

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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USDA Awards \$25 Million in Conservation Innovation Grants

2 Entities in Minnesota Received Funds to Develop Innovative Agriculture Approaches

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24, 2012 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced \$25 million in Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) awarded to 58 entities across the nation for projects that test and prove innovative approaches to conserving America’s private lands.

Minnesota was home to 2 recipients, who will demonstrate innovative approaches to improving soil health, increasing pollinator and wildlife habitat, addressing livestock manure management, producing on-farm energy savings and fostering water quality trading markets. Grant winners pay 50 percent of all project costs.

Awardees in Minnesota include: NatureServe and The Xerces Society, Inc.

“Conservation Innovation Grants will help spur creativity and problem-solving in our nation’s farms, ranches and forests,” said Don Baloun, State Conservationist for USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “Conservation grants allow the best minds in America to develop unique and innovative solutions that will help make conservation more efficient in the future.”

NatureServe (MN, WI, IA, IL) \$68,000

NatureServe and NRCS Regional Collaboration: Data and Technology Transfer to Enhance and Support Ecological Site Habitat and Wildlife Management

The goals of this project are to increase ecological and wildlife knowledge and data accessibility on a local and regional basis to support, enhance and accelerate the development of Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs). The project will also enhance Wildlife Interpretation sections of ESDs by linking classification information to wildlife species of concern.

The Xerces Society, Inc (CA, OR, MN, MI, WI, NJ, PA, MA, NH, FL, WY, MT, IN, TX)
\$997,815

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Next Steps in Pollinator Conservation: Operations and Maintenance, Organic Habitat Restoration, Expanding Seed Mix Choices, and Assessing Conservation Effectiveness

This project proposes to develop a Long-Term Operations and Maintenance Guidance for Established Habitats. This will advance the Science of Habitat Restoration Using Organic Technique, will increase the Availability of High Value Plant Materials and will assess the Effectiveness of Restoration for Pollinator Communities.

New this year was a special emphasis on water quality trading markets to demonstrating how farmers and ranchers can help municipalities and other point sources overcome high pollution control costs. Twelve entities received grant funds for this this purpose.

“We believe there are states around the nation that are on the cusp of having thriving water quality trading markets,” Vilsack said. “These grant awards will help develop projects that involve farmers and ranchers while they are helping to improve water quality.”

In a water quality trading program, point sources buy environmental benefits or “credits” from landowners who install specific conservation practices. Water quality trading is a market-based approach that enables facilities to achieve needed pollution controls through the purchase of credits for a particular pollutant. Farmers can produce water quality credits by implementing conservation practices that reduce nutrients or sediment losses, and generally at a much lower cost than a municipal treatment facility. The goal is to achieve water quality improvements more cost-effectively by bringing together willing buying and sellers.

NRCS administers CIG as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Grants are awarded to state and local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations and individuals. NRCS uses CIG to invest in innovative, on-the-ground conservation technologies and approaches with the goal of wide-scale adoption to address water quality and quantity, air quality, energy conservation, and environmental markets, among other natural resource issues.

For a complete list of CIG awardees and more information about NRCS conservation programs online, visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>.

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