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Welcome to today's presentation. I am a national technology specialist for NRCS support center. -- All participants are in endless and only mode. With the audio relate to your device speakers. If you have difficulties, check the various ways that your speakers can be adjusted. Computer or mobile device headsets can help with your quality and volume. Also note that the status bar, all green is an indicator that you have a strong connection. You can download the PDF from today's handouts pod. And you can view live captions in the link pod. Please type in your question or comments into the dialogue bar and click send to submit them. You can do so throughout the presentation. I am pleased to turn this presentation over to Michael Bennet. You may now begin

Thank you Holly. I appreciate everyone taking the time out of their schedule to listen in and view the webinar. A copy of the slides and copies of the webinar itself with the video and audio transcripts are available on the CIG websites. Hopefully we can get back today. If not, it should be up by tomorrow. And all of the questions and answers that we receive through the webinar will also be posted online once we have a chance to consolidate them and lump them into categories and get the answers posted. They will be posted as well.

Good morning. Or good afternoon depending on what time zone you are in. Thank you for participating in the CIG webinar. Thank you for your interest in CIG. The announcement went out on March 7. About two weeks ago. It was posted on grants.gov. And there were other documents that were sent by way of a press release. The APF itself, it is available@grants.gov and also on the CIG main webpage. And we have the link for those on the screen.

For a little bit of background for those who may not know, we have a number of folks who have applied in the past. And we have some new folks. CIG was authorized as part of the environmental quality incentives program and there are some statutes, they are overarching and are the authority documents.

The description. If you have applied in the past you have a good understanding of what it is. For those that may be new to CIG, it is a voluntary competitive program in the past several years, we have received -- last year it was right around 400 applications and out of that, we awarded 45 grants. It is highly competitive. The primary purpose is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technology. And the key word there is innovative. We are looking for big ideas and concepts that are based off of a proven technology that is out there. Innovative is the key. With the intent to leverage federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural protection. That is the primary description of the program.

As far as the purpose, it is to demonstrate and validate potentially innovative technologies and approaches. With the intent of taking that information and the knowledge learned to transition to assist with NRCS and developing or refining new conservation standards. Also technology or innovation that could be transferred to other farmers, ranchers or foresters. CIG does not fund research. However, if there are on the farm conservation research projects, CIG can fund those.

In general, pure research or basic research cannot be funded. But if you have something that has been developed in a lab or through the initial phases and you want to take that to an on farm study, CIG can fund that.

Eligibility. It's almost wide open. And the next page has more examples. It is open to nonfederal governmental agencies, to nongovernmental organizations, federally recognized Indian tribes and also available to individuals. For CIG, a lot of those, when they hear or see nongovernmental organizations, they right away think about nonprofit organizations. And for CIG purposes, it is much larger than that. On this page, it gives you more examples of what those organizations are. State, county and local governments, special district governments. Public and state institutions of higher learning. Made of American tribes that are federally recognized. Housing authorities, other Native American tribal organizations. Nonprofits that have a 501(c) (3), other non-five -- nonprofits that do not have the designation. Private institutions of higher learning, individuals, for-profit organizations, small businesses, private businesses and corporations. It's open to pretty much everyone other than federal government organizations.

As far as applications, they are accepted from eligible entities and all of the 50 United States, the Caribbean area to include the Puerto Rico and Virgin islands. The Pacific island areas, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Washington DC. We can accept applications from all of those.

A key component to be eligible for CIG, the project must involve producers to meet the environmental quality incentive program eligibility requirements. Those producers do not have to have EQIP contracts. But they need to be eligible. And these are the basic eligibility requirements when it pertains to CIG. Basically, they are covered under the statute and be in compliance with highly eroded the land and wet conservation compliance. You need to be an agricultural producer and you need to have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract. The CIG run for three years. So that they can have control of the land for those three years. Also, there are adjusted gross income requirements. The project needs to involve eligible producers in one way or another.

There is a matching fund requirements. That match is 50% of the project cost. It is a dollar for dollar ratio. For every dollar of federal funds provided, the nonfederal entity needs to provide a dollar of nonfederal funds. It can be more than that, but it cannot be less. And the funds, the nonfederal funds can come from a variety of sources. It can come from cash, or in-kind resources. In-kind meaning volunteer time, donated property or donated land. We have examples of how that breaks down. These are a few examples and different scenarios. The top one the total project cost is \$200,000. So the CIG contribution is \$100,000 and the applicant's contribution is \$100,000. The second one down, here we have a much larger project. The total project is \$4.5 million. The CIG contribution is \$2 million and the applicant contribution is \$2.5 million. In this case, the applicant contribution is greater than a 1:1 match. And that is fine. The third one, is a project with a total cost of \$1 million. The CIG contribution is \$500,000, the applicant contribution is \$500,000. So we have a 1:1 match, but in this case the applicant has a contribution of cash and in-kind resources. In this particular case, the cash is \$350,000, and in-kind is \$150,000. That is a recent change in the percentages between cash and in-kind. With the current regulation does not stipulate a specific limit on the amount of in-kind sources.

For this year's CIG for fiscal year 2016, the NRCS is making \$20 million available to support CIG. A couple of changes this year. And the big one you will notice is the maximum award for 2016 is \$2 million. That is the maximum federal dollar contribution. In the past, or at least last year, that was \$1 million. But we doubled it this year to \$2 million. The intent behind that is to get projects that are bigger and bolder. We have done a number of projects up to the \$1 million mark over the last several years. And we are hoping to get more innovative projects that may not have been considered in the past because of today's value. It is a single and multi-year project to three years. For the categories for this year, and this is another fairly recent change from years past. In years past, there were any number of focus areas. This year, we ratcheted that down and picked three focus areas. But they can be much broader. The first area is historically underserved producers, veteran farmers or ranchers, or organizations comprised of or representing these individuals. In the past, those have been outreach type projects. But it can be much broader than that. The second primary focus area are those projects that are designed to demonstrate and validate technologies that would improve or protect ground and or surface water quality. Again, that is a broad area. Again, we are hoping by not narrowing that down that we get folks to think outside of traditional lines and come up with some great ideas. And the third category is a relatively new category. And that is conservation finance. And I think in years past we may have tried to narrow that down. But for this year, we are looking for big, bold ideas. Conservation finance are things like carbon credit trading -- training that may have been done in the past. Those are a couple of examples. There are a lot of folks out there that have great ideas on how to bring outside finance into the realm to help improve conservation activities to help finance those things. We are looking for some of those projects that are new and innovative. That may not have been tried in the past or expanded on past practices. That is a fairly wide open area. In APF, it has some examples of different things that we are looking at. Again, it is a wide open category.

This outlines the process as we go forward. The third big change from this year is that we are not having a pre-proposal phase. We are going straight to full proposals. This is the general outline of how that works. I forgot the key process of top and that is where you go into grants.gov and complete your application package. Once it is completed you will submit through grants.gov and also to the CIG email box. When you submit through grants.gov, you should receive a document from grants.gov saying that it has been received. When it is sent to the CIG email box, we will strive to let folks know within 10 days that we have received it. A word of caution. We will acknowledge receipt of your file. But that does not verify that all of the components are there. You need to take a close look and make sure that everything required by the APF is included in your application package to grants.gov and the CIG mailbox. What people do in turn, with NRCS, we will consolidate the submissions, we will cross-reference them to make sure that what was received and grants.gov was received in the CIG mailbox. We have run into situations where we do not have an application received through one or the other, but it was received to the opposite. We will probably reach out and verify and try to find which document was missing. We will take that information and divide it up into a variety of them -- bins that will be part of our technical review panels. They will review your project. And usually -- we will have those panel members, and they will be subject matter experts and that particular focus area. They will spend several weeks reviewing the packets that come in and reviewing the data. And looking to make sure that it is in the right in the focus area. As we will see if it is a solid project with a good opportunity for success with reasonable budgets. They will review that. The technical review panel will forward their results to the grant review board. And they will do a more in-depth

review of the projects and look for those projects that we feel meet the mark or are innovative. And have a strong likelihood of success. They will take several of those and put them into a category to make recommendations to the chief. And then it will go to the chief review board with the chief will take a look at everything that was recommended. And have the opportunity to pull another project based on information that he or she is provided enough that the reviewers may not have considered. And once the chief reviews everything and make his selection, the projects will be announced and the following announcements, grants will be awarded. That is kind of how the process will work. We are striving to have the projects announced by 1 September. And the grants awarded by 30 September. That is what we are striving for this year.

A little bit about what goes into the proposal. The announcement for program funding contains the information that means to go into the application packet. The first -- you obtained the package through grants.gov. The first part is the standard form which is the application for federal assistance. The second part is the project executive summary. This is important. We will use this information to summarize projects as it goes forward to the chief for his recommendation. And it will also form the basis for any announcements that go out announcing a project. It is important to provide a concise snapshot of the particular project. We get into more detail in your project description. And that starts on page 7 of the announcement for program funding -- I guess on page 8 of the announcement. It has detailed information as to what should be included in the project. The next part of the project proposal will be the assessment of environmental impacts. I am going to turn it over to Andree -- Andree to talk about that.

Hello folks I want to take a moment to talk about a couple of things that you will see in the APF. We don't worry about them too much. At first you will find on page 9, regarding the assessment of environmental impacts where we would ask you to summarize or describe generally with the impact of what your proposal will be. Often, we see the beneficial impact. But I want to ask you to talk about the possibility that there could be some trade-offs. Often times, things that are intended to be just beneficial to have some adverse impacts. Think about it. And disclose those to us. This submission is not going to make or break your proposal. It will not -- affect the selection of your proposal. But it would help us to understand the project a little bit and give us an idea of the potential level of environmental documentation that may be required should your project be selected for funding. You don't have to write a whole lot. Just generally. If you can quantify some things, that would be helpful. Such as the number of acres of wetlands impacted, if you are trying to do carbon sequestration how much carbon you think you will be sequestering. That kind of thing. And to think through all of these specific resources. And think of them as natural resources. And others that are protected by law. Like endangered species. Will your project affect any of those? You do not need to go overboard on this. But if you can give us a brief summary, and when you do that consider off-site as well as on-site impacts. We want to make you aware as it says in note 1. If there are adverse impacts we may ask you to modify the project to avoid those. And also, in note 2, if a grant is awarded, to give you a heads up that there are some requirements that we may have to satisfy it first -- before work can begin. This slide is provided to help you think through some of the impacts that your project might have. This is a tool that NRCS uses it when it does planning in the field. And you can think of the wide variety of types of impacts that there could be.

For each of the resources and energy as well, this is a reminder of things for you to think about. And we are providing it to you in this slideshow so that you can refer to it if you would like to use it. This slide is a paragraph that is on page 14 of your APF. Here, we are giving you a heads up about our requirements to satisfy the national environmental policy act requirement. It is a federal obligation whatever there are federal funds involved in a project we have to meet the requirement. In order to do that, we want to give you a heads up that if an environmental assessment or impact statement is required, you will have to play a role in that. And possibly undertake the financing of it if it is required for your project. Again this is only if your project is selected for funding. And before we get to that point, we will do what is called an environmental evaluation. We will have the grantees work with our offices to complete that form. Our state offices would do the heavy lifting. But you will have to provide information so they know how to assess the project appropriately. And there may be some environmental complication with fish and wildlife for example that could be required. If your project is selected, do not worry we will work with you. I do want you to be aware that there is a slight potential for most of our project. Most of our projects do not require NEPA documentation. But we will work with you to make sure that it gets done. And all of this has to be done before you begin implementing your project. I just wanted you to be aware of that. This is also in your APF starting on page 14. It's more information about what we are required to do to satisfy the historic preservation act. And it says that we have to satisfy these requirements and we cannot delegate them to anyone else. It is to protect historic properties and cultural resources. And we would again require any remediation of adverse effects before the project could be implemented. It is a matter of reviewing the project and finding that impact and finding those and making sure that we mitigate to make the project possible. It will be a lot of work working with NRCS. It is not a lengthy process to do all of this. In many cases, NRCS offices have laid a lot of groundwork. Be aware that it has to be done before the project implementation begins. And I think that is it for me. Thank you very much.

Thank you. On this slide, we had talked about the assessment of environmental impacts. I will talk about the budget information. And what we are finding out is that the SF424 a, that auto populates is challenging to use. So I am trying to look at that and get some other ideas and get other examples on the website. But in general, the SF-424A, the first part over here, you are listing the total federal dollars requested and identifying what the nonfederal match is. And when you get to part 6, it breaks it down more. Into the different object categories. And identifies the federal requested and with the nonfederal match it. In grants.gov, when I went into the system to fill some of these out, I noticed that it does not fill them out exactly this way. You have to put a second one down here. On the first line you can put CIG federal. If you go to number two, you can put CIG nonfederal and that will split these out. It will put federal on the top line and nonfederal on the bottom. And then it will allow you to break it down by federal and nonfederal. Again, I need to go through a couple of examples and post them on our webpage to give some ideas. When we look at the budget, probably the biggest key component is going to be the budget narrative itself. And how you lay that out. That is going to back up all of the numbers that are put into the SF-424A. That will, for instance, SF-424A on the first line, or personnel that give a total amount. When you get into your budget narrative that will explain how the number was derived. The same for all of the other object classes. This is the SF-424A. It provides an overview. But the narrative itself is where it will get down into the meat of it and tell us with those numbers come from. And that is looked at in good detail by the technical review panel. We are looking for the cost effectiveness of the project. Is the cost reasonable based on the expected outcome? And

that is key. Especially when you are looking at a competitive process. It becomes key when you have a number of projects that may be looking at the same type of innovative demonstration valuation. It may become more important in selection and selecting the first one or two for recommendation to the chief.

Letters of support. Those are also required. The declaration of previous CIG projects. And the APF, it gets into more detail on what is meant by the declaration of previous CIG projects. In general you should list out all of your projects. Within the APF itself, it says, if you have a number of projects over the last couple of years, there is some other information that we want to know. And that is under number nine on page 11. It talks about that additional information that we would like to have. Part of that is to give us the assurance that should a CIG be awarded, that you have a good history of success using the funding wisely and producing results. Or are on the way to producing results if it is more than a two-year project. That becomes important. The declaration of historically underserved and veterans farmers. That is a self-declaration. And that is identified and we talked a little bit about that on page 12 of the APF. I have gotten questions before several questions as far as documentation of the state conservation, and what exactly that is. For our purposes, if you submit it by email, a copy of the email that went to the state conservation is. If it was sent via mail with a letter, copy the letter and the project will be fine as well. Certifications would be another form that is required. And we are making the transition to grants.gov. We initially listed the DUNS and SAM as pre-award requirements. But I think these are now required to register within grants.gov. You probably need those before you can register a grants.gov. We are trying to verify that and put that on our webpage. Something to look at with your SAM number. Last year we had a couple of awards that were made, but by the time the award was processed, or by the time the first voucher was submitted, the SAM number had expired. Make sure that the SAM number, keep on top of that and make sure that it is not ready to expire or ready to expire. Take action to get a new SAM number. Sometimes that has held up the final documentation of the award or reimbursements. Double check on that.

A couple of last points on the application. When you are looking at the application, at NRCS as your customer. We are looking for innovative technologies or approaches based off of the proven technology that is already out there. How can we take a piece of technology that may have been used for one purpose and repurpose it for an agricultural use? The second key thing is transferability. We want this project to succeed. We want the results to be transition. And how can it be transferred to NRCS to do a better job. To the USDA and other federal agencies and producers? You need to outline within the project summary, how it will be transferred. And give us assurance that it is possible through the project. And that the project should benefit agricultural producers in part -- who partner with NRCS. Your project, it should clearly defined the deliverables. What you plan to achieve? And we are looking for a project that is usable by the NRCS and others when it comes to fruition. The key point is, start early and plan to submit early if you can, so that we do not run into system issues.

Our webpage has a significant amount of information on it. If you have not been into it recently, it has been upgraded to a certain extent. We're trying to put more information on it and make it more user-friendly as time has gone on. But in the bottom left-hand corner of the slide that is the direct link to the webpage. And as you are going and, if you look at the section for applicants, that will have quite a bit of information that we hope will be helpful. This is a screenshot of the

applicant webpage which may or may not be legible on your computer. That will give you quite a bit of information and link you to the different forms and make you to grants.gov. And a couple of budget examples. And I want to fully develop some more to put up there as different examples. The biggest part of the budget is going to be how you explain it. Where do the numbers come from? And we have some sample documents and frequently asked questions. We try to up that -- update that based on last year's comments. And some additional resources. How to submit. I think this is a change over past years. There are 2 ways to submit one is through grants.gov. At the second one is to our CIG email box. What we have tried to do is that it gives us an opportunity to cross reference. We run into situations where in the past, we have gotten emails into the mailbox but have not gotten them through grants.gov or vice versa. Doing it both ways, we have the check in there we can reach out to someone if we do not see both. And also, grants.gov is a challenging system to work through. With the opportunity to lose various attachments. We are hoping that with the duplication we will end up with a more complete application package. And do a better job of reviewing them. I have noted at the bottom, please do not mail paper copies. With a lot of the screening processes that go on with the federal government, sometimes in the past, it may take a month to get a document through the mail. And then, it has to be scanned and converted to PDF. The more touches that happened, a better opportunity to lose part of your proposal and we do not want to do that.

The proposal deadline is May 10, 2016, by 4 PM. And we have gotten some questions on the time. We will take a look at that and get information back and posted on our website. There is some question on 4 PM, or 5 PM. What is the time? We need to clarify that and we will post that on our website for clarification. The contact information. As far as myself, that CIG program manager, if you have specific questions or concerns, please reach out to me. I have probably talk to 50 or 60 people so far. The other key team member if you have questions is Melleny Cotton. We'll do our best to answer those questions for you. And because of the EQIP eligibility, we often have to reach out to other folks to answer those questions.

One question I cannot necessarily answer, they wanted to know if their project will fit within the three categories. I can answer in broad terms. But you need to carefully review the categories and take a close look at your project. And you need to make that determination. One of the things I hesitate to do is to tell someone no, it does not fit. And have another project come through that someone else determined that it did it and they got funded. Especially if it is an innovative project that has not been done in the past. And that may warrant further review. That is something you're going to have to make your own determination. The chief always has the opportunity to consider project that may have been some edit that do not necessarily fit in one of those three categories. I think with that, we have gotten some questions through the line that we are trying to answer. If you have other questions, please list them out and we will do our best to go through them. Any questions that we are not able to answer now or do not get to, we will post on our webpage along with the answers.

I have a few of them I'm going to go through. And one is dealing with in-kind support. The one question on in-kind support is it necessary to demonstrate that the matching organization was not already planning to conduct an activity? We are not required, but I have run into a situation where an applicant apply to 2 different sources for the grant. They were awarded grants. And now they are struggling to find their cost match. Because they included the same cost match for

both projects. You need to take a close look at the grants that you may be applying to and make sure that they do not overlap. If they had already planned to conduct the activity, that is probably one of those questionable areas. We almost have to look at that on an individual basis. But, if you are using federal dollars to leverage your cost match, that would not be allowed. Again, if you have more questions on that, you can talk to me off-line. Call and I will try to answer a get a better answer up on the webpage.

Doesn't email to CIG email box, does that need to be up by 4 PM? We prefer both of them to be in the system by 4 PM. At grants.gov and at the CIG email box.

Another question on indirect costs and unrecovered. That is a question I will have to take off-line and talk to the experts on that and post that on the webpage. I would not want to give you misleading information right now.

Do the letters of support -- can that be a list or the actual letter. It would strengthen the application if you included the actual letters versus just a list.

Another one, as far as what are the considerations that the chief is taking into account when looking at projects that may have otherwise been projected? I don't know if there is any particular key areas that come into account. There may be some initiatives that have arisen since the announcement has gone out. And they had been identified by the Secretary, and the chief and by the president. It is hard to say. In summary, there are probably 2 considerations. One would be how cutting edge is the innovative technology? And what other top -- hot topics may have arisen since the program went out?

Can we talk with to find out if we are eligible in the first place? Or EQIP eligibility questions, though local NRCS office should be able to help you make a determination if you are NRCS eligible -- EQIP eligible.

Can a USDA employee serve as a technical collaborative or -- collaborator on a CIG grants? If the employee is serving outside of his normal job position, he or she could be a collaborator. They cannot do it as part of their normal day-to-day job. With each CIG grants, we do have a technical point of contact. But they are there to make sure that the project is progressing the way it should and do not necessarily serve as a technical collaborator.

What if the project fit into two or more categories? I would go ahead and list all category fields that it fits into. And they will review each of those categories.

Once we conclude the webinar, it will be downloaded and we will post it on to the CIG webpage. You will have the authority to go back and look at that or send other folks who were not able to participate. They should be able to pick that up along with any questions and answers that come out of it.

Do you need to identify the actual EQIP land owner? Or can you identify them as part of the project? As you work through your project, you should identify them as part of your project. I

think that would strengthen it more as far as the project that you already have both lined up. If you can outline who they are already, it helps. It helps to strengthen the application.

I have a question, if we are interested in a New Jersey veterans coalition grants. I ask that you contact me off-line. And we can discuss that in more detail. Offhand, I am not sure, and I don't know enough about the grant to say yes or no. You can talk to me off-line. I need more information and I will talk with some folks and see if that is a possibility.

I think that is the last question. Does the application need to include verification of EQIP eligibility for each producer? We do not need verification. The applicant, as they go forward, as part of their due diligence, they should acquire something from the EQIP eligible producer. That does not have to be submitted with the application.

Andree, you may be able to answer this. There is a question -- can the project be part of every EQIP to satisfy the requirements, more specifically [Indiscernible] requirements. I actually don't completely understand the question. But I would say that if you are going to have regular EQIP participants in your project, and they will be receiving EQIP funds separately, we do the environmental valuation process on every program participant project. So I suppose that could be a possibility. Although, we need to do an overall review as well. I think we could address it that way. Thank you.

Any other questions at this point? If you cannot think of any right now, or think of a way to phrase them so that they can be easily articulated, please feel free to reach out to myself or Melleny Cotton. And we can spend more time with you. And get down into more details specific to your situation. Yes and likewise, if I did not understand the question appropriately, please let Mike know and make the clarification.

Any other questions at this point? The question is, can a non-EQIP project applied? Yes, but you must have EQIP eligible producers.

I have a question from Teresa. You may have to contact me off-line. I'm not sure I fully understand. Yes, I see the question. It looks like you would need to most likely, in this case we would handle things separately. The question is, if the project is identifying logistical probability of a location having a recorded site, and I would say that we would need to discuss that. If it is selected for funding. And most likely we would have to do a [Indiscernible] and look at a specific site. We would have to work through that with you should your proposal be selected for funding.

Thank you. Any other questions? We only have about one minute left. I value your time. I do not want to keep you over. Please feel free to reach out to myself or Melleny Cotton. Both of our phone numbers and email addresses are on the contact page. Please, if you have questions, reach out to us. And I think that is it for me. I appreciate your time and your interest in CIG. And I look forward to receiving and reviewing your applications so that we can come up with some good ideas and some innovative technology to help improve our conservation resources and to look at potential ways of using alternate financing to go forward in the future. Again, thank you

very much for your calling in and have a great day.

[Event concluded]