

Agriculture groups and urban water works collaborate on key project

From news reports, news@agrinenews.com | Posted: Monday, January 19, 2015 11:02 am

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa — An innovative partnership was established Jan. 15 between Cedar Rapids and multiple agriculture commodity groups when \$2 million in Natural Resources Conservation Service funding 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," said Sean McMahon, executive director of the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance.

The NRCS announced the funding as part of the USDA's new Regional Conservation Partnership Program. The Middle Cedar Partnership Project will receive a portion of the \$370 million in RCPP projects nationwide.

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, Iowa Pork Producers Association and the Iowa Soybean Association.

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 will be collaborating partners along with several others, including the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Nature Conservancy, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation and others.



Sean McMahon 2014.jpg

Sean McMahon

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 MCPP.

Partners of the program applauded Cedar Rapids' project efforts.

"The funds Iowa receives from this project will add substantially to successful efforts already underway in the state to improve water quality," said Jamie Schmidt, Iowa Pork Producers president.

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.

Demonstration Watersheds get \$3.5 million

The Iowa Targeted Demonstration Watersheds Partnership Project will receive \$3.5 million through RCPP. With the funding, the Iowa ag department and its 20 project partners will be able to increase available resources through existing demonstration projects in key watersheds, conduct farmer-to-farmer outreach and assist farmers in implementing conservation practices.

"The projects will focus on the adoption of conservation practices that are most beneficial to reducing nutrient loading in up to nine watersheds," said Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey. "This effort is tied directly to the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and will serve as models for future work and focus on farmer-to-farmer outreach and education."

Nationally, more than 600 pre-proposals were submitted for RCPP in 2014. Of those, more than 200 were invited to submit full proposals.

"With so many strong project proposals, the project selection process was extremely competitive," said Mar. "RCPP is a 5-year \$1.2 billion USDA commitment; projects not selected in this first year may be eligible in subsequent years."

For more information on Iowa's RCPP projects, visit the webpage at www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov. To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or your local USDA service center.