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## **Sec. Vilsack: \$52 mil. in grants to help farmers get greener**

**By Agri-Pulse Staff**

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Comments due April 8; Proposals due April 23

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said Friday that a major USDA grants program “offers many opportunities to help landowners and operators seek new ways to remain profitable, such as participating in markets that reward them for sequestering carbon and limiting greenhouse gas emissions.” But to take advantage of the available \$52.4 million in competitive grants, hurry – the deadline is April 8<sup>th</sup> for comments, and April 23<sup>rd</sup> for submitting proposals.

Vilsack explained that the program is getting priority treatment because “President Obama is particularly interested in using partnerships to pursue innovative ways to increase our nation’s renewable energy production and reduce the effects of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.”

The \$52.4 million in financial assistance to protect the nation’s natural resources is being provided through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI). USDA has allocated \$5.8 million in financial assistance for multi-state and national projects that offer innovative approaches to working with socially disadvantaged, beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers and help further enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural lands and private nonindustrial forest lands.

Proposals for state projects must be submitted to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist by April 23. Multi-state and national projects must be submitted to the Chief, USDA-NRCS National Office in Washington, D.C. by the same date. In addition, USDA is seeking comment on how CCPI can contribute toward new methods of renewable energy production and conservation, reduce the effects of climate change, and reduce net carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. Comments must be submitted by April 8.

Administered by NRCS, CCPI, a voluntary initiative, allows landowners and operators of agricultural and non-industrial private forest lands to use selected conservation programs and resources from eligible partners to put conservation on the land. Under this program, NRCS enters into multi-year agreements with eligible partners that want to enhance conservation on agricultural and non-industrial private forest lands. Partners include

federally recognized American Indian tribes, state and local units of governments, producer associations, farmer cooperatives, colleges and universities and non-governmental organizations with a history of working closely with producers. A producer's land must be located within an approved CCPI project area to be considered for financial assistance through CCPI. In fiscal year 2009, producers can apply for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. Individual producers cannot submit a partner proposal.

Additional details about the CCPI Request for Proposals and public comment period can be viewed at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>

(From the Federal Register's main page, enter Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative in the Quick Search Box and submit). The information also can be obtained at the NRCS Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html> and at the U.S. government regulation Web site <http://www.regulations.gov/search/index.jsp>

For additional information about CCPI, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi/>

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