

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Commodity Credit Corporation

ACTION: NOTICE

Conservation Innovation Grants Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Announcement for Program Funding

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIG-16-01

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.912

SUMMARY: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is announcing availability of Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Proposals will be accepted from any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), or the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2016 will be up to **\$20 million**. Proposals are requested from eligible governmental or non-governmental organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of grant awards for projects between 1 and 3 years in duration.

This notice identifies the objectives, eligibility criteria, and application instructions for CIG projects. Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant.

DATE: Proposals must be received by NRCS before 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) on **May 10, 2016**.

ADDRESSES: Proposals must be sent electronically through www.grants.gov with a PDF to nrcsig@wdc.usda.gov.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Mike Bennett, National CIG Program Manager, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 6141-S, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone: (202) 720-1895; email: Mike.Bennett@wdc.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program is authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP, including 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 and guides or to the private sector. CIG is used to apply or demonstrate previously proven technology in order to increase adoption with an emphasis on opportunities to scale proven, emerging conservation strategies. CIG promotes sharing of skills, knowledge, technologies, and facilities among communities, governments, and other institutions to ensure that scientific and technological developments are accessible to a wider range of users. CIG funds projects targeting innovative on-the-ground conservation, including pilot projects, field demonstrations, and on-farm conservation research. On-farm conservation research is defined as an investigation conducted to answer a specific conservation-related question using a statistically valid design, while employing farm-scale equipment on farm fields. Specifically, a valid study design will use an appropriate number of replications and statistical analysis of results. To the extent NRCS funds research projects through CIG, the agency will only fund on-farm research projects that stimulate innovative approaches to natural resource management in conjunction with agricultural production.

NRCS will accept proposals under this notice for single or multiyear projects, not to exceed three years, submitted by eligible entities from any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), or the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). Eligible entities include Indian Tribes, State and local units of government, non-governmental organizations, and individuals.

Complete proposals received by the deadline will be evaluated through a two-tier review process. The first-tier review will be by a technical peer review panel based on the Proposal Evaluation Criteria identified in the instructions in section V.B. For the second-tier review, full proposals, along with their evaluations from the technical peer review and State Conservationist, will be forwarded to the Grants Review Board. The Grants Review Board will make its recommendations for project approval to the NRCS Chief who will make the final selections.

C: Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

For the purposes of CIG, the proposed innovative project or activity must promote environmental protection or natural resources enhancement, and encompass development and pilot field testing, on-farm research and demonstration, evaluation, and/or implementation of:

- Conservation adoption incentive systems, including market-based systems, or
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches.

Projects or activities under CIG must comply with all Federal, Tribal, State, and local regulations throughout the duration of the project and:

- Make use of proven technology or a technology that has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success,
- Demonstrate, evaluate, or verify environmental (soil, water, air, plants, energy and animal) effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of conservation technology in the field,
- Adapt conservation technologies, management, 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, or
- Demonstrate transferability of knowledge.

D. National Component

For FY 2016, NRCS will consider proposals that demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one bulleted topic under the categories listed below. Additional topics, not listed below, may be considered at the Chief's discretion. Proposals must identify the category being addressed as this will determine its technical peer review group assignment. Up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG in FY 2016 may be set-aside for proposals from historically underserved producers, veteran farmers or ranchers, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. Please see Section III.E. below for more information on the 10 percent set-aside.

1. Projects that describe innovative environmental enhancement and protection approaches and technologies for the primary benefit of historically underserved producers, veteran farmers or ranchers, or organizations comprised of or representing these individuals or entities. Such projects may include:

- Technology transfer,
- Demonstration of new or novel technology that can be easily and inexpensively adopted,
- Projects that assess resource conditions and land capabilities,
- Projects that emphasize program outreach, or
- Projects that develop technical training.

2. Projects that develop, demonstrate and/or quantify the impacts of innovative conservation systems (and their component practices or approaches) in an agricultural setting that improve/protect ground and/or surface water quality.

- Projects that utilize a systems approach to solving water quality problems and that include quantification of impacts are particularly encouraged.
- Projects that address areas/systems with major water quality issues are especially encouraged (e.g. reducing nitrogen and phosphorus loss in Western Lake Erie Basin, Mississippi River Basin, etc.; reducing nitrogen and phosphorus loss in tile drained soils; and others).
- In addition to those projects that can be completed within the three-year timeframe, projects will also be considered that lay a solid foundation for longer-term demonstration and quantification needs (e.g. edge-of-field monitoring, soil health management systems requiring time to demonstrate impact, etc.).

3. *Projects that demonstrate the cost effectiveness of leveraged public/private impact investments in working lands conservation.*

For the purpose of this section, NRCS is seeking applications that demonstrate the potential for new investment approaches that accelerate and expand private lands conservation. Examples include:

- Pay-for-success Environmental Improvement Bonds,
- Climate/Green Bonds,
- Sustainable Agricultural Investments,
- Sustainable Forestry Investments, and
- Green Infrastructure Investments.

To be given consideration, the proposed project should demonstrate each of the following:

1. Significant potential to leverage scalable investment from private capital markets to achieve conservation goals in areas such as soil and rangeland health, air quality, nutrient management, water quality and water use-efficiency, forest restoration, on-farm energy efficiency and generation, and green infrastructure.
2. Commitment to improve measurement and metrics of conservation outcomes associated with investment strategies.
3. Engagement of new conservation partners including diverse segments of the private investment community.
4. New models for retaining and enhancing the sustainable productivity of working farm, forest and ranchlands consistent with landowner ownership and natural resource management objectives.

CIG funding can be used to help mitigate risk associated with new and innovative conservation investment vehicles, through the use of approaches such as first loss strategies, price floors, guarantees, buyer of last resort mechanisms or other credit enhancements. Successful proposals will demonstrate a likelihood of success and clear metrics for conservation outcomes warranting the use of public funds to support risk mitigation strategies.

II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2016 will be up to **\$20 million**.

CIG will fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years (anticipated project start date of **September 30, 2016**). Funds will be awarded through a nationwide competitive grants process. The maximum award amount for any project will not exceed \$2 million in FY 2016.

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND INFORMATION

A. Applicant Eligibility

CIG applicants must be a federally recognized Indian Tribe, State or local unit of government, non-governmental organization, or an individual.

B. Project Eligibility

To be eligible, projects must involve producers who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements set forth in 7 CFR § 1466.6(b)(1) through (3). Additional information regarding EQIP eligibility requirements can be found at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip>. Participating producers are not required to have an EQIP contract.

C. Matching Funds Requirements

Selected applicants may receive CIG grants of up to 50 percent of their total project cost not to exceed \$2 million. CIG recipients must provide non-Federal funding equal to the amount of Federal funds requested. Non-Federal funds must be derived from cash and/or in-kind sources. Any combination of cash and in-kind funding can be used to meet the non-Federal match.

Matching funds must be secured at time of application. Proposals should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Additional information about matching funds can be found at 2 CFR Part 200.

D. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments

The following payment requirements apply to CIG:

- 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 found at section 1240G of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7, which imposes a \$450,000 payment limitation for all payments made to persons or legal entities under an EQIP contract entered into between FY 2014 and FY 2018.
- All agricultural producers receiving a direct or indirect payment through participation in a CIG project must meet the eligibility requirements of 7 CFR § 1466.6(b)(1) through (3).
- In addition, section 1240B of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2, prohibits duplicative payments. Accordingly, direct or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice for which an individual or legal entity has already received funds, or is contracted to receive funds through any USDA conservation program (e.g., Conservation Reserve Program, EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Security Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program).

To participate in EQIP financial assistance, an individual or entity must meet the eligibility requirements in 7 CFR § 1466.6, which include the following:

Criteria	Potential Verification Documentation*
Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions (7 CFR Part 12)	Documentation of their compliance status can be obtained by the producer at their local USDA Service Center or through the USDA customer service on-line portal
Have an interest in a farming operation as defined in 7 CFR Part 1400	Documentation of their interest in a farming operation can be obtained by the producer at their local USDA Service Center or through the USDA customer service on-line portal showing that the producer has established farm records
Have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract period	Documentation can be provided in the form of a deed, lease, or other documents which show the producer has adequate control for the term of the proposed contract period
The average adjusted gross income of the individual, joint operation, or legal entity may not exceed \$900,000	If using FY 2014-2018 CIG funding, documentation of a producer's Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) eligibility status can be obtained by the producer at their local USDA Service Center, or through the USDA customer service on-line portal.

*Many of the verification documents will require that the producer have current records established with the Farm Service Agency or require that the producer establish new records.

E. Historically Underserved Producers and Veteran Farmers or Ranchers

For the FY 2016 CIG award process, up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG may be set-aside for proposals from historically underserved producers or veteran 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.A.10. of this notice. Proposals that are unsuccessful in the set-aside competition will automatically be placed in the general application pool for consideration. Funds not awarded from the set-aside pool will revert back into the general funding pool. Listed below are the regulatory definitions of a Historically Underserved Producer and a Veteran Farmer or Rancher, which are found at [7 CFR 1466.3](#):

- *Historically underserved producer* means a person, joint operation, legal entity, or Indian Tribe who is a beginning farmer or rancher, socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, or limited resource farmer or rancher.
- *Veteran farmer or rancher* means a producer who meets the definition in section 2501(e) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, as amended (7 U.S.C. 2279(e)).

F. Activities Limitation and Implementation

Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in a project's geographic area 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 appropriate State's EQIP Eligible Practices List by contacting the applicable [NRCS State office](#).

CIG is designed to provide financial assistance to grantees. Procurement of any technical assistance required to carry out a project is the responsibility of the grantee. Technical oversight for grant projects will be provided by a Federal technical representative who will be designated by NRCS. NRCS will also designate a Program Contact and Administrative Contact for each project.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION FOR PROPOSALS

All standard forms necessary for CIG submission are posted on the following Website: [Grants.gov - Forms Repository](#). Additional information is posted on the CIG website at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.

A. Content and Format

Proposals must contain the content, format, and information set forth below to receive consideration for funding. If submitting applications for more than one project, submit a separate proposal for each project. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in their application. Applicants must submit a single copy of the application in the following format:

- Each page must be on numbered 8½" x 11" white paper that has one-inch margins; and
- The text of the application must be typed single spaced in a font no smaller than 12-point.

Proposals that fail to comply with the required content and format will not be considered for funding. Material exceeding stated page limits will not be considered. Proposals must include all required forms and narrative sections described below. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will not be considered.

1. **Application Form:** (Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance) Applicants must use this document as the cover sheet for each proposal. Standard Form 424 can be downloaded from [Grants.gov - Forms Repository](#).
2. **Project Executive Summary:** (One (1)-page maximum.) Provide the project title, applicant entity name, funding requested, resource concern, project duration, geographic area/location, and describe in non-technical language the issue/problem, project objectives to address the issue/problem, the innovative approach/methods to be employed (including the role of participating partners, if applicable), how impact will be quantified, and predicted benefits/deliverables of the project if funded.

3. **Project Description:** (Fifteen (15)-page maximum.) The description must include the following information:
- a. Project background: Describe the issue or problem, and the history of, and need for, the proposed innovation. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success of the project.
 - b. Project objectives: Be specific using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project's purpose and goals. Describe how the project is innovative.
 - c. Project methods: Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project.
 - d. Geographic location and size of project or project area: Describe the geographic location of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, farm types, demographics, etc.) of the project area. Provide a map, if possible.
 - e. EQIP eligible producer participation: Estimate the number of EQIP eligible producers involved in the project, and describe the type and extent of their involvement (Note: Producers receiving direct or indirect payments through participation in a CIG project must also meet the EQIP eligibility requirements).
 - f. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion. Anticipated project start date of **September 30, 2016**.
 - g. 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.
 - h. Project deliverables/products: Provide a list of specific deliverables and products that will allow NRCS to monitor project progress and payment. The proposal shall include a set of technical deliverables designed to evaluate the performance and broader applicability of the project being proposed for implementation. In addition to project-specific deliverables, selected applicants will be required to provide the following:
 1. Semi-annual progress reports;
 2. Supplemental narratives that explain and support payment requests;
 3. A final report;
 4. Performance items specific to the project that indicate progress;
 5. A new technology and innovative approach fact sheet;
 6. A draft practice standard, if appropriate; and
 7. Participation in at least one NRCS approved event during the grant period.
 - 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, i.e., agricultural producers by type, region, or sector; historically underserved producers and communities; rural communities; and municipalities. Explain 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 progress report, quarterly financial reports, and a final project report to NRCS. Instructions for submitting reports will be detailed in the grant agreement.

4. **Assessment of Environmental Impacts:** Will implementation of the proposal have physical, chemical or biological impacts on the environment? If so, describe in general terms what they will be and how extensive they will be. The description of the potential environmental impacts must address beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. The length of the description should be commensurate with the complexity of the project proposed and the natural environmental resources impacted directly, indirectly, or cumulatively. Where possible, information on environmental impacts should be quantified, such as number of acres of wetlands impacted, amount of carbon sequestration estimated, etc. Natural environmental resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other resources protected by law, regulation, executive order, and agency policy.

Note #1: Please be aware that proposals for projects with potentially adverse impacts to natural resources may need to be modified in order to achieve acceptable and beneficial levels of environmental impact. NRCS may choose not to select projects that cannot be modified.

Note #2: Please be aware that National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 review and consultation by NRCS State or Area Office with consulting parties (such as the pertinent State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and federally recognized Tribes) may be required prior to the implementation of conservation practices and/or activities for their potential to affect cultural resources.

5. **Budget Information:** (Twelve (12)-page maximum.) The budget portion of the application consists of the two parts described below:
- Standard Form (SF) 424A Budget Information- Non-Construction Programs:** Fill in all spaces as appropriate. Section B, Item 6, column 1 should reflect the NRCS funds and Column 2 should reflect the applicant's matching funds. This form is the summary budget for the project.
 - Detailed Budget Narrative:** Provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project, broken down by each project year. Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities. Explain how budget items are essential to achieving project objectives. Justify the project cost effectiveness and include justification for personnel and consultant salaries with a description of duties. In addition, any subcontractors and consultants must also submit a statement of work. The budget narrative should support the Federal funds requested and the applicant's matching funds.

The format of this information, which can be in a chart, spreadsheet, table, etc., should be readable in 8 ½" by 11" printable pages. The information needs to be presented in such a way that the evaluators and NRCS can readily understand what expenses will be incurred to support the project. The breakdown of the Federal share and matching funds should be shown separately as in the SF-424A, not combined.

Note: Please include \$3,000 in the project budget for travel designated by NRCS. These funds are required and can be part of the Federal portion, the applicant's matching funds, or both. Please identify whether the funds are part of the Federal portion, the cost share, or both.

6. Indirect Costs

- a. Applicants wishing to claim indirect costs must have a federally approved indirect cost rate. The approved indirect cost rate must be included in the application package.
- b. An indirect cost rate not to exceed 15 percent may be approved for applicants without a preexisting, federally approved indirect cost rate. To be considered for an indirect cost rate not to exceed 15 percent, applicants must submit an indirect cost rate proposal with the application that includes the following:
 1. Applicant's written policy for allocating and identifying direct and indirect costs;
 2. The contact information of the person who prepared proposal;
 3. Breakdown of indirect salaries by position title and amount;
 4. Line item expenditure descriptions describing how the costs are being allocated between direct and indirect costs;
 5. Applicant's tax identification number; and
 6. Signed certification attesting that (i) all costs in proposal are allowable under the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) cost principles; (ii) costs treated as indirect have not been claimed as direct; (iii) similar types of costs have been accounted for consistently; and (iv) the applicant will notify the Federal Government of any account changed that would affect the rate. This certification should be signed by the applicant's approving official or the applicant's chief financial officer.

7. **Matching:** Proposals must include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from non-Federal third parties.

Cash Match

For third-party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement is required for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representative of the contributing organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the contributor, (2) the name of the applicant organization, (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made, (4) the dollar amount of the cash contribution, and (5) a statement that the contributor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.

In-Kind Match

"In-kind" refers to non-cash contributions of goods or services made by third-party individuals or organizations to support projects. Examples of "in-kind" contributions include work done by unpaid volunteers and donations of supplies, facilities, or equipment. In-kind contributions must be necessary to accomplish program activities and verifiable.

For any third-party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement is required for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representatives of the contributing organization and the applicant, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the contributor, (2) the name of the applicant's organization, (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made, (4) a good faith estimate of the

current fair market value of the third-party in-kind contribution, and (5) a statement that the contributor will make the contribution during the grant period.

The value of applicant contributions to the project will be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars and Cost Principles for additional guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

8. **List of Letters of Support:** Include entity name, location, role, and if a commitment of cash or in-kind support has been made, the type (cash vs. in-kind) and value.

Note: NRCS may conduct reference checks to ensure that organizations identified are supportive and involved with the project.

9. **Declaration of Previous CIG Projects Involvement and Past Performance:** Identify any previously awarded National or State CIG projects related to this proposal and any of their principal investigators and please respond to item 9.a below. If you have never received an NRCS CIG, but have received other Federal or non-Federal assistance agreements (an assistance agreement is a grant or cooperative agreement and not a contract), please respond to item 9.b below. If you have never received any type of Federal or non-Federal assistance agreements, please indicate this in your proposal.

- a. Applicant has previously received an NRCS CIG

Identify the NRCS CIG(s) you currently have or have received in the past. Detail the purpose, outcomes to date, and how this new proposal relates to the previous award. For up to the five most recent projects (if within the past two years), demonstrate how you successfully managed the grant(s), and successfully performed all phases of work under the previous or existing grant(s), including whether the desired outcomes of the project(s) were met by providing information on the following:

1. Funds Expenditure: the balance of grant funds currently remaining.
2. Describe your compliance with grant requirements, including, but not limited to, information regarding your compliance with the work plan, schedule, terms and conditions, and timely reporting (e.g., semiannual progress reports, financial status reports, and any other required submittals). Also, describe your success using NRCS grant funds, including whether you reported accomplishments to NRCS.

- b. Applicant has received other Federal and/or non-Federal assistance agreements

1. Identify current and/or prior federally and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements. Please provide information on no more than five of your most recent assistance agreements (if received within the past two years). Describe your history of successfully managing these agreements and performing the agreements including meeting and complying with reporting requirements, submitting final acceptable technical reports, and reporting on whether you were making progress towards achieving the results under those agreements and, if not, whether you explained why.

10. **Declaration of Historically Underserved and Veteran Farmers or Ranchers:** If an applicant wishes to compete in the 10 percent set-aside funding pool, applicants must make a declaration in writing of their status as historically underserved producers or veteran farmers or ranchers, or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities. (Refer to Part III.E. that describes the provision of a set-aside pool of funding for Historically Underserved Producers and Veteran Farmers or Ranchers.)
11. **Documentation of Submission to State Conservationist:** Applicants must include documentation showing that the application was sent to the appropriate State Conservationist(s) or delegate(s) for review by 4:00 p.m. EDT on **May 10, 2016**. If a project is multi-State in scope, all State Conservationists or delegates in the project area must be sent the application for review. A list of State office addresses and phone numbers is included at the end of this notice. Applicants are encouraged to consult with the appropriate State Conservationist(s) or delegate(s) during application development.
12. **Certifications:** Standard Form (SF) 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs. All proposals must include this document. The SF-424B may be found at: [Grants.gov - Forms Repository](#) or by contacting the State office. In addition, applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following Federal regulations:
 - a. 2 CFR Part 417, [Government-wide Debarment and Suspension \(Non-procurement\)](#)
 - b. 2 CFR Part 418, [New Restrictions on Lobbying](#)
 - c. 2 CFR Part 421, [Government-wide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace \(Financial Assistance\)](#)

B. Additional Pre-award Requirements

The following items must be obtained prior to entering into an agreement with the Federal Government but do not need to be provided in the proposal. Applicants are encouraged to apply early for their Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) and System for Award Management (SAM) numbers.

1. **DUNS Number:** A Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) DUNS number is a unique nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. CIG applicants must obtain a DUNS Number. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at: <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.
2. **SAM:** Official U.S. Government system that consolidated the capabilities of CCR/FedReg, ORCA, and EPLS. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. Please allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the SAM registration.

C. How to Submit an Application

Applicants must submit proposals electronically through Grants.gov with a pdf copy emailed to nrcscig@wdc.usda.gov. All proposals must contain all of the elements of a complete package and meet the requirements described above. Instructions for electronically submitting the required standard forms, and instructions for adding attachments are posted on Grants.gov.

Grants.gov provides date and time stamps on proposals submitted through its website. All proposals must be received by **May 10, 2016**. Emailed proposals must be in pdf format and received by NRCS before the submission deadline.

Note: NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or website problems related to Grants.gov or emailed submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process or send their email in advance of the submission deadline to avoid problems. **Hard copies will not be accepted.**

D. Due Date

Proposals must be received by 4:00 p.m. EDT on **May 10, 2016**. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed proposals early via email to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

E. Acknowledgement of Submission

NRCS will acknowledge receipt of timely proposals via email. An applicant who does not receive such an email acknowledgement within 30 days of their submission, but believes he/she submitted a timely proposal must contact the NRCS program contact below within 30 days of submission deadline. Failure to do so will result in the proposal not being considered.

CIG Program Contact:

Mike Bennett
National CIG Program Manager
USDA-NRCS
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 6141-S
Washington, D.C. 20250
Phone: (202) 720-1895
Email: Mike.Bennett@wdc.usda.gov

F. Withdrawal

Proposals may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before selections are made. Proposals may be withdrawn by the applicant, or by an authorized representative.

G. Funding Restrictions

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:

1. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
2. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the grant;
3. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and amendments thereto;
4. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
5. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
6. 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

7. 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 person listed on Part VII.B.

H. Review

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant. Complete proposals will be evaluated by a technical peer review panel based on the Proposal Evaluation Criteria identified in the proposal instructions in section V.B.

Proposals, along with their technically based recommendations from the peer review groups and findings from review by State Conservationists or their delegates, will then be forwarded to the Grants Review Board. The Grants Review Board will make its recommendations for project approval to the NRCS Chief who will make the final selections.

I. Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with [2 CFR Part 200](#). This regulation provides that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with [2 CFR Part 200](#), this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG. 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.

J. Natural Resources and Historic Property Review Requirements

1. The Council on Environmental Quality's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations at 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508 and the NRCS regulation that implements NEPA at 7 CFR Part 650 require that an environmental review be prepared for Federal actions that may have environmental effects. 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 if there will be actions with potential to affect the environment 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, Technical 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 pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document (e.g., Environmental Assessment 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.
2. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 and its implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800), and other related authorities, require federal agencies to determine if a project has the potential to cause an effect to historic properties and, if yes, if they are adverse and how the effects may be addressed. This NHPA review and compliance in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA and implementing regulations

at 36 CFR Part 800 must be completed by NRCS and may not be delegated. This compliance process includes consultation with SHPOs, Tribes, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs), Native Hawaiian Organizations (NHOs), and the appropriate preservation community regarding identification, evaluation of National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility, evaluation of effects, and if the effects are adverse, treatment. This treatment may include avoidance or other forms of mitigation of adverse effects. This mitigation will occur after the grant is awarded, but before it is implemented.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

A. Review and Selection Process

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant. NRCS staff will evaluate complete proposals based on how they demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one of the topics provided in section I.D. of this notice.

There are three steps in evaluating full CIG proposals. First, proposals will be reviewed by a Technical Peer Review Panel. The Technical Peer Review Panel consists of NRCS national technical specialists, and technical specialists from other appropriately related Federal agencies, and non-Federal agencies. Proposals will be reviewed based on the CIG Proposal Evaluation Criteria listed in Part V.B below.

The Technical Peer Review Panel will forward their recommendations and the proposals to a Grants Review Board, which will certify the peer review panels' recommendations and ensure that the application evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The CIG Grants Review Board consists of members of NRCS leadership, specifically the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology (Chair), the Deputy Chief for Soil Science and Resource Assessment, the Deputy Chief for Programs, the Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability, one Regional Conservationist, one State Conservationist, and the Director of the Office of Outreach and Advocacy. The Grants Review Board will also consider findings from review by State Conservationists or their delegates before forwarding its recommendations to the NRCS Chief for final review and selection.

B. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

For the purposes of CIG, the proposed innovative project or activity must promote environmental protection or natural resources enhancement, and encompass development and pilot field testing, on-farm research and demonstration, evaluation, and/or implementation of:

- Conservation adoption incentive systems, including market-based systems, or
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches.

Projects or activities under CIG must comply with all Federal, State, and local regulations throughout the duration of the project and:

- Make use of proven technology or a technology that has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success,

- Demonstrate, evaluate, or verify environmental (soil, water, air, plants, energy and animal) effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of conservation technology in the field,
- Adapt conservation technologies, management, 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, or
- Demonstrate transferability of knowledge.

The Technical Peer Review Panels will use the following criteria to evaluate project proposals:

1. Purpose, Approach, and Goals
 - a. Design and implementation of project based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.
 - b. Promotes environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production.
 - c. Project outcome is clearly measurable.
 - d. Potential for successful completion.
 - e. Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered and an acceptably significant level of improvement will be achieved.
2. Innovative Technology or Approach
 - a. Project is innovative (national, regionally, and/or local in nature).
 - b. Project conforms to description of innovative projects or activities in Announcement for Program Funding.
3. Project Management
 - a. Timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable.
 - b. Project staff has technical expertise needed.
 - c. Budget is adequately explained and justified.
 - d. Experience and capacity to partner with and gain the support of other organizations, institutions and agencies.
4. Benefits and Transferability
 - a. Potential for producers and landowners to use the innovative technology/approach or technologies/approaches.
 - b. Potential to transfer the approach or technology nationally or to a broader audience or other geographic or socio-economic areas.
 - c. Potential for successful transfer, through planned project activities, to historically underserved producers and communities.
 - d. Potential for NRCS to successfully use the innovative approach or methods.
 - e. Project will result in the development of technical or related technology transfer materials (technical standards, technical notes, guide sheets, handbooks, software, etc.).

C. Other Factors

In making final recommendations from among the most highly qualified applicants NRCS's Grants Review Board may consider the following factors if, and as, appropriate.

- A balanced distribution of funds among the states and territories.
- A balanced distribution of projects across resource concerns.
- Appropriate participation by Historically Underserved Producers, Veteran Farmers or Ranchers or community based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.

- Whether full participation by historically underserved individuals and groups will be achieved.
- Fair distribution of funds between urban and non-urban areas.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

NRCS anticipates announcing CIG selections by **September 1, 2016** and awarding all grants by **September 30, 2016**. However, NRCS will not distribute any funds, and grantees cannot begin work until the parties execute an appropriate CIG agreement.

Applicants should plan their projects based on a project start date of **September 30, 2016**.

E. Unsuccessful Proposals

Applicants whose proposals are not selected for funding will be notified of their status within 30 days of the announcement of CIG selections.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected for funding will receive official notification from National Headquarters. However, all selections are contingent upon successful completion of the environmental, cultural and historic properties/resources review process by the appropriate NRCS State or Area Office and financial review.

Note: Appropriations Restrictions: Awards made under this solicitation are subject to the provisions contained in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, (P.L. No. 114-113-), Division A, Sections 745 and 746, regarding corporate felony convictions and corporate Federal tax delinquencies.

B. Grant Agreement

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

The grant will permit the NRCS National Technical Contact to be involved in overseeing the work performed by the selected recipients. Although NRCS will negotiate precise terms and conditions as part of the award process, the anticipated Federal involvement for this project may include:

- close monitoring of the recipient's performance to verify the results
- collaborating during performance of the scope of work
- reviewing substantive terms of proposed contracts
- reviewing qualifications of key personnel (NRCS will not select employees or contractors employed by the award recipient)
- reviewing and commenting on reports prepared under the agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient)

C. Natural Resources and Historic Property Review Requirements

1. Upon notification of selection, the applicant must contact the [NRCS State Office Environmental Liaison](#) to determine the scope and level of NEPA documentation required for the project. The environmental documentation prepared to meet NEPA requirements must be prepared prior to implementing activities with grant funds.

Selected applicants may be required to prepare and pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document(s) if an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement is needed. Grant funds cannot be awarded until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met.

2. Upon notification of selection, the recipient must contact the NRCS State office to discuss if National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 review is needed. The NRCS State Conservationist and appropriate staff, including the State Resources Conservationist, Cultural Resources Specialist (CRS) or Coordinator (CRC) will help and, under the direction of the State Conservationist, are responsible for completing this compliance, consultation and review. Additionally, in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA, implementing regulations for section 106 (36 CFR part 800), and with USDA regulations on consultation with Tribes, and related authorities, the NRCS State Conservationist, using appropriate historic preservation staff such as the CRS or CRC, shall consult with concerned federally recognized Indian Tribes and the State Historic Preservation Officer). NRCS may not delegate or assign consultation with Tribes or the SHPO to the recipient or other parties and must carry out agency historic preservation responsibilities quickly as possible and prior to implementation of the grant project by the recipient. The State office may have programmatic agreements in place to help facilitate and streamline this process. State CRSs and CRCs have extensive experience in determining if section 106 review and compliance is needed. If section 106 review and compliance is needed, it must be completed prior to expenditure of funds.

D. Reporting Requirements

Selected applicants will be required to submit a SF-425, Federal Financial Report to the NRCS administrative contact, no later than 30 days after the end of each quarter and 90 days after completion of project. In addition, every 6 months the selected applicant must submit a written performance progress report to the NRCS program, technical, and administrative contacts. This report is distinct from the quarterly financial report described above. Each progress report shall cover work performed during the previous 6-month period and include, at a minimum:

- Project Status:
 - Summary of progress, including the results to date and a comparison of actual accomplishments with proposed goals (milestones) for the period and, where project output can be quantified, a computation of the costs per unit of output
 - Current problems or unusual developments or delays
 - Reasons why goals and objectives were not met, if appropriate
 - Additional pertinent information including, where appropriate, analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit cost
 - Any time extensions
 - Any changes to the project's original objectives, methods, or timeline with a summary of the justification for the changes
 - Lessons learned that inform future project activities or broader efforts in the project's topic area

- Work to be performed during the next six month period
- Project Results
 - Any preliminary results that can be used by NRCS for practice-standard revisions, policy changes, program revisions and training opportunities.
 - Products/software tools and/or technologies currently ready for adoption and/or transfer
 - Potentially promising products/software tools and/or technologies not yet ready for adoption and/or transfer, and a description of what is needed to reach that maturity.
 - Identification of new data or research needs to inform broader efforts in the project's topic area
 - Project activities that have been featured on recipient or partner Websites and success stories that could be amplified by NRCS
- EQIP Requirements
 - Provide the following in accordance with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and CIG agreement provisions:
 - A listing of EQIP-eligible producers involved in the project, identified by name and social security number or taxpayer identification number;
 - A self-certification statement indicating that each individual or entity receiving a direct or indirect payment for any structural, vegetative, or management practice through this grant is in compliance with the adjusted gross income (AGI) and highly-erodible lands and wetlands conservation (HEL/WC) compliance provisions of the Farm Bill.

The final report is due to the NRCS program, technical, and administrative contacts 90 days after completion of the project. This report is distinct from the performance progress reports described above. The final report will summarize the project and describe methods, quality control, findings, and recommendations. Additional information, forms, and templates can be found at

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/cig/?cid=stelprdb1045412>

E. Freedom of Information and Privacy Act

Applicants should be aware that some or all of the information submitted in their application may be subject to public disclosure through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Applicants are advised to mark confidential information, such as proprietary information, to potentially prevent disclosure.

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

A. CIG Program Contact

Mike Bennett
 National CIG Program Manager
 USDA-NRCS
 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 6141-S
 Washington, D.C. 20250
 Phone: (202) 720-1895
 Email: Mike.Bennett@wdc.usda.gov

B. CIG Administrative Contact

Frankie Comfort
Grants and Agreements Team
USDA-NRCS
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 6815-S
Washington, D.C. 20250
Phone: (202) 720-0242
Email: frankie.comfort@wdc.usda.gov

Additional information about CIG, including fact sheets and frequently asked questions, is available on the CIG web page at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.

Signed this 3 day of March in Washington, D.C.



Jason A. Weller
Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation and
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Attachments

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS FISCAL YEAR 2016 APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECK LIST

Important: Proposals Missing Any of These Required Items Will Not Be Considered

- 1. **Application Form:** Submit Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance.
- 2. **Project Executive Summary**—(one page maximum) **Provide the project title, applicant entity name, funding requested, resource concern, project duration, geographic area/location, funding pool, primary category and topic for consideration (refer to page 7), and** describe in non-technical language the issue or problem and how the project addresses it innovatively through its objectives (one paragraph), methods, environmental outcomes, participating partners, deliverables, and any potential negative impacts.
- 3. **Project Description:** (15 pages maximum, single-spaced, single-sided, 12 point font)
 - a. Project background
 - b. Project objectives
 - c. Project methods
 - d. Geographic location and size of project area (include a map if possible)
 - e. EQIP eligible producer participation (Note: Producers receiving direct or indirect payments through participation in a CIG project must also meet the EQIP eligibility requirements)
 - f. Project action plan and timeline
 - g. Project management
 - h. Project deliverables/products
 - i. Benefits or results expected and transferability
 - j. Project evaluation
- 4. **Assessment of Environmental Impacts**
- 5. **Budget Information:** (12 pages maximum) Submit a completed Standard Form 424A (SF-424A) Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs.
 - a. Complete SF-424A
 - b. Detailed budget narrative
- 6. **Indirect Costs:** Submit documentation of federally approved indirect cost rate or indirect cost rate proposal if claiming indirect costs.
- 7. **Matching:** Submit written verification of commitments of matching support from non-Federal third parties.
- 8. **List of Letters of Support:** Include entity name, location, and if a commitment of cash or in-kind support has been made, the type (cash vs. in-kind) and value.
- 9. **Declaration of Previous CIG Projects Involvement and Past Performance**

- 10. Declaration of Historically Underserved and Veteran Farmers or Ranchers):** If an applicant wishes to compete in the 10 percent set-aside funding pool, applicants must make a declaration in writing of their status as a Historically Underserved Producer, Veteran Farmer or Rancher, or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities.
- 11. Documentation of Submission to State Conservationist:** Include documentation showing that the proposal was sent to the State Conservationist(s) or delegate(s).
- 12. Certifications:** Complete Standard Form 424B (SF-424B) Assurances-Non-Construction Programs.

STATE CONSERVATIONISTS AND REGIONAL CONSERVATIONISTS

Gayle N. Barry, Regional Conservationist – Northeast
Office Number: (202) 690-2197

CT – Thomas Morgart, STC
344 Merrow Road, Suite A
Tolland, Connecticut 06084
Phone: 860/871-4011
Fax: 860/871-4054
(E) thomas.morgart@ct.usda.gov
Assistant: Carolyn Miller

DE – Kasey Taylor, STC
1221 College Park Drive, Suite 100
Dover, Delaware 19904-8713
Phone: 302/678-4160
Fax: 302/678-0843
(E) Kasey.taylor@de.usda.gov
Assistant: Ivy McBride

MA – Christine Clarke, STC
451 West Street
Amherst, Massachusetts 01002-2995
Phone: 413/253-4350
Fax: 855/596-7666
(E) christine.clarke@ma.usda.gov
Assistant: Gifty Torkornoo

MD – Terron Hillsman, STC
John Hanson Business Center
339 Busch's Frontage Road, Suite 301
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-5534
Phone: 410/757-0861
Fax: 410/757-0687
(E) terron.hillsman@md.usda.gov
Assistant: Nora de la Rosa

ME – Juan Hernandez, STC
967 Illinois Avenue
Suite #3
Bangor, Maine 04401
Phone: 207/990-9585
Fax: 207/990-9599
(E) juan.hernandez@me.usda.gov
Assistant: Rachel Henderson
Please cc Brian Vigue

MI – Garry Lee, STC
3001 Coolidge Road, Suite 250
East Lansing, Michigan 48823-6321
Phone: 517/324-5270
Fax: 517/324-5171
(E) garry.lee@mi.usda.gov
Assistant: Lorrie Skinner

NJ – Carrie (Mosley) Lindig, STC
220 Davidson Ave 4th floor
Somerset NJ, 08873
Phone: 732/537-6040
Fax: 855/305-7157
(E) carrie.lindig@nj.usda.gov
Assistant: Maria Collazo

NY - Greg Kist, STC
441 South Salina Street
Suite 354
Syracuse, New York 13202-2450
Phone: 315/477-6504
Fax: 315/477-6550
(E) greg.kist@ny.usda.gov
Assistant: Angela VanDyke

NH – Rick Ellsmore, STC
273 Locust Street
Suite 2D
Dover, New Hampshire 03820
Phone: 603/868-7581 ext. 105
Fax: 603/868-5301
(E) rick.ellsmore@nh.usda.gov
Assistant: Shari Cohen

OH – Terry Cosby, STC
200 North High Street, Room 522
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2478
Phone: 614/255-2472
Fax: 614/255-2548
(E) terry.cosby@oh.usda.gov
Assistant: Nancy Jervis

PA - Denise Coleman, STC
359 East Park Drive, Suite 2
Harrisburg PA 17111
Phone: 717/237-2203
Fax: 717/237-2238
(E) denise.coleman@pa.usda.gov
Assistant: Mary Spardy

RI - Richard "Pooh" Vongkhamdy, STC
60 Quaker Lane, Suite 46
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886-0111
Phone: 401/828-1300
Fax: 401/828-0433
(E) pooh.vongkhamdy@ri.usda.gov
Assistant: Mary Bent-Ellis

VT – Vicky Drew, STC
356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105
Colchester, Vermont 05446
Phone: 802/951-6796
Fax: 802/951-6327
(E) vicky.drew@vt.usda.gov
Assistant: Matt Perry
Lorrie Doering

WV – Louis Aspey, STC
West Virginia State Office
1550 Earl Core Road, Suite 200
Morgantown, West Virginia 26505
Phone: 304/284-7540
Fax: 304/284-4839
(E) louis.aspey@wv.usda.gov
Assistant: Nanette Kimble

STATE CONSERVATIONISTS AND REGIONAL CONSERVATIONISTS

James E. Tillman, Sr. – Regional Conservationist - Southeast
Office Number: (202) 690-2197

AL – Ben Malone, STC
3381 Skyway Drive P.O. Box 311
Auburn, Alabama 36831
Phone: 334/887-4500
Fax: 334/887-4552
(E) ben.malone@al.usda.gov
Assistant: Allison Smith

KY – Karen Woodrich, STC
771 Corporate Drive Suite 210
Lexington, Kentucky 40503-5479
Phone: 859/224-7350
Fax: 859/224-7399
(E) karen.woodrich@ky.usda.gov
Assistant: Greta Steverson

PR – Edwin Almodovar, Director
Director, Caribbean Area
IBM Plaza, Suite 604
654 Munoz Rivera Avenue
Hato Rey, Puerto Rico 00918-4123
Phone: 787/766-5206, ext. 237
Fax: 787/766-5987
(E) edwin.almodovar@pr.usda.gov
Assistant: Nilda Gonzalez

AR – Mike Sullivan, STC
Federal Building, Room 3416
700 West Capitol Avenue
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201-3215
Phone: 501/301-3100
Fax: 501/301-3194(V)
(E) Michael.sullivan@ar.usda.gov
Assistant: Mandy Moore

LA – Kevin Norton, STC
3737 Government Street
Alexandria, Louisiana 71302
Phone: 318/473-7751
Fax: 318/473-7626
(E) kevin.norton@la.usda.gov
Assistant: Jacqueline Guillory

SC – Ann English, STC
Strom Thurmond Federal Building
1835 Assembly Street, Room 950
Columbia, South Carolina 29201-2489
Phone: 803/253-3935
Fax: 803/253-3670
(E) ann.english@sc.usda.gov
Assistant: Patrice Moses

FL – Russell Morgan, STC
2614 N.W. 43rd Street
Gainesville, Florida 32606-6611 or
P.O. Box 141510, Gainesville, FL 32614
Phone: 352/338-9500/ 9507
Fax: 352-338-9574
(E) russell.morgan@fl.usda.gov
Assistant: Andytra Lewis

MS – Kurt Readus, STC
Suite 1321, Federal Building
100 West Capitol Street
Jackson, Mississippi 39269-1399
Phone: 601/965-5205 x2140
Fax: 601/965-4940
(E) kurt.readus@ms.usda.gov
Assistant: Leroy Lockett

TN – Kevin Brown, STC
675 U.S. Courthouse
801 Broadway
Nashville, Tennessee 37203-3878
Phone: 615/277-2531
Fax: 615/277-2577
(E) kevin.brown@tn.usda.gov
Assistant: Courtney Hansman

GA – Terrance Rudolph, STC
Federal Building, Stop 200
355 East Hancock Avenue
Athens, Georgia 30601-2769
Phone: 706/546-2272
Fax: 706/546-2120
(E) terrance.rudolph@ga.usda.gov
Assistant: Kandi Hostetler

NC – Tim Beard, STC
4407 Bland Road, Suite 117
Raleigh, North Carolina 27609-6293
Phone: 919/873-2102
Direct: 919/873-2101
Fax: 919/873-2156
(E) tim.beard@nc.usda.gov
Assistant: Pam Chaney

VA – Jack Bricker, STC
Culpeper Building, Suite 209
1606 Santa Rosa Road
Richmond, Virginia 23229-5014
Phone: 804/287-1691
Fax: 804/287-1734
(Email) jack.bricker@va.usda.gov
Assistant: Kathleen Anderson
David Kriz

STATE CONSERVATIONISTS AND REGIONAL CONSERVATIONISTS

Astor Boozer, Regional Conservationist- West Office Number: (202) 690-2196

AK – Robert Jones, STC
800 West Evergreen
Atrium Building, Suite 100
Palmer, Alaska 99645-6539
Phone: 907/761-7747
Fax: 907/761-7790
(E) robert.jones@ak.usda.gov
Assistant: Dee Covalt

AZ – Keisha Tatem, STC
230 North First Avenue
Suite 509
Phoenix, Arizona 85003-1733
Phone: 602/280-8801
Fax: 602/280-8809
(E) Keisha.tatem@az.usda.gov
Assistant: Sherry Ellicott

CA - Carlos Suarez, STC
430 G Street
Suite 4164
Davis, California 95616-4164
Phone: 530/792-5600
Fax: 530/792-5790
(E) carlos.suarez@ca.usda.gov
Assistant: Rachel Lopez

CO – Clinton Evans, STC
Denver Federal Center
Building 56, Room 2604
PO Box 25426
Denver, CO 80225
Phone: 720-544-2810
Fax: 720-544-2965
(E) clinton.evans@co.usda.gov
Assistant: Cyndee Hjelmstad

GU – Bruce Petersen, Director
Director, Pacific Islands Area
FHB Building, Suite 301
400 Route 8
Mongmong, Guam 96910
Phone: 671/472-7490
Fax: 671/472-7288
(E) bruce.petersen@hi.usda.gov
Assistant: Cheryl Morton

HI – Bruce Petersen, Director
300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 4-118
P.O. Box 50004
Honolulu, Hawaii 96850-0002
Phone: 808/541-2600 x105
Fax: 808/541-1335
(E) bruce.petersen@hi.usda.gov
Assistant: Cheryl Morton

ID – Curtis Elke, STC
9173 West Barnes Drive
Suite C
Boise, Idaho 83709
Phone: 208/378-5700
Fax: 208/378-5735
(E) curtis.elke@id.usda.gov
Assistant: Pamela Dugan

MT – Lisa Coverdale, STC
Federal Building, Room 443
10 East Babcock Street
Bozeman, Montana 59715-4704
Phone: 406/587-6811
Fax: 406/587-6761
(E) lisa.coverdale@mt.usda.gov
Assistant: Heather Higgs

NM – Xavier Montoya, STC
6200 Jefferson Street, N.E.
Suite 305
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87109-3734
Phone: 505/761-4400
Fax: 505/761-4481
(E) xavier.montoya@nm.usda.gov
Assistant: Scott Skinkle

NV – Ray Dotson, STC
1365 Corporate Blvd.
Reno, Nevada 89502
Phone: 775/857-8500 ext 102
Fax: 775/857-8524
(E) ray.dotson@nv.usda.gov
Assistant: Jonnie Eyster

OR – Ron Alvarado, STC
1201 NE Lloyd Blvd. Suite 900
Portland, Oregon 97232
Phone: 503/414-3200
Fax: 503/414-3103
(E) ron.alvarado@or.usda.gov
Assistant: Laurie Sassman

UT – Dave Brown, STC
W.F. Bennett Federal Building
125 South State Street, Room 44402
Salt Lake City, Utah 84138
Phone: 801/524-4555 or 4564
Fax: 801/524-4403
(E) dave.brown@ut.usda.gov
Assistant: Gayla Pressett

WA – Roylene Rides at the Door, STC
W. 316 Boone Avenue, Suite 450
Spokane, Washington 99201-2348
Phone: 509/323-2900
Fax: 509/323-2909
(E) roylene.rides-at-the-door@wa.usda.gov
Assistant: Georgia Sormun

WY – Astrid Martinez, STC
Federal Building, Room 3124
100 East B Street
Casper, Wyoming 82602-1911
Phone: 307/233-6750
Fax: 307/233-6753
(E) astrid.martinez@wy.usda.gov
Assistant: Jill Binette

STATE CONSERVATIONISTS AND REGIONAL CONSERVATIONISTS

Kevin Wickey, Regional Conservationist - Central
Office Number: (202) 690-2196

IA – Kurt Simon, STC
210 Walnut Street, Room 693
Des Moines, Iowa 50309-2180
Phone: 515/284-6655
Fax: 515/284-4394
(E) kurt.simon@ia.usda.gov
Assistant: Shelly Grimmus

MN – Cathee Pullman, STC
375 Jackson Street
Suite 600
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1854
Phone: 651/602-7900
Fax: 651/602-7913 or 7914
(E) cathee.pullman@mn.usda.gov
Assistant: Kristine Kust

OK – Gary O'Neill, STC
100 USDA, Suite 206
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074-2655
Phone: 405/742-1204
Fax: 405/742-1126
(E) gary.oneill@ok.usda.gov
Assistant: Connie Fitzpatrick

IL – Ivan Dozier, STC
2118 W. Park Court
Champaign, Illinois 61821
Phone: 217/353-6600 or 6601
Fax: 217/353-6676
(E) ivan.dozier@il.usda.gov
Assistant: Kristi Einck

MO – JR Flores, STC
Parkade Center, Suite 250
601 Business Loop 70 West
Columbia, Missouri 65203-2546
Phone: 573/876-0909
Fax: 573/876-9439
(E) jr.flores@mo.usda.gov
Assistant: Sonja Williams

SD – Jeff Zimprich, STC
Federal Building, Room 203
200 Fourth Street, S.W.
Huron, South Dakota 57350-2475
Phone: 605/352-1200
Fax: 605/352-1288
(E) jeffrey.zimprich@sd.usda.gov
Assistant: Kathy Irving

IN – Jane Hardisty, STC
6013 Lakeside Blvd.
Indianapolis, Indiana 46278-2933
Phone: 317/290-3200
Fax: 317/290-3225
(E) jane.hardisty@in.usda.gov
Assistant: Lisa Bolton

ND – Mary Podoll, STC
220 E. Rosser Avenue, Room 278
P.O. Box 1458
Bismarck, North Dakota 58502-1458
Phone: 701/530-2000
Fax: 701/530-2110
(E) mary.podoll@nd.usda.gov
Assistant: Theresa Ristvedt

TX – Salvador Salinas, STC
W.R. Poage Federal Building
101 South Main Street
Temple, Texas 76501-7602
Phone: 254/742-9800
Fax: 254/742-9819
(E) salvador.salinas@tx.usda.gov
Assistant: Cindy Sultenfuss

KS - Eric Banks, STC
760 South Broadway
Salina, Kansas 67401-4604
Phone: 785/823-4565
Fax: 785/452-3369
(E) Eric.banks@ks.usda.gov
Assistant: Muriel Morgenthaler

NE – Craig Derickson, STC
Federal Building, Room 152
100 Centennial Mall, North
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508-3866
Phone: 402/437-5300
Fax: 402/437-5490
(E) craig.derickson@ne.usda.gov
Assistant: Jamie Petersen

WI – Jimmy Bramblett, STC
8030 Excelsior Drive, Suite 200
Madison, Wisconsin 53717
Phone: 608/662-4422
Fax: 608/662-4430
(E) jimmy.bramblett@wi.usda.gov
Assistant: Julie Wombacher

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