

USDA Awards Funds to Improve Conservation

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced it is investing \$15.7 million through grants to 47 entities that will help develop and demonstrate cutting-edge ideas to accelerate innovation in private lands conservation.

Recipients of USDA's Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) will demonstrate innovative approaches to improve air quality, climate change, energy conservation, soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat in balance with productive agricultural systems. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers this competitive grants program.

"Conservation Innovation Grants activate creativity and problem-solving to benefit conservation-minded farmers and ranchers," said Eric B. Banks, Kansas State Conservationist. "These grants are critical in sparking new ideas and techniques for conservation on America's private lands and strengthening rural communities. Everyone relies on our nation's natural resources for food, fiber, and clean water and will benefit from these grants."

Seven of the approved grants support conservation technologies and approaches to help farmers and ranchers who historically have not had equal access to agricultural programs because of race or ethnicity, or who have limited resources, or who are beginning farmers and ranchers.

The CIGs in Kansas include:

- **Kansas State University:** Received \$230,618 to demonstrate interactions between reduced tillage, soil water storage, and nutrient leaching under water limited irrigated cropping systems.
- **Oklahoma State University:** (Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas) Received \$872,044 to adopt on-farm soil health management systems for the southern plains.

A full list of recipients is available here: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/cig/>

The grants are funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Grantees must work with producers and forestland owners to develop and demonstrate the new technologies and approaches. At least 50 percent of the total cost of CIG projects must come from non-federal matching funds, including cash and in-kind contributions provided by the grant recipient.

NRCS has offered this grant program since 2004, investing in ways to demonstrate and transfer efficient and environmentally friendly farming and ranching. In the past years, the grants have helped develop trading markets for water quality and have shown how farmers and ranchers may use fertilizer, water, and energy more efficiently. For more on this grant program, visit USDA's Conservation Innovation Grants Web page, or contact a local NRCS office. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer