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USDA ANNOUNCES \$58 MILLION TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Program Will Provide Funding for 63 Water Conservation Projects in 21 states

WASHINGTON, July 30, 2009 — U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Dave White today announced nearly \$58 million for water conservation and water quality improvements on agricultural working lands. The funding was made available for 63 projects in 21 states through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program.

“We must take steps to protect and preserve our water resources, and the Obama Administration is committed to using this program to provide financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to improve water conditions on their land,” said White.

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) promotes ground and surface water conservation and improves water quality by helping farmers and ranchers implement agricultural water enhancement activities. With the services and resources of other conservation partners, AWEP allows the Federal Government to leverage investment in natural resources conservation.

Landowners can obtain funding through AWEP for several types of projects, including:

- Water quality or water conservation plan development, including resource condition assessment and modeling;
- Water conservation restoration or enhancement projects, including conversion to the production of less water-intensive agricultural commodities or dry land farming;
- Water quality or quantity restoration or enhancement projects;
- Irrigation system improvement or irrigation efficiency enhancement;
- Activities designed to mitigate the effects of drought and climate change; and
- Other related activities deemed by the Secretary to help achieve water quality or water conservation benefits on agricultural land.

AWEP was established by the 2008 Farm Bill and funding comes from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the program for USDA. NRCS implements AWEP by entering into EQIP contracts directly with agricultural producers.

All AWEP recipients must meet EQIP requirements. Though participating AWEP producers do not need to have existing EQIP contracts, they must be eligible for EQIP. All partner proposals were selected competitively. Proposals for priority areas may have received higher rankings, and include property undergoing conversion of agricultural land from irrigated to dry land farming; projects that help producers meet regulatory requirements; and projects located where there is a high percentage of agricultural land and producers in a region or area.

Approved AWEP Projects and Funding by State:

Arkansas - 1 project - \$1,383,417

California - 15 projects* - \$18,079,101

Colorado - 1 project - \$333,000

Florida - 1 project - \$1,000,000

Georgia - 2 projects - \$2,000,000.00

Iowa - 1 project - \$158,950

Idaho - 4 projects - \$6,920,000

Illinois - 1 project - \$49,440

Indiana - 2 projects* - \$554,000

Michigan - 1 project* - \$1,500,000

Mississippi - 2 projects - \$2,400,000

North Carolina - 1 project - \$100,000

North Dakota - 5 projects - \$2,253,352

Nebraska - 5 projects - \$2,590,000

New Jersey - 1 project - \$400,000

New Mexico - 4 projects - \$3,328,537

New York - 1 project \$500,000

Oklahoma - 1 project - \$275,000

Oregon - 8 projects* - \$3,605,879

Texas - 5 projects - \$10,425,000

Washington - 1 project - \$53,600

Total - 63 projects - \$57,909,276

Note: Project numbers indicated with an asterisk indicate multi-state projects. For more information about specific AWEPP projects visit www.nrcs.usda.gov or the nearest USDA Service Center in your area.