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USDA announces new Conservation Innovation Grants

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Over \$18 million in Conservation Innovation Grants will fund 55 projects to develop and refine cutting-edge technologies and approaches to help farmers and ranchers conserve and sustain natural resources. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the grants during a speech at the Soil and Water Conservation Society annual meeting in Dearborn, MI.

"These Conservation Innovation Grants will benefit both agriculture and the environment by getting 21st century ideas in the hands of our producers across the country," Vilsack said.

The Conservation Innovation Grant program is designed to speed the transfer and enhance use of technologies and methods that show promise in solving the nation's top natural resource problems by targeting innovative, on-the-ground conservation. Approved projects address issues such as water quantity and quality, grazing lands, soil and forest health, and air quality.

"The Conservation Innovation Grant program enables USDA to review, field test, and demonstrate practices and ideas that have yet to be successfully mainstreamed into our portfolio of practice options," said Dave White, Chief of the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Some recent examples of completed Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) projects include:

- * Iowa Cattleman's Association project. The Non-Basin Technologies for Open Feedlot Runoff Demonstration, Implementation and Monitoring CIG Project designed, installed, and evaluated the overall effectiveness of alternate technologies utilizing vegetation and natural soils for nutrient reduction of open feedlot runoff.
- * The Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Project. The Irrigation Automation for the Cranberry Industry CIG Project in Massachusetts resulted in better acceptance by cranberry growers of irrigated water management techniques that save water and energy. The project field-tested irrigation automation systems on 133 pump houses representing 11 different producers and 1,835 acres of cranberry bogs through 3 frost seasons.

* The California Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices (SWP). The Innovation for Air and Water Quality CIG Project examined ways for wine growers to improve air and water quality related to vineyards. The project resulted in a workbook that has been widely distributed and completed by over 1,300 wine growers.

Grantees provide matching funds, bringing the total value of the approved projects to more than \$36.8 million. The program targets grants to state and local governments, Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations and individuals.

As part of its continuing outreach efforts to minority and underserved communities, USDA will fund six proposals valued at \$1 million to help Native American tribes and limited resource producers address natural resource issues, energy efficiency, and market-based approaches to conservation.

Additional information about CIG, including summaries of approved projects, is available at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig. A listing of all fiscal year 2009 CIG projects can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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