



Participatory Research Partnership for Regenerative Organic Specialty Crop Production

Rodale Institute – California Organic Center (RI-COC)

1014 W. Ventura Blvd., Camarillo, CA 93010

Partnership Opportunity. The California Organic Center invites proposals from experienced specialty crop growers and farming organizations interested in a three-year participatory research partnership (January 2027 – December 2029) to manage a three - acre field trial at the Center in Camarillo, CA.

Overview. Rodale Institute is a global leader in regenerative organic agriculture, advancing farming systems that improve soil health, environmental sustainability, and human well-being through scientific research, farmer collaboration, and education. Our mission is founded on the connection between healthy soil, healthy food, and healthy people. Rodale Institute *California Organic Center (RI-COC)* conducts regionally relevant research to develop practical solutions for California specialty crop production. Research priorities include regenerative organic production systems, soil health, soil water retention and water management technologies, soil carbon, soil microbial communities, climate resilience, and farming practices that enhance long-term agricultural productivity while reducing external inputs.

Approximately **three acres** of research land will be available for specialty crops production. This partnership is designed to integrate commercial farming expertise with rigorous scientific research by conducting field-scale experiments under real-world production conditions. The collaborating grower will manage day-to-day farming operations, while research objectives, experimental treatments, and field designs will be developed jointly with RI-COC scientists to ensure scientifically sound and statistically valid research that will inform practical commercial production practices. The specific crops grown will be determined through discussion with the partner farmer and RI-COC.

Proposal Timeline

RFP Release: October 5, 2026

Proposal Deadline:

November 30th, 2026 (5:00 PM PT)

Proposal Review: November 2026

Partner Selection: December 2026

Collaboration Period:

January 2027 – December 2029

Shared Partnership Commitments. This collaboration is intended as a mutually beneficial research partnership rather than a conventional land-lease arrangement. RI-COC will contribute approximately three acres of research land, irrigation water and existing irrigation infrastructure, scientific expertise, experimental design, research coordination, data collection, and laboratory analyses required for RI-COC-defined research objectives. The selected partner will contribute commercial production expertise, seeds and planting materials, fertilizers and compost, labor, farm equipment, crop-specific irrigation

components, day-to-day crop management, harvest and post-harvest handling, production records, and implementation of agreed-upon research treatments.

Research questions, treatments, and field layouts will be developed collaboratively and selected based on their relevance to RI-COC's research mission and their potential value to California growers. Use of RI-COC land primarily for commercial production, product promotion, or commercial product testing without a substantial research component is outside the scope of this partnership and may require a separate agreement and cost-sharing arrangement.

Scope of Work. The selected collaborator will be responsible for all routine crop production activities, including:

- Field preparation and planting
- Provision of seeds, transplants, and other planting materials
- Installation and management of crop-specific in-field irrigation components
- Weed, pest, and disease management
- Provision and application of compost, fertilizers, and other crop production inputs
- Labor and crew management
- Provision and operation of farm equipment required for routine production activities
- Harvest and post-harvest handling
- Maintenance of production records needed to support the research

Research treatments, production practices, and field layouts will be developed collaboratively with RI-COC scientists. The selected partner will implement agreed-upon management protocols and coordinate with RI-COC researchers to maintain research integrity throughout the project. The collaborating grower will retain ownership of the harvested crop and all revenue generated from its sale, except for crop samples retained by RI-COC for research purposes.

Rodale Institute Contributions to the Partnership

- Approximately three acres of research land
- Upkeep of existing irrigation infrastructure
- Irrigation water, with water use monitored by RI-COC to support research objectives and efficient water management.
- Scientific oversight, experimental design, data collection, and research coordination

RI-COC researchers will collect soil, plant, and crop health and performance data throughout the growing season, including measurements related to soil health, soil carbon, soil microbial communities, crop productivity, and other project objectives. Plant and harvested crop samples may also be collected for yield and quality assessment and other laboratory analyses. RI-COC will determine and cover the costs of sampling and laboratory analyses required for RI-COC-defined research objectives. Additional analyses requested by the collaborating partner will be subject to prior approval and may be the financial responsibility of the partner.

Partner Qualifications

Applicants should demonstrate:

- Experience producing commercial specialty vegetable or fruit crops
- Ability to manage field-scale production systems
- Experience or strong interest in regenerative organic agriculture
- Willingness to collaborate with researchers and follow established research protocols
- Commitment to maintaining accurate production records and regular communication throughout the project

Commercial Products and Technologies. This RFP is intended primarily to establish a participatory research partnership with a commercial grower or farming organization. Proposals involving the evaluation, demonstration, or validation of a proprietary commercial product, technology, equipment, input, or service may be considered; however, such projects may require a separate research agreement and financial contribution to support land use, water, research personnel, experimental design, data collection, laboratory analyses, equipment use, and other project costs. Terms will be negotiated based on the scope and research requirements of the proposed project. Any financial, data-use, publication, intellectual property, or promotional terms associated with commercial product testing will be established under a separate agreement.

Expected Outcomes. This partnership will generate high-quality scientific data from commercial-scale farming systems while producing research that is directly applicable to California growers. Project results may contribute to peer-reviewed publications, extension materials, field demonstrations, and educational programming. Collaborating growers will be appropriately acknowledged as research partners in publications, presentations, and outreach activities. The research field will also serve as a public-facing demonstration and showcase of regenerative organic production practices, providing the collaborating grower with visibility through RI-COC field days, farm tours, educational events, and other outreach and communication activities. Participation in this partnership does not constitute endorsement by Rodale Institute or RI-COC of any commercial product, technology, company, or production system. RI-COC will retain scientific independence in the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of research results, including results that are favorable, unfavorable, or show no significant treatment effects.

Proposal Submission

Applicants shall submit a proposal of **no more than two (2) pages** describing:

- Farming background and relevant experience
- Specialty vegetable production experience
- Specialty crops proposed for production during the partnership
- Experience with regenerative organic or organic farming systems
- Available labor, equipment, and operational capacity
- Interest in participating in this collaborative research partnership

Proposals must be submitted electronically as a single PDF no later than **5:00 PM Pacific Time on November 30th, 2026**. Submit proposals via email to:

Dr. Arianna Bozzolo, Arianna.bozzolo@rodaleinstitute.org