



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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NEWS RELEASE

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New England Small Farm Institute, Belchertown, awarded \$110,000 USDA grant

BELCHERTOWN, MA -- The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today presented the New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) with a \$110,000 federal Conservation Partnership Initiative (CPI) Grant for a project that will improve conservation services to local farmers with grass-based livestock operations in the Chicopee River Basin.

NESFI is one of only six organizations nationwide selected to receive a CPI grant this year, and the only organization east of the Mississippi River.

NESFI will lead a partnership of nine organizations to develop a service network to assure good conservation practices on grass-based livestock farms. The project will focus on new farmers and start-up enterprises.

The grant check was presented by Cecil Currin, USDA-NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts, to NESFI director Judith Gillan at the institute's headquarters on Jackson Street in Belchertown. Douglas Gillespie, Massachusetts Commissioner of Agricultural Resources, and other federal, state and local officials and partnering agricultural and land conservation organizations attended.

CPI grants are administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and are designed to foster conservation partnerships and fund projects that focus technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds of special significance and other geographic areas of environmental sensitivity. CPI is open to state and local governments, tribes and nongovernmental organizations with a history of working with agricultural producers.

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Small-scale livestock enterprises are increasingly common in New England's upland watersheds. The region's soil base, hilly terrain, and rain-rich climate are particularly suited to grazing operations. Consumer demand is strong for grass-based farm products because of their social and economic acceptability, as well as their dietary value. Market proximity and well established buy-local campaigns provide regional farmers with a competitive advantage in providing "native grown."

"Grass-based farming and livestock enterprises are central to the future of agriculture in this area," Currin said. "This grant will support the development of locally-led solutions to their natural resource concerns. NESFI is well suited to helping them cooperate and share information to address their environmental challenges."

NRCS received 29 proposals involving 31 states (including five multi-state submissions). Applications were received from one local agency, four state agencies, three universities, three conservation districts, four resource conservation and development councils and 13 nongovernmental organizations (one nonprofit submitted two proposals in different states).

CPI proposals were required to address one or more of the following conservation priorities: terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat, coastal resources, livestock nutrient management and minor/specialty crop pest management.

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