Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program

Certifying that Minnesota’s farms and waters can prosper together

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Memorandum of Understanding

- Supports development of a voluntary program
- Directs agencies to coordinate and prioritize funding
- Provides recognition and certainty to certified producers
- Established an Advisory Committee

MOU signed by Governor Mark Dayton, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, and former EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson in 2012.
Advisory Committee

The committee submitted a series of recommendations presented in seven position papers:

- Pilot projects
- Program operations
- Program measurement tool
- Certainty
- Program data management
- Program incentives
- Program promotion

Members of the MN Ag Water Quality Certification Program Advisory Committee.
Legislation

- Statute adopts Advisory Committee’s recommendations
  - Pilot program up to 3 years
  - Evaluate progress
  - Provides regulatory certainty
- $3 million appropriated from Clean Water Fund (biennium) to pilot the program
Executive Action

- Builds on **interagency partnership**

- Commissioner of Agriculture shall sign certification contracts on behalf of other agencies with water authority

- Agencies shall honor contracts when implementing **new water quality laws or rules**
Certification Contract

- Contract between the **State of Minnesota and certified producer**
- Defines **certainty** and grants it to producer
- Outlines duties a producer must perform to retain certification
- **Field assessment records** attached as appendix to contract
What is “Certainty?”

- **Not an exemption** from existing rules and regulations
- Relevant to the **land within an agricultural operation**
- Conditional upon:
  - **Implementation** of recommended practices
  - **Maintenance** of practices during certification

Certainty = Insurance policy against moving regulatory goal post
Certification Process

Technical & Financial Assistance

Application
Assessment
Verification
Certification Contract
Step 1. Application

- Establishes **eligibility** for program resources
- Ensures **compliance** with existing water quality regulations
Step 2. Assessment Tool

- Based on **NRCS Ag Water Quality Index**
- Each **parcel** is assessed for each **crop**
- A **systems approach** rather than one specific focus
Step 2. Assessment Tool

- Physical field characteristics
- Nutrient management
- Tillage management
- Pest management
- Irrigation and tile drainage management
- Conservation practices
Step 3. Field Verification

- **Whole farm** conservation planning
- **Site-specific** treatments
- **Boots-on-the-ground** conservation delivery
Certification & Recognition
Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- **$9 million partnership** to deliver conservation
- Expands program implementation **statewide**
- EQIP, ACEP, CSP for producers seeking certification
- National demonstration project

Program partners at the RCPP announcement.
Partners
The certification program is well suited for use in market-based sustainability initiatives.

Scientific-based certification process with third-party verification coming from public entity.

Could easily translate into measurement for:
- Payments for Ecosystem Services
- Environmental offsets
- Water quality trading
- Branding (some certified farmers already using branding for their businesses)
Questions?

www.mda.state.mn.us/awqcp

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