

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Commodity Credit Corporation

ACTION: NOTICE

Conservation Innovation Grants Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Announcement for Program Funding-Vermont

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.912

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Vermont (VT), an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture, is announcing availability of Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of the Vermont State CIG competition in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 will be approximately \$212,000. Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive grants process. Only projects with a direct nexus to the state of Vermont will be considered.

There are three categories of natural resources concerns or technology needs in the State CIG for FY 2014. Applications are requested from eligible governmental or non-governmental organizations, individuals or legal entities for competitive consideration of grant awards for projects between 1 and 3 years in duration. This notice identifies the objectives for CIG projects, the eligibility criteria for projects, and provides the associated instructions needed to apply to CIG.

DATES: Applications must be received in the NRCS Vermont State Office by 4 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on **Friday, May 9, 2014**.

ADDRESSES: The address for hand-delivered applications or applications submitted using mail or overnight courier service is: Conservation Innovation Grants Program, c/o Robert Kort, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105, Colchester, Vermont 05446. Contact phone number for hand-delivered applications is (802) 951-6796 x233 or 221.

To submit your application electronically, email materials to bob.kort@vt.usda.gov or visit Grants.gov-Apply for Grants and follow the instructions.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Robert Kort, Vermont State CIG Program Manager, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105, Colchester, VT 05446; Phone: (802) 951-6796 x233; Fax: (802) 655-0638; email: bob.kort@vt.usda.gov, Subject: Conservation Innovation Grants APF; or consult the Vermont NRCS web site at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/vt/programs/?cid=nrcs142p2_010522.

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) were authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8] under the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill). 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 into NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides, and references or to the private sector. **CIG does not fund research projects. Projects intended to formulate hypothesis do not qualify for a CIG project.** CIG is used to apply or demonstrate previously proven technology. It is a vehicle to stimulate the development and adoption of conservation approaches or technologies that have been studied sufficiently to indicate a high likelihood of success, and that are candidates for eventual technology transfer or institutionalization. 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 and field demonstrations.

Vermont NRCS will accept applications under this notice for single or multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years. Applications can be submitted to NRCS from eligible entities including Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, State and local governments, non-governmental organizations, individuals and legal entities. **Applications must have a direct nexus to the state of Vermont and include an entity from Vermont as part of the project management.**

Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant. Complete applications received by the applicable deadline that comply with the provisions of this notice will be evaluated by a technical peer review panel and scored based on the Criteria for Application Evaluation identified in this document. Scored applications will be forwarded to the Vermont State Conservationist who will make the final award selections. The State Conservationist reserves the right to not fund any or all proposals.

C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

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

- Conservation adoption approaches or incentive systems; or
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches; and
- Environmental soundness with goals of environmental protection and natural resource enhancement.

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

- Makes use of a proven technology or a technology that has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success;
- Demonstrates and verifies 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; or
- Demonstrate transferability of knowledge.

D. CIG Categories

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, the Vermont State CIG has three categories of natural resources concerns and technology needs for possible funding. Applicants must identify the most appropriate category for the topic of their proposal. The categories are: Water Quality and Soil Health, Forestry/Wildlife, and Energy. *Note that the Water Quality and Soil Health and Forestry/Wildlife categories have priority topics identified, while the Energy category does not identify priority topics.* Beginning Farmers, Limited Resource Farmers, Federally recognized Indian Tribes or members of Federally recognized Indian Tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities, are encouraged to submit application(s) in any of the categories.

1. Water Quality and Soil Health

The topics listed below have been identified as priority water quality areas for consideration and funding under the Vermont CIG in 2014. Other innovative conservation approaches and technologies will be considered if they demonstrate improved implementation of NRCS water quality improvement conservation practices.

- **Wetlands Restoration Demonstration and Monitoring Project:** Mosquitoes are natural components of many types of wetland ecosystems. It is well documented in the scientific literature that dragonflies, damselflies, backswimmer bugs, salamander larvae, fish and other mosquito predators in wetlands can reduce mosquito populations. Restored wetlands along riparian areas improve water quality by storing floodwater, retaining sediment, and retaining, removing, and transforming nutrients. However, public perception of natural and restored wetland sites remains mixed, with appreciation of wetland functions and values including floodwater retention, wildlife habitat, and aesthetics coupled with fears that all wetlands produce mosquitoes and that all mosquitoes are vectors for diseases such as West Nile Virus or Eastern Equine Encephalitis. These negative public perceptions of wetlands are a barrier to further participation in and public acceptance of wetlands restoration projects. Using restored wetlands as demonstration sites to showcase wetlands restoration practices and related mosquito and mosquito predator populations along with public education and outreach will increase awareness of the benefits of wetlands restoration.

Under this project the applicant will sample two NRCS-identified restored floodplain wetlands and two nearby currently drained floodplain wetland hayfields or pastures dominated by Reed Canarygrass. NRCS will be involved in

an advisory capacity on sample design. Mosquito sampling will follow VT Agency of Agriculture protocols and recommendations. Sampling and species identification will include three years of data collection on a minimum of the following for each area:

- Mosquito Larvae and adults
- Invertebrate larvae and adults (ex. dragonflies and damselflies)
- Fish

Required project deliverables include:

- Providing two mosquito and mosquito predator sampling workshops for interested citizen scientists, mosquito detection volunteers with mosquito control districts, or other participants. (One for each demonstration site)
- Two onsite field trips for the general public (one for each demonstration site)
- Data from field sampling
- Final report summarizing findings from field sampling
- Fact sheet detailing demonstration site results
- Creation of a presentation showing results of demonstration site sampling
- Presentation of results presented at three public forums within the towns nearby demonstration sites

- **Demonstration and Evaluation of a Phosphorus Removal System for Tile Drainage:** Tile drainage systems in agricultural fields have the potential to deliver significant concentrations and loads of phosphorus to surface waters. Increasing attention is being focused on tile discharge and its treatment as one more means of meeting TMDL goals for phosphorus reduction in Vermont. A new interim practice standard, Phosphorus Removal System (782), has been recently developed and approved by NRCS for use in Vermont. This practice will be used to capture phosphorus in tile discharge and reduce the concentration and loadings to surface waters. A number of different types of material can be used in these “in line” systems as treatment media of the discharge water. As a new agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) there is the need to demonstrate its use on a Vermont farm and to provide some evaluation of its practicality and efficiency.

Under this project the applicant will identify a suitable Vermont farm(s) and field to implement at least two of these practices. The systems will be designed and constructed as required by the NRCS practice standard for Phosphorus Removal System. Different adsorption media will be evaluated and two will be selected for installation in the two systems for comparison purposes. The systems will be evaluated for a minimum of two years after construction. Evaluation will include documentation of construction costs, procedures and treatment materials evaluated for use. A minimum of 20 paired water quality samples will be collected for each system to show differences in phosphorus concentrations between inflows and outflows. If possible, phosphorus loading estimates and reductions will also be provided. An important part of the project will be to

provide tours of the sites, information pamphlets and other media to promote the practice in Vermont. A final report will also be provided as part of the project.

- **Demonstration and Evaluation of Adaptive Nutrient Management**

Approach: The adaptive management approach enables growers to use a data-driven process to refine nutrient management to better adapt to conditions encountered on their farms. The adaptive nutrient management approach can be used to:

- Introduce new nutrient management technologies
- Improve the nutrient use efficiency
- Decrease the loss of nutrients to the environment
- Use tools and/or techniques for nutrient management that are not currently in use
- Evaluate post-season site-specific data that can be used to establish future optimal nutrient applications

Adaptive nutrient management is a process for evaluating and adjusting nutrient management based on data collected at the field level following a set of protocols. The four basic steps involve: Step 1 – Develop the plan for the evaluation; Step 2 – Implement the nutrient management plan; Step 3 – Evaluate the plan based on lessons learned; Step 4 – Adjust the nutrient management. Proper protocols can be found in NRCS Agronomy Technical Note No. 6, Adaptive Nutrient Management,

<http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=30618.wba>

As a new Agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) there is the need to demonstrate its use on a Vermont farm and to provide some evaluation of its practicality and efficiency. Under this project the applicant will identify a suitable Vermont farm and fields to implement this approach. The process will be evaluated for a minimum of three years and shall follow NRCS protocols. An important part of the project will be to provide workshop presentations, information pamphlets and other media to promote the process in Vermont. A final report will also be provided as part of the project.

- **Development of a Vermont Phosphorus Mass Balance Tool for Vermont Farms:**

Vermont farms have been identified as a significant source of non-point phosphorus in many Vermont watersheds. Increasing attention is being focused on the amount of phosphorus being imported to farms versus the amount that is safely exported. Examining and correcting the phosphorus mass balance for farms is one more means of reducing field losses of phosphorus and meeting TMDL goals for phosphorus reduction in Vermont. There are several existing tools available for quantifying farm phosphorus mass balances, including the Cornell Phosphorus Mass Balance Tool. These tools each have advantages and disadvantages. For example the Cornell tool requires extensive data input similar to what is required for development of a nutrient management plan. There is the need to use, modify or develop a phosphorus mass balance tool for Vermont that can be easily completed with a minimal amount of data.

Under this project the applicant will evaluate existing tools to quantify phosphorus mass balances on Vermont farms. One tool will be selected, modified or developed for use by resource managers and farmers. The tool will then be applied to a minimum of three different farms as a demonstration. The selected farms should vary in size and type. As part of the project several training sessions will be provided to interested parties that would potentially use the tool in the future. A final project report will also be provided that includes instructions on model use.

- **Short-Season Silage Corn and Cover Crop Program:** Many Vermont dairy farmers are struggling to implement cover crops. One reason for this is that the typical long-season maturity varieties of corn are generally harvested too late in the year to allow for proper establishment of cover crops in the fall. Many farmers are reluctant to grow short-season varieties of silage corn (90 day maturity or less) due to concerns regarding lower yields and poor feed quality.

In order to accelerate the adoption of growing short-season silage corn along with cover crops, this CIG opportunity would provide for a ‘financial guarantee’ against the risk of crop losses associated with the transition to this new cropping system. The farms must be willing to plant, for 3 years, a minimum 20 acres of short-season corn silage to be harvested prior to October 1 and with cover crop planted no later than October 1. Participating farmers would plant one field (or a portion of a field equaling at least 20 acres) to the short-season corn variety and cover crop. A similar field in close proximity (similar soil types, slopes and drainage) would be planted to the farmer’s desired long-season corn variety. Yield measurements and feed analysis from the two fields would determine disparity in total crop/feed value from the two fields. The participant would be reimbursed financially for any resulting loss in total feed value from the short-season corn field. This compensation could be reduced to a partial payment if available funds for the project become limited.

Final products will include:

- On-farm demonstrations of short-season corn with cover crops on a Vermont farm, where farmers can receive updated information regarding the trials and the outcomes,
 - A report providing analysis of all farm fields enrolled (short-season and long-season maturity fields) and providing comparison data, per year, of final yield and feed values, as well as the cover crop establishment success on the short-season corn fields. The report will provide general conclusions regarding the applicability of growing short-season corn and harvest prior to October 1 in Vermont,
 - Fact sheets which provide evaluation of the practicality of following this planting regime.
- **Update of the P Index for Vermont:** In Vermont, nutrient management plans require using the Phosphorus Index as a phosphorus risk assessment tool. Vermont’s Phosphorus Index was last revised on Jan. 25, 2005. Developed mainly for VT’s dairy farms, it includes Modified Morgan soil tests, manure applications and crop/vegetation types of corn and other row crops, alfalfa and

other forages, small grains, pasture, CRP land and woodland. Since 2012, other farm types are requesting nutrient management plans. These farms include vegetable, fruits and specialty crops along with greenhouse/high tunnels operations. The combination of these issues indicate the present VT Phosphorus Index needs to be updated to include greenhouse media tests, more organic nutrient sources and crop types.

- **Development of Public/Private Partnerships to Accelerate Adoption of Water Quality BMPs:** Accelerated agricultural BMP implementation will be necessary in the Lake Champlain Basin of Vermont to meet the goals of the revised phosphorus TMDL for the Basin that will be released soon. At the same time federal and state funds will likely be limited to existing levels or may even see some decreases. Private funding is one potential source of new funds that could be used in conjunction with state and federal funding to accelerate BMP implementation rates on Vermont farms. This funding could be used in several ways: to target geographical areas or specific farms that are not eligible for state or federal funding, to support specific BMP practices that cannot be funded with existing sources, or to use as match with existing state and federal funding to increase allowable cost share rates (make payments that more closely match the full cost of the practices). In past projects, the provision of payment rates at or close to 100% of the practice cost has been shown to significantly increase farmer participation and to increase practice implementation. The awardee will be responsible for contacting appropriate private companies, foundations, etc., coordinating with state and federal agencies, and developing partnership agreements with interested parties that identify the specifics of any financial agreements necessary to accelerate BMP implementation in the Lake Champlain Basin of Vermont.

2. Forestry/Wildlife

The topics listed below have been identified as priority forestry/wildlife areas for consideration and funding under the Vermont CIG in 2014. Other innovative conservation approaches and technologies (see "Overview" on page 2) will be considered if they demonstrate improved implementation of NRCS forestry or wildlife habitat improvement conservation practices:

- **Evaluation of NRCS Funded Wildlife/Forestry Practices:** Evaluate and determine the efficacy of NRCS funded wildlife and forestry conservation practices. Practices may include but are not limited to invasive plant control, early successional habitat management, and forest stand improvement. Provide recommendations based upon findings to increase effectiveness, consistency and/or site suitability of specific practices.
- **Restoration of Native Plant Species:** – The use of native woody plant materials is required for all NRCS sponsored tree and shrub planting projects. In addition, local source (genotype) plant materials are strongly encouraged in NRCS planting projects as they will generally be the most successful, are in line with the purpose of conservation projects and will help maintain the natural communities of Vermont. However, the demand to establish trees and shrubs on conservation projects in Vermont, such as through riparian forest buffer establishment, exceeds

local source plant material and stock is purchased from out of state. Often, highly desired plant species cannot be purchased locally. In addition, the cost to coordinate, purchase and plant trees and shrubs on large projects can be significant.

This CIG opportunity seeks to develop and demonstrate innovative approaches to restore native and local plants or communities.

Specific areas of interest for this grant include:

- Determining low cost alternatives to direct tree planting that would also support using local plant materials. Examples may include various natural regeneration site preparation techniques, directing seeding, etc. that must keep in mind commonly encountered problematic site conditions (i.e. Reed Canarygrass).
- Developing high conservation value local plant materials that are not currently available in the State. Priority will be given to state-ranked uncommon, rare or very rare species (S1, S2, S3) or for plants that are part of an uncommon, rare or very rare Vermont Natural Community.

3. Energy

*The objective of this category is to implement new technologies and/or approaches to conserve energy or utilize agricultural and forest lands as a source of reliable, affordable, and environmentally sustainable biofuels and renewable energy. Topics that will be considered for funding include but **are not limited to**:*

- Development of conservation practice specification guidance for on-farm energy practices.
- Utilizing crops for energy production and water quality protection to provide financial incentives to the farm operation; and
- Evaluate and demonstrate the use of fast growing woody biomass species in agroforestry systems e.g., alley cropping, riparian forest buffers, windbreaks, etc.

II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

Vermont NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2014 will be up to \$212,000. Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive grants process. The maximum award amount for any project will not exceed \$75,000. CIG will fund single-year and multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years. Multi-state proposals will not be considered under this State CIG option.

Due to the limited amount of funds, NRCS reserves the right to offer less funding than what is requested in the grant application.

The anticipated start date for awarded projects is September 1, 2014. Awards will be made using agreements with the NRCS Vermont State Office.

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, individual or legal entity.

B. Project Eligibility

To be eligible for CIG, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements set forth in 16 USC 3839aa-1. 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 the total project cost. The recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and in-kind contributions. Up to half of the applicant's matching funds (up to 25 percent of the total project cost) may be from in-kind contributions. The remainder of the match must be provided in cash.

The limit on in-kind contributions does not apply to projects carried out by a Beginning Farmer, Limited Resource Farmer, Federally recognized Indian Tribes, members of Federally recognized Indian Tribes, or a community-based organization comprised of or representing them. Instead, the contribution from cash sources must be at least 25% of the federal request; the remainder may come from in-kind contributions. This means that 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 these individuals and entities meet the statutory requirements for receiving a CIG.

Matching funds must be secured at time of application. Applications 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 in [2 CFR 215](#).

D. Beginning or Limited Resource Farmers and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes

Beginning Farmers, Limited Resource Farmers, Federally recognized Indian Tribes, members of Federally recognized Indian Tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing them wishing *to be eligible for the in-kind contribution exception must make a declaration in the application* as described in Part IV.B.13 in this notice. Below are the regulatory definitions of a Beginning Farmer and a Limited Resource Farmer, which are found at [7 CFR 1466.3](#):

Beginning Farmer - a person or legal entity who:

- Has not operated a farm, or who has operated a farm 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;
- 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 consistent with the practices in the county or State where the farm is located; *and*

- 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. 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 would be seriously impaired.

Limited Resource Farmer -

- A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$155,200 in each of the previous 2 years (adjusted for inflation using Prices Paid by Farmer Index as compiled by National Agricultural Statistical Service); *and*
- Has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous 2 years (to be determined annually using Department of Commerce data).

E. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments

Subject to limited exception, 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 2014. 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 exceed the payment limitation. Through project progress reports, CIG grantees are responsible for certifying that individuals or entities involved in CIG projects do not exceed the payment limitation. All direct and indirect payments made to producers using CIG funds must be reported to the Vermont State CIG Program Manager in the quarterly report. Further, all individuals or entities receiving direct or indirect payments through participation in a CIG project must also meet the EQIP eligibility requirements.
- In addition, section 1240B, 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 entity has already received funds, or is contracted to receive funds through any USDA conservation programs (e.g., EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Security Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program).

F. Project Eligibility

To participate in EQIP financial assistance, an individual or entity must meet the eligibility requirements in 7 C.F.R. 1466.8, which include the following:

Criteria	Potential Verification Documentation*
Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions (7 C.F.R. 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 the agricultural operation as	Documentation of their farm interest can be

defined in 7 C.F.R. Part 1400	obtained by the producer at their local USDA Service Center or through the USDA customer service on-line portal showing that the producer has farm records established
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 \$1,000,000, unless not less than 66.66 percent of the average adjusted gross income of the person, joint operation, or legal entity is average adjusted gross farm income (7 C.F.R. Part 1400)	If using FY 2009-2014 CIG funding, documentation of a producer's 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 (FSA) or require that the producer establish new records.

G. 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 Vermont State EQIP Eligible Practices List by contacting the NRCS State Office or visiting the [Vermont EQIP](#) website.

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. The Vermont State CIG Program Manager is the NRCS contact to provide technical oversight for each project receiving an award.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. How to Obtain Materials

The announcement for the Vermont CIG funding opportunity can be found on the following websites: <http://www.grants.gov> and http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/vt/programs/farbill/?cid=nrcs142p2_010522.

All Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standard forms necessary for CIG submission are posted on the following website: [Grants.gov - Forms Repository](#). An application package checklist and project summary sheet is included in Part VIII of this announcement. Standard forms, samples of certain completed forms, as well as editable versions of the checklist and summary sheet are on the Vermont NRCS website.

B. Content and Format

Applications are required to contain the content, format, and information set forth below in order to receive consideration for funding. 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. Applicants may submit either a written application accompanied by an electronic copy or an electronic application via email or through Grants.gov.

Applications should be formatted for and printed on numbered 8½” x 11” white paper. The text of the application should be in a font no smaller than 12-point, single-spaced, single-sided, with one inch margins. *Applications that fail to comply with the required content and format will not be considered for funding.*

Applications must include all required forms and narrative sections described below. *All forms and narrative sections must be properly completed* (e.g., fill out *all* sections of Standard Form (SF) 424A and other forms). If submitting applications for more than one project, submit a separate application for each project. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Material exceeding stated page limits will not be considered.

1. **Application Form:** Applicants must use SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance as the cover sheet for each project application. SF-424 can be downloaded from Grants.gov - [Forms Repository](#) , [Vermont state CIG](#) or obtained from the Vermont NRCS State Office.
2. **Project Summary:** Applicants must submit a project summary (no more than three pages in length) that includes the information listed below. A template for the Project Summary Sheet is in Part VIII.B.
 - a. Project title
 - b. Project director name and contact information (including e-mail)
 - c. Names and affiliations of project collaborators
 - d. Project background (describe the issue or problem and how the project addresses it innovatively)
 - e. Project objectives (purpose & goals)
 - f. Project methods (methodology, tools, and processes)
 - g. Project deliverables/products
 - h. Project area/location
 - i. Project start and end dates (Anticipated start date is September 1, 2014)
 - j. CIG category (Water Quality and Soil Health, Forestry/Wildlife, or Energy)
 - k. Declaration of Previous CIG Project
 - l. Declaration of EQIP eligible producer involvement and description of involvement
 - m. Declaration of Beginning or Limited Resource Farmer or Federally recognized Indian Tribe
 - n. Total project cost and Federal funds requested
3. **One-Page Abstract:** Include a one-page, non-confidential technical summary that describes the work to be undertaken and the expected outcome and benefits. The technical summary should take into account the priorities and evaluation factors described in this solicitation.
4. **Project Description:** The description must include the following information and is limited to 15 pages in length. It should provide a clear description of the work to be undertaken and how it will be accomplished, and provide sufficient information for the

reviewers to evaluate the application in accordance with the merit review criteria in Part V.

- a. Project background: Describe the issue or problem including 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.
- 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. Location and size of 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.
- e. EQIP eligible producer participation: Estimate the number of EQIP eligible producers involved in the project, and describe the extent of their involvement (EQIP eligible producers **must** be involved in the project). 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 start date is September 1, 2014.
- 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. Failure to disclose ongoing, completed, or funded projects in a category similar to that for which CIG funds are being requested could lead to termination of a CIG award. 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: 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 product 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) Quarterly reports;
 - 2) Supplemental narratives that explain and support payment requests;
 - 3) A final report;
 - 4) Performance items specific to the project that indicate progress; and
 - 5) A new technology and innovative approach or "lessons learned" fact sheet, or a case study, as is appropriate.
 - 6) 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.
5. **Additional Information**: Bibliographies and/or resumes (not to exceed two pages per person), and references.
6. **Assessment of Environmental and Social Impacts**: Describe and assess 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 full description and assessment of the potential impacts to all potentially impacted environmental resources must be disclosed. *One line or short descriptions of environmental impacts are not acceptable.* The length of the analysis should be commensurate with the complexity of the project proposed and the environmental resources impacted either 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. Environmental resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other specific resources protected by law, regulation, Executive Order, and agency policy.

These resources are outlined in the NRCS Environmental Evaluation Worksheet, NRCS Conservation and Planning Application (CPA) form 52, which is available at: [NRCS-CPA-52](#). The NRCS 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 (note that CPA-52 does not need to be completed unless awarded a CIG). 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.

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. NRCS may choose not to select projects that cannot be modified.

7. **Budget Information**: (Twelve (12) page maximum). The budget portion of the application consists of three parts described below:
- a. 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 cost share funds. If your cost share is from multiple sources you may show that in the remaining columns of Item 6. This form is the summary budget for the project.
 - b. Detailed Budget Description: Specific item by item breakdown of the totals provided in Item 6 of the SF-424A should be provided. This detail should show what individual costs were added together to arrive at the totals presented in each of Object Class Categories on the SF-424. The format of this information should be readable in 8.5 by 11 printable pages. It may be in a chart, spreadsheet, table, etc. 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 the cost share should be shown separately as in the SF-424A, not combined.* This may be on separate documents

or on different sections of the same one. Items provided to NRCS in the budget details should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- i. Personnel: A list of personnel, their salary, hourly rate, hours, % time
 - ii. Fringe Benefits: % of salary, differing rates for different staff
 - iii. Travel: basis for airfare, mileage rate (NTE Federal govt. rate), per diem, hotel, car rental, how many trips, how many days, number of staff
 - iv. Equipment: type of equipment, cost per item, per batch, per load, quantity
 - v. Supplies: type of supplies, cost per item, per batch, per load, quantity (a general statement such as “office supplies \$3,000” is not acceptable)
 - vi. Contractual: Cost of each subcontract – the total of all subcontracts should be shown on the SF-424, but an itemized budget should be provided for each potential subcontract. The budgets for the subcontracts should follow this same format and be submitted with your proposal.
 - vii. Construction: N/A
 - viii. Other: Cost per item, per batch, per load, quantity
- c. 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 to the information above, any subcontractors and consultants must also submit a statement of work. The budget narrative should support the federal funds requested and the cost share.*

Note: Matching funds need to be adequately documented in the Budget Narrative. There needs to be a real basis for the numbers used in the budget to provide confidence that the personnel time will be put into the project. Additional information will be requested to substantiate such entries in the budget when necessary.

8. 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 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.
- c. If applicant does not have a federally approved indirect cost rate, it is at the agency's (NRCS) discretion whether to allow indirect cost.

9. List of letters of support: Include entity name, location, role, and if a commitment of cash or in-kind support has been made, the value.

10. Matching: Applications should include written commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from non-federal third parties.

Cash match: For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement 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 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, email, 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.

Note: The value the producer's time as an in-kind match needs to be substantiated (hours and hourly rate). This needs to be more than a number conveniently used (so it seems) to balance the budget. Matching credit will not be given for activities that would have been part of normal farmstead operations if a CIG award was not received.

The sources and amounts of all matching support from non-applicants must be summarized on a separate page and placed in the application immediately following the summary of matching support (matching support means a budget narrative broken down by year).

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 for other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

11. Declaration of Previous CIG Projects Involvement and Past Performance:

If you have ever received an NRCS National or State CIG, please respond to item 11.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 11.B below. If you have never received any type of federal or non-federal assistance agreements, please indicate this in your proposal. In evaluating an applicant's response, in addition to the information provided by the applicant, NRCS may consider relevant information from NRCS files and/or from other federal or non-federal grantors to verify or supplement information provided by the applicant.

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. 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., quarterly progress reports, financial status reports, and any other required submittals). Accomplishments: 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:

Identify current and/or prior federally and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements received. Please provide information on no more than five of your most recent assistance agreements. 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.

12. Declaration of EQIP Eligibility and Producer Involvement: 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). The declaration must describe and certify the level of involvement by EQIP eligible producers.

13. Declaration of Beginning or Limited Resource Farmer or Federally Recognized Indian Tribe: If an applicant wishes to be eligible for the in-kind contribution exception, applicant must make a declaration in writing of their status as a Beginning Farmers, Limited Resource Farmers, Federally recognized Indian Tribes or members of Federally recognized Indian Tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.

- 14. Certifications:** All applications must include a signed SF-424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs. SF-424B may be found at: [Grants.gov - Forms Repository](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/vt/programs/farmland/?cid=nrcs142p2_010522) , http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/vt/programs/farmland/?cid=nrcs142p2_010522 , or the Vermont NRCS State Office. Applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following federal:
- 2 CFR Part 417, [Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension \(Non-procurement\)](#) ;
 - 7 CFR Part 3018, [New Restrictions on Lobbying](#) ; and
 - 2 CFR Part 421, [Governmentwide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace \(Financial Assistance\)](#) .

The items below must be obtained prior to entering into an agreement with the federal government. Applicants are encouraged to apply early for their DUNS/SAM numbers.

- 15. 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. 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 call 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.

- 16. System for Award Management (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 may submit applications electronically through Grants.gov or to the e-mail address listed below. Alternatively, applications may be submitted via express mail, overnight courier service, or U.S. Postal Service to the addresses listed below. All applications 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 applications submitted through its website. All applications regardless of how they are submitted must be received on **Friday, May 9, 2014**. E-mailed applications must be received by NRCS before the submission deadline.

Note: NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or web site problems related to Grants.gov or e-mailed submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process or send their e-mail in advance of the submission deadline to avoid problems.

Paper applications must be accompanied by an electronic copy on a compact disc (CD) or flash drive.

If submitting applications for more than one project, submit a separate, complete application package for each project.

The address for submitting an application by e-mail is bob.kort@vt.usda.gov

The address for hand-delivered applications or applications submitted using mail or overnight courier service is:

Conservation Innovation Grants Program
c/o Robert Kort
USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105
Colchester, Vermont 05446

Contact phone number for hand-delivered applications is (802) 951-6796 x233 or 221.

Note: Applicants must submit only one signed original copy of each project application. Applications submitted by fax will not be considered. The use of Federal Government postage-paid envelopes, e-mail and/or equipment in filing applications is a violation of federal law and will disqualify you from consideration

D. Due Date

Applications must be received in the NRCS Vermont State Office by 4 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), on **Friday, May 9, 2014**. A postmark date is NOT a factor in whether a written application is received on time. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit written applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS. Applicants submitting an electronic application by email are strongly encouraged to contact the CIG Program Manager before the application deadline to verify its receipt.

E. Acknowledgement of Submission

Applications received by the due date will be acknowledged via email. An applicant who does not receive an acknowledgement within 15 days of the submission, but believes they submitted a timely application, 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.

F. Withdrawal

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.

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 any 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 in Part VII.

H. Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with [7 CFR §3019.36](#). 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 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 (both regulations found at [NRCS-CPA-52](#)) 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.6) 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.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

A. Review and Selection Process

Prior to the technical (peer) 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. To help avoid an application that is incomplete or does not comply with the provisions of this notice, the applicant can contact the Vermont State CIG Program Manager prior to submission of their application with questions about application materials, for assistance in completing the required forms, or for the screening of a draft application.

Applications meeting the provisions of this notice will be reviewed and scored by a peer review panel based on criteria which includes that listed in Part V.B below. The peer review panel will include NRCS and other technical specialists. Scored applications will be forwarded to the Vermont State Conservationist for final selection and funding decisions.

Note: Applicants are encouraged to do enough upfront homework so their application is well developed, has adequate detail, and demonstrates a high likelihood of the proposed project being successful. Such applications will rank higher and have a better chance of being funded.

B. Application Evaluation Criteria

A technical peer review panel will include the following criteria in its evaluation of project applications.

1. Purpose, Approach, and Goals

- Design and implementation of project based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.
- Promotes environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production.
- Project outcome is clearly measurable.
- Potential for successful completion.
- Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered and an acceptably significant level of improvement will be achieved.

2. Innovative Technology or Approach

- Project is innovative (national, regionally, and local in nature).
- Project conforms to description of innovative projects or activities in proposal request announcement.

3. Project Management

- Timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable.
- Project staff has technical expertise needed.
- Budget is adequately explained and justified.
- Experience and capacity to partner with and gain the support of other organizations, institutions and agencies.

4. Benefits and Transferability

- Potential for producers and landowners to use the innovative innovative technology/approach or technologies/approaches.
- Potential to transfer the approach or technology nationally or to a broader audience or other geographic or socio-economic areas.
- Potential for successful transfer, through planned project activities, to historically underserved producers and communities.
- Potential for NRCS to successfully use the innovative approach or methods.
- Project will result in the development of technical or related technology transfer materials (technical standards, technical notes, guide sheets, handbooks, software, etc.).

5. Other

- Addresses more than one Vermont CIG category/topic.
- Timing and synergy with other Vermont or regional projects.
- Match leverages Federal funds better than one to one minimum.
- Dollar amount requested leverages Federal funds.

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

CIG awards are anticipated to be announced by August 1, 2014. 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 September 1, 2014.

VI. AWARD INFORMATION AND ADMINISTRATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected for grant funding will receive a letter of official notification from the NRCS Vermont State Office. All selections are contingent upon successful completion of the environmental review process and financial review. Applicants who are not selected will be notified by official letter.

Note: Awards made under this solicitation are subject to the provisions contained in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. No. 112-55), Division A, Sections 738 and 739 regarding corporate felony convictions and corporate federal tax delinquencies

B. Grant Agreement

The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), through NRCS, will use a grant agreement with selected applicants in order to participate in the CIG component of EQIP. The applicant will need to work with the administrative contact to develop an agreement prior to starting work on the project.

The grant will permit the NRCS 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. Environmental Review Requirements

Upon notification of selection, the applicant must contact the NRCS Vermont State CIG Program Manager and NRCS Vermont Environmental Liaison to determine the scope and level of documentation needed for compliance with 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.

D. Reporting Requirements

Grant recipients will be required to provide a quarterly report of progress, quarterly financial reports, and a final project report to NRCS. Reporting requirements will be detailed in the grant agreement.

Grantees must submit a Financial Status Report (SF-425) no later than 30 days after the end of each quarter and 90 days after completion of project. The SF-425 is available at: [Grants Management Forms](#) and the [Vermont NRCS website](#).

Each progress report shall cover work performed during the previous 3-month period and include, at a minimum:

- A statement 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
- Any current problems or unusual developments or delays
- The 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
- Lessons learned that inform future project activities or broader efforts in the project's topic area
- Work to be performed during the succeeding period
- Any preliminary results that can inform NRCS standards, policy, training or programs
- Products and/or technologies currently ready for adoption and/or transfer
- Potentially promising products and/or technology not yet ready for adoption and/or transfer, and a description of what is needed to reach that maturity.
- Identification of any 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
- Any funded or unfunded time extensions
- Any changes to the project's original objectives, methods, or timeline with a summary of the justification for the changes

The grantee must send copies of each quarterly progress report to the NRCS contact, and comply with any requests for information from this individual. NRCS recommends that the grantee work closely with the Vermont CIG Program Manager throughout the course of the project.

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.

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. The NRCS Vermont State CIG Program Manager will have technical oversight responsibility for each project receiving an award.

To satisfy the requirements of EQIP ([7 CFR 1466](#)) compliance measures, the grantee is required to submit as a component of the quarterly progress report:

1. A list of producers, identified by name and address, of all EQIP-eligible producers or entities involved in the project;
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; and
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, adjusted gross income, highly erodible land, and wetland conservation compliance Farm Bill provisions.

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 prevent disclosure.

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

For programmatic questions (e.g., CIG categories, application completion and review, etc.), please contact:

Robert Kort
 Vermont State CIG Program Manager
 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
 356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105
 Colchester, VT 05446
 Phone: (802) 951-6796 x233
 Fax: (802) 655-0638
 Email: bob.kort@vt.usda.gov

For administrative questions (e.g., indirect costs, contracts, forms, etc.), please contact:

Kim Pedersen
 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
 430 G Street, #4164
 Davis, CA 95616
 Phone: (530) 792-5678
 Fax: (530) 792-5731
 Email: Kimberly.Pedersen@ca.usda.gov

Additional information about CIG, including fact sheets and frequently asked questions (FAQs), is available on the National CIG webpage:

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/cig/?cid=nrcs143_008205 and the Vermont State CIG webpage:

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/vt/programs/?cid=nrcs142p2_010522

Signed in Colchester, Vermont on March 28, 2014.

Vicky Drew
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Application Package Checklist

B. Project Summary Sheet

Important: Applications Missing Any of These Required Items Will Not Be Considered**VERMONT STATE CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANT
FISCAL YEAR 2014 APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECKLIST**

- 1. Application Form:** Complete Standard Form 424 (SF-424) Application for Federal Assistance
- 2. Project Summary:** (Three pages maximum length, template available)
- a. Project title
 - b. Project director name and contact information (including e-mail)
 - c. Names and affiliations of project collaborators
 - d. Project background (describe the issue or problem and how the project addresses it innovatively as defined in Section I.C.
 - e. Project objectives (purpose and goals)
 - f. Project methods (methodology, tools, and processes)
 - g. Project deliverables/products
 - h. Project area/location
 - i. Project start and end dates (Anticipated start date is September 1, 2014)
 - j. CIG category (Water Quality & Soil Health, Forestry/Wildlife or Energy)
 - k. Declaration of Previous CIG Project
 - l. Declaration of EQIP eligible producer involvement and description of involvement
 - m. Declaration of Beginning or Limited Resource Farmer or Federally recognized Indian Tribe
 - n. Total project cost and Federal funds requested
- 3. One-Page Abstract:** (non-confidential summary describing the project and expected outcomes and benefits)
- 4. Project Description:** (15 pages maximum, single spaced, single sided, 12 point font)
- a. Project background
 - b. Project objectives
 - c. Project methods
 - d. Location and size of project area (include a map if possible)
 - e. EQIP eligible producer participation
 - f. Project action plan and timeline
 - g. Project management
 - h. Project deliverables
 - i. Benefits or results expected and transferability
 - j. Project evaluation
- 5. Additional Information:** Bibliographies, resumes and references.
- 6. Assessment of Environmental and Social Impacts:** Describe and assess the anticipated environmental effects of the proposed project.

- 7. Budget Information:**
- a. Standard Form 424A (SF-424A) Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs (*completely filled out*)
 - b. Detailed budget description
 - c. Budget narrative
- 8. Indirect Costs:** Information required if you have a current Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Agreement you want to claim indirect costs in this application.
- 9. Letters of Support:** Include entity name, location, and if a commitment of cash or in-kind support has been made, the value.
- 10. Matching Information:** Provide details on both cash and in-kind third party matching support.
- 11. Declaration of Previous CIG Project:** Identify involvement in any previously awarded CIG projects, and federal funds requested or received from other sources (non-CIG) for the same or a similar project.
- 12. Declaration EQIP Eligibility & Producer Involvement:** 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.)
- 13. Declaration of Beginning or Limited Resource Farmer or Federally Recognized Indian Tribe.** If applicable, include a statement declaring your status as a Beginning Farmer, Limited Resource Farmer, Federally recognized Indian Tribe or member of Federally recognized Indian Tribe, or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities.
- 14. Certifications:** Complete Standard Form 424B (SF-424B) Assurances-Non-Construction Programs
- 15. DUNS Number:** To obtain a DUNS number go to <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or call 1-866-705-5711. Allow adequate time for processing.
- 16. System for Award Management (SAM).** Visit <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/> to register. Allow adequate time for processing.

Note: This checklist is for use by the applicant and does not need to be included with the application.

VERMONT STATE CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANT
FY 2014 Project Summary Sheet

Project Title:

Project Director:

Contact Information:

E-mail:

Telephone:

Fax:

Project Collaborators and Affiliations:

Project Background:

Project Objectives

Project Methods

Project Deliverables/Products:

Project Area/Location:

Project Start and End Dates:

Applicable Category: (Check one):

- Water Quality and Soil Health
- Forestry/Wildlife
- Energy

Declaration of Previous CIG Project:

The applicant or any of the principal investigators has been involved in a previously awarded CIG project(s). (Check one)

- Yes. Identify_____
- No

The applicant is requesting or has received federal funds from other sources (non-CIG) for the same or a similar project. (Check one)

- Yes. Identify_____
- No

Declaration of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Eligibility

1) The applicant has read and understands the responsibilities related to EQIP eligibility and payment limitations as outlined in Part III of this announcement. (Check one)

- Yes
- No

2) The applicant and any producers that will receive direct or indirect payments through this project are eligible to participate in the EQIP program. (Check one)

- Yes
- No

3) Describe the EQIP eligible producer’s level of involvement in the project.

Declaration of Beginning or Limited Resource Farmer or Federally Recognized Indian Tribe

The applicant wishes to be eligible for the in-kind contribution exception, and declares their status as a Beginning Farmer, Limited Resource Farmer, Federally recognized Indian Tribe or member of a Federally recognized Indian Tribe, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. (Check one)

Yes. Specify_____

No

Total Cost of Project: \$

Federal Funds Requested: \$

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