A bill to be entitled An act relating to young farmers and ranchers; creating s. 570.842, F.S.; creating the Florida Young Farmer and Rancher Matching Grant Program within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; specifying the purpose of the grants; requiring the department to select grant recipients based on specified criteria; requiring the department to adopt rules; requiring that applicants meet specified eligibility requirements; requiring the department to give preference to veterans; specifying a range for grant amounts awarded; providing that a recipient may not receive more than one award per grant period under the program; specifying that grant funding is contingent upon specific appropriation from the Legislature; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 570.842, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

570.842 Florida Young Farmer and Rancher Matching Grant Program.—

(1) The Florida Young Farmer and Rancher Matching Grant Program is created within the department to support the startup functions associated with new farming and ranching operations.

(a) Grants administered by the department through this program must be for the purpose of fostering the creation and expansion of agricultural businesses by young farmers and
ranchers in this state.

(b) The department shall select grant recipients based on selection criteria adopted pursuant to subsection (2).

(2) The department shall adopt rules governing the operation of the program, including an application process and selection criteria for grant recipients.

(a) At a minimum, in order to be eligible to receive a grant, an individual must meet all of the following requirements:

1. Be an agricultural producer, be an employee of a farm or ranch, or have been actively involved in Future Farmers of America for at least 1 year.

2. Be at least 18 years of age, but younger than 35 years of age.

3. Have operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 years.

4. Demonstrate, at a minimum, a dollar-for-dollar matching investment for the grant amount requested.

5. Submit, on a form prescribed by the department, a grant application during the application period established by the department. The department may designate only one period each year for accepting applications.

(b) In the application review process, the department shall give a preference to an applicant who is a veteran, as defined in s. 1.01(14).

(3) Each grant award under the program must be between $5,000 and $20,000, with no more than one award being made to an individual grant recipient per grant period.

(4) Annual grant funding for this program is contingent
Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.