USDA NEWS RELEASE

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USDA AWARDS NEARLY $20 MILLION IN CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS
(Utah gets five grants)

CORNING, New York, June 27, 2007-Agriculture Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Mark Rey today announced the award of nearly $20 million in Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) to 36 states to fund 51 projects designed to develop and refine cutting-edge technologies and approaches that can help producers maintain viable agricultural operations.

“CIG accelerates development, transfer and adoption of promising new technologies and approaches to some of the Nation's most pressing natural resource concerns,” said Rey. “CIG benefits agricultural producers and consumers by providing more options and possibilities for environmental enhancement. We proposed further expanding this successful program in the 2007 Farm Bill and we hope Congress enacts our proposal.”

The Bush Administration proposed a five-fold increase in funding for Conservation Innovation Grants in the 2007 Farm Bill from $20 million to $100 million per year.

CIG funds pilot projects and conservation field trials that can last from one to three years. The total value of the approved projects is about $45 million after the grantees match of at least 50 percent. Grants for approved projects cannot exceed 50 percent of the total project cost and the federal contribution for a single project cannot exceed $1 million.

As part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service administers CIG, which provides competitive grants to state and local governments, tribes, non-governmental organizations and individuals to promote the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Applicants from 47 states submitted 171 CIG project proposals and requested CIG grants totaling about $61.7 million. Projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers.

This fiscal year's grantees include three resource conservation and development councils, two conservation districts, five state and local governments, 16 non-governmental organizations, 12 colleges and universities, one tribe, nine business entities and three individuals.

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Approved projects address traditional natural resource issues concerning agriculture such as water quantity, water quality improvement, livestock nutrient management, grazing lands and forest health, and soil resource management. Approved projects also address emerging natural resource issues including agricultural air emissions, energy conservation and market-based approaches to conservation.

USDA allocated more than $2 million to address natural resource concerns in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This 64,000 square-mile watershed covers parts of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. These states will use the funding to carry out diverse projects to address water quality and other priority natural resource concerns.

As part of its outreach efforts, USDA will fund four proposals valued at $1.2 million to help tribes and limited resource producers in eight states to address natural resource issues as well as energy efficiency and market-based approaches.

Additional information about CIG, including summaries of approved projects, is available at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig. A chart for a listing of FY 2007 CIG projects (PDF) can be found at:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/2007awards.html.

Utah CIG Grants

The following is a summary of five CIG grants that were awarded in Utah:

Identification of underground and surface field drains in Box Elder and Cache County. In collaboration with the Utah Association of Conservation Districts, the Northern Utah Soil Conservation District and the North Cache Soil Conservation District will locate, identify, and electronically map the field drains of Northern Utah. This will increase the management of important and productive sustainable agricultural farmlands through proper drainage and weed control.

Integrating technology into improved orchard irrigation. Under the direction of Dr. Brent Black at Utah State University, Ray Rowley of Cherry Hill Farms in Santaquin, will integrate the use of weather stations and soil moisture sensors into orchard irrigation management and will develop specific guidelines for the use of these technologies to optimize irrigation timing for reduced water use and improved orchard health and fruit quality.

Conversion of pivot irrigation system from a diesel fuel-powered system to a hydro-power operating system. Roger Barton, owner of Barton Farms in Ferron, will convert a pivot irrigation system from a diesel motor-powered system to a water pressure hydro-powered system. This will include utilization of water pressure to run the pivot instead of the diesel engine.

Development of a recovery credit system for the Utah Prairie Dog. Project Director Ted Toombs with Environmental Defense in Boulder, Colorado, will collaborate with Mark Petersen of the Utah Farm Bureau, to encourage and facilitate agricultural producer participation in the recovery of the Utah Prairie Dog through the creation of a Recovery Credit System for this endangered species. This innovative market-based system will provide a mechanism by which those in need of credits to offset habitat

degradation (such as developers) will fund habitat restoration, enhancement and maintenance projects on private, producer-owned lands.

Establishing no-till conservation tillage in the San Rafael Conservation District. The San Rafael Conservation District in Castle Dale, will purchase two no-till drills and related equipment to create awareness of and make this innovative crop planting technology available to local producers. The benefits of these minimum tillage systems will be in reduced soil erosion, improved water conservation, less air pollution, energy conservation through less fuel usage, and improved wildlife habitat.

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