



## Ag Nonpoint Source Grant Program Round 18 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, January 9, 2012. New this year, an original and 8 copies of all proposals shall be submitted in response to the Round 18 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 18 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. The AEM Strategies should 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.

### **Agronomic Practices (Cover Crop and Mulching)**

Continued for projects approved and contracted through Round 18, 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. This shift in program policy is being made in order to encourage adoption of these two agronomic practice systems for suitable farms and situations. 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. As with all BMPs cost shared through AgNPS the cover crop and mulching practices must be planned prior to submitting a proposal to the State Committee. Use of the NRCS Conservation Practice Job Sheet for Cover Crop (340) is recommended for cover cropping planning purposes. NRCS Rates per acre for both practice systems shall serve as a guide to estimate practice costs for the proposal.

### **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 18 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 18 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 codes. 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.

### **Application Form**

Question 16d was added to the application form, “***Are any covered (roofed) barnyards or heavy use areas proposed for implementation?  Yes  No. For each farm proposing to implement a covered barnyard or heavy use area please provide a detailed justification for this alternative. Please also explain why other alternatives are not feasible.***”

This question was added to provide the proposal reviewers and Program Manager with detailed information pertaining to the technical and cost justification for covered barnyards and heavy use areas. Complete clean water exclusion via covering a barnyard or heavy use area is an eligible component practice under the Agricultural Management Practices Catalog for Barnyard Runoff Management Practice System. **However, when proposing this alternative under the AgNPS Program, a detailed explanation must be provided why other less costly options cannot be implemented.** If other less costly alternatives are feasible, but the farm operation would benefit from the total cover and exclusion option, the landowner should provide a contribution that is greater than the minimum required by the program. The water quality improvement gained from covering the barnyard and the percentage of landowner contribution will be considered in the proposal’s total score.

### **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*).

### **Proposal Rating Sheet**

The questions and supplementary information required in the RFP reflects the considerations described in the Proposal Rating Sheet. Please see the Round 18 Proposal Rating Sheet for details on program considerations and priorities.

Under Scope of Work and Time Frame a consideration was added *“If the sponsor has multiple open grants from past funding cycles, the application clearly defines the capacity of the District to complete proposed activities.”* District applicants will not be asked to identify all open grants on each application. However, the State Committee will be providing a report that outlines all grants received, including those that are open, to the proposal review and ranking panel. The report will include an assessment of missing interim reports and a list of expired contracts that have not yet satisfied final report requirements. This report will provide the reviewers with the necessary information to judge District past performance as well as capacity to carry-out future AgNPS contracts. If the District is planning to apply for a grant pursuant to Round 18, the application should explain the District’s capacity to fulfill the objectives of the current project while concurrently working toward completion of open contracts.

Under Cost Effectiveness language was added requesting that administrative, technical and engineering services reflect an appropriate percentage of the total project cost. Administrative and technical expenses should remain a reasonable percentage of the total project cost. An analysis of Round 17 indicates that the vast majority of project proposals include administrative and technical expenses within the range of 5% - 20% of the total project cost. Costs reflected outside of this range should be justified in the proposal.

### **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.***

### **Payment Clause**

Payment for invoices submitted by the Contractor shall only be rendered electronically unless payment by paper check is expressly authorized by the Commissioner, in the Commissioner’s sole discretion, due to extenuating circumstances. Such electronic payment shall be made in accordance with ordinary State procedures and practices. The Contractor shall comply with the Comptroller of the State of New York’s procedures to authorize electronic payments. Contractor acknowledges that it will not receive payment on any invoices submitted under this Agreement if it does not comply with the Comptroller of the State of New York’s electronic payment procedures, except where the Commissioner has expressly authorized payment by paper check as set forth above.

For additional details and how to sign up, please contact: <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/epay/index.htm>.

### **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 18 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 18 competitive projects through the State Fiscal Year 2011-2012 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 December 19, 2011.**

518-457-0562

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