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Benefitting people and society

Guidelines for applicants
EMERGING INVESTIGATOR 2026
PLANT SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE AND FOOD BIOTECHNOLOGY

Facts about the call

Total amount available for granting:
DKK 25million

Amount available per grant:
Up to **DKK 12.50 million**

Call opens:
07 November 2025

Call closes:
12 January 2026 at 14:00 (CET)

Interview:
19 March 2026 (upon invitation)

Applicant notification:
April 2026

Earliest start date:
1 May 2026

Latest start date:
1 April 2027

Review committee:
Committee on Plant Science, Agriculture and Food Biotechnology

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All Grant Recipients must comply with the ['General Terms and Conditions'](#) for grants from the Novo Nordisk Foundation (the Foundation).

The Foundation will treat all applicant and application information confidentially. Read more about how the Foundation processes personal data under 'privacy & security' in the online application system, NORMA. See how to access NORMA in section 2 of these guidelines.

You can find more information about the Foundation's application and granting process at the [NORMA Help Centre](#). Detailed information about the different parts of the application is available in NORMA.

1 EMERGING INVESTIGATOR 2026 WITHIN PLANT SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE AND FOOD BIOTECHNOLOGY

1.1 Purpose

With the Emerging Investigator call, the Novo Nordisk Foundation seeks to support upcoming and highly promising research leaders within plant science, agriculture and food biotechnology in the Nordic countries. The intention of the Emerging Investigator grant is to enable excellent scientists to establish their own research group or to further strengthen their recently started group.

The Research Leader Programme
To support the best and most talented research leaders at all career stages, from senior postdocs wanting to start their own independent research group to established senior principal investigators, the NNF offers three different grants under the Research Leader Programme: Emerging, Ascending and Distinguished Investigators.

Please note that only the Emerging and Ascending Investigator grants are open within plant science, agriculture[1] and food biotechnology.

1.2 Areas of support

The proposed research should address major challenges within plant, agricultural and food science associated with developing sustainable agriculture and food production. The research should be fundamental in character with a clear and strategic outlook to improve sustainability and potential solutions. The proposed research should significantly extend existing knowledge beyond state-of-the-art and may have a high-risk profile. The research should be based on life science research disciplines.

Non-exhaustive list of areas that would fall within scope:

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[1] Agriculture is here defined as terrestrial farming and cultivation of plants, including forestry and controlled environment agriculture (CEA).

- Research focused on plants and microorganisms for food, fibre, materials or climate change mitigation that enhance productivity, resilience, and resource-use efficiency across the value chain from primary agricultural production to end-product.
- Development of agricultural-, food-, and forestry systems with higher productivity using less land, and with greater circularity, biodiversity, ecosystem functionality and with minimum impact on environment and climate.
- Research on the characterization and application of microorganisms or microbial communities for circular economy purposes including inputs in agriculture, food and ecosystem services.
- Research into the understanding of food components and ingredients derived from plants, microbes, insects, and cellular agriculture, with a focus on functionality, safety, and technological aspects of food science and biotechnology.
- Research focused on merging food raw materials and ingredients from the above-mentioned categories to understand the interplay between various components in the food matrix, e.g. to enhance processability, stability, and organoleptic quality. *Interdisciplinary approaches including nutrition and health aspects may only be included to a limited extent.*
- Research focused on the development and application of methods and technologies, including data-driven approaches such as models and algorithms, to enable and support sustainable agriculture and food production. *A significant proportion of the proposed research should explore the use of the new method or technology for its intended application.*

The programme will not support:
- Research primarily focusing on livestock, livestock commodities and feed.
- Research focusing on aquaculture, or its derived commodities.
- Research with their main research component on nutritional uptake and clinical studies.

Projects with a focus on pharmaceuticals and therapeutics should submit their application to the Novo Nordisk Foundation Committee on Bioscience and Basic Biomedicine while proposals focusing on industrial biotechnology and environmental biotechnology should be submitted to the Novo Nordisk Foundation Committee Industrial Biotechnology and Environmental Biotechnology.

IMPORTANT! For the biotechnology requirement, the OECD short definition of biotechnology will be used as a reference for assessments. The OECD single definition of biotechnology is: the application of science and technology to living organisms, as well as parts, products and models thereof, to alter living or non-living materials for the production of knowledge, goods and services. Essentially, any chemical or physical modification of a biological entity or product is considered biotechnology within this call.

1.3   Eligibility

PROFILE
The Emerging Investigator grant is for talented researchers typically at the senior postdoc or assistant professor level. The grant is intended for researchers who have matured to a point

where they are ready to start their own independent research group, or existing group leaders in the early phase of starting their group. Ideally, applicants should have 4-8 years of research experience after having received their PhD degree (leave of absence not included). Minor deviations will be tolerated if they can be justified.

Applicants should have a strong track record within their field of research relative to their career stage, which will typically include primary or senior authorships on high-impact research publications, contributions to key conferences in the field, important technology developments, etc.

Applicants who are already established independent group leaders with more than two years of group leader experience are only exceptionally considered 'Emerging Investigators'. Instead, they would typically fit into the 'Ascending Investigator' category.

Applicants, who, at the time of application, have already secured a `starting grant´ with similar scope (e.g., Villum Young Investigator, DFF – Sapere Aude, ERC starting grant, etc.) are only considered eligible if they in the application can argue how management of two large and clearly non-overlapping projects is feasible.

Importantly, applicants should have a clear goal and strong motivation for starting their own independent research group, or further strengthening their newly started research group.

Place of employment and institutional anchoring
Researchers from across the world with the academic potential to establish an independent research program at a university or other non-profit research institution in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway or Sweden are eligible to apply for the Emerging Investigator grant. This host institution administrates the grant.

During the grant period, the grant recipient and the associated group members must be employed at the administrating host institution.

Important restrictions
Important restrictions regarding NNF grants and proposals:
- Applicants may submit only *one* application per call.
- The present call is for the grant type 'Investigator' that includes Emerging Investigator, Ascending Investigator, Distinguished Investigator, the NERD programme, NNF Young Investigator, NNF Laurate Research grants and the Data Science Investigators, Recruit and Start Package grants. If an applicant submits more than one application to these calls within the same year, *only the first application submitted will be evaluated*, while the subsequent applications will receive administrative rejections. After having received notification on the funding decision, the applicant may submit a new application for a Novo Nordisk Foundation Investigator grant.
- It is not possible to hold more than one active Investigator grant. Applicants with an active Investigator grant can only apply for a new Investigator grant in the final year of the project, however, the grant periods cannot overlap.
- Invitation of co-applicants is not possible within this call.

1.4 Funding

A total of up to DKK 25 million is available for grants of up to DKK 12.50 million for projects over a 5-year grant period. In the case of many applications of exceptionally high quality within one career stage, an amount of up to DKK 12.50 million of the total grant budget may exceptionally be transferred to calls for other career stages under the Research Leader Programme within the same committee and within the mandate letters for those, as approved by the Board of Directors. Any such transfer must be approved by the NNF committee responsible.

Applicants may apply for funding for the following types of expenses directly related to the project:

- **Salary** for the applicant for all or part of the project period in case the applicant is not tenured or guaranteed her or his own salary [2].
- **Salary for employees**, e.g., PhD students, postdoc and/or for research or technical assistance. Salary for employees can only be applied for if they are employed at a lower job structure/salary level than the applicant.
- **PhD tuition fee** up to DKK 80,000 per student per budget year (must be included separately in the budget).
- **Operating expenses,** e.g., lab consumables, chemicals and reagents, research animals, sequencing/proteomics and other analysis services directly related to the project.
- **Equipment** required for the project, however not exceeding 20% of the budget total.
- **Conference and workshop participation** and presentation of research results, up to DKK 50,000 per budget year.
- **Travel expenses** directly related to the project, i.e., experiments carried out in other labs for a limited period. Up to DKK 30,000 per budget year.
- **Publications costs** emanating from the research project, up to DKK 50,000 per budget year.
- **Project Supplement** only available for Danish Universities. More information is below.
- **Bench fee** (not applicable Danish Universities. More information is below.)
- **Administrative expenses** not applicable Danish Universities. More information is below.

> **Full-time equivalents (FTEs)**
> For each salary entry, please specify the FTE in years within the designated FTE field. This will indicate the proportion of a full-time position that the project funding will support for each year of the grant period. One full-time employee for one year equals 1.0 FTE.

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[2] Institutions can apply for funding of additional expenses if they incur for leave in connection with the birth of a child (parental leave) for all grant recipients and all personnel employed in Denmark with salary covered by a Foundation grant. For more information: Novo Nordisk Foundation increases support for parental leave to promote diversity and equal opportunities - Novo Nordisk Fonden

Bench fee (not applicable to Danish universities)
Bench fee can be included in the budget for support of individual researchers to cover expenses needed to conduct the proposed research.

Bench fee is calculated per academic employee actively working on the project [eligible to apply for salary]. It may only be used for expenses related to the research project which cannot be included within another individual budget category. Bench fee may account for a maximum of DKK 8,000 per month per FTE. The budget must specify the expenses covered by the bench fee, which may include:
- common or shared laboratory expenses and consumables
- laboratory utilities (electricity, gas, water)
- maintenance of essential equipment
- service contracts
- technical and IT support

PLEASE NOTE that bench fee cannot cover rent, administrative support, representation, social contributions etc. A valid bench fee policy in line with the Foundation's requirements must be available at the time of application, and this official documentation from the administrating/co-applicant's institution must be provided upon request.

Project supplement for research grants:[3] (Danish universities only)
The project supplement contributes to the coverage of indirect costs at Danish universities, and replaces budget posts such as administrative costs, bench fee and parental leave.

More information on the joint model for project supplement is found at Universities Denmark's website. Questions related to the project supplement should be directed to the research support units at your university.

Administrative support (not applicable to Danish universities)
Administrative support may account for a maximum of 5% of the total budget and must be included therein. The administrative support:
- can cover expenses such as for accounting, payment of salaries, purchasing, hiring, as well as auditing and financial reporting on the project
- cannot cover administrative expenses that are not directly related to the project
- can via the host institution be shared between the institutions of the main- and co-applicant(s), as detailed in the application budget

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[3] If you apply as a senior postdoc and transition to an assistant professor position during the grant period, your eligibility for the project supplement will change. You must inform the Foundation of this change via the grant management system.

> • is not automatically included in the grant and must be stated/applied for in the application budget but should not be specified in detail

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The Foundation will not award funding for:
- Commercial activities
- Overhead/indirect costs (such as rent, electricity, water and maintenance)
- Double funding of projects:
    - If the applicant has received funding for the proposed project from other sources, in part or in full, this must be accounted for in the budget, as no budgetary overlaps are allowed
    - If an identical or overlapping project proposal has been submitted to other funding institutions than the Foundation, it must be noted in the application
    - If the applicant receives funding for the project, or parts of the project, from other sources following submission of the application to the Foundation, the Foundation must be informed immediately

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1.5 Language

The application and all additional materials must be submitted in English.

1.6 Application process

The Emerging Investigator call has a 2-stage application and evaluation process:

Application system opens	**07 November 2025**
Application deadline	**12 January 2026 at 14:00 CET**
Evaluation of applications	**January - February 2026**
Interview (Upon Invitation)	**19 March 2026**
Applicant notification	**April 2026**
Earliest possible start date	**1 May 2026**
Latest possible start date	**1 April 2027**

When all applications have been assessed, applicants will be notified about whether they have been awarded a grant. The notification e-mail will be sent from norma-noreply@novo.dk to the e-mail address used when creating a profile in NORMA.

PLEASE NOTE: The Foundation does not provide feedback in case an application is declined.

1.7   Assessment criteria

Emerging Investigator grants are individual grants awarded to excellent junior researchers with original and ambitious projects, to help them start their own independent research group. Hence, independence and research leadership potential of the applicant constitutes important assessment criteria. As such, both 'Project' and 'Person' will be considered in the assessment.

NNF's Committee on Plant Science, Agriculture and Food Biotechnology will primarily assess the applications based on the following criteria:

Scientific quality and impact of the project proposal
- Research question and scientific impact.
- Scientific approach.
- Societal impact.

Applicant merits and potential
- Quality of past performance.
- Research leadership and/or potential.
- Collaborations and scientific environment.

Additional considerations:
- The current performance of the applicant should be evaluated relative to career stage and seniority.
- The current funding situation of the applicant should not affect the score, but the level of commitment of the candidate to the project can be the taken into consideration.
- Whether the applicant applies for own salary or has own salary covered by host institution or from additional funding should be irrelevant for the evaluation.

The following elements will not be given weight during the evaluation:
- The current funding situation of the applicant. However, NNF does not allow double funding of projects and the level of commitment of the candidate to the project can be taken into consideration by the committee, for instance, if the applicant has existing major obligations or large grants.
- Whether the applicant applies for funding for their own salary, or has own salary covered by host institution or other funding.

The applicant, as the principal investigator of the proposed project, should during the project act independently from more senior researchers at the host institution where the project and the applicant is based. If the project involves collaboration with other groups or independent investigators, the applicant must clearly demonstrate ownership of the project. The nature of collaboration, including roles and responsibilities, should be well described in the application.

Other grants from NNF
If you have an active grant from the Foundation, this may be taken into consideration in the evaluation of your application for a new grant. In general, it is recommended that the main applicant has delivered results on the active grant(s) before submission of a new application to the Foundation. If you apply while having an active grant from the Foundation, you must

describe how the project you propose in this application is different from and/or coherent with the project(s) already funded and briefly describe the progress of the already funded project(s). This information should be included in the **Project Description**.

2 The application and grant management system NORMA

2.1 Creating and submitting an application

The Foundation uses the application and grant management system NORMA: https://norma.novonordiskfonden.dk

If you do not have a user profile in NORMA, you can create one by clicking **Register** on the login page. The main applicant should only have one user profile. Please use your work e-mail address for registration.

The registered user who submits an application will be legally responsible for the truthfulness of the content of the application.

You can find guidance on how to create and submit an application at: NORMA Help Centre.

If you experience technical problems and cannot find a solution in the NORMA Help Centre, please contact NORMA Support: norma-support@novo.dk.

3 Application content

This section provides guidelines on the content required in the sections of the online application form for this call. Detailed information about the different parts of the application is available in NORMA.

3.1 Applicant

The **Applicant** tab relates to information about all those involved in an application, meaning the main applicant or contact person applying on behalf of an organisation/institution.

APPLICANT INFORMATION
CV (4,000 characters, including spaces)
Please provide your brief CV with information on education, employment history, recent research funding, current supervision/training/teaching activities, summary of publication and bibliometric information (total number of peer-reviewed publications, first/corresponding/senior authorships, citation information, h-index), and other relevant information if space allows (max. 4,000 characters, including spaces).

Publications (5,000 characters, including spaces)
Applicants should include a link to an updated profile with a full publication list, e.g., Google Scholar, ORCHID, Web of Science or Scopus. Below that, list the 10 most relevant publications for evaluating your merits. Please include all authors (or number of authors on publications with more than 10 authors) and highlight your own name. Please also provide the 5-year impact factor for the individual journals.

Summary of own research (2,000 characters, including spaces)
Please provide a summary of your research achievements and describe how you expect your research will contribute to solve major challenges within plant-, agricultural- and food science associated with developing sustainable agriculture and food production.

Supplementary information (2,000 characters, including spaces)

This field can be used to provide additional information that is important for the committee´s evaluation of your application, e.g., leave of absences, employment situation, possible considerations regarding your fit with the `investigator´ profile, teaching obligations, other project obligations.

PREVIOUS AND CURRENT GRANTS FROM NNF
If you have previously submitted other applications in the same calendar year, summarize how these applications are related to the current application.

If you have received any grants from NNF as an applicant or a co-applicant within the past five years, you must provide the application number, project title, grant period (in years), grant amount and the percentage share of the grant (100% if there is no co-applicant). Briefly summarize how any of the grants are related to the current application.

3.2   Institution

Please provide information about the institution where the grant will be administered. This institution is where the main applicant will be employed during the grant period, and the institution that will ultimately be responsible for administering and allocating the grant, including budgeting, financial reporting and staff supported by the grant.

It can take up to five working days to register a new administrating institution in NORMA.
The application cannot be submitted before the institution has been registered.

3.3   Proposal

Describe the project using the fields in the **Proposal** tab.

PROJECT TITLE
Please provide a short title for the project (maximum 150 characters, including spaces).

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Please provide a brief stand-alone summary of the project describing its purpose, target group and activities, including the major challenge and knowledge gaps being addressed, overall purpose and expected outcomes (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

(maximum 30,000 characters, including spaces)[4]
The applicant is free to choose any preferred structure for the project description. The following elements should be included:

- Major challenge being addressed and strategic outlook. How does the proposed research help to provide solutions enabling sustainable agriculture and/or food production?
- Critical knowledge gaps and identification of important research questions.
- Specific aims, testable hypotheses, and success criteria.
- Scientific background covering state-of-the art most relevant to the project.
- Experimental plan including methods and technologies to be utilized and/or developed.
- Alternative approaches, risk assessment and contingency plans.
- Discussion of experimental outcomes and potential impact.
- Ambition as ascending research group leader.

Abbreviations should be defined at the first use, and preferably a list of abbreviations should be included in the project description.

ILLUSTRATION UPLOADS
A maximum of four illustrations can be uploaded here.

The following file formats for illustrations are accepted in the system: JPG, JPEG, PNG and BMP. The maximum accepted size for each illustration is 50 MB and 1050*1650 pixels.

LITERATURE REFERENCES
Please provide the reference information for the literature cited in the project description (maximum 8,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

LAY PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Please provide a brief summary for non-experts in lay language. If the application is awarded a grant, the text may be used for publication (maximum 1,000 characters, including spaces, line breaks and special characters).

3.4 Budget

Enter the project grant period, and the budget template will become available.
Only budget information submitted via the **Budget** tab will be considered in the review process. Any additional budget information attached under **Appendices** (or any other tabs) will not be considered.

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[4] One or two simple tables can be embedded within the project description if needed.

3.5 Appendices

All uploads must be in PDF format. NORMA automatically places these uploads at the end of the application. Appendices other than those specified here are not permitted and will not be included in the evaluation. Do not attach any other appendices such as recommendations, support letter from collaborators, offers on equipment, etc.

Only the following **mandatory document** will be considered in the assessment:
- **A hosting letter** signed by the head of the department/institute. The letter must confirm that the host institution will provide the required infrastructure, laboratory, and office facilities, as well as administer the grant. If applicable, please include the general bench fee policy of the institution.