

For Immediate Release:

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets
Contact: Scott Waterman | 802-622-4662



\$7 Million USDA NRCS Grant for New Vermont ‘Pay-For-Performance’ Agricultural Phosphorus Reduction Program

Agency of Agriculture announces USDA grant to fund 5-year innovative program that will compensate exemplary farm stewardship and build off ongoing clean water programs

September 17, 2020 / Montpelier VT - The Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM) is proud to announce the receipt of a \$7 million grant award from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that will enable the Agency to launch a statewide [Vermont Pay-for-Phosphorus \(VPFP\) Program](#) to further expand and support agriculture’s role in delivering clean water results for Vermont.

The VPFP Program will use an innovative ‘pay-for-performance’ approach to compensate farmers for voluntary and verified phosphorus load reductions in agricultural crop fields that exceed phosphorus reductions set by state and federal standards on a farm-by-farm basis. This new and innovative program will build on the existing agricultural water quality clean-up framework and will accelerate the pace of implementation and clean water work occurring with farmers, partners, and the state.

Senator Patrick Leahy, former chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee and its most senior member, said: “Vermonters are good stewards, and many Vermont farmers go well beyond what is required of them in managing their land to protect water quality, often at considerable cost. I congratulate the Vermont Agency of Agriculture for creating this program that will reward those farmers and encourage them to do even better. I thank NRCS for awarding this grant, which reflects exactly the innovation that we hoped to see when we included the RCPP program in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills.”

The grant was awarded through [NRCS’ Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\) Alternative Funding Arrangement \(RCPP-AFA\)](#), a new initiative enabling partner-led projects that propose innovative use of federal assistance to achieve conservation benefits. This project will build on the success of the current state and partner clean water implementation efforts and Vermont’s engaged farmers. Agriculture was responsible for 97% of the reported phosphorus reductions in the Lake Champlain Basin in State Fiscal Year 2019 – and achieved these reductions with the most cost-effective rate of implementation in any sector. This new program will accelerate agricultural water quality improvements with new funding and a new strategy for incentivizing and valuing farmer’s agricultural land stewardship efforts.

“This innovative program is great news and will help us build upon our comprehensive approach to improving water quality and protecting our environment. I thank my team at the Agency of Agriculture and our federal partners, as well as Sen. Leahy, for their work on this initiative,” said Vermont Governor Phil Scott. “Vermont’s farmers play a critical in meeting our clean water goals. This incentive will improve water quality while also helping the bottom line on farms, which is a great example of how we move forward on our environmental and economic goals.”

The award of this grant to Vermont represents the culmination of more than seven years of work by VAAFM to engage stakeholders, research new technologies, and model and test innovative conservation systems. This program will compensate farmers directly for the value of water quality improvements implemented on their farms above baseline requirements. The VPFP is also designed to be equitable between geographic areas, farm types, and farm sizes, and will provide farmers flexibility and autonomy over their farm's agronomic management.

"Innovation will play a critical role in improving our environment," said Vermont Agriculture Secretary Anson Tebbets. "This new program creates a path to reward Vermont farmers for their efforts to improve water quality. We encourage all farmers to take a close look at this new program. "

The VPFP Program will compensate farmers for quantifiable and field-verifiable performance voluntarily reported and evaluated through the Farm Phosphorus Reduction Planner (FarmPREP)*. FarmPREP will estimate the number of pounds of phosphorus running off each farm field each year under current management and will compare these runoff values to the estimated pounds of phosphorus runoff that would occur under baseline historical management assumptions and above program threshold requirements. Enrolled farms will then receive payment per pound of phosphorus runoff they reduce across their whole farm above and beyond state and federal standards - \$4.9 million in payments for pounds of phosphorus reduced are planned over this 5-year project. To encourage participation in the VPFP Program, farmers who successfully enroll in the program will be eligible for an incentive payment of up to \$4,000 per farm.

For more information about the Vermont Pay-For-Performance Agricultural Phosphorus Reduction Program visit: <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/VPFP>

**(FarmPREP is a web-based application developed by Stone Environmental, a Montpelier VT based company.)*

For questions please contact:

Ryan Patch | VAAFM Water Quality Division Assistant Director

802-272-0323 | Ryan.Patch@Vermont.gov

Obediah Racicot | USDA-NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Obediah.Racicot@USDA.gov

For media inquiries please contact:

Scott Waterman | VAAFM Director of Communications and Policy

802-622-4662 | Scott.Waterman@vermont.gov