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Applicants needed for EQIP funds in Mower County

Aug. 18 deadline announced for federal program seeking to help farms

AUSTIN, Minn. – Thursday, June 29, 2017 – Mower County agricultural producers and landowners looking to solve natural resource problems on their farms need to contact local conservation staff in advance of a mid-August deadline.

This week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that farmers need to apply by Aug. 18 for USDA funding in 2018 under the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP is a voluntary program providing financial and technical assistance to ag producers and landowners. These contracts give financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air, and related resources on ag land and non-industrial private forestland.

Ag producers and landowners in Mower County interested in EQIP should contact Mower Soil & Water Conservation District or the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office for Mower County in advance of the deadline to start the application process.

“EQIP provides a significant amount of funding for conservation projects in Mower County, including about \$300,000 in 2016,” Mower SWCD district manager Justin Hanson said. “It really helps us work toward our goals, especially in relation to water quality.”

Locally, Mower County has three priority areas in which land in those zones might be eligible for enhanced cost assistance on conservation practices. Those areas include the subwatersheds of Root River (south branch), Rose Creek and Dobbins Creek (north-south branches), which need participants in the final grant year of the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) led by NRCS.

Under MRBI, Mower SWCD and NRCS-Mower County have worked with producers and landowners in the three subwatersheds to implement voluntary conservation practices to improve water quality, restore wetlands, enhance wildlife habitat and sustain ag profitability in the Mississippi River Basin.

Conservation practices installed by producers serve to avoid, control and trap nutrient runoff, prevent erosion and provide essential wildlife habitat.

These practices benefit the natural resources of the Mississippi basin and enhance agricultural profitability through reduced input and enhanced soil health, which results in higher soil organic matter, increased infiltration and water-holding capacity and nutrient cycling.

NRCS has identified the Mississippi River basin as a top priority due to water quality concerns, primarily related to the effects of nutrient loading on the health of local water bodies and, eventually, the Gulf of Mexico. The 13-state MRBI builds on the cooperative work of NRCS and its conservation partners in the basin, and offers ag producers in priority watersheds the opportunity for voluntary technical and financial aid.

Go to the Mower SWCD homepage online – www.mowerswcd.org – to view maps showing the boundaries of the Root River, Dobbins Creek and Rose Creek subwatersheds.

EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis; however, NRCS establishes application acceptance or submission deadline dates for evaluation and ranking of eligible applications. Contracts will be awarded to producers with the highest rankings until funds are exhausted.

To learn more about EQIP in Mower County, contact Brian DeVetter of NRCS-Mower County at 507-433-8429 or Aaron Gamm, Mower SWCD district technician, at 507-434-2603. You can visit their office at 1408 21st Ave. N.W. in Austin.

Mower Soil & Water Conservation District

Since 1953, Mower SWCD has provided land and conservation services to Mower County landowners to help manage lands in a way that promotes a sound economy as well as sustains and enhances natural resources that are key to the state’s environmental health. Mower SWCD is one of Minnesota’s 91 SWCDs each are governed by an elected board.

EQIP funds available in Mower County

Who: Mower County farmers and agricultural landowners.
What: Can apply locally for federal EQIP funds.
Where: All of Mower County. Potential incentives are available for three priority areas: Root, Dobbins and Rose subwatersheds.
When: Need to apply by Aug. 18 for funding in 2018.
Why: Provide financial and technical assistance to farmers and ag landowners for implementing conservation practices.
How: Contact Mower SWCD at 507-434-2603 or USDA-NRCS staff in Mower County at 507-433-8429. **Online:** www.mowerswcd.org
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In 2016, a crew builds in the Rose Creek subwatershed of Mower County a grass waterway, one of the practices supported by the federal EQIP