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News Release

USDA Announces More than \$22 Million in Conservation Innovation[Email This Page](#)

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WASHINGTON, June 8, 2017 - The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today announced that the agency will award more than \$22.6 million to drive public and private sector innovation in resource conservation. The agency is investing in 33 projects nationwide through its competitive Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program, which helps develop the tools, technologies, and strategies to support next-generation conservation efforts on working lands and develop market-based solutions to resource challenges. Public and private grantees - including non-governmental organizations, American Indian tribes, academic institutions and local government entities - will leverage the federal investment by at least matching it.

The projects announced today focus on conservation finance and pay-for-success models to stimulate conservation adoption; data analytics for natural resources; water management technologies and approaches; and historically underserved farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners. The 2017 CIG awards bring the total NRCS investment to nearly \$286.7 million for 711 projects since 2004.

"The Conservation Innovation Grant program is an example of government at its best, providing seed money to help spur cutting-edge projects," said NRCS Acting Chief Leonard Jordan. "This year's competition resulted in an impressive array of proposals that will ultimately benefit the people who grow our food and fiber."

The National Audubon Society's Conservation Ranching Program, for example, pairs private landowners with local ecologists who guide them through sustainable grazing and management practices that support healthy grasslands, vital for birds and cattle alike. Cattle owners who commit to the program can brand their beef with Audubon's "Grazed on Bird-Friendly Land" label and sell it on a premium market for a greater return-on-investment. Through the 2017 CIG award, Audubon will scale the program from pilot sites to fully functioning, self-sustaining ranch-to-retail markets in seven western states - bringing conservation-minded producers and consumers together in the marketplace.

"The CIG conservation finance and pay-for-success projects reward farmers, ranchers and producers who make their livelihoods on America's working lands sustainably, through sound science and conservation principles," said Jordan. "And CIG funding ensures that all producers, including new and under-represented farmers and ranchers, can benefit economically from innovative conservation tools and strategies.

Annually, about 10 percent of CIG funding is set aside to support efforts to benefit farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who historically have not had equal access to agricultural programs because of race or ethnicity; who have limited resources; who are military veterans interested in farming or ranching; or who are beginning farmers or ranchers. Ten projects totaling \$5,141,856 were selected in 2017 because they will benefit historically underserved agricultural producers and forest landowners.

With the 2017 CIG funding, the Winston County Self Help Cooperative will educate small, limited-resource and disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in six Mississippi counties on how to obtain access to information, hands-on training exercises, mentoring and other outreach activities that will enhance their agricultural enterprises. WCSHC will provide to producers research-based information on soil health and sustainable production practices with an emphasis on economic and ecological performance.

The Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians in Washington will utilize the 2017 CIG funds to implement a new and emerging animal waste treatment system for dairy farms. The advanced distillation and nutrient separation processor converts dairy wastewater into clean, distilled reclaim water, with liquid ammonia and nutrient-rich solid material byproducts that can be used for agricultural purposes. Both the Stillaguamish Tribe and Winston County projects highlight the great potential of science to producers and the farming industry.

Read about and download the **full list of this fiscal year's selected projects**. [CLICK HERE](#)  to view the list through an interactive map.

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CIG is funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The maximum grant is \$2 million per project, and the length of time for project completion is three years. The CIG projects are designed to engage EQIP-eligible producers in on-the-ground conservation activities that speed up the transfer and adoption of innovative conservation technologies and approaches. The NRCS uses CIG to work with other public and private entities to accelerate transfer and adoption of promising technologies and approaches to address some of the nation's most pressing natural resource concerns.

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