



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **USDA Announces \$235 Million Available for Innovative New Conservation Partnerships**

### ***Local Coalitions Can Now Apply for Funding to Improve Soil Health, Preserve Clean Water, Combat Drought, Protect Wildlife Habitat Pre-Proposals are Due July 8, 2015***

WARWICK, RI (May 21, 2015) — USDA announced today an investment of up to \$235 million to improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability. The funding is being made available through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), the newest conservation tool of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

RCPP, created by the 2014 Farm Bill, empowers local leaders to work with multiple partners—such as private companies, local and tribal governments, universities, non-profit groups and other non-government partners—along with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to design solutions that work best for their region. Local partners and the Federal government both invest funding and manpower to projects to maximize their impact. This will be the second round of projects funded through RCPP. The RCPP program helps USDA build on already-record enrollment in conservation programs, with over 500,000 producers participating to protect land and water on over 400 million acres nationwide.

“This is a new, innovative approach to conservation,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “This initiative allows local partners the opportunity to design and invest in conservation projects specifically tailored for their communities. These public-private partnerships can have an impact that’s well beyond what the Federal government could accomplish on its own. These efforts keep our land and water clean, and promote tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism, and other industries.”

Vilsack continued, “We had tremendous interest from local partners when we first launched this program last year. In this new round of applications, we’ll be looking for even greater emphasis on expanding partnerships that break down barriers, work across boundaries, leverage resources and create new opportunities for innovation.”

In January, USDA announced \$394 million in awards in the first round of RCPP applications (which represented two years’ worth of funding for fiscal years 2014 and 2015). Locally in Rhode Island, USDA NRCS partnered with the University of Rhode Island on a project worth over \$600,000 to utilize riparian forest buffers on over 375 acres of agricultural and forest land. The project will address diverse agricultural and natural resource goals including protection of important drinking water supplies and providing essential habitat for many at-risk species such

as the New England cottontail rabbit.

Today's announcement was made possible by the 2014 Farm Bill. The 2014 Farm Bill builds on historic economic gains in rural America over the past five years, while achieving meaningful reform and billions of dollars in savings for taxpayers. Since enactment, USDA has made significant progress to implement each provision of this critical legislation, including providing disaster relief to farmers and ranchers; strengthening risk management tools; expanding access to rural credit; funding critical research; establishing innovative public-private conservation partnerships; developing new markets for rural-made products; and investing in infrastructure, housing and community facilities to help improve quality of life.

**USDA is now accepting proposals for RCPP. Pre-proposals are due July 8. For more information on applying, visit the [Rhode Island RCPP website](#) or <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ri/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>.**