

Grants to help farms & ranches build resilience to drought

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WASHINGTON, April 4, 2013 – The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) remains focused on carrying out its mission, despite a time of significant budget uncertainty. Today's announcement is one part of the department's efforts to strengthen the rural economy.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today the recipients of \$5.3 million in Conservation Innovation Grants that will help develop approaches and technology that show producers how to adapt to extreme climate changes that cause drought.

Last year's drought was the worst since the 1950s, having large impacts on producers across the country. With another possible drought this year, this grant program is one of the ways the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service is working to help producers prepare.

"USDA is working diligently to help American farmers and ranchers rebound from last year's drought and prepare for future times of climatic extremes," Vilsack said. "Conservation Innovation Grants are an excellent way to invest in new technology and approaches that will help our farmers, ranchers and rural communities be more resilient in the future."

The grants will address drought-related issues, such as grazing management, warm season forage systems, irrigation strategies and innovative cropping systems.

Recipients plan to evaluate innovative, field-based conservation technologies and approaches, leading to improvements like enhancing soil's ability to hold water, evaluating irrigation water use and installing grazing systems that are more tolerant to drought.

Examples of projects include:

- South Dakota State University: Received \$713,000 to establish four grazing management demonstrations on South Dakota and Nebraska ranches. Producers can observe and demonstrate the impacts of innovative grazing management practices on their land's ability to recover from the 2012 and future droughts through the use of rainout shelters.
- Texas AgriLife Research: Received \$233,000 to develop guidelines for managing irrigation under drought conditions and computer programs for linking weather stations with irrigation scheduling.
- University of Florida Board of Trustees: Received \$442,000 to address adaptation to drought by demonstrating and evaluating innovative approaches for improving irrigation water use efficiency of agricultural crops under drought conditions.
- Colorado State University: Received \$883,000 to demonstrate synergistic soil, crop and water management practices that adapt irrigated cropping systems in the central Great Plains to drought and lead to efficient use of water. An existing model will be modified to allow farmers to calculate water savings from different conservation practices.
- Intertribal Buffalo Council: Received \$640,000 to evaluate how traditional/historical practices aided tribes in dealing with drought, developing a best practices database, and using that information for training and demonstration projects. This grant will support 57 tribes in 19 states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.)

Summaries of all projects selected for 2013 Conservation Innovation Grants are available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.

NRCS has offered this grant program since 2004, investing in ways to demonstrate and transfer efficient and environmentally friendly farming and ranching practices. This specific announcement of program funding was in response to last year's historic drought.

Conservation Innovation Grants projects are funded by the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and awarded through a competitive grants process. At least 50 percent of the total cost of projects must come from non-federal matching funds, including cash and in-kind contributions provided by the grant recipient.

For more on grant recipients or Conservation Innovation Grants, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html.

USDA has made a concerted effort to deliver results for the American people, even as USDA implements sequestration – the across-the-board budget reductions mandated under terms of the Budget Control Act. USDA has already undertaken historic efforts since 2009 to save more than \$700 million in taxpayer funds through targeted, common-sense budget reductions. These reductions have put USDA in a better position to carry out its mission, while implementing sequester budget reductions in a fair manner that causes as little disruption as possible.

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USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service helps America's farmers and ranchers conserve the Nation's soil, water, air and other natural resources. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment.

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