



Ag Nonpoint Source Grant Program Round 19 Request for Proposals (RFP) Highlights

Submission Requirements

Proposals **must** be submitted to Lucy Roberson, Director of Fiscal Management for the Department of Agriculture and Markets by 4:30 p.m. Local Time on Monday, December 10, 2012. An original and 8 additional copies of all proposals shall be submitted in response to the Round 19 RFP.

Electronic Format

Again this year the RFP and attachments will only be available for downloading at the Department of Agriculture and Markets website at <http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/RFPS.html>.

Please note: the RFP will not be hard copied and sent to each District office. If you experience trouble downloading the RFP or attachments please contact the Albany office of the SWCC.

AEM Strategies

The Round 19 RFP continues to focus on the connection of the proposed project to the County AEM Strategy. The project application and proposal narrative sections ask the applicant to describe how the proposed project addresses the objectives of the County AEM Strategies. The intent of these questions is to encourage Districts to document the local water quality concerns addressed by the proposed project using the justification provided by current County AEM Strategy. The AEM Strategies serve as the foundation for local agricultural conservation efforts. The Priority Waterbodies List (PWL) and other documentation required in the application should support the planning unit goals and objectives outlined in the AEM Strategy.

Screening Tool for Covered Heavy Use Area Protection, Barnyard Runoff Management, and Feedlot Systems

Due to the relatively high costs of constructing roofs and covers for heavy use areas, barnyards, and feedlots, funding through the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control (AgNPS) Program for these types of practices must be justified to protect and/or restore water quality. Funding through the AgNPS Program for covered Heavy Use Areas, Barnyards, or Feedlots may be a viable option if other less costly alternatives are not feasible. However, funding through the AgNPS Program shall not be used for the cost-share of new or relocated production facilities such as barns for livestock.

To warrant consideration of AgNPS funding for a roof, or cover, a screening protocol was developed for the Ag NPS Program and must be completed and signed by the proposal applicant (Sponsoring District), and Landowner/Operator. The information requested should be found in the CNMP or Tier 3A plan for the farm.

Agronomic Practices (Cover Crop and Mulching)

Continued for projects approved and contracted through Round 19, Cover Crops and Mulching will be eligible for cost-sharing for a three year term instead of the previous one year cost-share period to allow sufficient time to demonstrate the value of the practice to the farmer. By increasing the numbers of years that the program can help support a change in management such as cover cropping and/or mulching, the State Committee is continuing to add emphasis on field level conservation that is cost-effective relating to the anticipated water quality benefit. This change will also help to facilitate successful practice adoption taking into account the need to demonstrate practice success over more than one growing season. NRCS rates per acre for mulching practice systems shall serve as a guide to estimate practice costs for the proposal.

Cover Crop Planning Tool

The AEM Tier 3A Cover Crop Planning Tool was developed to assist planning, implementation, and evaluation of cover crops on farms not yet having a Tier 3A Cropland Conservation Plan, Tier 3A Nutrient Management Plan, or Tier 3B CNMP, but with interest in the practice and existing resource concerns that could be addressed with cover crops (a universally beneficial practice). It is intended to help:

- advance the planning process with farms by helping to prioritize fields where cover crops would be most effective at conserving soil, improving soil health, and/or recycling nutrients;
- provide a detailed assessment of resource concerns (Part 1) as well as an annual planning (Part 2) and evaluation tool (Part 3) while the District is working with a farm on cover crops; and
- as a stepping stone to planning additional Tier 3A components or Tier 3B CNMPs with farms.

If a Tier 3A Cropland Conservation Plan, Tier 3A Nutrient Management Plan, or 3B CNMP exists on a farm, then Part 1 of the AEM Tier 3A Cover Crop Planning Tool should already be addressed, but if not, Part 1 provides an opportunity to add detail and clarify the purpose and resource concerns to be addressed by cover crops. Parts 2 and 3 of the Cover Crop Planning Tool may be used to supplement that existing plan by supplying a tactical, annual cover crop plan and evaluation step specifically for the cover crop practices recommended in the existing 3A or 3B plan. In such cases, the Cover Crop Planning Tool should be included in the binder/plan file for the existing Tier 3 plan. Alternatively, planners may choose to incorporate all the technical aspects of the Cover Crop Planning Tool into a format of their choosing within the existing Tier 3A Cropland Conservation, Tier 3A Nutrient Management, or Tier 3B CNMP.

What work in the AEM Tiers is required before submitting an application for a cover crop project to the NYS Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Grant Program?

Farms must have participated in Tier 1, Tier 2, and at least one of the following Tier 3 activities before an application for cover crop funding can be made on their behalf:

- AEM Tier 3A Cover Crop Planning Tool through Part 1;
- AEM Tier 3A Cropland Conservation Plan;
- AEM Tier 3A Nutrient Management Plan; or
- AEM Tier 3B CNMP.

When should Parts 2 and 3 of the AEM Tier 3A Cover Crop Planning Tool be completed (or equivalent as a part of an existing Tier 3A Cropland Conservation, Tier 3A Nutrient Management, or Tier 3B CNMP)? The Annual Cover Crop Plan (Part 2) shall be completed annually with producers in time for them to properly establish the cover crops. The Annual Cover Crop Evaluation (Part 3) shall be completed with the producer after establishment, but before termination of the cover crop. If the AEM Tier 3A Cover Crop Planning Tool is used for an awarded NYS Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Grant Program project, Parts 2 and 3 shall be updated for a farm each year of the project.

Nutrient Management: Precision Feed Management

Precision Feed Management is a unique practice system that emphasizes the relationship of feed management experts and farmers to maximize yields while balancing nutrient imports and exports. The vast majority of the expenses related to the practice are consultant or contractual services with a much lesser extent related to actual implementation construction costs. As a result of the unique combination of technical “planning” services and implementation expenses, the new AEM Tier 2 Management of Feed Nutrients Worksheet will serve as the planning pre-requisite tool for each farm proposing to implement precision feed management.

Agricultural Management Practices Catalog

The Agricultural Practices Catalog for Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention and Water Quality Protection in NYS (NYS Agricultural Practices Catalog) is the official list of BMP systems eligible for funding under the AgNPS Program. On page 2 of the Round 19 RFP under Proposal Eligibility it states: *“The ‘Agricultural Management Practices Catalogue’ shall serve as guidance for BMP selection. Funds may be used for preventative or remedial initiatives, or both.”* A point of discussion for the State Committee in the development of the Round 19 RFP was the need to focus attention on the practice systems being installed that meet the definitions of the catalog. The catalog includes Management Practice Summary Sheets that define the practice system, provide the water quality purpose, source category, pollutants controlled, description, etc...Adherence to the catalog is imperative to achieve the objectives of the AgNPS Program. Planning, installing, and evaluating practice systems pursuant to the catalog provide Districts and the State Committee a consistent and comprehensive framework to analyze project and program success.

The catalog is a living document in need of periodic review and updates. Nevertheless, the catalog has been written with an expansive view and can translate to most individual NRCS component practice standards. The Catalog does not exclude innovative methods to accomplish the objectives defined in the practice summary sheets. For questions on practice systems and individual component practices please email Brian Steinmuller during the designated time for Questions and Answers defined in the RFP. For more information please visit the, Agricultural Management Practices catalog at: <http://www.nys-soilandwater.org/aem/forms/Agricultural%20BMP%20Catalogue%20June%202007.pdf>.

(Pasture Management – Prescribed Grazing Systems)

In order for Pasture Management – Prescribed Grazing Systems to be cost shared through the AgNPS Grants Program there must be a water quality (WQ) benefit derived from the system and the individual component practices installed must collectively meet the definition of “Pasture Management – Prescribed Grazing Systems” found on page II-90 of the Ag Management Practices Catalog.

- “Pasture Management: Prescribed Grazing System” is defined in the Ag. Practices Catalog” as “a prescribed grazing management system using **five** or more paddocks for a grazing season, alternating paddocks to allow for forage vigor and re-growth. Livestock graze for no more than a week before they are rotated to another paddock”. Outcomes of this specific definition are outlined below:
 - In AgNPS proposals, pasture systems that do not meet the catalog definition should not be identified as a Pasture Management System. Alternatives for these situations will be described later.
 - A Pasture Management System cost shared through AgNPS Program must meet the catalog definition for the 10 year life span of the practice system or the farmer may be subject to repaying the cost shared amount.
 - Districts should plan on providing evaluation and follow up services to farmers who receive cost sharing for Pasture Management on a regular basis to help them maintain their systems and remain in compliance with the program.
 - Farms that enter the program under the practice “Pasture Management: Prescribed Grazing System” and do not follow through by establishing at least 5 paddocks and a maximum 7 day rotation at close-out inspection will be deemed as incomplete.
- Associated “grazing” practices that may be cost shared under AgNPS that do not meet the definition of “Pasture Management: Prescribed Grazing System” would be applicable when:
 - Fencing will directly exclude livestock from streams and other hydrologically sensitive areas. The appropriate catalog practice for this condition would be “Fencing”.
 - Cropland is converted to permanent pasture and will provide a significant water quality benefit. In such cases, a pasture system meeting at least the NRCS Conservation Practice: Prescribed Grazing must be put in place to assure continued water quality protection. Livestock will not be allowed access to streams and other hydrologically sensitive areas. In these cases the appropriate catalog practices are “Fencing” and “Critical Area Protection: Vegetative Cover”.
- In situations where other conservation practices will be used in association with pasture systems such as Alternative Water Supply, Animal Trails and Walkways, Stream Crossing, etc. the grant proposal should identify if the pasture system in place or to be established meets the catalog definition of “Pasture Management: Prescribed Grazing System”. The project narrative should be written to provide sufficient detail on practice installation for each farm in the proposal.

Proposal Narrative

A bullet was added asking the applicant to *“Describe how the project will be evaluated to ensure that proper operation and maintenance will be conducted for continuation of the projects’ stated benefits.”* The purpose of this narrative bullet is to raise the District’s awareness that the conservation practices installed under the AgNPS Program must be properly operated and maintained for at least its designated lifespan. The AEM Base Program, under Tier 5B - BMP Evaluation, can be employed to support this purpose (*see AEM Base Program policies and guidelines for more information on program eligibility*).

A bullet was added asking the applicant to *“If applicable, for livestock farms please provide details on animal to land density and/or animal units that would be impacted by the proposed project (e.g. the water quality impact of 50 AUs would be addressed through the proposed Barnyard Runoff Management System, or 150 AUs will be excluded from watercourses through the proposed Pasture Management System).* The purpose of this narrative bullet is to provide the proposal reviewers enhanced information about the identified need to mitigate or opportunity to prevent pollution from high animal livestock activities.

Proposal Rating Sheet

New under Round 19, proposals that include streamside conservation practice systems including limiting livestock access to streams and implementing conservation buffers on all participating farms will receive preference (bonus) points to the final aggregated score. The points will be awarded on a progressive scale starting with 2 points for livestock access control, 3 points for livestock access control with the completion herbaceous buffers, or 4 points for access control with a forest buffer. Conservation buffer preference points may be awarded in cases where livestock control is not applicable, points will be awarded according to the following criteria:

- To receive conservation buffer points on cropland and/or pasture, where access control of livestock is not applicable, 3 points will be awarded to the final aggregated score for implementing Herbaceous Buffers, NRCS Standard 390 on all participating farms
- To receive conservation buffer points on cropland and/or pasture, where access control of livestock is not applicable, 4 points will be awarded to the final aggregated score for implementing Forest Buffers, NRCS Standard 391 on all participating farms

* For the purpose of awarding preference points, if all farms commit to implement a range of eligible conservation buffer systems but not all commit to the highest level of conservation buffers, the points will be awarded based on the buffer system with the fewest amount of points available. *For example, if there are four farms on the proposal and two commit to implement Herbaceous Buffers, NRCS Standard 390 and two farms commit to implement Forest Buffers, NRCS Standard 391, then three points will be awarded to the final aggregated score. For another example, if there are four farms on the proposal and three commit to implement Forest Buffers, NRCS Standard 391, and one farm does not commit to install any of the above listed practice systems, then no additional points will be awarded to the final aggregated score.*

Under Identified Need/Opportunity a consideration was added "Selected BMPs are needed to protect groundwater due to karst topography and vulnerability to contamination."

The questions and supplementary information required in the RFP reflects the considerations described in the Proposal Rating Sheet. Please see the Round 19 Proposal Rating Sheet for details on program considerations and priorities.

District Resolution

Language has been added clarifying program procedures when a District employee and/or Board Member's farm is included in the application for funding assistance. The following note was added to page 10 of the RFP:

"NOTE: If the project application includes eligible participating landowner(s) that are either SWCD Board Members or Employees, please attach a copy of the official Board Meeting minutes that reflect the process for the selection of the farm(s), disclosure of interests, and necessary recusals from the authorizing resolution." If this information is not provided, when applicable, the individual will be removed from the proposal and not considered for funding.

Checklist for Completeness

The Checklist for Completeness has been clarified as to which missing items constitute a critical flaw. The Checklist for Completeness must be signed by the SWCD Manager and/or Chair and submitted with each application.

Pages 4-5 of the RFP describe the format requirements for planning and implementation proposals. The checklist is provided as a tool for the applicant to ensure that the required attachments have been included with each proposal.

The following is the policy as it appears under the Proposal Format section of the RFP:

Applications received by the deadline will be screened for completeness. If any of the required information is determined to be missing the applicant will be notified by email and provided **5 business days** to submit the missing item(s). If the item(s) are not submitted by the designated deadline, the proposal will be deemed incomplete and not be considered for funding. If the item(s) are received by the designated deadline, the proposal will receive a 5 point reduction penalty from the final aggregated score.

Please make plans to be available to receive and respond to requests for clarification or missing information within 3-5 days after the proposal submission date. All notices will be emailed to the address provided on the first page of the application form. The subject line will read **Round 19 Missing Information Request**.

You should request assistance from your regional Associate Environmental Analyst in reviewing proposals for completeness before the submission deadline.

Available Funding

The State Committee has made available approximately \$10.5 million for Round 19 competitive projects through the State Fiscal Year 2012-2013 budget.

Please review the entire RFP and Proposal Rating Sheet before preparing applications.

All questions related to the RFP and the required attachments shall be addressed to Brian Steinmuller by November 28, 2012.

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