

**Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Report To  
Papio-Missouri River NRD Board  
November 10, 2016  
Neil Jensen, District Conservationist**



**USDA Seeks Applications for \$25 Million in Conservation Innovation Grants**

*Funding is available in six focus areas, including data analytics tools and precision conservation*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA is seeking new proposals for cutting-edge projects that will provide new conservation opportunities through its competitive Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program.

CIG is authorized and funded under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and fosters innovative conservation projects that accelerate the transfer and adoption of promising technologies that benefit natural resources, agricultural production and forest management. The 2017 focus areas for project proposals include the following:

- Innovative approaches that benefit historically underserved and veteran farmers and ranchers, beginning farmers and ranchers and those with limited resources;
- Natural resources data analytics tools—such as software and mobile apps—that increase producer knowledge of conservation benefits and alternatives;
- Precision conservation tools that uncover opportunities for better input management (for example, nutrient management addressing source, timing, rate and placement), or address in-field vulnerabilities;
- Conservation finance approaches that demonstrate the potential for new investment strategies to accelerate and expand private lands conservation;
- Demonstration, evaluation and quantification of the effects of water management and soil health practices to minimize off-site impacts of natural resource challenges, such as excess sediment and nutrient runoff;
- Pay-for-success models that stimulate conservation adoption and achievement of measurable outcomes.

Potential applicants should review the [announcement](#) for program funding that is available on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Proposals are due by Jan. 9, 2017, and final CIG funding is subject to fiscal year 2017 funding actions. American Indian tribes, state and local units of government, non-governmental organizations and individuals are eligible to submit proposals. More information on the CIG program, including a link to application materials and submission procedures, can be found on the NRCS [CIG website](#).

Example CIG projects funded previously:

- Cover Crop Demonstration Project
- Pollinator and Beneficial Insect Plantings for Organic and Specialty Crop Producers
- Ephemeral Gully Assessment and Adoption of Preventative Measures to Reduce Erosion in Cultivated Croplands
- Soil Health
- Simple Scientific Irrigation Scheduling System



### **USDA Expands Working-Lands Conservation Opportunities through CRP**

USDA will offer a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands practice specifically tailored for small-scale livestock grazing operations. Small livestock operations (100 or fewer head of grazing dairy cows or the equivalent) can submit applications to enroll up to 200 acres of grasslands per farm. USDA's goal is to enroll up to 200,000 acres.

The new practice for small-scale livestock grazers aims, in part, to encourage greater diversity geographically and in types of livestock operation. This opportunity will close on Dec. 16, 2016. Offers selected this fiscal year will be enrolled into CRP Grasslands beginning Oct. 1, 2017.

CRP Grasslands participants can use the land for livestock production (e.g. grazing or producing hay), while following their conservation and grazing plans in order to maintain the cover. A goal of CRP Grasslands is to minimize conversion of grasslands either to row crops or to non-agricultural uses. Participants can receive annual payments of up to 75 percent of the grazing value of the land and up to 50 percent to fund cover or practices like cross-fencing to support rotational grazing or improving pasture cover to benefit pollinators or other wildlife.

To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation).



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