Have an idea for a project that provides a sustainable solution to an environmental, social or economic problem while also engaging students? Thousands of dollars are up for grabs to help such ideas get off the ground.

The Green Fund began accepting applications for annual grants on Nov. 1, and will continue taking them until Jan. 28.

The fund, which is overseen and managed by a committee of 10 University of Arizona undergraduate and graduate students, provides a total of up to $400,000 annually to sustainability projects proposed by members of the campus community. Previously housed in the Office of Sustainability, the Green Fund is now managed by Student Affairs, and receives administrative support from a small team of staff. Associate Dean of Students Chrissy Lieberman serves as director and an administrative adviser.

The Green Fund is funded almost entirely by student fees, and the Agnese Nelms Haury Program in Environment and Social Justice also funds Green Fund grants for projects that provide socially just solutions to environmental problems.

The Green Fund offers two types of grants — mini grants, which provide up to $2,000 for six-month projects, and annual grants, which fund projects that last between one and three years. There's no maximum amount for annual grants.

The application cycle for mini grants occurs earlier in the fall.

"Who better to speak about what we want on campus than the people who are on campus?" said Meck Slagle, a graduate student studying entomology and insect science who co-chairs the Green Fund Committee with Alexis Shannon, an undergraduate in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment.

Because the annual grants fund projects with large budgets and timelines of up to three years, applications are most often filed by faculty and staff who lead the projects with students, Slagle said. Student involvement is one of the primary criteria for funded projects, along with environmental, social and economic sustainability, and long-term impact.

Projects that are awarded annual grants typically receive up to $100,000, Slagle said. Funds are distributed in July, at the beginning of the fiscal year.

The student committee that selects the projects to fund is diverse, and the projects that get funded are wide-ranging in the types of sustainable solutions they provide, Shannon said.
Past projects that received annual grants include the UA Community Garden near the Highland Parking Garage, where students, employees and community members grow their own produce, and Greening the Game, which collects recyclable and compostable material at UA sporting events and teaches fans recycling tips.

For fiscal year 2019, the Green Fund awarded about $66,000 to a project called Beerworms, led by Goggy Davidowitz, a professor and Distinguished Scholar of Entomology. The project aims to create a scalable process for raising mealworms, the larva form of darkling beetles, on spent beer-brewing grains.

The project capitalizes on growing interest and demand for edible insects, which have been identified as an option to fill a predicted worldwide shortage of protein by 2050 as the global population approaches 1 billion, Davidowitz said. Eating insects is common in many countries, but they're usually harvested in the wild, which isn't sustainable, he said. And although there's a burgeoning edible-insect farming industry with roughly 200 startup companies worldwide, Davidowitz said many of them raise their mealworms, crickets and black soldier flies on wheat bran and oats. In other words, people food.

Davidowitz and his team are trying something different by raising their mealworms on spent beer-brewing grains provided by Ten55 Brewing and Sausage House.

"If you're trying to produce food for people, it kind of defeats the purpose if you're using people food to do that," he said.

The Beerworms project lives in a nondescript building off North Campbell Avenue, near the Campus Agricultural Center. There, three undergraduates, a graduate student and Hunter Clark, a research technician, manage the farm of mealworms. The colony now consists of about 1 million mealworms. A small number, Davidowitz said. He hopes to grow the colony to several hundred million, and is now experimenting with ways to make processes more efficient.

An entomologist at the UA since the '90s, Davidowitz' research focus is on ecological and evolutionary physiology. He began raising and experimenting with a variety edible insect species as a side project about a year and a half ago with support from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. That laid the groundwork to build up the lab at the Campus Agricultural Center, and the $66,000 from the Green Fund provides income for the four students working on the project.

The team is nearly ready to begin selling its product, and gave away samples of stir-fried mealworms on chips with salsa at the 2018 Arizona Insect Festival in October.

"Once you roast them, they're kind of like chips. You can't eat just one," Davidowitz said, describing the flavor of mealworms as "nutty."

Davidowitz also has partnered with Tech Launch Arizona to turn the beerworm venture into a business, dubbed HexaFeast, which he hopes will help make the UA and Tucson a premier location for edible-insect research.
"The Green Fund has an important role at the University in that it gives students the opportunity to do hands-on sustainability," Davidowitz said. "It supports oddball thinking, or nonstandard ways of doing things."

Now that the Green Fund is taking applications for fiscal year 2020's annual grants, the committee is open to all ideas, but Slagle hopes to see a more diverse pool of applicants, particularly beyond science disciplines.

"We get a lot from the sciences, but I know that there are sustainability ideas out there in the business realm, or the art realm, the social science realm," she said. "I really would like to see ideas come from them because I know they have them."

For more information about Green Fund grants, or to apply, click here [13].

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