

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agency: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

ACTION: NOTICE

Conservation Innovation Grants Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Announcement for Program Funding (APF)

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.912

Grants.gov Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-RI-12-01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NRCS requests applications for Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Applications will only be considered **for projects in Rhode Island**. Contingent on Congressional action, NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2012 will be approximately \$125,000. Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive grants process.

There are six CIG categories available in Rhode Island in FY 2012: **Nutrient Management; Energy Conservation; Soil Health; Wildlife; Urban and Small Farms; and Aquaculture**. Applications are requested from eligible government or non-government organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of grant awards for projects between one and three years in duration. This notice identifies the objectives for CIG projects, the eligibility criteria for projects, and associated instructions needed to apply to CIG.

PROPOSAL DUE DATE AND ADDRESSES: Proposals must be received in the NRCS Office in Warwick, RI, by 4 p.m., Eastern Time (ET), on **May 1, 2012**.

The address for mailed, courier serviced, or hand-delivered applications is: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants Program, 60 Quaker Ln, Suite 40, Warwick, RI 02886-0181. Contact phone number is 401-828-1300.

To submit your application electronically, visit www.Grants.gov – Apply for Grants and follow the instructions.

For more information and to download the application materials, please visit the Rhode Island NRCS website at www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION	1
A. Legislative Authority	1
B. Overview	1
C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities	1
D. CIG Categories	2
1. Nutrient Management	2
2. Energy Conservation	3
3. Soil Health	4
4. Wildlife	4
5. Urban and Small Farms:	5
6. Aquaculture:	5
II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY – STATE COMPONENT	5
III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION	5
A. Matching Funds	5
B. Beginning and Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers, and Indian Tribes	5
C. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments	6
D. Project Eligibility	7
IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION	7
A. How to Obtain Application Materials	7
B. Proposal Content and Format	8
C. How to Submit a Written Proposal	12
D. How to Submit a Proposal Electronically	12
E. Application Due Date	12
F. Acknowledgement of Submission	13
G. Funding Restrictions	13
H. Patents and Inventions	13
I. Environmental Review Requirements	14
J. Withdrawal of Applications	14
K. Deliverables	14
V. APPLICATION REVIEW	15
A. Proposal Review and Selection Process	15
B. Criteria for Proposal Evaluation	15
C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates	16
VI. AWARD INFORMATION	16
A. Award Notification	16
B. Environmental Review Requirements (if determined to be required)	16
C. Grant Agreement	16
D. Reporting Requirements	17
VII. CIG STATE CONTACTS	18

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

CIG was authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8] under Section 1240H of the Food Security Act of 1985, as added by section 2509 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP and CIG to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). EQIP is funded and administered by NRCS under the authorities of the CCC.

B. Overview

The purpose of CIG is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) into NRCS technical manuals, guides, and references, or to the private sector.

CIG does not fund research projects. Instead, it is a vehicle to stimulate the development and adoption of conservation approaches or technologies that have been studied sufficiently to indicate a likelihood of success and to be candidates for eventual technology transfer or institutionalization. CIG funds projects targeting innovative on-the-ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.

NRCS will accept applications for single or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years, submitted to NRCS from eligible entities, including Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, State and local governments, and non-governmental organizations and individuals. Applications are accepted **for projects in Rhode Island**.

Applications will be evaluated by a technical peer review panel based on the Criteria for Application Evaluation identified in this document. The panel will make recommendations for project approval to the State Conservationist. Final award selections will be made by the Rhode Island State Conservationist of NRCS.

C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

For the purposes of CIG, the proposed innovative project or activity must encompass the development, field testing, evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of:

- Conservation adoption approaches or incentive systems; or
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches; or

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

- Environmental soundness with goals of environmental protection and natural resource enhancement.

To be given priority consideration, the innovative project or activity should:

- Make use of a proven technology or a technology that has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success;
- Demonstrate and verify environmental (soil, water, air, plants, energy, and animal) effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of conservation technology in the field;
- Adapt conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption;
- Introduce conservation systems, approaches, and procedures from another geographic area or agricultural sector;
- Adapt conservation technology, management, or incentive systems to improve performance; and
- Demonstrate transferability of knowledge.

While NRCS is interested in receiving proposals for each bulleted topic below, special interest is placed on receiving proposals that address topics identified as a “Priority Need.” Additional topics (not listed below) may be considered at the State Conservationist’s (STC’s) discretion. If an additional topic is proposed for the STC’s consideration, it must be identified as such in the proposal.

D. CIG Categories

For Fiscal Year 2012, six categories will be offered for Rhode Island CIG: **Nutrient Management; Energy Conservation; Soil Health; Wildlife; Urban and Small Farms; and Aquaculture.**

1. Nutrient Management

- **Priority Need:** Demonstrate and quantify the optimal combinations of nutrient source, application rate, placement, and application timing (4 Rs), as measured by impact on nutrient use efficiency and yield for one or more of the following: corn, vegetables, and hay/pasture. Demonstrations are encouraged that show how these optimal combinations change for one or more of the following comparisons: tillage vs. reduced tillage systems, manure-amended vs. non manure-amended systems, and/or organic vs. conventional production systems.
- Demonstrate new and innovative advances in precision farming technologies related to low disturbance fertilizer injection and quantify the effects on nutrient use efficiency, yield, and producer risk.

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

- Demonstrate active methods which improve on the capture of nitrogen in manure management systems and provide the opportunity to recycle the manure nitrogen in lieu of synthetic fertilizers. Examples may include: technologies that help growers deal with excess manure by means of exports or other value added products that generate income for the grower; and quantifying the impacts of innovative technologies that decrease nitrogen and phosphorus losses from the field (e.g., biofilters, wetland restoration, drainage water management).
- **Priority Need:** Evaluate the use and cost effectiveness of technologies and/or programs that demonstrate the processing, removal and use of manure from horse or other operations that do not typically have a land base for application.

2. Energy Conservation

- **Priority Need:** Evaluate and demonstrate renewable energy systems (e.g. hydropower, solar, geo-thermal, and/or wind) that displace fossil fuel energy and meet on-farm energy needs, while increasing energy efficiency and/or reducing environmental contaminants (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions).
- Develop and/or demonstrate innovative implementation systems to achieve greater use of energy audits that address cropland, buildings, and equipment.
- Demonstrate the use of immediate feedback devices such as smart meters and their effect on increasing energy conservation and efficiency in the farming sector.
- Evaluate and demonstrate energy savings through adaptive management cropping systems that utilize crop rotations that include legumes and grasses in long term no-till systems that will increase nutrient cycling through enhanced soil biological activity.
- Develop and demonstrate innovative planning and decision aids to assess potential impacts of small on-farm renewable energy systems on wildlife and wildlife habitats and that can be used to identify appropriate sites to avoid or minimize potential adverse impacts.
- Demonstrate the feasibility and document the relevant issues associated with using low-head hydropower turbines in surface water sources such as in-stream installations and small dams (e.g. using a flow-through or pumpback configuration).
- Develop and demonstrate the use of woody biomass in small scale high efficiency energy systems such as using residue from Timber Stand Improvement to create wood pellets for use as an alternative energy source.
- Demonstrate the use of reduced tillage methods on vegetable crops to document the savings of fuel/time/labor.

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

3. Soil Health

- **Priority Need:** Demonstrate and quantify the impacts of cover crops, crop rotations, tillage and/or soil amendments on soil chemical, physical, and/or biological properties and their relationships with nutrient cycling, soil water availability, and plant growth.
- **Priority Need:** Demonstrate and quantify the rate of increase in available soil water holding capacity as a function of soil properties, management practices (e.g. tillage, amendments, crop residue inputs), and/or climate.
- Demonstrate innovative seeding methods of cover crops and multiple species cover crop mixes to allow for earlier establishment and increased biomass production.

4. Wildlife

- **Priority Need:** Develop planning and decision aids to assess and maximize wildlife habitat value on land used to grow biofuel crops.
- Develop and/or demonstrate small scale fish screen, fish passage, and other fish related technology and criteria for native aquatic species of conservation concern.
- Demonstrate innovative approaches to restoring and reconnecting riparian ecosystems that preserve hydrologic connectivity and aquatic organism passage.
- Develop Oak Management Guidelines to assist planning Brush Management in wildlife habitat related to Ecological Sites.
- Develop planning and decision aids to assess the value of habitat development projects by estimating grouse, woodcock and New England Cottontail population responses to conservation practices.
- **Priority Need:** Demonstrate the effectiveness and document the economics of alternate pest control methods in agricultural crops to protect pollinators and their habitats (e.g., ground application versus aerial application of pesticides, provision of habitat for “beneficial” insects).
- Document the benefits to other wildlife species of improving pollinator habitat.
- Evaluate the following NRCS conservation practice standards using a large diversity of flowering plants in order to quantify and demonstrate the revised practice standard benefits to pollinators: 332-Contour Buffer Strips, 342-Critical Area Planting, 393-Filter Strip, 391-Riparian Forest Buffer, 311-Alley Cropping, 380-Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment, and/or 580-Streambank and Shoreline Protection.
- Develop state-specific and crop/orchard-specific plans that address the nesting and foraging needs of crop/orchard-specific pollinators.

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

- Develop planning and decision aids to assess the value of various silvicultural practices on native wildlife habitat in Rhode Island.

5. Urban and Small Farms:

- **Priority Need:** Develop or determine retrofits of existing conservation practices to make the practice more applicable to small, urban or organic farms. This would include the development of additional scenarios, cost, methods that would better encourage both small acreage and organic operations to apply for EQIP initiatives. Additionally this would assist the field planners with selecting appropriate practices to address resource concerns at this scale.

6. Aquaculture:

- Identify additional resource concerns with aquaculture operations and develop new or retrofit existing conservation practices to address these resource concerns.

II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY – STATE COMPONENT

The intent of the State Component is to provide flexibility to NRCS State Conservationists to target CIG funds to individual producers and smaller organizations that may possess promising innovations, but may not compete well on the larger scale of the national grants competition.

For FY 2012, the State Component of CIG will be available in Rhode Island at the discretion of the State Conservationist. Funding availability and application and submission information for state competitions will be announced through public notices and on State NRCS websites. State Conservationists will determine the funding level for state competitions, with individual grants not to exceed \$75,000.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

CIG applicants must be a Federally-recognized Indian Tribe; State or local unit of government; non-governmental organization; private business; or individual.

A. Matching Funds

Selected applicants may receive grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide non-Federal funding (matching funds) for at least 50 percent of the project cost. Up to half of the applicant's matching funds (up to 25 percent of the total project cost) may be from in-kind contributions.

B. Beginning and Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers, and Indian Tribes

For the FY 2012 grant award process, up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG may be set-aside for applications from Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. To compete for these set-aside funds, the applicant must make a declaration in the application as described in Part IV C.7 of this notice. Applications that are unsuccessful in the

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

set-aside competition will be placed automatically in the general application pool for consideration. Funds not used in the set-aside pool will revert back into the general funding pool.

Beginning Farmer or Rancher - a person or legal entity who:

- Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of an entity who will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch
- In the case of a contract with an individual, individually, or with the immediate family, material and substantial participation requires that the individual provide substantial day-to-day labor and management of the farm or ranch consistent with the practices in the county or State where the farm is located
- In the case of a contract with an entity or joint operation, all members must materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch. Material and substantial participation requires that each of the members provide some amount of the management or labor and management necessary for day-to-day activities, such that if each of the members did not provide these inputs, operation of the farm or ranch would be seriously impaired

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers - a farmer or rancher who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as a member of a group without regards to their individual qualities.

In addition, an exception regarding matching funds is made for projects funded out of the set-aside. Up to three-fourths of the required matching funds for such projects (up to 37.5 percent of the total project cost) may derive from in-kind contributions. This exception is intended to help Beginning Farmers or Ranchers and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers meet the statutory requirements for receiving a CIG.

C. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments

Section 1240G of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7, imposes a \$300,000 limitation for all cost-share or incentive payments disbursed to individuals or entities under an EQIP contract between fiscal years 2008 and 2012. The limitation applies to CIG in the following manner:

- CIG funds are awarded through grant agreements; these grant agreements are not EQIP contracts. Thus, CIG awards in and of themselves are not limited by the payment limitation
- Direct or indirect payments made to an individual or entity using funds from a CIG award to carry out structural, vegetative, or management practices count toward each individual's or entity's EQIP payment limitation. Through project progress reports, CIG grantees are responsible for certifying that producers involved in CIG projects do not

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

exceed the payment limitation. Further, all direct and indirect payments made to producers using CIG funds must be reported to the NRCS CIG program manager in the semi-annual report. Direct or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice for which the producer has already received funds, or is contracted to receive funds, through any of the USDA Programs (EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Security Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, etc.) since this would be considered a duplicate payment.

D. Project Eligibility

To be eligible for CIG, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements as set forth in 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-1. Further, all agricultural producers receiving direct or indirect payments through participation in a CIG project must also meet the EQIP eligibility requirements. Refer to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/> for more information on EQIP eligibility requirements. Participating producers are not required to have an EQIP contract.

A person or legal entity shall not be eligible to receive any benefit during a crop, fiscal, or program year, as appropriate, if the average adjusted gross non-farm income of the person or legal entity exceeds \$1,000,000, unless not less than 66.66 percent of the average adjusted gross income of the person or legal entity is average adjusted gross farm income.

A person who is determined ineligible for USDA program benefits under the Highly Erodible Land Compliance (HELIC) and Wetland Compliance (WC) provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985 will not be eligible to receive direct or indirect payments through CIG.

Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in Rhode Island through EQIP are ineligible for CIG funding except where the use of those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation. The burden falls on the applicant to sufficiently describe the innovative features of the proposed technology or approach (applicants should reference the Rhode Island EQIP Eligible Practices List by contacting the NRCS office at 401-822-8818).

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. NRCS will designate a Program Contact, an Administrative Contact, and a Technical Contact to provide administrative and technical oversight for each project receiving an award.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. How to Obtain Application Materials

All OMB standard forms necessary for CIG submission are posted on the following website: www.grants.gov/agencies/aapproved_standard_forms.jsp. An application checklist is available on www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

B. Proposal Content and Format

Applications must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for a grant. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Submit applications in the following format:

- Applications should be typewritten or printed on 8½” x 11” white paper. The text of the application should be in a font no smaller than 12-point, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. If submitting applications for more than one project, submit a separate, complete application package for each project. Proposals should be saved as Microsoft Word or Adobe (PDF) files onto a CD and the electronic copy included in the application package.

Proposals must include all required forms and narrative sections described below. **Incomplete applications will not be considered.**

1. **Cover Sheet:** Applicants must use **Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance** as the cover sheet for each project application. Standard Form 424 can be downloaded from www.grants.gov/agencies/aapproved_standard_forms.jsp or from the CIG State contacts in section VII.
2. **Project Summary Sheet:** Applicants must submit a Project Summary Sheet (no more than one page in length) that includes the listed information. A template for the Project Summary Sheet is available on the NRCS CIG website: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig or on the Rhode Island NRCS website at www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov.
 - a. Project Title
 - b. Project Director name and contact information (including e-mail)
 - c. Names and affiliations of project collaborators
 - d. Project Purpose
 - e. Project Deliverables/Products
 - f. Project Scope/Area
 - g. Project Start and End Dates (Projects should plan to begin no earlier than August 1, 2012)
 - h. CIG State Category (Natural Resource Concerns or Technology)
 - i. Proposal Review Category (Water Resources; Soil Resources; Atmospheric Resources; and Grazing Land and Forest Health; Market-Based Approaches; Wildlife Habitat; Improved on-farm energy efficiency)
 - j. Certifications – EQIP Eligibility and Request for Federal Funds
 - k. Brief summary of project

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

3. **Project Description:** Each project must be completely and accurately described in no more than ten (10) single-sided, double-spaced pages, 12 point font. The description must include the following information:
- a. **Project narrative:** Clearly and concisely describes the proposed project and discusses the expected benefits. The project narrative should provide a clear description of the work to be undertaken and how it will be accomplished. It must be formatted to address each of the merit review criteria listed in section V.1.B and provide sufficient information for the reviewers to evaluate the application in accordance with these merit review criteria. The project narrative should mention the amount of money applied for and matching dollars provided.
 - b. **Project background:** Describe the history of, and need for, the proposed innovation. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a good probability for success of the project;
 - c. **Project objectives:** Be specific, using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project's purpose and goals. Describe how, based on the description of innovative conservation projects and activities provided in section I.C., the project is innovative;
 - d. **Project methods:** Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project;
 - e. **Location and size of project or project area:** Describe the location of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, farm types and demographics, etc.) of the project area. Provide a map, if possible;
 - f. **Producer participation:** Estimate the number of producers involved in the project, and describe the extent of their involvement (all producers involved in the project must be eligible for EQIP);
 - g. **Project action plan and timeline:** Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion;
 - h. **Project management:** Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant education or experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Explain the level of participation required in the project by government and non-government entities. Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project;
 - i. **Benefits or results expected and transferability:** Identify the results and benefits to be derived from the proposed project activities, and explain how the results will be measured. Identify project beneficiaries—for example, agricultural producers by type or region or sector; rural communities; municipalities. Explain

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

how these entities will benefit. In addition, describe how results will be communicated to others via outreach activities;

- j. **Project evaluation:** Describe the methodology or procedures to be followed to evaluate the project, determine technical feasibility, and quantify the results of the project for the final report. (Grant recipients will be required to provide a semi-annual report of progress, quarterly financial reports, and a final project report to NRCS. Instructions for submitting quarterly reports will be detailed in the grant agreement.); and
- k. **Environmental impacts:** Environmental Information and Assessment of Environmental Impacts: Describe the anticipated environmental effects of the proposed project. The description of the potential environmental and social impacts must address all potential beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. A description of the potential impacts to all environmental resources must be disclosed. Environmental resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other specific resources protected by law, Executive Order, and Agency policy. These resources are outlined in the NRCS Environmental Evaluation Worksheet, form NRCS-CPA-52, which is available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ECS/environment/CPA-52.doc>. The CPA 52 form can be used as a guide for the scope of environmental information that should be prepared for this section of the application. In addition to describing impacts, applicants are required to assess the significance or degree of potential environmental impact of the proposed project on environmental resources. Applicants may consult with NRCS Environmental Liaison concerning the scope of what should be addressed in this section of the application. A list of the Environmental Liaisons can be found on the following website: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ECS/environment/liaison.doc>

Note: Please be aware that applications for projects with potentially adverse impacts may need to be modified in order to achieve acceptable and beneficial levels of environmental impact. If projects cannot be modified, then there is a potential during the screening process that the application may not be selected.

- 4. **Budget Information:** Use **Standard Form (SF) 424A, Budget Information Non-Construction Programs**, to document budget needs. SF424A is available at www.grants.gov/agencies/aapproved_standard_forms.jsp or at www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov.

In addition to the SF424A, all applicants must provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project, broken down by each project year. Itemize the costs necessary for successful completion of the proposed project. Indicate the total amount (both cash and in-kind) of non-Federal matching support that will be provided to the proposed project. Identify and provide documentation of the source(s), the amount, and the nature

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

(cash or in-kind) of the matching funds. An indirect cost-rate agreement must be included if the applicant is claiming indirect costs. Indirect costs cannot exceed 15%. In-kind costs of equipment or project personnel cannot exceed 50 percent of the applicant's match. The remainder of the match must be provided in cash.

The project budget should include the following:

- a. Position title, number of hours, and total cost for personnel proposed;
 - b. Total cost for travel;
 - c. Proposed equipment, supplies, or other major expenses over \$5,000;
 - d. Total of all direct costs;
 - e. Total of indirect costs (not to exceed 15% of direct costs); and
 - f. Summary of total project costs
- 5. Declaration of Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher:** If an applicant wishes to compete in the 10 percent set-aside funding pool (see Part III B.) that describes the provision of a set-aside pool of funding for beginning farmer or rancher, socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, and avail themselves of the in-kind contribution exception, applicants must make a declaration in writing of their status as a Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher, or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities
- 6. Declaration of EQIP Eligibility:** Applicants must include a statement indicating that the proposed project will involve EQIP-eligible producers. Applicants must make a declaration in writing that they, or parties involved in the project, are eligible for EQIP (if EQIP eligible producers are not involved, the proposal will be considered ineligible)
- 7. Certifications:** All applications must include a signed **Standard Form (SF) 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs**. SF 424B may be found at: www.grants.gov/agencies/aapproved_standard_forms.jsp or from the CIG State contacts in section VII. Applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following from 7 Code of Federal Register (CFR):
- a. Part 3017, Government wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement);
 - b. Part 3018, New Restrictions on Lobbying; and
 - c. Part 3021, Government wide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace (Financial Assistance).
- 8. DUNS Number:** A Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number is a unique nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. A *Federal Register* notice of final policy issuance (68 FR 38402) requires a DUNS number in every

**Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island**

application (i.e., hard copy and electronic) for a grant or cooperative agreement (except applications from individuals) submitted on or after October 1, 2003. For information about how to obtain a DUNS number go to www.grants.gov/RequestaDUNS or call 1-866-705-5711. **Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.**

- 9. Required CCR Registration:** The Central Contractor Registry (CCR) is a database that serves as the primary Government repository for contractor information required for the conduct of business with the Government. This database will also be used as a central location for maintaining organizational information for organizations seeking and receiving grants from the Government. CIG applicants must register with the CCR. To register, visit www.ccr.gov. **Allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the CCR registration.**

C. How to Submit a Written Proposal

Applicants must submit one signed original copy of each project application. Hard copies must be accompanied by an electronic copy on a compact disc (CD). Electronic files must be either Microsoft Word or Acrobat (PDF) files. **Applications submitted via facsimile or e-mail will not be accepted.**

The address for submission of all applications is:

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
60 Quaker Lane, Suite 40
Warwick, RI 02886-0181

Contact phone number: 401-828-1300

D. How to Submit a Proposal Electronically

Applicants may submit proposals electronically through Grants.gov, the Federal government's e-grants portal. Applications submitted through Grants.gov must contain all of the elements of a complete application outlined above. Instructions for electronically submitting the required standard forms, abstract, narrative, and declarations are posted on Grants.gov. Instructions for adding attachments are available on Grants.gov. Applications submitted electronically are date and time stamped by Grants.gov and must be received by the identified closing date.

Note that NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or website problems related to Grants.gov submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process well before the submission deadline to avoid problems.

E. Application Due Date

Proposals must be received at NRCS Office in Warwick, RI, by 4:00 pm ET on May 1, 2012. A postmark date is NOT a factor in whether an application is received on time. The

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

applicant assumes the risk of any delays in proposal delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

F. Acknowledgement of Submission

Applications received by the due date will be acknowledged with an official letter. If an applicant has not received an acknowledgement within 30 days of the submission, they must contact the NRCS programmatic contact (See Part VII). Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel.

G. Funding Restrictions

The indirect costs (F & A) for CIG awards may not exceed 15 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Awardees may not use unrecovered indirect costs as part of their matching funds.

CIG funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law, or approved in writing by the Authorized Departmental Officer in advance of incurring such costs:

- a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
- b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the grant;
- c. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and any amendments thereto;
- d. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
- e. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
- f. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee; and,
- g. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces; and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the administrative contact.

H. Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with USDA regulation 7 CFR 3019.36. This regulation provides that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with 7 CFR 3019.2, this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG.

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically.

I. Environmental Review Requirements

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NRCS regulations that implement NEPA require that an environmental review be prepared for actions where the Agency has discretion and control. Accordingly, NRCS' financial assistance under the CIG program requires compliance with these regulations. As part of the application packet, applicants are required to provide environmental information pertaining to their project (described further under Part IV B.4.k.) to help NRCS determine the appropriate documentation required to comply with NEPA and NRCS regulations. If the application is selected for funding, the NRCS Program Contact and NRCS Environmental Liaison will coordinate with the selected applicant concerning documentation for compliance with NEPA. The selected applicant will be required to prepare and/or pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document (e.g., Environmental Assessment and/or Environmental Impact Statement if required for NEPA compliance). Grant funding cannot be approved until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met.

J. Withdrawal of Applications

Applications may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before an award is made. Applications may be withdrawn by the applicant, or by an authorized representative thereof, if the representative's identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the application.

K. Deliverables

Applications must include the following activities as deliverables:

- a. Semi-annual reports;
- b. Supplemental narratives to explain and support payment requests;
- c. Final report;
- d. Performance items specific to the project that indicate progress;
- e. New technology and innovative approach fact sheet; and
- f. Sponsor or attend at least one event showcasing the project during the period of the grant. This may include the NRCS CIG Showcase or comparable NRCS event

**Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island**

V. APPLICATION REVIEW

A. Proposal Review and Selection Process

Prior to technical review, each application will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications and those that do not meet the provisions of this notice will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant.

Applications meeting the provisions of this notice will be scored by a review panel assembled by the Rhode Island State Conservationist. Proposal rankings and recommendations will be forwarded to the Rhode Island NRCS State Conservationist, who will make the final selection and funding decisions.

B. Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

The review panel will use the following criteria to evaluate project proposals. .

1. Purpose and goals (25% of total):

- a. The purpose and goals of the project are clearly stated;
- b. There is strong potential for successful completion
- c. Outcome is clearly measurable with regards to the Natural Resource Concern(s) or Technology Need(s) slated in this notice;
- d. The project has a significantly positive environmental impact in consideration of potentially adverse impacts.
- e. The project promotes environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production.

2. Soundness of approach or design (20% of total):

- a. Design and implementation of project is based on sound methodology and/or demonstrated technology;
- b. The project substantively involves EQIP eligible producers; and,

3. Project management (20% of total):

- a. Milestones and timeline are clear and reasonable;
- b. Project staff has the technical expertise needed;
- c. Budget is adequately explained and justified; and
- d. Percentage that project leverages non-Federal matching funds above the required 50 percent (degree to which non-Federal matching funds are leveraged).

**Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island**

4. Transferability (35% of total):

- a. Deliverables include educational and outreach activities and materials that showcase the purpose, goals, methods, and results of the project;
- b. Potential to transfer the approach or technology nationally or to other geographic or socio-economic areas; and
- c. Project will result in the development or improvement of NRCS technical or related materials that will help foster expanded adoption of the innovative technology or approach.

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

CIG Awards are anticipated to be announced by June 1, 2012. Funds are not awarded, and work may not start, until an agreement is signed by both NRCS and the grantee. All agreements are expected to be awarded by July 30, 2012.

VI. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected will receive a letter of official notification from the Rhode Island NRCS. This notice will indicate the need to work with the administrative contact to develop an agreement prior to starting work on the project. Applicants who are not selected will be notified by official letter.

B. Environmental Review Requirements (if determined to be required)

Project proponents that are selected to receive grant funding will need to work with the NRCS Program Contact and NRCS Environmental Liaison concerning what documentation will need to be prepared for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NRCS regulations. Selected applicants may be required to prepare and/or pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document if an Environmental Assessment and/or Environmental Impact Statement is needed. Grant funds cannot be awarded until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met. A list of the NRCS Environmental Liaisons can be found at the following web address: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ECS/environment/liaison.doc>

C. Grant Agreement

The CCC, through NRCS, will use a grant agreement with selected applicants to document participation in the CIG component of EQIP. The grant agreement will include:

1. project purpose;
2. project objectives and deliverables;

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

3. the final project plan listing cooperators in the project, and identifying the grant applicant and the project manager;
4. the project timelines and expected project completion date;
5. the project progress and budget reporting requirements;
6. award amount and budget information;
7. information regarding requests for advance of funds or reimbursement;
8. the role of NRCS technical oversight in the project;
9. reporting requirements including attendance at CIG grantee biannual meeting;
10. changes in project plans; and
11. other requirements and terms deemed necessary by the CCC to protect the interests of the United States

D. Reporting Requirements

Grantees receiving an advance of Federal funds of more than \$25,000 are required to submit a SF-272 (Report of Federal Cash Transactions), and when necessary, the continuation sheet, SF-272-A, no later than 15 days following the end of each quarter or 90 days after project completion. These reports are used to monitor cash advanced to recipients and to obtain disbursement and outlay information for each award.

Payment by NRCS to the grantee will be made on a quarterly basis on a reimbursable or advanced basis upon completion of work. Payment requests must be submitted on an accrual accounting basis and will be executed upon the submission of a properly executed form SF-270.

Grantees must submit a Financial Status Report (SF 269) no later than 30 days after the end of each quarter and 90 days after completion of project. The SF-272 and SF-269 are available at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/InfoForGrantees.html.

In addition, every six months the grantee must submit a written performance progress report to the NRCS program contact and the NRCS technical contact. This report is distinct from the quarterly financial report described above. Each progress report shall cover work performed during the previous 6-month period, including any funded or unfunded time extensions, a comparison of actual accomplishments to project goals, and a statement of work projected to be completed in the next 6-month period.

To satisfy the requirements of EQIP (7 CFR 1466) compliance measures, the grantee is required to submit as a component of the semi-annual progress report:

1. A list of producers, identified by name and social security number, of all EQIP-eligible producers or entities involved in the project.

Conservation Innovation Grants
Fiscal Year 2012 Announcement of Program Funding - Rhode Island

2. The dollar amount of direct and indirect payment made to each individual producer or entity for any structural, vegetative, or management practices. Both quarterly and cumulative payment amounts must be submitted.
3. A self-certification indicating that each individual or entity receiving a direct or indirect payment through this grant is in compliance with the EQIP Payment Limitation, AGI, HEL, and Wetlands Conservation Compliance Farm Bill provisions.

A progress report template will be provided to grantees by the NRCS program contact. This template is also available on the NRCS CIG website at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/InfoForGrantees.html.

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. NRCS will designate a Program Contact and a Technical Contact for the project. These individuals will have technical oversight responsibility for the project. The grantee must send copies of each semi-annual progress report to these NRCS contacts and comply with any requests for information from these individuals. NRCS recommends that the grantee work closely with these subject matter experts throughout the course of the project.

Upon passage of the completion date of the project, a final report must be submitted within 90 days detailing project activities, funding received, funding expended, results, and potential for transferability of results. The final report should address completion of the project deliverables listed in the grant agreement.

VII. CIG STATE CONTACTS

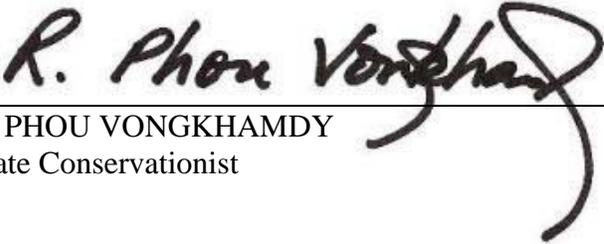
CIG Program Contact

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Additional information about CIG, including fact sheets and frequently asked questions (FAQs), is available on the CIG webpage: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig



R. PHOU VONGKHAMDY
State Conservationist

MARCH 16, 2012
Signed in Warwick, RI