

USDA awards millions to environmental projects

By Kimberlee Kruesi - Times-News writer Magicvalley.com | Posted: Saturday, July 2, 2011

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is spending up to \$14.4 million on environmental projects in 24 states.

Earlier this month, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the first \$7 million will fund 31 projects in 11 states through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative. CCPI-funded projects are only to be used for conservation on agriculture lands.

“We want to help farmers and ranchers make important and innovative contributions to reducing greenhouse gas emissions,” Vilsack said in a press release.

“These grants are designed to test and verify exciting new approaches to greenhouse gas reduction that other conservation-minded producers will want to put to work on their operations.”

The day after announcing the winners of the CCPI grants, Vilsack designated \$7.4 million from the USDA’s Conservation Innovation Grant to go toward more research-based projects. Unlike CCPI grants, CIG grant recipients are required to match the funds in cash or in-kind services.

CIG approved nine large-scale greenhouse gas mitigation projects in 24 states.

The Applied Ecological Services Inc. was awarded \$550,000 for a project that will expand across Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The project will develop low-carbon farming practices for landowners in the Palouse region. By lowering carbon emissions, the ecological services firm hopes to show that soil fertility will be restored.

The Dairy Research Institute was awarded \$1.1 million. The Institute will develop a sustainability toolkit by researching how to reduce dairy producer greenhouse emissions.

By the end of the project, the toolkit will list indicators that best describe an economic, social and environmentally valuable farm. The project will study large- and small-scale dairies that carry out both conventional and organic production methods.

The toolkit will be national in scope, but the project plans on using an Idaho dairy producer in the pilot tests. The Institute is still deciding which dairy they will use.