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Iowa ag groups and urban water works collaborate on key project

City of Cedar Rapids and commodity groups announce innovative partnership to address water quality concerns.

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An innovative partnership was founded January 15, 2015 between the city of Cedar Rapids and multiple agriculture commodity groups in Iowa. A \$2 million USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funding grant was approved for water quality improvement projects in the Middle Cedar River.

"The city of Cedar Rapids is to be commended for its leadership and vision to partner with farmers to implement conservation practices that will improve water quality throughout the watershed," says Sean McMahon, executive director of the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance. "We applaud Cedar Rapids for its spirit of engagement and collaboration in this innovative, public-private partnership."



IMPROVE WATER QUALITY: Thanks to a newly announced \$2 million USDA/NRCS grant, several ag groups in Iowa are partnering with city of Cedar Rapids Water Works to work together on a project addressing water quality concerns.

NRCS announced the funding as part of USDA's new Regional Conservation Partnership Program, or RCPP. The Middle Cedar Partnership Project, or MCPP, will receive a portion of the \$370 million total USDA is spending for RCPP projects nationwide. The Iowa ag partners who are participating say they appreciate this voluntary approach to improving water quality and reducing soil erosion.

New project will attract partner dollars, too, as matching funds

The project will advance implementation of nutrient reduction and flood protection practices in targeted areas of the Middle Cedar, which is part of the larger Cedar River Watershed. Funds from the project will be supplemented by an additional \$2.2 million from partner contributions. The city of Cedar Rapids is the lead partner on the project which involves over a dozen collaborating partners, including the Iowa Corn Growers Association (ICGA), Iowa Pork Producers Association (IPPA) and the Iowa Soybean Association (ISA), all focused on improving Iowa's water quality.

The MCPP will focus on specific areas of the Middle Cedar watershed, which covers nearly 2,500 square miles upstream in Benton, Tama and Black Hawk counties. All three counties' Soil and Water Conservation Districts have agreed to be collaborating partners along with several others, including the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, and others.

Data collected will be used to track improvements in water quality

As part of the partnership, ISA's Environmental Program and Services team, along with other partners, will initiate and complete watershed assessments and planning services in the first year of the project. ISA is already collaborating upstream with the Miller Creek Water Quality Initiative Project to monitor water quality conditions resulting from conservation practices and tile outlets. Data collected from the project will be used to track improvements at the field and practice scale, information that will support the new MCPP, or Middle Cedar Partnership Project.

Partners of the program applaud Cedar Rapids cooperation

Partners of the program applauded Cedar Rapids' project efforts and spokesmen for each partnering group made these comments:

- **Wayne Humphreys**, a farmer from Columbus Junction, who chairs the ICGA Animal Ag & Environment Committee says, "We applaud the city of Cedar Rapids for their environmental leadership in partnering with farmers in this voluntary project to enhance water quality. Leveraging public and private funds, the federal USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program will extend and intensify efforts in upstream watersheds to further improve water quality."

- **Jamie Schmidt**, president of IPPA, says, "The funds Iowa receives from this project will add substantially to successful efforts already underway in the state to improve water quality. IPPA is fully committed to the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and encourages its members to implement practices that will contribute to continued success."

- **Tom Oswald**, ISA president and farmer from Cleghorn, says "Realizing meaningful progress on nutrient and water quality challenges takes a commitment of leadership with the capacity and capabilities to make a difference. This is why ISA is excited about working with farmers and the city of Cedar Rapids as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program. No question, the city of Cedar Rapids needs quality source water supporting businesses and residents. This RCPP project is a good example of agriculture and the urban water sector taking opportunities to work together in new and innovative ways to reduce nutrient pollution and improve water quality."

Addressing water quality in the Cedar River watershed is a priority at both state and local levels as a majority of the drinking water produced by the Cedar Rapids treatment facilities is distributed to food production users including PepsiCo, Cargill and General Mills. Additionally, IDALS will be receiving \$3.5 million of funding for the Iowa Target Demonstration Watershed Partnership Project through the RCPP program. This funding will be used to increase available resources through existing demonstration projects in key watersheds, conduct farmer-to-farmer outreach and assist farmers in implementing conservation practices across the state.

The [Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance](#) was created and funded by Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Soybean Association and Iowa Pork Producers Association. The alliance works to accelerate the pace and scale of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy by increasing farmer awareness and adoption of science-based practices proven to have environmental benefits.