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News Release

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Environmental Quality Incentives Program Funding Available for Producers in the Grand Lake St. Marys and Wabash River Watersheds

Applications due December 20, 2013

Celina, OH, Oct. 28, 2013 – Farmers in Mercer County and portions of Auglaize and Darke Counties seeking financial and technical assistance for nutrient management should visit their county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to apply for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The NRCS can provide financial assistance for a portion of the cost for constructing animal waste storage facilities and for conservation practices that help keep nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, on the field and out of the water.

According to Ryan Kemper, the NRCS District Conservationist serving Mercer County, producers in the Grand Lake St. Marys and Wabash River watersheds are making a noticeable change in the landscape. Fields previously bare after harvest are now planted with cover crops, a conservation practice which prevents nutrient runoff by holding soil and nutrients in place, and also improves soil health by adding organic matter. Through EQIP, NRCS has contributed over \$8.5 million in these watersheds for conservation practices aimed at improving the water quality in Grand Lake St. Marys, the Mississippi River, and Gulf of Mexico, the final destination for water draining from most of these watersheds.

The water quality problems in Grand Lake St. Marys prompted the State of Ohio to designate the watershed as “distressed” in 2011, triggering rules designed to improve agricultural nutrient management. Kemper says the farmers understand how certain agricultural practices can affect water quality and want to minimize any negative impact of what they do on their farm to their communities’ water. In fact, their desire to put in conservation practices, like animal waste storage facilities has created a backlog of applications for EQIP assistance.

The Mercer County Soil and Water Conservation District sponsors the Wabash River Watershed project and also offers technical assistance for conservation planning. The SWCD works with NRCS to provide financial assistance for producers in this watershed using EQIP. The \$3.7 million Wabash River project began in 2012 and runs through 2015.

Farmers interested in EQIP assistance must apply by Friday, December 20, 2013. To schedule appointments, farmers should call 419-586-2548 in Mercer County, 419-738-4016 in Auglaize County, or 937-548-1715 in Darke County. Farmers can also call the Mercer County SWCD at 419-586-3289. A map of the Grand Lake St. Marys and Wabash River watersheds is available on-line at <http://www.epa.ohio.gov/dsw/tmdl/WabashRiver.aspx>

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