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SIGN UP FOR AWEP EXTENDED UNTILL APRIL 1

NRCS has re-opened its Request for Proposals for the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), established in the new farm bill to promote ground and surface water conservation and water quality improvements. In a notice published in the Federal Register on March 26, 2009, USDA-NRCS is seeking project proposals from potential partners through April 1. A previous Request for Proposals published in the Federal Register required proposals to be submitted by March 2, 2009. The criteria for proposals have remained unchanged from the original notice.

"We reopened our Request for Proposals period to ensure that we address as many water quality and quantity issues as possible," said NRCS State Conservationist Sylvia Gillen. "We want to leverage our federal funds with the efforts of local and regional partners and encourage a more collective approach to solving specific water quality and quantity concerns."

Additional details about the AWEP Request for Proposals can be viewed at the Federal Register at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/> <<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>> . (From the Federal Register's main page, enter Agricultural Water Enhancement Program in the Quick Search Box and submit). The information also can be obtained at the USDA-NRCS Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html> <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html>> .

Up to \$58.4 million in financial assistance will be available nationwide to agricultural producers and entities through this new program. USDA-NRCS administers AWEP, a component of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), USDA's largest conservation program. AWEP offers financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers carry out water enhancement activities that conserve ground and surface water and improve water quality on agricultural lands such as cropland, pasture, grassland and rangeland.

Agricultural water enhancement activities include: water quality or water conservation plan development; water conservation restoration or enhancement projects, including the conversion to the production of less water-intensive agricultural commodities or dry land farming; water quality or quantity restoration or enhancement projects; irrigation system improvement or irrigation efficiency enhancement; and activities designed to reduce drought's impacts; and other related activities that will help achieve water quality or water conservation benefits on agricultural land.

Under this new program, USDA-NRCS can contract directly with agricultural producers who are included in approved partner proposals. Eligible partners include federally-recognized Indian tribes, states, units of local government, or agricultural or silvicultural associations. Producers who apply for AWEP assistance must meet EQIP eligibility requirements. All AWEP funding must go to producers. Like EQIP, contract terms for producers under AWEP run from 1 year to 10 years.

Agricultural producers in selected project areas can apply for available AWEP funds at their local USDA service center.

For additional information about the AWEP, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awep/> <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awep/>> .

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