

Questions and Answers

December 2010

Conservation Innovation Grant Program

Q. What is Conservation Innovation Grants?

A. Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. Under CIG, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds are used to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals. CIG is authorized under EQIP. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers CIG.

Q. Who is eligible for CIG?

A. Non-Federal governmental and non-governmental organizations, federally-recognized Indian tribes, and individuals are eligible to receive a grant.

Q. Who are limited resource farmers or ranchers?

A. A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$155,200 in each of the previous two years (adjusted for inflation using Prices Paid by Farmer Index as compiled by National Agricultural Statistical Service), and has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years (to be determined annually using Commerce Department Data).

Q. Who are beginning farmers and ranchers?

A. A beginning farmer and rancher is a person or legal entity who has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of an entity who will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

Q. What will be the size of individual grants?

A. In fiscal year 2011, the maximum award amount for any project will not exceed \$1 million.

Q. How will grant applications be evaluated?

A. CIG applications will be evaluated by technical peer review panels against the criteria identified in the CIG funding notice. Evaluated applications will be forwarded to a Grant Review Board that will certify the panels' recommendations and ensure that the evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The Grant Review Board will then forward award recommendations to the NRCS Chief, who will make the final award decisions.

Q. Are applicants required to provide matching funds?

A. Yes. CIG will pay up to 50 percent of the cost of the proposed project. Up to 50 percent of the applicant's match (i.e., up to 25 percent of the total project cost) may come from in-kind contributions. The applicant's match must consist of non-Federal funds.



Q. What is CIG’s connection to EQIP?

A. There are a number of connections between CIG and EQIP, including:

- CIG was authorized under EQIP and funds for CIG come from EQIP funding.
- Grant funds that are provided to a producer or entity to carry out structural, vegetative, or management practices count toward each producer’s or entity’s EQIP payment limitation.
- CIG projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers.

Q. What kind of projects are eligible for CIG?

A. Applications must describe projects that incorporate innovative conservation approaches or technologies, or both used in combination.

Applicants should consider the following:

- CIG is not a research program. It is a vehicle to promote the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies. CIG will fund projects targeting on-the-ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.
- Proposed projects must conform to the description of innovative conservation projects and activities included in the interim final rule and funding notice.
- Proposed innovative approaches or technologies must address a natural resource conservation concern or concerns. The natural resource concerns for CIG will be identified by the NRCS Chief, and may change each year. The CIG natural resource concerns are published in each funding notice.

Q. Is CIG a nationwide program?

A. Yes. Applications for CIG are accepted from the 50 States, 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

Q. Who is responsible for the technical assistance on CIG projects?

A. The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance on CIG projects. Technical

oversight for grant projects will be provided by a Federal grant representative, who will be designated by NRCS.

Q. Is special consideration provided for beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, and Indian Tribes?

A. Yes. Two programmatic exceptions exist for beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, and Indian Tribes.

- Up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG may be set aside for applications from either a beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, or Indian Tribes, or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities.
- Up to 75 percent of their matching funds may come from in-kind contributions.

Q. How do people apply for CIG?

A. Application information is available on the NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html and www.grants.gov

Q. How much money is available for CIG?

A. The NRCS Chief determines the CIG funding level on an annual basis. In fiscal year 2011, up to \$25 million was available for CIG.

Q. What is the CIG State component?

A. The intent of the State component is to provide flexibility to NRCS State Conservationists to target CIG funds to individual producers and smaller organizations that may possess promising innovations, but may not compete well on the larger scale of the national grants competition. The State component emphasizes projects that have a goal of providing benefits within a limited geographic area. Projects may be farm-based, multi-county, small watershed, or Statewide in scope. Funding availability, application and submission information for State competitions will be announced through public notices (and on State NRCS websites) separately from the national notice.

State Conservationists will determine the funding level for State competitions, with individual grants not to exceed \$75,000.

For More Information

If you need more information about CIG, please contact the National CIG Program Manager, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 6227-S, Washington, D.C., 20250, telephone: (202) 720-8071, fax: (202) 720-4839.

Additional information is available on the World Wide Web at:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.