

# NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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## **Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) Proposal to USDA is Funded at \$3.625 Million**

ST PAUL, MN, March 13, 2012 – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will allocate \$3.625 million in financial assistance through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP). These funds will be administered by NRCS in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota portions of the Red River Basin. Funds will be utilized by local landowners to help address problems related to erosion, water quality, and flooding.

“This is the fourth year funds been made available through AWEP under the current Farm Bill,” Lance Yohe, RRBC Executive Director, said. “They have brought over \$12.5 million into the Red River Basin for ring dikes, improvements to water quality and reduction of flooding. This is a great program helping us achieve basin wide goals that we would like to see continue.” He cited the efforts of MN Congressman Peterson, ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee, and state conservationists in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota as being instrumental in bringing this program to the Red River Basin.

“This is another opportunity for farmers to get involved with conservation efforts that will improve water quality and quantity,” Peterson said. “I believe this is an important piece of the puzzle addressing long-term solutions to flood control in the Red River Valley.”

AWEP funds will be used for the following strategies, which were developed by RRBC with assistance from local units of government, commodity and farm groups, and federal and state agencies: sugar beet cover crop strategy, beach ridge erosion reduction strategy, restricted flow sediment pool strategy, water flow retardation strategy, stream bank erosion reduction strategy, and ring dikes and other EQIP strategies.

This year, beach ridge erosion reduction and water flow retardation strategies will be targeted first. These strategies will slow beach ridge run-off, which causes erosion and poor water quality from sediments and nutrients; restrict flows by use of culverts and dikes; retard flows of water; and proven tools such as stream bank erosion projects, buffer strips, wetland restorations and cover crops. Together these strategies will improve water quality, reducing nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment and provide changed flows, enhancing available supplies and positively impacting erosion patterns.

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“NRCS continues to be proud of the Red River Basin Initiative Partnership with the Red River Basin Commission and many others,” said Don Baloun, MN NRCS State Conservationist. “In 2012, MN NRCS will have \$1.8 million in financial assistance targeting some key AWEPP conservation practices. I would like to challenge all producers in the basin to take advantage of this special sign-up.”

Baloun recommends individuals sign up for the (130) Drainage Water Management Plan (CAP) through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and then proceed to sign up for the (554) Drainage Water Management practices through AWEPP.

“Additionally, I would like producers to look at payment rates for the following conservation practices such as cover crop (340); ring dike (356); drainage water management (554) and side inlet pipes (410),” Baloun continued. “I encourage every producer to do one or two conservation practices in 2012.”

“Participation by producers in North Dakota in FY2011 focused on ring dike protection and cover crop strategies,” said Mary Podoll, ND State Conservationist. “Producers were pleased with the program, the timeliness and the focus on conservation practice application. We (NRCS) are excited that we’re going to be able to work with producers and provide assistance with similar objectives this year,” she said.

“Through these efforts, this is another way to work together throughout the Red River basin to help producers reduce runoff and at the same time help improve the soil quality and health,” Paul Flynn, Acting State Conservationist for South Dakota added.

For more information on eligible projects, contact your local Soil Conservation District office in ND and SD, the Soil and Water Conservation District office in MN, local NRCS offices, local watershed district or water resource district offices, or your congressional office.

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