

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Commodity Credit Corporation

ACTION: NOTICE

Conservation Innovation Grants Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Announcement for Program Funding

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.912

SUMMARY: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing availability of Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Applications are accepted from all 50 States, Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2010 will be approximately \$25 million. Applications are requested from eligible governmental or non-governmental organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of grant awards for projects between 1 and 3 years in duration.

Funds will be awarded through a two-phase nationwide competitive grants process which will include a pre-proposal for all applications, and a full application package only for competitively selected pre-proposal applicants, pursuant to notification by NRCS. Both phases are described in this announcement, but only pre-proposals are being solicited at this time.

This notice identifies the objectives for CIG projects, the eligibility criteria for projects, and provides the instructions needed to apply to CIG.

Each pre-proposal will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant. NRCS will request a full application package only from those applicants selected in the pre-proposal process.

DATES: Pre-proposals must be received at the NRCS National Headquarters by 4 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST), on **April 26, 2010**.

Full Applications: Project pre-proposals selected for funding consideration by NRCS will be notified by May 10, 2010, and if requested, a full application must be submitted to the NRCS National Headquarters by 4 p.m. EST, on **June 4, 2010**.

ADDRESSES: The address for hand-delivered, express mail, or overnight courier service for pre-proposals and applications is: Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants Program, Room 5233 South Building; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, D.C. 20250. The contact phone number for hand-delivered pre-proposals and applications (needed to enter the USDA South Building) is: (202) 720-2335.

Pre-proposals and applications sent via the United States Postal Service must be sent to the following address: Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants Program, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013-2890.

To submit your application electronically, visit [Grants.gov-Apply for Grants](https://www.grants.gov) and follow the instructions.

For more information contact:

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) was authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8] under section 1240H of the Food Security Act of 1985, as added by section 2509 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP and CIG to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). EQIP is funded and administered by NRCS under the authorities of the CCC.

B. Overview

The purpose of CIG is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies, while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) into NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides, and references or to the private sector. CIG does not fund research projects. Projects intended to formulate hypothesis do not qualify. CIG is to apply proven technology which has been shown to work previously. It is a vehicle to stimulate the development and adoption of conservation approaches or technologies that have been studied sufficiently to indicate a likelihood of success, and to be candidates for eventual technology transfer or institutionalization. CIG promotes sharing of skills, knowledge, technologies, and facilities among communities, governments, and other institutions to ensure that scientific and technological developments are accessible to a wider range of users. CIG funds projects targeting innovative on-the-ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.

A two phase evaluation process will be utilized for proposals submitted under this notice. The first phase requires the applicant to submit a pre-proposal. Pre-proposals will be evaluated by NRCS staff under the sub-category identified by the applicant (see section I.D). Each pre-proposal will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant.

NRCS will accept pre-proposals for single or multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years, submitted to NRCS from eligible entities including federally recognized Indian tribes, State and local units of government, and non-governmental organizations and individuals. Pre-proposals are accepted from all 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

NRCS will request a full application package only from those applicants selected in the pre-proposal process. Complete applications received by applicable deadlines will be evaluated by a technical peer review panel based on the Criteria for Application Evaluation identified in the application instructions in section VI.B.

Applications with technically-based recommendations from the peer review groups will be forwarded to the Grants Review Board. The Grants Review Board will make recommendations for project approval to the Chief who will make the final selections.

C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

For the purposes of CIG, the proposed innovative project or activity must encompass the development, field testing, evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of:

- Conservation adoption approaches or incentive systems, including market-based systems;
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches; and
- Environmental soundness with goals of environmental protection and natural resource enhancement.

To be given priority consideration, the innovative project or activity:

- Makes use of a proven technology or a technology that has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success;
- Demonstrates and verifies environmental (soil, water, air, plants, energy use, and animal) effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of conservation technology in the field;
- Adapts conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption;
- Introduces conservation systems, approaches, and procedures from another geographic area or agricultural sector; and
- Adapts conservation technology, management, or incentive systems to improve performance.

D. National Component

For FY 2010, CIG will offer the following funding categories: National, Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and Mississippi River Basin. These funding categories may include applications that focus on market-based approaches to conservation, including the advancement of emerging markets for ecosystem services and the development of market-based tools. Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes or eligible entities servicing Beginning, Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes are encouraged to submit application(s) in any of the categories. Pre-proposals must identify the most appropriate sub-category for the proposal.

1. National Category

Pre-proposals must demonstrate the use of innovative technologies or approaches, or both, to address the sub-categories listed below.

Only pre-proposals addressing the following sub-categories will be considered:

Ecosystems Markets

The objective of this crosscutting subcategory is to focus on projects that advance the development of markets for ecosystem services and demonstrate their potential to provide new conservation incentives and improvements.

- Development of regional partnerships, market infrastructure (such as ecosystem market registries), and integrated tools that facilitate the development of ecosystem markets;

- Design and demonstration of active ecosystem markets that result in real water quality and biodiversity trades;
- Development of models and monitoring systems to analyze economic and environmental effects of ecosystem markets;
- Design and implementation of multi-credit ecosystem service trades or demonstration of stacking/bundling ecosystem services;
- Development and testing of verification and certification protocols for ensuring environmental benefits from ecosystem market transactions;
- Design and use of conservation easements that incorporate multiple ecosystem markets; and
- Development and sophistication of the “Farm of the Future” concept which incorporates ecosystem benefits options into a landowner’s portfolio as effective new revenue streams.

Adapting Management for Improved Conservation Effects

- Use the field-level Agriculture Policy Extender (APEX) model to generate site-based benefits of conservation, including quantifiable outcome-based metrics that fits within the NRCS field office planning structure;
- Development of innovative technologies to reduce transformation and transport of mercuric compounds (methyl mercury), nitrogen, and other potential contaminants from natural and constructed wetlands; and
- Cloud based computational analysis and modeling to link resource concerns, conservation systems/practices, and quantifiable outcome-based metrics.

Preservation and Enhancement of Wildlife Habitat

- Develop planning and decision aids to assess and maximize wildlife habitat value on land used to grow bio-fuel crops, including metrics that quantify units of potential habitat provided; and
- Examine managed grazing as a habitat management tool, including metrics that quantify units of potential habitat provided.

Energy

The objective of this sub-category is to implement new technologies and approaches to conserve energy and produce renewal energy while sustaining agricultural productivity.

- Innovative tools to estimate the energy and fossil fuel implications of cropland agronomic practices. Such tools need to be based on sound science and data, yet be useable by farmers and conservationists. Proposals may be based either on extending and validating the NRCS Cropland Energy Estimator prototype or developing a new tool;
- Life cycle analyses for current conservation practices to assess the energy and fossil fuel implications associated with the use of the practice including analyzing the fossil fuel embedded in materials and agrochemicals;
- Innovative implementation systems to achieve greater use of energy audits including energy audits that address cropland in addition to buildings and equipment;
- Innovative on-farm energy conservation technologies;
- Innovative on-farm applications of renewable energy production technologies to displace fossil fuel energy;
- Sustainable biomass production, harvest, and handling technologies; and

- Demonstrate reduced reactive nitrogen and methane emissions from animal agriculture with the additional benefits of producing energy or other marketable by-products.

Productivity and Environmental Health of Pastureland

- Develop improved assessment tools for comparing “Pastureland Condition Scores” to a reference condition for particular soil and climatic conditions; and
- Implement the use of new or novel pasture management systems that can benefit water or air quality, greenhouse gas (GHGs), or pathogen loading and runoff, and metrics to quantify measurable units of improvement gained through the use of these systems.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

The objective of this sub-category is to solicit proposals from individuals and organizations to conduct applied research or demonstrate research results for agriculture to address climate change adaptation and mitigation. Proposals should emphasize demonstrations of the capabilities of agricultural conservation systems to reduce GHG emissions and increase soil and vegetation carbon sequestration, and to maintain high levels of food and fiber production in the face of changing temperature and precipitation regimes.

Proposals for funding should focus on applying established basic research results to field scale situations.

- Carbon sequestration practices in a wide variety of cropping systems and assessment of how these practices impact other ecosystem services, such as water quality and biodiversity, as well as farm profitability;
- Demonstration of effective nutrient management practices to control nitrous oxide emissions;
- New and emerging nitrogen fertilizer forms utilized to reduce nitrous oxide emissions from soils;
- Utilization of organic nitrogen sources to reduce nitrous oxide emissions;
- Long-term carbon balance of prescribed burning on range and pasture land;
- Emerging soil and plant management systems to maintain productivity with a changing climate;
- Management of methane emissions through improved manure storage and utilization;
- Development of conservation planning approaches that integrate agronomic knowledge with climate and weather information in order to assist farmers with adapting to changing climate patterns;
- Development of tools to facilitate efficient processing of soil moisture sensor data;
- Development and testing new user-friendly technology to quickly measure CO₂ and N₂O gases in soils;
- Development and testing new tools for measuring soil carbon where specialty crops are grown and on organic farms; and
- Development of efficient technologies for recycling nitrogen and/or bio-energy creating biochar soil amendments in order to enhance soil quality and carbon sequestration and/or bio-energy production. Demonstrate systems that are carbon net negative.

Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture

- Examine methods and life cycle analysis for encouraging niche agricultural markets. These markets would focus on providing value-added agricultural products that are produced in an environmentally sustainable way.

Soil Quality

- Compare new technologies and methods (carbon fractions, enzymes, and other) for early prediction of soil quality degradation;
- Demonstrate conservation technologies to reduce soil erosion and minimize soil emissions of carbon in organic soils;
- Demonstrate technologies to restore and enhance the function and ecosystem services of degraded soils;
- Demonstrate conservation technologies that help maintain soil quality on lands formerly enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that have been converted to crop production;
- Develop and implement a decision support system to aid land management decisions to enhance soil quality and other related ecosystem services;
- Evaluate and demonstrate technologies to restore and enhance ecosystem services of subaqueous soils;
- Application of continuous no-till crop production to enhance soil resources and other ecosystem services while maintaining crop productivity; and
- Cover crop species and management strategies for areas with less than 20 inches of rainfall.

Priority Landscapes

- Adapt technologies (LiDAR, remote sensing, electromagnetic induction (EMI), and simulation models) for assessment of soil salinity and prediction of soils and landscape components subject to salinization;
- Develop and demonstrate innovative technologies to prevent, alleviate, and adapt to salinity in Great Plains landscapes (non-irrigated cropland management, irrigation water management, and crop species);
- Develop and evaluate technologies to measure emissions of nitrous oxide emissions from sensitive soils and landscapes;
- Implement new and innovative technologies to restore and enhance at risk forest ecosystems, e.g., longleaf pine; and
- Implement conservation practices and measure effects on ecosystem services at watershed landscape scales.

Nutrient Management

- Feed management, or adoption of new or novel feedstuffs or additives, for manure nutrient reduction to reduce water and air quality problems, GHGs, or pathogen loading and runoff;
- Demonstrate active methods which improve on the capture of nitrogen in manure management systems and provide the opportunity to recycle the manure nitrogen in lieu of synthetic fertilizers;
- Demonstrate the use of water filtration or other medium as a method of reducing chemical compounds and odors from poultry operations and other livestock facilities;

- Design and test “farmer-friendly” recordkeeping software for complex systems, including quantification of nutrients applied by crop and field, manure form, dates, irrigation data, and runoff water quality; and
- Development of new strategies to fully implement existing nutrient management conservation.

Air Quality and Atmospheric Resource

- Evaluation, demonstration, and documentation of air quality benefits/impacts of existing NRCS practice standards;
- On-farm demonstration and development of new practice standards for new technologies to address agricultural air emissions;
- Development and documentation of net GHG benefits and calculation methodologies for existing NRCS practice standards;
- Demonstrate innovative approaches to decrease atmospheric concentrations of GHG by increasing carbon sequestration (e.g. increasing soil carbon);
- Implement the use of improved microorganisms for modification of GHG production (increase or decrease depending on desired result) and document the method and results;
- Implement the use of new or novel technologies for removal of odors, dust, hair, feathers, and particulate from fan exhaust from confined animal operations, and document the results;
- Identification, evaluation, demonstration, and quantification of air quality improvement techniques, practices, and activities compatible with agriculture production and the management and handling of agriculture waste and by-products;
- Implement the use of water filtration or other medium as a method of reducing chemical compounds and odors from poultry operations or other livestock facilities, and document the method and results; and
- Demonstrate reduced reactive nitrogen emissions from monoculture agriculture.

Program Outreach and Conservation Technology Transfer to Targeted Groups

- Transfer of demonstrated conservation technologies and practices through a producer handbook consistent with the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) and adapted to specific producer groups (i.e., organic farming, specialty crops, livestock, poultry, row crops, small grains, etc.);
- Improved or innovative conservation practices and systems for rice production that address the habitat needs of waterfowl, including metrics that assess potential habitat provided;
- Technology transfer to, but not limited to, Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Indian tribes, Land Grant Colleges and Universities, or Community-Based Organizations;
- Demonstration of new or novel technology that can easily and inexpensively be adopted by small-scale producers in order to address concerns or problems of the farmers, producers, or landowners;
- Demonstration of new or novel technologies that lead to significant management efficiencies in farm resource management from a systems perspective, including technologies that lead to demonstrated benefits to multiple ecosystem services;
- Examine resource conditions and land capabilities by social groups of the traditionally underserved groups and communities;

- Emphasis on program outreach to underserved producers or landowners; and
- Opportunities to work with universities and other institutions to develop technical training for Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes or entities servicing Beginning, Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers and Indian tribes.

Sustainable and Organic Agriculture

The objective of this sub-category is to focus on natural resource concerns related to sustainable and organic agriculture including conservation technology specific to organic production systems, field data or tools for conservation planning, and evaluation of NRCS conservation practice standards for integration of sustainable and organic agricultural productions systems.

Technology Needs

- Carbon Sequestration – how much carbon can be sequestered using various organic rotations and tillage systems typical for organic operations?
- Rotations for pest control – need technology on which crops help to suppress specific pests and the sequencing of the crops to minimize pest (weeds, insects, diseases);
- Erosion Control – need to evaluate the predicted wind and water erosion for organic crop rotations and tillage systems and slopes greater than 1-2 percent slopes;
- Nutrient Cycling – need technology to determine the proper crops and the sequence of the crops to maximize the nutrient cycling of crop nutrients;
- Organic approved nutrient (timing, rates, sources, and methods) – determine the proper source, rate, timing, and method(s) of application for organically approved nutrient amendments;
- Harvesting time and techniques for commodities quality and pest control – determine harvesting times and techniques that may minimize pest damage for the planned commodity;
- Ecological Site Description (range and forest grazing livestock production) – describe the ecological site description based on the existing condition and the expected site condition with organic management;
- Forage Suitability Group Description (pasture and hayland) – assess the suitability of forages for a given soil/climate under organic management conditions;
- Demonstration of Beneficial Insect Habitat for Pest Control – need technology to determine the amount (acres) of habitat required to provide adequate pest control, matching plant species to attract desirable beneficial insect species, and managing habitat to provide pest control during the cropping season; and
- Demonstration of Continuous Cover Crops – need technology on how cover crops can be used on a continuous basis throughout the growing season to provide erosion control, crop nutrients, and pest control for the next crop in rotation and other ecosystem services.

Field Data for Conservation Planning

- Identify and explain the various organically approved soil and crop amendments to address nutrients and pest management for organic operations; and

- Develop a guidance document for incorporating beneficial insect and pollinator habitat into the farm landscape to implement biological pest management strategies, including outcome metrics that describe expected habitat benefits.

Conservation Planning Needs

- Develop guidance document on developing NRCS conservation plans to help organic producers meet the Organic System Plan conservation components for crop and livestock production;
- Analyze requirements to develop a Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition Plan to identify obstacles and limitation that discourage its use by farmers and provide recommendation to overcome obstacles and limitations;
- Analyze requirements to become a Technical Service Provider (TSP) in order to write a Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition identifying obstacles and limitation that discourage individual from seeking TSP certification and provide recommendation to overcome obstacles and limitations;
- Expand the investigation of how conservation practices can be scaled to increase the adoption by small farms; and
- Undertake an assessment of applicable conservation practices on organic production.

Conservation practice standard modification

- Evaluate the conservation practices that deal with establishing permanent vegetation (herbaceous and forest) to address approved seed and planting stock sources for organic operations;
- Evaluate conservation practices to ensure materials are addressed that will meet the national organic program guidelines; and
- Review NRCS conservation practice standards and activities to, (a) identify those current practices and activities that are most critical to sustainable and organic production systems, along with obstacles or limitations within the standard or activity guidance that prohibit or discourage use and provide recommendations to overcome these issues, and (b) proposed practices or activities critical to sustainable and organic system conservation not currently available.

Specialty Crops

The objective of this sub-category is to focus on natural resource concerns related to specialty crops, including conservation technology specific to specialty production systems, field data or tools for conservation planning, and evaluation of NRCS conservation practice standards for integration into specialty crops production systems.

Technology Needs

- Seasonal High Tunnels – demonstrate conservation systems for specialty crops using seasonal tunnels involving crop rotations, cover crops, conservation tillage, nutrient management, pest management, and irrigation systems;
- Carbon Sequestration – how much carbon can be sequestered using specialty crop rotations and tillage systems typical for specialty crop operations?
- Develop and test new tools for measuring soil carbon where specialty crops are grown and on organic farms;
- Rotations for pest control – need technology on which crops help to suppress specific pests and the sequencing of the crops to minimize pests (weeds, insects, diseases) in specialty crop systems;

- Erosion Control – demonstrate conservation systems to include crop rotations, cover crops, organic mulches, conservation tillage, etc. in lieu of plastic culture;
- Nutrient Cycling – need technology to determine the proper crops and the sequence of the crops to maximize the nutrient cycling in specialty crop production systems;
- Harvesting time and techniques for commodities quality and pest control – determine harvesting times and techniques that may minimize pest damage for the planned commodity;
- Demonstration of Beneficial Insect Habitat for Pest Control – need technology to determine the amount (acres) of habitat required to provide adequate pest control, matching plant species to attract desirable beneficial insect species, and managing habitat to provide pest during the cropping season;
- Demonstration of Cover Crops – need technology on how cover crops can be used for the production of specialty crops to include orchards and vineyards to provide erosion control, recycle crop nutrients, improve soil quality, pest control for the next crop in rotation, and other ecosystem services; and
- Develop a guidance document and evaluate criteria to determine when an Integrated Pest Management Plan has been developed and implemented that meets NRCS Pest Management Standard 595.

Field Data for Conservation Planning

- Develop a guidance document for incorporating beneficial insect and pollinator habitat into the farm landscape to implement biological pest management strategies.

Conservation Planning Needs

- Identify conservation needs to support specialty crop and provide recommendations to address conservation needs.

Conservation practice standard modification

- Identify conservation practices that are most critical to specialty crop production systems and develop a guidance document to implement the practices.

Sage-Grouse

The objective of this sub-category is to implement new technologies and approaches to maintain, restore, or enhance at-risk species in watersheds with predominantly agricultural land uses while sustaining productivity.

Technology Needs

- Demonstrate effectiveness, cost, and longevity of various types of fence markers to reduce or prevent grouse mortality due to fence collisions;
- Demonstrate cost, effectiveness, and durability of alternatives or modifications to wood fence corner posts that provide raptor perches;
- Demonstrate technologies to control the spatial positioning and social groupings of cattle without fences; and
- Develop techniques and methods to accelerate big sagebrush establishment and growth on sagebrush ecological sites converted to introduced grasses.

Field Data

- Determine grouse habitat needs at the landscape level for each population;
- Determine grouse mortality impacts from various fence types;

- Determine safe distances from grouse seasonal habitat types to fences; and
- Identify Ecological Sites associated with habitat needs at the landscape level.

Standard Modifications

- Develop and field test benefits to grouse and impact on livestock production from potential modifications to Practice Standards:
 - Fence – fence type, fence markers, and distance from seasonal habitats; and
 - Brush Management – develop treatment scenarios based on landscape parameters which limit treatment widths, lengths, and shape for the long-term maintenance of sagebrush and shinnery oak habitats and seasonal use patterns.

Planning Needs

- Develop Sagebrush and Shinnery Oak Management Guidelines to assist planning Brush Management in grouse habitat related to Ecological Sites;
- Develop guidelines for grouse friendly fences;
- Develop guidelines for grouse friendly water developments;
- Provide technology transfer to livestock producer groups and NRCS field office staff;
- Develop Geographic Information System planning and decision aids that assess sage-grouse habitats in relation to landscape stressors such as renewable energy development;
- Develop planning and decision aids to assess the value of habitat development projects by estimating sage-grouse population responses to conservation practices; and
- Develop metrics of measurable habitat improvement that could potentially be traded under a species-banking framework.

Pollinator Habitat

The objective of this sub-category is to offer the opportunity for projects to help address present technology, data, management, planning, and implementation needs in regard to the enhancement of pollinator habitat.

Technology Needs

- Document the effectiveness and economy of alternate pest control methods in agricultural crops (e.g., ground application versus aerial application of pesticides, provision of habitat for “beneficial” insects) to protect pollinators and their habitats;
- Develop guidelines and management strategies for establishing and maintaining the foraging and nesting needs for specific pollinators and other beneficial insects;
- Develop guidelines and management strategies for the provision of quality foraging and “resting” areas for the European honey bee during or after their being transported to provide pollination services; and
- Estimate and document the effects upon pollinator populations and health due to the conversion to biofuel feedstock or agricultural production of lands presently enrolled in CRP or other conservation easement programs.

Field Data for Conservation Planning

- Establish demonstration plantings of NRCS-recommended pollinator habitat seed/plant mixes to determine if these mixes are providing the expected pollinator habitat while also performing the intended conservation function;

- Document regional time of bloom of native plants and non-invasive, non-native plants in addition to monitoring the specific pollinators foraging upon these plants;
- Document the benefits to other wildlife species of improving pollinator habitat;
- Demonstrate effective methods of establishing and maintaining the most beneficial pollinator-friendly plant materials for specific regions of the Nation; and
- Develop regional, crop-specific guidance specifying the vegetative species, landforms, and necessary acreage to support appropriate populations of managed and wild pollinators per unit area (e.g. acres) of pollinated crops (i.e., describe the components of the landscape).

Conservation Practice Standards Modifications

- Evaluate the following NRCS conservation practice standards using a large diversity of flowering plants in order to document if the revised practice standards do benefit pollinators while also meeting the main purpose of the conservation practice:
 - 332-Contour Buffer Strips
 - 342-Critical Area Planting
 - 393-Filter Strip
 - 412 – Grassed Waterways
 - 528-Prescribed Grazing
 - 580 – Streambank and Shoreline Protection

Conservation Planning Needs

- Develop region-specific “recipes” of pollinator-friendly plant species to fulfill specific pollinator needs in both natural and agricultural situations;
- Develop strategies to integrate pollinator habitat management into the agricultural working lands matrix to promote holistic, ecosystem-based conservation plans that support the full suite of ecosystem services;
- Develop region-specific and crop/orchard-specific plans that address the nesting and foraging needs of crop/orchard-specific pollinators; and
- Develop region-specific and crop/orchard-specific metrics that define and establish measurable units of pollinator habitat that can be used to develop pollinator trading/banking programs.

2. Chesapeake Bay Watershed Category

Pre-proposals must demonstrate the use of innovative technologies or approaches, or both, to address the sub-categories specific to and within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Chesapeake Bay's watershed covers 64,299 square miles in the District of Columbia and parts of six States: New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

CIG is accepting pre-proposals for projects that tackle specific deep-rooted agricultural problems that contribute significantly to degraded Chesapeake Bay water quality (e.g., manure/poultry litter nutrient excesses, legacy sediment, and the cumulative effect of small dairies). Solutions to these problems should be highly transferrable to other regions of the watershed, and results should be well-documented and communicated. Projects that address priority agricultural challenges could strive to reduce barriers to adoption of priority conservation practices and implement new tools or strategies to address the pollution source.

Only pre-proposals addressing the following sub-categories will be considered:

Natural Resources Management

- Projects that successfully maximize water quality benefits of livestock exclusion and strive to achieve 100 percent exclusion in one or more priority watersheds. Projects that implement exclusion practices that maximize water quality benefits and that address whole-farm nutrient balance issues are encouraged;
- Projects that demonstrate how to effectively reach small dairies that are not implementing even the most basic conservation practices. Projects that target technical assistance and outreach to small dairies in priority watersheds to implement whole farm strategies for achieving specific nutrient/sediment reduction targets are encouraged;
- Projects that tackle phosphorus-saturation in soils on poultry and dairy operations including finding ways to encourage farmers not to land apply manure on P-saturated soils, developing alternative uses of manure, and developing P-remediation approaches to draw-down phosphorus in soils;
- Projects that promote widespread use of nutrient-use efficiency tools that help improve the nutrient uptake by crops and reduce nutrient losses to the environment;
- Projects that show how to develop and employ outreach and marketing tools for farmers that demonstrate the on-farm economic benefits of conservation practices that bolster ecosystem services. Projects that apply these marketing tools to producers and deliver significant increases in nutrient/sediment-reducing conservation activities are encouraged;
- Projects that significantly reduce ammonia emissions from animal operations;
- Projects that promote widespread use of manure injection or other approaches to reduce phosphorus losses on no-till systems;
- Projects that demonstrate innovative Clean Water Act permitting for agricultural sources, and successfully deliver compliance assistance;
- Innovative processes for development of comprehensive nutrient management plans for small to medium animal feeding operations; and
- On-farm utilization of manure from fields with high phosphorus to fields with lower phosphorus, as provided in comprehensive nutrient management plans.

Program Outreach

- Nutrient management, integrated pest management, wetlands restoration for improved water quality, comprehensive nutrient management plans, confined animal feeding operations, animal feeding operations, and targeted traditionally underserved communities using on farm small scale demonstrations;
- Innovative procedures to implement core conservation practices with farmers or producers with historically low participation in the Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs; and
- Projects that show how to develop and implement program outreach marketing tools for farmers or producers that demonstrate the on-farm economic and environmental benefits of conservation practices. Projects that apply these marketing tools to producers and deliver significant increases in nutrient/sediment-reducing conservation activities are encouraged.

3. Mississippi River Basin

Pre-proposals must demonstrate the use of innovative technologies or approaches, or both, to address the sub-categories, specific to and within the Mississippi River Basin and address the

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative ([MRBI](#)) objectives to manage and optimize nutrient management, reduce downstream nutrient loads, maintain agricultural productivity, and enhance wildlife and other ecosystem services.

Primary Resource Concern: Water Quality (Nutrients - Nitrogen and Phosphorus)

Priority Efforts: Water Management, Vegetative Practices, and Nutrient Management

Area(s) of Consideration: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin within the Mississippi River Basin

Only pre-proposals addressing the following sub-categories will be considered:

Water Management

- Demonstrate treatment effectiveness and efficiency (cost per pound of reduction) of nitrogen contaminants in runoff or drainage water using innovative practices including: (1) bioreactors, (2) constructed wetlands, (3) drainage water management, and (4) saturated flow through tree/shrub buffers/riparian areas;
- Demonstrate innovative drainage water management for surface or sub-surface drainage systems improving acceptance and adoption by producers, documenting benefits to producers, increasing lands that drainage water management is suitable for, and incorporating drainage water management with other conservation practices for an effective system of nutrient and water management;
- Demonstrate effects of implementing drainage water management at watershed scale including management techniques to reduce annual and spring nitrate loads (cost per pound of reduction) to downstream receiving waters and assess effects on phosphorus;
- Demonstrate and evaluate bioreactors (size and types) to support development of conservation practice standards to address nitrogen removal in drainage tile lines; and
- Demonstrate innovative field scale methods to monitor drainage water management system performance, including nitrate-nitrogen concentrations and flow rates, with an emphasis on simple and cost effective tests and measurements within the capability of producers.

Vegetative Practices

- Demonstrate and document nutrient reductions (cost per pound) with the use of constructed, created, enhanced, or restored wetlands for the primary purpose of reducing nutrient loads while enhancing wildlife and other ecosystem services;
- Evaluate variable width vegetated filters or targeted vegetative filters for areas where concentrated flow leaves a field. Demonstrate the use of harvestable vegetated filters to remove nutrients collected and utilized by vegetation;
- Demonstrate new alternatives for dedicated perennial crops which may be used for energy production or other purposes, targeting conversion from marginal pasture or croplands;
- Demonstrate innovative cover crop establishment and management techniques, including nutrient and manure management;
- Demonstrate an optimization approach to incorporate permanent vegetative practices to address critical nutrient management problems that fit within producer's productivity objectives and decisions at the field level;

- Demonstrate the efficacy of reconnecting subsurface drainage to interflow through herbaceous and riparian buffers, for enhanced denitrification of shallow ground water; and
- Demonstrate how landscape-scale placement of perennial vegetation can bolster nutrient management and other ecosystem services.

Nutrient Management

- Utilize innovative approaches to improve the development, implementation, and documentation of nutrient management plans at critical sites including producer costs and benefits;
- Demonstrate a program that uses innovative types of incentives to pay producers to utilize higher levels of nutrient management and documents resulting changes in nutrient losses;
- Demonstrate new and innovative advances in precision farming technologies related to low disturbance fertilizer injection and document the effects on nutrient losses and producer risk; and
- Develop and implement a program to determine the correlation of cornstalk nitrate testing to nitrate loss reduction on farms.

Manure Management

- Develop and demonstrate innovative alternative systems for managing and handling liquid manure on farms with greater than 300 cows to reduce nutrient losses;
- Demonstrate innovative techniques for keeping liquid manure applied via irrigation, surface application, or injection from entering subsurface drainage systems through macro pores;
- Demonstrate new alternatives to traditional manure application to frozen ground and during periods of high soil moisture in order to effectively manage applications during the timeframe where the overwhelming amount of annual runoff occurs in the Upper Mississippi River Basin;
- Demonstrate improved farming systems that increase the time period available for land application of manure in order to reduce nutrient runoff and leaching; and
- Demonstrate active methods for improving on the capture of nitrogen in manure management systems while providing the opportunity for recycling the manure nitrogen in lieu of applying synthetic fertilizers.

Adaptive Management

- Utilize innovative approaches to increase adoption rate of emerging nutrient management and load reduction practices such as cover crops, drainage water management, and bioreactors;
- Demonstrate innovative and efficient use of appropriate risk assessment technology tools (N-Index, P-Index, RUSLE2, APEX (NTT), SWAT, NLEAP, etc.) to help producers apply conservation practices where most needed;
- Utilize innovative, participatory approaches to achieve MRBI objectives on the HUC 12 scale to promote and increase adoption of adaptive nutrient management; and
- Develop simple, inexpensive, and reliable science-based tools or models to evaluate the effects of MRBI initiated systems and practices for managing nutrients at field and watershed scales and reporting outcomes.

Program Outreach

- Create a MRBI demonstration and program outreach site that includes a combination of avoiding, controlling, and trapping practices to manage nutrients and reduce nutrient loads. Establish on-farm water quality demonstrations, innovative pilot projects, and conduct producer outreach efforts with underserved communities to improve producer adoption of conservation practices/resource management systems and approaches to manage nutrients and reduce nutrient loadings while maintaining agricultural productivity. Conduct informational and educational efforts to help prepare traditionally underserved communities, associated partners, and others to respond to MRBI Request for Proposals;
- Develop and demonstrate use of, and provide needed support for, an effective communication network within MRBI for sharing successes, failures, innovative approaches, and monitoring efforts. Improve ability of NRCS and partners to adaptively manage MRBI to better manage/optimize nutrients, maintain agricultural productivity, and enhance wildlife;
- Demonstrate cooperative efforts to make high cost technology available to Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, Indian tribes, Land Grant Colleges and Universities, and others needed for managing nutrients in MRBI watersheds that can be replicated and self-sustaining; and
- Identify barriers on the adoption and implementation of core nutrient reduction practices (avoiding, controlling, and trapping) and demonstrate solutions and approaches to the barriers. Demonstrate methods to increase adoption of nutrient reduction practices with traditionally low or non participating producers in high risk areas.

II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

A. National Component

NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2010 will be approximately \$25 million.

Funds will be awarded through a nationwide competitive grants process. The maximum award amount for any project will not exceed \$1 million in FY 2010. CIG will fund single- and multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years.

B. State Component

For FY 2010, a State Component of CIG may be available at the State level as determined by each State Conservationist or Director. Funding availability and application submission information for State competitions will be announced through www.grants.gov and on the NRCS State Web site separately from this notice. State Conservationists and Directors will determine the funding level for State competitions, with individual grants not to exceed \$75,000.

The intent of the State Component is to provide flexibility to State Conservationists and Directors of the Caribbean and Pacific Islands area to target CIG funds to individual producers and smaller organizations that may possess promising innovations, but may not compete well on the larger scale of the national grants competition.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

CIG applicants must be a federally recognized Indian tribe, State or local unit of government, non-governmental organization, or individual.

A. Matching Funds

Selected applicants may receive CIG grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. The recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and in-kind contributions. Only 25 percent of the required match can be contributed as in-kind. In-kind costs of equipment or project personnel cannot exceed 50 percent of the applicant's match (except in the case of projects carried out by either a Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities). The remainder of the match must be provided in cash.

Matching funds must be available at time of application. Additional information about matching funds can be found at the following link: [OMB Circular A-110](#).

B. Beginning or Limited Farmers or Ranchers or Indian Tribes

For the FY 2010 grant award process, up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG may be set-aside for applications from Beginning Farmer or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, or Indian tribes or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. An exception regarding matching funds is made for projects funded out of the set-aside. Up to three-fourths of the required matching funds for such projects (up to 37.5 percent of the total project cost) may derive from in-kind contributions. This exception is intended to help Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes meet the statutory requirements for receiving a CIG.

To compete for these set-aside funds, the applicant must make a declaration in the application as described in Part V.4 in this notice. Applications that are unsuccessful in the set-aside competition will be placed automatically in the general application pool for consideration. Funds not used in the set-aside pool will revert back into the general funding pool.

Beginning Farmer or Rancher - a person or legal entity who:

- Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of an entity who will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch;
- In the case of a contract with an individual, individually, or with the immediate family, material and substantial participation requires that the individual provide substantial day-to-day labor and management of the farm or ranch consistent with the practices in the county or State where the farm is located; and
- In the case of a contract with an entity or joint operation, all members must materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch. Material and substantial participation requires that each of the members provide some amount of the management or labor and management necessary for day-to-day activities, such that if each of the members did not provide these inputs, operation of the farm or ranch would be seriously impaired.

Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher -

- A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$155,200 in each of the previous 2 years (adjusted for inflation using Prices Paid by Farmer Index as compiled by National Agricultural Statistical Service); and
- Has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous 2 years (to be determined annually using Department of Commerce data).

Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher - a farmer or rancher who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as a member of a group without regards to their individual qualities. Those groups include African Americans, American Indians or Alaska natives, Hispanics, Asians, Asians, and native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders.

C. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments

Section 1240G of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7, imposes a \$300,000 limitation for all cost-share or incentive payments disbursed to individuals or entities under an EQIP contract between fiscal years 2008 and 2012. The limitation applies to CIG in the following manner:

- CIG funds are awarded through grant agreements. These grant agreements are not EQIP contracts; thus, CIG awards in and of themselves are not limited by the payment limitation.
- Direct or indirect payments made to an individual or entity using funds from a CIG award to carry out structural, vegetative, or management practices count toward each individual's or entity's EQIP payment limitation. Through project progress reports, CIG grantees are responsible for certifying that producers involved in CIG projects do not exceed the payment limitation. Further, all direct and indirect payments made to producers using CIG funds must be reported to the NRCS CIG program manager in the semi-annual report. Direct or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice for which the producer has already received funds, or is contracted to receive funds through any of the USDA programs (EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Security Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, etc.) since this would be considered a duplicate payment.

D. Project Eligibility

To be eligible for CIG, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements as set forth in [16 USC 3839aa-1](#). Further, all agricultural producers receiving direct or indirect payments through participation in a CIG project must also meet the EQIP eligibility requirements. Additional information regarding EQIP eligibility requirements can be found at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/>. Participating producers are not required to have an EQIP contract.

A person or legal entity will not be eligible to receive any benefit during a crop, fiscal, or program year, as appropriate, if the average adjusted gross non-farm income of the person or legal entity exceeds \$1,000,000, unless not less than 66.66 percent of the average adjusted gross income of the person or legal entity is average adjusted gross farm income.

A person who is determined ineligible for USDA program benefits under the Highly Erodible Land Compliance and Wetland Compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985 will not be eligible to receive direct or indirect payments through CIG.

Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in a project's geographic area through EQIP are ineligible for CIG funding except where the use of those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation. The burden falls on the applicant to sufficiently describe the innovative features of the proposed technology or approach (applicants should reference the appropriate State's EQIP Eligible Practices List by contacting the State office).

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. NRCS will designate a Program Contact, Administrative Contact, and Technical Contact to provide oversight for each project receiving an award.

IV. PRE-PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

A. PRE-PROPOSAL

1. How to Obtain Pre-proposals Materials

The announcement for CIG funding opportunity can be found on the following Web site: www.grants.gov and <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>. Pre-proposals are required.

2. Pre-proposal Content and Format

Pre-proposals must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for the full application phase. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. If submitting pre-proposals for more than one project, submit a separate document for each project.

All non-form based submissions should be prepared in a font no smaller than 12-point, single-spaced, single-sided, with one-inch margins. Material exceeding stated page limits will not be considered.

- a. Pre-proposal Cover Sheet: Applicants must use Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance as the cover sheet for each project application. Standard Form 424 can be downloaded from [Grants.gov-Forms](http://www.grants.gov/Forms).
- b. Project Brief Description: Applicants must submit a brief description including the information below (limited to 3 pages in length). An optional template titled Project Summary Sheet is available on the NRCS CIG Web site at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.
 1. Project Title
 2. Applicant determined CIG funding category (refer to page 4)
 3. Applicant determined sub-category (refer to page 4 for a list and description)
 4. Project start and end dates
 5. Project director name, contact information (including email)
 6. Names and affiliations of project collaborators
 7. Project purpose
 8. Project scope/area
 9. Project summary
 10. Project deliverables/products
 11. Declaration of EQIP eligible producer involvement

12. Declaration of Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe
- c. Project Location Map: Applicants must submit a map indicating the location of the proposed project (limited to 1 page in length).
 - d. Budget Information (Limited to 1 page in length).
 - e. DUNS Number: A Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number is a unique nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. A *Federal Register* notice of final policy issuance (68 FR 38402) requires a DUNS number in every application (i.e., hard copy and electronic) for a grant or cooperative agreement (except applications from individuals) submitted on or after October 1, 2003. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at: <http://www.grants.gov/RequestaDUNS> or by calling 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.
 - f. Required Central Contractor Registry (CCR) Registration: The CCR is a database that serves as the primary government repository for contractor information required for the conduct of business with the government. This database will also be used as a central location for maintaining organizational information for organizations seeking and receiving grants from the government. CIG applicants must register with the CCR. To register, go to: <http://www.ccr.gov>. Allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the CCR registration.

3. How to Submit Pre-proposals

Applicants may submit applications electronically through Grants.gov. Applications submitted through Grants.gov must contain all of the elements of a complete pre-proposal and meet the requirements described above. Instructions for electronically submitting the required standard forms, and instructions for adding attachments are posted on Grants.gov. Applications submitted electronically are date and time stamped by Grants.gov and must be received by the identified closing date. NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or Web site problems related to Grants.gov submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process in advance of the submission deadline to avoid problems.

The address for hand-delivered pre-proposals or pre-proposals submitted using express mail or overnight courier service is:

Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
1400 Independence Ave, SW.
Room 5233 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250

Contact phone number for hand-delivered pre-proposals (needed to enter the USDA South Building) is: (202) 720-2335.

The address for pre-proposals sent via the United States Postal Service is:

Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
Post Office Box 2890
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890

Applications submitted by email or fax will not be considered.

4. Pre-Proposal Application Due Date

Pre-proposals must be received in Room 5233 South Building at the NRCS National Headquarters by 4:00 p.m. EST on **April 26, 2010**. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed pre-proposals via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

5. Acknowledgement of Submission

Pre-proposals received by the due date will be acknowledged with an electronic notification. If an applicant has not received an acknowledgement within 30 days of the submission, they must contact the NRCS program contact below. Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for the second phase.

CIG Program Contact:

Gregorio Cruz
National CIG Program Manager
1400 Independence Ave, SW.
Room 5233 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250
Phone: (202) 720-2335
Fax: (202) 720-4265
Email: gregorio.cruz@wdc.usda.gov

6. Withdrawal of Pre-Proposal

Pre-proposals may be withdrawn by email at any time. Pre-proposals may be withdrawn by the applicant, or by an authorized representative thereof, if the representative's identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the pre-proposal.

7. Pre-Proposal Review

Pre-proposals will be evaluated by NRCS staff under the category identified by the applicant. Each pre-proposal will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice including EQIP payment limitations. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant.

8. Anticipated Notification

Applicants from both selected and not selected pre-proposals will be notified via mail. Applicants selected for funding consideration must submit a complete application as described in the following sections.

V. APPLICATION INFORMATION FOR FULL PROPOSALS (only for those applicants notified at the end of the pre-proposal selection process that their proposals have been identified for further evaluation)

All Office of Management and Budget standard forms necessary for CIG submission are posted on the following Web site: Grants.gov-Forms. An application checklist is available on the CIG Web site: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.

A. Application Content and Format

Applications are required to contain the content, format, and information set forth below in order to receive consideration for funding. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Applicants must submit five copies of the application in the following format:

- Applications should be typewritten or printed on 8½” x 11” white paper. The text of the application should be in a font no smaller than 12-point, single-spaced, single-sided, with one-inch margins.
- Applications that fail to comply with the required content and format will not be considered for funding.

Applications must include all required forms and narrative sections described below. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

- 1. Project Description:** The description must include the following information and is limited to 10 pages in length. Pages in excess of the 10-page limit will be discarded and not evaluated. Bibliography, resumes, and references will be included in the page count for the project page limit.
 - a. Project narrative: The project narrative should provide a clear description of the work to be undertaken and how it will be accomplished. It must be formatted to address each of the merit review criteria listed in Part VI.B and provide sufficient information for the reviewers to evaluate the application in accordance with these merit review criteria.
 - b. Project background: Describe the history of, and need for, the proposed innovation. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a good probability for success of the project.
 - c. Project objectives: Be specific using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project’s purpose and goals. Describe how the project is innovative.
 - d. Project methods: Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project.
 - e. Location and size of project or project area: Describe the location of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, farm types and demographics, etc.) of the project area. Provide a map, if possible.
 - f. Producer participation: Estimate the number of producers involved in the project, and describe the extent of their involvement (all producers involved in the project must be eligible for EQIP).
 - g. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion.
 - h. Project management: Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant education or experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Explain the level of participation required in the project by government and non-government entities. Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project.
 - i. Benefits or results expected and transferability: Identify the results and benefits to be derived from the proposed project activities, and explain how the results will be measured. Identify project beneficiaries, i.e., agricultural producers by type,

region, or sector; rural communities; and municipalities. Explain how these entities will benefit. In addition, describe how results will be communicated to others via outreach activities.

- j. Project evaluation: Describe the methodology or procedures to be followed to evaluate the project, determine technical feasibility, and quantify the results of the project for the final report (grant recipients will be required to provide a semi-annual report of progress, quarterly financial reports, and a final project report to NRCS. Instructions for submitting quarterly reports will be detailed in the grant agreement).
- k. Environmental Information and Assessment of Environmental Impacts: Describe and assess the anticipated environmental effects of the proposed project. The description of the potential environmental and social impacts must address all potential beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. A full description and assessment of the potential impacts to all potentially impacted environmental resources must be disclosed. One line or short descriptions of environmental impacts are not acceptable. The length of the analysis should be commensurate with the complexity of the project proposed and the environmental impacts impacted either directly, indirectly (later in time), or cumulatively. Where possible, information on environmental impacts should be quantified, such as number of acres of wetlands impacted, amount of carbon sequestration estimated, etc. Environmental resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other specific resources protected by law, Executive Order, and agency policy. These resources are outlined in the NRCS Environmental Evaluation Worksheet, form NRCS-CPA-52, which is available at: [NRCS-CPA-52](#). The CPA-52 form can be used as a guide for the scope of environmental information that should be prepared for this section of the application. In addition to describing impacts, applicants are required to assess the significance or degree of potential environmental impact of the proposed project on environmental resources. Applicants may consult with the NRCS Environmental Liaison concerning the scope of what should be addressed in this section of the application. A list of the Environmental Liaisons can be found on the following Web site: [Environmental Liaison](#)

Note: Please be aware that applications for projects with potentially adverse impacts may need to be modified in order to achieve acceptable and beneficial levels of environmental impact. If projects cannot be modified, then there is a potential during the screening process that the application may not be selected.

- 2. **Budget Information:** Applicants must prepare a Standard Form (SF) 424-A Budget Information Non-Construction Programs to document budget needs. The SF-424A is available at: [Grants.gov-Forms](#) or can be obtained from a NRCS State office. For standard grant applications, a budget form is required for each year of requested support. In addition, a cumulative budget is required detailing the requested total support for the overall project period. The budget form may be reproduced as needed by applicants. Funds may be requested under any of the categories listed on the form, provided that the item or service for which support is requested is allowable under the authorizing legislation, the applicable statutes, regulations, Federal cost principles, and NRCS program guidelines and can be justified, as necessary, for the successful conduct of the proposed project. Applicants must also include a budget narrative to justify their budget requests (see number 3 below). If claiming indirect costs, the

applicant must provide an indirect cost rate agreement or indirect cost rate proposal as justification for the rate of indirect costs being claimed. Indirect costs is based on total Federal funds awarded and cannot exceed 15 percent.

3. **Budget Narrative (maximum 9 pages):** In addition to the SF-424A, all applicants must provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project, broken down by each project year. All budget categories for which support is requested must be individually listed (with costs) in the same order as the budget and justified on a separate sheet of paper and placed immediately behind the Budget Form (SF-424A). Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities. Explain how budget items such as personnel, travel, equipment, etc. are essential to achieving project objectives. Justify the project cost effectiveness and include justification for personnel salaries such as resumes. A budget narrative is also required for the matching portion.
4. **Matching:** Applications should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties.

For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, signed by the authorized organizational representative of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor, (2) the name of the applicant organization, (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made, (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation, and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.

"In-kind" refers to non-cash contributions of goods or services made by third party individuals or organizations to support projects. Examples of in-kind include work done by unpaid volunteers and donations of supplies, facilities, or equipment. In-kind contributions must be necessary to accomplish program activities and are verifiable.

For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representatives of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor, (2) the name of the applicant's organization, (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made, (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution, and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

The sources and amounts of all matching support from outside the applicant institution should be summarized on a separate page and placed in the application immediately following the summary of matching support (matching support means a budget narrative broken down by year).

The value of applicant contributions to the project will be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars, Cost Principles that apply to their entity for additional guidance, and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

5. **Declaration of Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian Tribe:** If an applicant wishes to compete in the 10 percent set-aside funding pool, applicants must make a declaration in writing of their status as a

Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities. This declaration is also required in order to be eligible for the in-kind contribution exception. (Refer to Part III B that describes the provision of a set-aside pool of funding for Beginning or Limited Farmers or Ranchers and Indian tribes.)

- 6. Declaration of EQIP Eligibility:** Applicants must include a statement indicating that the proposed project will involve EQIP-eligible producers. Applicants must make a declaration in writing that they, or parties involved in the project, are eligible for EQIP (if EQIP eligible producers are not involved, the proposal will be considered ineligible). The declaration must describe and certify the level of involvement by EQIP eligible producers.
- 7. State Conservationist Letter of Review:** Applicants must send a cover letter showing that the application was sent to the appropriate State Conservationist(s) for review. If a project is multi-State in scope, all States Conservationists in the project area must be sent the application for review. The State Conservationist(s) will review the application for potential duplication of efforts, ethics concerns, and consistency with overall State EQIP objectives. Applicants must send their application (at least the Project Description, Budget Information, and Narrative) to the appropriate State Conservationist(s) postmarked, or dated if electronic, no later than **June 4, 2010**. State Conservationist(s) must submit letters to the NRCS National Headquarters by June 18, 2010. A list of State office addresses and phone numbers is included at the end of this notice. Applicants are encouraged to consult with the appropriate State Conservationist(s) during application development to discuss the letter of review.
- 8. Certifications:** All applications must include a signed Standard Form (SF) 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs. The SF-424B may be found at: Grants.gov-Forms or by contacting the State office. Applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following from 7 CFR:
 - a. Part 3017, [Government wide Debarment and Suspension \(Non-procurement\)](#)
 - b. Part 3018, [New Restrictions on Lobbying](#)
 - c. Part 3021, [Government wide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace \(Financial Assistance\)](#)

B. How to Submittal a Written Application

Applicants must submit one signed original copy of each project application. Applicants must submit five copies of the application.

The address for submitting hand-delivered, express mail, or overnight courier service applications is:

Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
1400 Independence Ave, SW.
Room 5233 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250

The contact phone number for hand-delivered applications (needed to enter the USDA South Building) is: (202) 720-2335.

The address for applications sent via the United States Postal Service is:
Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
Post Office Box 2890
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890

Applications submitted by email or fax will not be considered.

C. How to Submit an Application Electronically

Applicants may submit applications electronically through Grants.gov. Applications submitted through Grants.gov must contain all of the elements of a complete application and meet the requirements described above. Instructions for electronically submitting the required standard forms, abstract, narrative, and declarations are posted on Grants.gov. The cover letter requesting the State Conservationist's letter of review may be scanned as an attachment to the application. Instructions for adding attachments are available on the Web site. Applications submitted electronically are date and time stamped by Grants.gov and must be received by the identified closing date. NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or Web site problems related to Grants.gov submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process in advance of the submission deadline to avoid problems.

D. Application Due Date

Applications must be received in Room 5233 South Building at the NRCS National Headquarters by 4:00 p.m. EST on **June 4, 2010**. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

E. Acknowledgement of Submission

Applications received by the due date will be acknowledged with an official letter. If an applicant has not received an acknowledgement within 30 days of the submission, they must contact the NRCS program contact below. Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding.

CIG Program Contact:

Gregorio Cruz
National CIG Program Manager
1400 Independence Ave, SW.
Room 5233 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250
Phone: (202) 720-2335
Fax: (202) 720-4265
Email: gregorio.cruz@wdc.usda.gov

F. Funding Restrictions

Awardees may not use unrecovered indirect costs as part of their matching funds.

CIG funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law, or approved in writing by the Authorized Departmental Officer in advance of incurring such costs:

- a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
- b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the grant;
- c. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and any amendments thereto;
- d. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
- e. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
- f. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee; and,
- g. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces; and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the administrative contact person.

G. Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with USDA regulation [7 CFR §3019.36](#). This regulation provides that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with [7 CFR §3019.2](#), this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG. USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically.

H. Environmental Review Requirements

The Council on Environmental Quality's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations at CFR Part 1500-1508 and NRCS' regulation that implements NEPA at 7 CFR Part 650 require that an environmental review be prepared for actions where the agency has discretion and control. Accordingly, NRCS' financial assistance under the CIG program requires compliance with these regulations. As part of the application packet, applicants are required to provide environmental information pertaining to their project to help NRCS determine the appropriate documentation required to comply with NEPA and NRCS regulations. If the application is selected for funding, the NRCS Program Contact and NRCS Environmental Liaison will coordinate with the selected applicant concerning documentation for compliance with NEPA. The selected applicant will be required to prepare and pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document (e.g., Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement if required for NEPA compliance). Grant funding cannot be approved until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met.

I. Withdrawal of Applications

Applications may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before selections are made. Applications may be withdrawn by the applicant, or by an authorized representative thereof, if the representative's identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the application.

J. Deliverables

Applications must include all of the following activities as deliverables:

1. Semi-annual reports
2. Supplemental narratives to explain and support payment requests
3. Final report
4. Performance items specific to the project that indicate progress

A thorough list and explanation of measurable performance items specific to the project will be used in the technical evaluation (refer to “CIG Technical Evaluation Criteria”)

5. New technology and innovative approach fact sheet
6. Attendance to at least one NRCS CIG Showcase or comparable NRCS event during the period of the grant

VI. APPLICATION REVIEW

Application Review and Selection Process

There are three steps in evaluation of complete applications from selected pre-proposal applicants. Packages will be reviewed by a Technical Peer Review Panel and will be divided among technical peer review groups. Applications will be reviewed based on the CIG Technical Evaluation Criteria listed in Part VI.B below.

The Technical Peer Review Panel will forward their recommendations and the applications to a Grants Review Board, which will certify the peer review panels’ recommendations and ensure that the application evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The Technical Peer Review Panel consists of NRCS national technical specialists, national technical specialists from other appropriately related Federal agencies, and technical specialists from non-Federal sources. The CIG Grants Review Board consists of five members of NRCS leadership, specifically the Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment, the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, the Deputy Chief for Financial Assistance and Community Development, one Regional Conservationist, and one State Conservationist. The Grants Review Board is chaired by the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology.

A. Criteria for Application Evaluation

Peer review panels will use the following criteria to evaluate project applications:

CIG Technical Evaluation Criteria
Purpose, Approach, and Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Design and implementation of project based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.b) Promotes environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production.c) Project outcome is clearly measurable.d) Potential for successful completion.e) Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered and an acceptably significant level of improvement will be achieved.
Innovative Technology or Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Project is innovative (national, regionally, and local in nature).b) Project conforms to description of innovative projects or activities in proposal request announcement.
<u>Project Management</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable.b) Project staff has technical expertise needed.c) Budget is adequately explained and justified.d) Experience and capacity to partner with and gain the support of other organizations, institutions and agencies.
<u>Transferability</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Potential for producers and landowners to use the innovative technology or technologies.b) Potential to transfer the approach or technology nationally or to a broader audience or other geographic or socio-economic areas, including limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and other traditionally underserved producers and communities.c) Potential for NRCS to successfully use the innovative approach or methods.d) Project will result in the development of technical or related technology transfer materials (technical standards, technical notes, guide sheets, handbooks, software, etc.)

Note: For applications under the Mississippi River Basin funding category only, proposals that complement MRBI proposals under the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative and Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program will be given higher priority consideration in the selection process.

Projects with an ecosystem markets focus will be reviewed by the USDA Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets.

B. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

CIG Awards are anticipated to be announced by July 30, 2010. Funds are not awarded, and work may not start until an agreement is signed by both NRCS and the grantee. All agreements are expected to be awarded by September 17, 2010.

VII. AWARD INFORMATION AND ADMINISTRATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected for funding will receive a letter of official notification from National Headquarters. However, all selections are contingent upon successful completion of the environmental review process. Upon notification of selection, the applicant must contact the National NRCS Environmental Liaison in order to determine the scope and level of NEPA documentation required for the project. The environmental documentation prepared to meet NEPA requirements must be prepared prior to award of grant funds. The official notice will also indicate the need to work with the administrative contact to develop an agreement prior to starting work on the project. Applicants who are not selected will be notified by official letter.

NRCS reserves the right to have grant award(s) administered by a third party. In the event that a third party administers the grant award(s), the applicant/recipient will be notified in writing.

B. Environmental Review Requirements

Project proponents that are selected to receive grant funding must work with the NRCS Program Contact and NRCS Environmental Liaison concerning what documentation will need to be prepared for compliance with NEPA and NRCS regulations. Selected applicants may be required to prepare and pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document if an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement is needed. Grant funds cannot be awarded until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met. A list of the NRCS Environmental Liaisons can be found at the following Web address: [Environmental Liaison](#).

C. Grant Agreement

The Commodity Credit Corporation, through NRCS, will use a grant agreement with selected applicants to document participation in the CIG component of EQIP. The grant agreement will include:

1. Project purpose
2. Project objectives
3. Project deliverables (refer to section V.I. – section V, letter I)
4. Final project plan listing cooperators in the project and identifying the grant applicant and project manager
5. Project timelines and expected project completion date
6. Project progress and budget reporting requirements
7. Award amount and budget information
8. Information regarding requests for advance of funds or reimbursement
9. Role of NRCS technical oversight in the project
10. Reporting requirements including attendance at NRCS CIG showcase or comparable NRCS event during the period of the grant

11. Changes in project plans
12. Other requirements and terms deemed necessary by the CCC to protect the interests of the United States

D. Reporting Requirements

Grantees receiving an advance of Federal funds of more than \$25,000 are required to submit a SF-272 (Report of Federal Cash Transactions) and, when necessary, the continuation sheet, SF-272-A, no later than 15 days following the end of each quarter or 90 days after project completion. These reports are used to monitor cash advanced to recipients and to obtain disbursement and outlay information for each award.

Grantees must submit a Federal Financial Report (SF-425) no later than 30 days after the end of each quarter and 90 days after completion of project. The SF-272 and SF-425 are available at: [Grants Management Forms](#).

In addition, the grantee must submit a written performance progress report to the NRCS Program Contact and Technical Contact every 6 months. This report is distinct from the quarterly financial report described above. Each progress report must cover work performed during the previous 6-month period, including any funded or unfunded time extensions, a comparison of actual accomplishments to project goals, and a statement of work projected to be completed in the next 6-month period.

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. NRCS will designate a Program Contact, an Administrative Contact, and a Technical Contact to provide oversight for each project receiving an award. These individuals will have technical oversight responsibility for the project.

To satisfy the requirements of EQIP ([7 CFR 1466](#)) compliance measures, the grantee is required to submit as a component of the semi-annual progress report:

1. A list of producers, identified by name and social security number, of all EQIP-eligible producers or entities involved in the project.
2. The dollar amount of direct and indirect payment made to each individual producer or entity for any structural, vegetative, or management practices. Both quarterly and cumulative payment amounts must be submitted.
3. A self-certification indicating that each individual or entity receiving a direct or indirect payment through this grant is in compliance with the EQIP Payment Limitation, AGI, HEL, and Wetlands Conservation Compliance Farm Bill provisions.

A progress report template will be provided to grantees by the Program Contact. This template is available on the NRCS CIG Web site at: [Information for Grantees](#).

The grantee must send copies of each semi-annual progress report to the NRCS contacts and comply with any requests for information from them. NRCS recommends that the grantee work closely with these subject matter experts throughout the course of the project.

Upon passage of the completion date of the project, a final report must be submitted within 90 days detailing project activities, funding received, funding expended, results, and potential for transferability of results. The final report should address completion of the project deliverables listed in the grant agreement.

NRCS will host an annual meeting for CIG grantees and NRCS technical contacts. Grantees will be required to attend at least one of these sessions at their own expense.

VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS

CIG Program Contact:

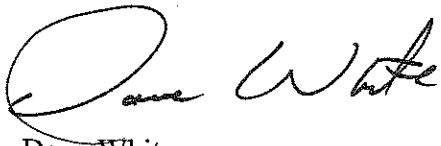
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Additional information about CIG, including fact sheets and frequently asked questions, is available on the CIG Web page at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.

Signed this 29th day of March in Washington, D.C.



Dave White
Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation and
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Attachments

IX. OTHER INFORMATION

Important: Applications Missing Any of These Required Items Will Not Be Considered

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS FISCAL YEAR 2010 PRE-PROPOSAL PACKAGE CHECK LIST

- 1. Pre-proposal Cover Sheet:** Submit Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance
- 2. Project Brief Description:** Submit a brief description including the information below (limited to 3 pages in length). An optional template titled Project Summary Sheet is available on the NRCS CIG Web site at:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.
 - a. Project Title
 - b. Applicant determined CIG funding category (refer to page 4)
 - c. Applicant determined sub-category (refer to page 4 for a list and description)
 - d. Project Start and End Dates
 - e. Project Director name, contact information (including e-mail)
 - f. Names and Affiliations of Project Collaborators
 - g. Project Purpose
 - h. Project Scope/Area
 - i. Project Summary
 - j. Project Deliverables/Products
 - k. Declaration of EQIP eligible producer involvement
 - l. Declaration of beginning or limited farmer or rancher or Indian tribe
- 3. Project Location Map:** Submit a map indicating the location of the proposed project (limited to 1 page in length).
- 4. Budget Information** (limited to one page in length).
- 5. DUNS Number:** For information about how to obtain a DUNS number, go to <http://www.grants.gov/RequestaDUNS> or call 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.
- 6. Required CCR Registration:** To register, visit <http://www.ccr.gov>. Allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the CCR registration.

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS
FISCAL YEAR 2010 FULL APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECK LIST

- 1. Project Description:** (10 pages maximum, single-spaced, single-sided, 12 point font)
 - a. Project narrative
 - b. Project background
 - c. Project objectives
 - d. Project methods
 - e. Location and size of project area (include a map if possible)
 - f. Producer participation
 - g. Project action plan and timeline
 - h. Project management
 - i. Benefits or results expected and transferability
 - j. Project evaluation
 - k. Environmental information and assessment of environmental impacts
- 2. Budget Information:** Submit a completed Standard Form 424A (SF-424a) Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs.
- 3. Budget Narrative:** Submit a detailed budget narrative (maximum of 9 pages).
- 4. Matching Information.**
- 5. Declaration of Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe (Special Provisions):** If applicable, include a statement declaring your status as a Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe, or community-based organization representing these entities.
- 6. Declaration Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Eligibility:** Include a statement indicating that the proposed project will involve EQIP-eligible producers. Applicants must make a declaration in writing that they, or parties involved in the project, are eligible for EQIP. (If EQIP eligible producers are not involved, the proposal will be considered ineligible.)
- 7. State Conservationist Letter of Review:** Include documentation showing that the proposal was sent and reviewed by the State Conservationist(s).
- 8. Certifications:** Complete Standard Form 424B (SF-424b) Assurances-Non-Construction Programs.

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