

## Conservation Excellence Grant (CEG) Program

The Conservation Excellence Grant (CEG) Program is a new state funded program with the purpose of providing financial and technical assistance for the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) on agricultural operations. The State Conservation Commission (SCC) administers the program with assistance from county conservation districts delegated certain responsibilities and duties. These delegated responsibilities include reviewing, ranking and approving applications for eligible projects and monitoring project completion.

### Priority Projects Include:

- Livestock Exclusion Fencing
- Riparian Buffers
- Livestock Stream Crossings
- Off-Stream Livestock Watering Facilities
- Waste Storage Facilities
- Streambank Protection
- Barnyard / Feedlot Runoff Abatement
- Cover Crops
- Planning BMPs (Nutrient Management Plans, Manure Management Plans, Conservation Plans, Ag E&S Plans)

The CEG Program funds are for proposed projects that implement planned BMPs from an Ag Erosion & Sediment (E&S) Control Plan, Conservation Plan, Nutrient Management Plan or a Manure Management Plan that has been developed for an agricultural operation. Priority will be given to proposed projects that already have planning, permitting, engineering, and design work completed. Combining multiple priority practices improves application scoring. Other non-priority practices that are still eligible for funding can be found on the BMP list for the REAP program, which is located on the PA Department of Agriculture Website.

Financial assistance from CEG is provided to program applicants through grants, loans and tax credits, or a combination of all three. Priority will be given to applicants who propose utilizing all three methods of funding. Tax credits will be facilitated through the REAP Program administered by the SCC. A single grant awarded by the district to an eligible applicant may not exceed \$250,000.

Applications for the CEG program are available now from the Conservation District and the District will begin accepting applications on July 1. At this time, the Conservation District is not imposing an application deadline. The application form is simple to fill out, but applicants will need to have much information gathered prior to completing the form.



*Stream Crossings are a priority practice*



Feel free to contact Mark Flaharty or Stephen Miller at the Conservation District for assistance completing the application form.

**Important Dates:**

- July 1, 2020- Conservation District begins accepting completed applications
- No application deadline at this time

Projects funded through the CEG program that have an estimated cost of over \$25,000 are subject to the Pennsylvania Prevailing Wage Act. Documentation will be required from program applicants to ensure that a project is in compliance with the Prevailing Wage Act. It is the grantee's responsibility to register the project and to assure that prevailing wages were applied. More information about the Pennsylvania Prevailing Wage Act

can be found on the Department of Labor & Industry's website at [www.dli.pa.gov](http://www.dli.pa.gov).

Any agricultural operation is eligible to apply for assistance through the CEG program. An agricultural operation is defined as an operation that is required by state law to have either an Ag E&S plan, a Manure Management plan, or a Nutrient Management plan. Eligible project costs which may be reimbursed by CEG program funds include:

- Project design, engineering, and associated planning
- Project construction or installation – including labor provided by the applicant
- Equipment, materials, and other components of eligible projects
- Post-construction inspections

All BMPs installed as part of a CEG program project must be designed, constructed and maintained according to the standards and specifications listed in the PA Tech Guide. Planning, engineering, and technical assistance may be received from private consultants, the Conservation District, or the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

The CEG program offers participants the flexibility to cover project costs with different funding methods. While the primary funding option under the CEG program is a grant, applicants can use a low-interest loan such as Agri-Link loans or a commercial loan, the REAP tax credit program, federally funded programs (e.g. USDA-NRCS, FSA programs), and any other funding programs that might be available with a grant award to finance their project. A combination of funding methods improves application scores for large projects but is not required for small projects under \$25,000.

**Things to remember:**

- Projects over \$25,000 are subject to the PA Prevailing Wage Act
- Proposed BMPs must be planned in the operation's Ag E&S plan, Conservation plan, Manure Management plan, or Nutrient Management Plan
- CEG offers flexible funding options: grants, tax credits, and Agri-Link low interest loans





YORK COUNTY  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

*Conserving Natural Resources for Our Future*

Please check the Conservation District website ([yorkcc.org](http://yorkcc.org)) for more information. Email Mark Flaharty ([mflaharty@yorkccd.org](mailto:mflaharty@yorkccd.org)) or Stephen Miller ([smiller@yorkccd.org](mailto:smiller@yorkccd.org)) or call the Conservation District at (717) 840-7430 for information or help with applications.





FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 16, 2020

## **Agriculture Secretary Invites Applications for \$2.5 Million in Conservation Excellence Grants Created by PA Farm Bill**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding today invited Lancaster and York County farmers to apply for up to \$250,000 in Conservation Excellence Grants. The \$2.5 million program, created by 2019 PA Farm Bill, funds on-farm measures that reduce erosion and run-off, improving soil and water quality to ultimately sustain agriculture and improve the region's quality of life.

“Pennsylvania farmers have demonstrated their commitment to sustaining our lives, even in the midst of unprecedented challenges,” said Sec. Redding. “This funding will support their efforts to conserve precious soil and water resources and their ability to support our lives, our communities and our economy in the future.”

Funds will be administered by the Lancaster and York County Conservation Districts. Lancaster and York County farms have been prioritized for their location along the Susquehanna River that empties into the Chesapeake Bay. Measures funded in these two counties have the greatest potential impact to improve water quality in a region that is home to almost four million Pennsylvanians. Funds may be made available to farms in other counties if available.

Some examples of eligible measures — called Best Management Practices, or BMPs — include fencing to keep livestock out of streams, streambank restoration, cover crops, planted streamside buffers to filter nutrients out of streams, manure storage, and comprehensive plans to manage nutrients, control erosion and conserve soil and water. Funding will support technical assistance and the installation of these and other high-impact BMPs.

The [PA Farm Bill](#), a historic \$23 million investment in growing and sustaining the commonwealth's agriculture industry, was modeled after the governor's six-point plan to cultivate future generations of Pennsylvania agriculture. The bill supports business development and succession planning, creates accommodations for a growing animal agriculture sector, removes regulatory burdens, strengthens the ag workforce, protects infrastructure, and works toward making Pennsylvania the nation's leading organic state.

BMPs funded by Conservation Excellence Grants will help Pennsylvania meet its [federally mandated goals to reduce nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment](#) into the Chesapeake Bay by 2025.

Applications will be accepted beginning July 1, and evaluated on a first-come, first-served basis, according to their potential to meet program criteria. Grant funding may be combined with other public grants, tax credits such as the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP), and private funding.

Find applications, instructions and more information about [Conservation Excellence Grants](#) on the department's website. Applications are also available from the [Lancaster County Conservation District Office](#) and [York Conservation District Office](#). Completed applications should be returned to the district office for the county in which the applicant's farm is located. Complete grant program

guidelines can also be found in the [Pennsylvania Bulletin](#). Farmers with questions about applying may contact Program Administrator Eric Cromer at 223-666-2556 or [ecromer@pa.gov](mailto:ecromer@pa.gov).

Learn more about the [PA Farm Bill](#) and investments in a vibrant, sustainable future for Pennsylvania's agriculture industry on the department's website, [agriculture.pa.gov](http://agriculture.pa.gov).

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Shannon Powers – 717.603.2056; [shpowers@pa.gov](mailto:shpowers@pa.gov)

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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

November 2, 2020

To: Members  
State Conservation Commission

From: Johan E. Berger, Conservation Program Specialist  
Financial Administration, Policy, Certification & Conservation District Programs

RE: Conservation Excellence Grant Program Update

During the September 15, 2020 public meeting of the State Conservation Commission, staff briefing the Commission on several major elements of the Conservation Excellence Grant Program as noted below:

1. The Commission was awarded a sub-grant of funds (\$3.848 million) as part of DEP's *Chesapeake Bay Implementation Grant Program* for expansion of the *Conservation Excellence Grant Program (CEG)* in Tier 2 counties identified in the ChesBay Phase III WIP. The Commission took action to expand the CEG Program to Cumberland and Franklin counties.
2. CEG Expansion - The '*Agreement for Delegation of Administrative Responsibilities for the Conservation Excellence Grant Program*' and '*Required Output Measures*' have been distributed to the respective Cumberland and Franklin County conservation district Board of Directors for their consideration and signature. Both delegation agreements will provide up to \$1.154 million to each conservation district.
  - As of this report, the Cumberland County Conservation District Board of Directors has approved and signed the CEG delegation agreement. The Cumberland Board indicated they will provide CEG grants at a cost share rate of 75% of actual project costs.
  - The Franklin County Conservation District Board of Directors will be considering the delegation agreement during their public meeting on November 9, 2020. It is expected the Board will agree to participate in the CEG program and sign the delegation agreement. The conservation district and State Conservation Commission staff continue to discuss a cost share rate for the program in Franklin County.
3. Public-Private Partnership – Commission staff is also actively engaged with Lancaster Farmland Trust and Salisbury Township to develop a public-private partnership model that will utilize CEG's financial bundling (grants, tax credits and loans) concepts in a public private partnership. This agreement will be for up to \$1.154 million.

4. CEG Program activities. The Lancaster and York county conservation districts have been accepting CEG applications since July 2020. The following actions have been taken by the respective conservation districts on CEG applications and grants to applicants:

#### Lancaster County

- The Lancaster County Conservation District Board of Directors took action at their October meeting on one (1) CEG grant - a waterway project (\$10,000) which also included REAP credits and farmer funding. The grassed waterway project is complete, and the District is awaiting bills to be submitted for payment.
- Two (2) more CEG applications totaling over \$100,000 will be approved at the district's November 4, 2020 board meeting.
  - A project totaling \$113,000 for a waste storage facility, HUAP and stream bank fencing.
  - A project totaling roughly \$35,000 for a waterway, diversion and other associated BMPs.
  - Lancaster anticipates one (1) CEG application prepared for approval in December.
- Outreach efforts include posting CEG information on the conservation district website and newsletter.

#### York County

- The York County Conservation District Board of Directors took action at their October meeting on five (5) CEG applications:
  - One grant for a grassed waterway (\$24,756.88)
  - Four grants for cover crops (\$13,100.00) have been approved totaling 360 acres (230 acres of multispecies, 130 acres of single species-first time cover crop). Cover crop payments are flat-rate payments - \$9,200 of CEG will be dispersed in the spring for multispecies cover crops and \$3,900 will be dispersed for single species cover crops.
- York's outreach to date has been to post information on their website, two (2) District Facebook posts, an article in the York County Coalition for Clean Waters, two (2) newsletter articles. Flyers have been distributed to NRCS, FSA, PSU Extension and the county Farmland Preservation Program.