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Natural Resources Conservation Service Funds Innovative Project in Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG, PA--(Marketwire - June 27, 2007) - State Conservationist Craig Derickson today announced that the Pennsylvania Environmental Council will receive \$212,048 to fund an innovative project designed to use excess manure for mine reclamation and biofuel production in Schuylkill County.

"This project is an example of the innovation the USDA is attempting to expand in the 2007 Farm Bill," Derickson said. "Projects such as this will develop and refine cutting-edge technologies and approaches that can help Pennsylvania producers maintain viable agricultural operations and contribute to the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay."

PEC and its partners will design a commercial-scale demonstration area using composted poultry manure largely from farms eligible for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). These farms are located in watersheds in the Susquehanna River Basin that are rich in nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus. Manure from these farms will be transported to nutrient-deficient mine lands in Schuylkill County. These sites will be used to cultivate switchgrass and native grassland perennials for biomass production once the soil is nourished by the nutrients. Biomass production and carbon sequestration will be monitored on the 40-acre demonstration area during the three-year project.

This project also may help producers engage in the emerging nutrient trading program for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed in Pennsylvania. It will assist producers, local conservation districts, and the PA Department of Environmental Protection to arrange for the quantification, certification, sale and transfer of eligible nutrient reduction credits to interested buyers and aggregators.

Other partners besides PEC include Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania State Conservation Commission, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation and the Western Pennsylvania Watershed Program.

The funding for this project comes from NRCS's Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program. CIG funds projects targeting innovative on-the-ground conservation. It is a vehicle to stimulate the development and adoption of conservation approaches or technologies that have been studied sufficiently to indicate a likelihood of success and to be candidates for eventual technology transfer. For more information on the CIG program, please visit <http://www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/CIG.html>

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