have the potential to create jobs and significant growth in the agri-business sector.
- if a company, be incorporated for less than 3 years at the deadline for receipt of applications;
- a manufacturing or an internationally traded services business*;
- not involved in activities that fall within gambling or "gaming" as defined in the Gaming & Lotteries Act 1956;

¹ HPSUs are start-up businesses with the potential to develop an innovative product or service for sale on international markets and the potential to create a minimum of 10 jobs and €1m in sales within 3 to 4 years of starting up.

- must not directly or indirectly, by way of funding or shareholding, be covered by Articles 1 and 2 of the European Council decision, (2014/145/CFSP) of 17 March 2014, and subsequent Regulations (960/2014, 1290/2014 and 833/2014) concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

**Projects focused solely on the domestic market may not be considered to have significant growth potential.*

6. Ineligible Applicants

The fund is not open to the following:

- Projects focused solely on the domestic market.
- Individuals or start-up companies that have been approved financial support from Enterprise Ireland (including Feasibility Grants, New Frontiers Stipend, CORD Grant, Competitive Start Fund or Equity Investment) in the past 2 years.
- Applicants who were approved any other State or EU funding for the project for which they are seeking feasibility funding.
- Companies who have already reached their de minimis aid limit.
- Applications submitted in hard copy format

7. Eligible Activities

Successful applicants will be awarded feasibility funding to support a maximum of 50% of the study costs. Typical elements involved in carrying out a feasibility study include:

- Market research;
- Customer research;
- Cost analysis;
- Financial projections;
- Manufacturing process assessment;
- Plant evaluation and selection;
- Raw material sourcing;
- Prototyping;
- Negotiating with potential joint venture partners or obtaining a manufacturing licence may also be included.

8. Eligible Costs

Eligible costs include:

- Salary costs of the applicant/employees of the applicant;
- Foreign travel and subsistence costs related to the project;
- Fees of external consultants;
- Costs of building and/or testing a prototype;
- Costs of exhibiting at or visiting one overseas trade fair.

Full details on eligible expenditures and limits are outlined in Appendix 1.

Any expenditure incurred prior to 3pm on Tuesday, September 6th 2016 is not eligible for support.

9. Maximum Funding Levels

The maximum grant available is €25,000. The grant is calculated at a maximum of 50% of eligible expenditure of up to €50,000 incurred by the successful applicant.

Eligible applications for funding will be considered on a competitive basis. Enterprise Ireland will assess eligibility of the activities proposed in the study and associated costs. The amount of support will be recommended by the Evaluation Panel following the Final Assessment.

10. Closing Date/Time for Applications

Completed applications must be submitted before **3 p.m. on Tuesday, September 6th, 2016**. Late applications will not be considered.

11. Application Process

Applications must be submitted via the on-line form available on [Enterprise Ireland's website](#). Applications in any other format will not be accepted.

On submission of an application, an auto-generated email will be sent to confirm that Enterprise Ireland has received the application form. After the deadline for receipt of applications, and when initial checks are carried out, each application will be acknowledged within three working days. Applicants who do not receive either acknowledgement should immediately contact GA-CFF@enterprise-ireland.com

12. Eligibility

All applications will be screened for eligibility for the fund. Ineligible applicants will be informed within two weeks of the deadline for receipt of applications.

13. Evaluation Process

The process for selection of successful applicants will involve two stages:

1: Shortlisting of Applications:

An Evaluation Panel will carry out a paper-based evaluation of all eligible applications using the following criteria.

Evaluation Criteria	Weighting
Business Proposition: <i>Customer demand and the long-term potential of the business to achieve sustainable growth (i.e. achieving sales of €1m per annum with strong early export potential and employment of 10 or more within three years,).</i>	30%
Applicant(s)/ Team Profile: <i>Track record and sector knowledge, market etc.</i>	40%
Innovation Level of Proposed Product/Service	30%
Total	100%

Following, evaluation, the highest ranking applications, up to a maximum of 20, will progress to the second stage of the Evaluation Process. This is subject to each of these applicants having achieved a score of at least 60% in the first stage of the Evaluation Process.

2: Presentations:

This stage will consist of a four-minute presentation to an Evaluation Panel comprising industry experts and representatives of Enterprise Ireland. The presentation to the Evaluation Panel will take place at the offices of Enterprise Ireland at **Dublin Road, Athlone, Co. Westmeath**, on **October 18th 2016**. Applicants must be able to attend on this day. Invitations will be issued to the relevant applicants at least one week before the presentation.

The presentation should address the following:

- What is it about the applicant/management team that makes you capable of executing on this feasibility study?
- What specific need does the product/service address?
- Why would someone be 'compelled' to purchase the product/service?

- How innovative is the product/service?

The Evaluation Panel will score each applicant based on how well these equally-weighted issues are addressed and will rank them in order of merit. Applicants that are being considered for support must have attained at least 60% of the score available at this stage.

Where two or more applicants have the same score, the scores attained, by each of those applicants, in the following criteria, will be applied, as necessary, in the order set out below to determine the ranking of the applicants:

- The applicant with the highest score under 'Applicant(s)/ Team Profile';
- If the scores are still even, the applicant with the highest score under 'Business Proposition';
- If the scores are still even, the applicant with the highest score under 'Innovation Level of Proposed Product/Service'.

Enterprise Ireland may engage with the applicants that are being considered for support. This engagement may involve discussing, in more detail, the projected expenditure set out in the application form. This engagement may result in reallocation(s) between or within categories of expenditure applied for, however, the maximum expenditure that can be approved is limited to the total projected expenditure contained in the Application Form.

The available fund of €250,000 will then be allocated to the applicants being considered for support, in rank order until either (1) the fund is exhausted; or (2) funding has been allocated to all applicants that have achieved the minimum score (i.e. 60%).

A recommendation is then made to Enterprise Ireland's approving committee based on the results of the Evaluation Process and allocation of funding.

14. Approval

Following formal approval by Enterprise Ireland's Investment Committee, a formal letter of offer will be issued to the successful applicants.

15. Grant Agreement

Successful applicants must return the acceptance of the offer within 60 days of the date of the letter of offer. This letter of offer, when accepted, forms a legal agreement between Enterprise Ireland and the Applicant. The engagement referred to above will also involve verification of the appropriate legal entity to which the Offer of funding will be made.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified at the earliest opportunity and will be offered feedback.

16. Drawing down grants

A maximum of three grant claims can be made against approved project expenditure. Costs must have been incurred and paid for in full before submitting a claim. The final claim date will be stipulated in the letter of offer. Any balance unclaimed after the Final Claim Date will be cancelled.

17. Confidentiality

Enterprise Ireland will not release any information received as part of this application except for evaluation as set out above or as may be required by law, including the Freedom of Information (FOI) Acts 1997 and 2003 and the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003. In the event of a FOI request, the client where possible will be given reasonable advance notice.

As part of its evaluation process, the application will be given to an assessment panel which will include external assessors as well as Enterprise Ireland employees. All external assessors will have signed a confidentiality agreement with Enterprise Ireland.

Appendix I: Eligible Expenditures and Limits

Note: expenditure claimed must be incurred by the legal entity to which the grant is offered

Salaries and Overheads:

- The maximum eligible salary per applicant/employee of the applicant is €1,000 per week (€200 per day) for a maximum of 12 weeks (60 days).
- Only time spent on the proposed project by the applicant/employees of the applicant is eligible.
- Claims for wages and salary support for the applicant/employees of the applicant must be supported by payslips and proof of payment.
- Where the business is pre-trading, input of the applicant's time may be eligible, subject to proof of loss of earnings.
- Support for external consultants must be applied for in the Consultancy Fees section.
- Time spent by the applicant/employees of the applicant preparing for and attending a Trade Fair is ineligible.
- Overheads up to a 30% of eligible salary costs can be applied for.

Foreign Travel and Subsistence:

- Only Travel and Subsistence costs for overseas trips related to the proposed project are eligible.
- Foreign Travel and Subsistence costs must be for the applicant/employees of the applicant.
- Subsistence rates cover all out-of-pocket expenses including hotels, meals, taxis, incidentals etc.
- If Foreign Travel and Subsistence is for Trade Fairs, it is limited to 5 employees.
- Eligible Travel Costs: Economy air/ferry or rail fares, mileage (60c per kilometre) or economy car hire (note: mileage cannot be claimed on hire cars)
- Eligible Subsistence Rates: Overnight Rate (*24 hr period*): max €200; Day rate (< 24 hours): €60.

Consultancy Fees:

- The daily rate is to be inclusive of consultant's time and all associated travel, subsistence and out-of-pocket expenses.
- Maximum consultancy rates are: 1–20 days: €900 per day; 21–30 days €700 per day.
- A maximum of 30 days per consultant is eligible. Where more than one consultant is being used from the same firm the 30-day maximum and daily rates will apply to the firm.

Prototype Expenditure:

- If the feasibility study includes the building or testing of a prototype, the following expenditures are eligible for support: prototype materials, specialised software tools, hire of equipment or facilities and other sundry costs relating to building a prototype.
- Where consultants/contractors are being used to input into the prototype design/build, the costs should be entered in the Consultancy Fees section of the application form.
- Applicant/employee time should be entered under the Salaries and Overheads section
- Capital items/equipment costs such as laptops and servers are not eligible under this expenditure item.

Trade Fair Details and Expenditure:

- Only the cost of the Applicant's first-time participation in a particular overseas Trade Fair/Trade Show in any one country is eligible.
- A maximum of five people (which can only be the applicant/employee(s) of the applicant) can be supported for attendance at a Trade Fair.