NRCS Announces National Water Quality Initiative Conservation in Puerto Rico

Agricultural Producers located in the Rio Grande de Añasco priority watershed will be able to participate

May 9, 2012 – San Juan, PR – NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar, announced the launch of a new National Water Quality Initiative committed to improving impaired waterways in western Puerto Rico. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will manage the initiative by making funds available to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners in the Rio Grande de Añasco watershed.

“The Water Quality Initiative will further NRCS’ partnership efforts to improve water quality using voluntary actions on private lands,” Director Almodóvar said. “This initiative is a focused approach in areas facing significant natural resource challenges. It bolsters the positive results of landscape conservation initiatives NRCS and its partners already have underway.”

Through this effort, eligible producers in the Rio Grande de Añasco watershed will invest in voluntary conservation actions to help provide cleaner water for their neighbors and communities. The selected watershed was identified with help from state agencies, partners, and the NRCS State Technical Committee.

Using funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NRCS will provide funding and advice to producers to install conservation practices such as cover crops, filter strips and terraces in watersheds with impairments where the federal investment can make a difference to improve water quality.

“American farmers are good stewards of the environment, especially when they have the tools they need to protect or improve fish and wildlife habitat and water quality,” said NRCS Chief Dave White. “We look forward to collaborating with producers in key watersheds to help them have a positive impact on streams with impaired water quality.”

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The Rio Grande de Añasco is one of the primary rivers discharging into Mayagüez Bay and drains one of the largest watersheds in Puerto Rico. The Río Grande de Añasco watershed covers an area of 257 square miles and includes portions of Añasco, Mayagüez, Las Marías, Maricao, San Sebastián, Lares, Yauco, and Adjuntas municipalities. The watershed is ranked # 5 on the list of impaired watersheds in the Puerto Rico Unified Watershed Assessment, due primarily to sediment, bacterial and chemical contamination (low dissolved oxygen, high arsenic and turbidity). Many of these pollutants are directly related to agricultural sources such as fertilizers, pesticides and manure.

NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year. Remember to check with your local NRCS office to see if you are located the selected watershed. All applications for funding consideration, during this fiscal year, must be received by June 15, 2012. This summer, NRCS will notify all applicants of the results and begin developing contracts with selected applicants.

Since 1935, NRCS’ nationwide conservation delivery system works with private landowners to put conservation on the ground based on specific, local conservation needs, while accommodating state and national interests. For more information about NRCS’ programs, initiatives and services in the Caribbean Area, please visit us online at www.pr.nrcs.usda.gov. For additional information about the NRCS National Water Quality Initiative, please contact José Castro at 787-766-5206 x117 or jose.castro@pr.usda.gov. For details on activities in the Añasco watershed, please contact Mayagüez District Conservationist, Zulma Garcia, at 787-831-3454 x100 or Zulma.garcia@pr.usda.gov.

Río Grande de Añasco watershed map (source PR Department of Natural Resources and Environment).