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Texas receives \$10.4 million for water conservation projects

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TEMPLE -- The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is making \$10.4 million available through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) for five water conservation and water quality projects on Texas agricultural working lands.

"AWEP is a voluntary conservation initiative that provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to improve water conditions on their agricultural land," said Don Gohmert, NRCS state conservationist for Texas. "With water supplies short across Texas, this is just one more way agriculture can help conserve its use."

Funded projects in Texas include:

*Water quality improvement project for the Leon River sponsored by Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

*Texas agriculture water conservation project for the Ogallala Aquifer sponsored by the Texas Water Development Board

*Lake Arrowhead watershed project to improve available water quantity sponsored by the Chisholm Trail Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), Inc.

*Water enhancement projects for drought mitigation and water conservation on University lands owned and managed by the University of Texas System sponsored by the University of Texas

*Brazos Bottom Irrigation Water Management sponsored by the Post Oak RC&D, Inc.

Funding is being made available for 63 AWEP projects in 21 states. Project proposals were developed by sponsors who offered services and resources, allowing the Federal Government to leverage its investment in natural resources conservation.

AWEP promotes ground and surface water conservation and improves water quality by helping farmers and ranchers implement agricultural water enhancement activities, including water quality or water conservation plan development, conversion to the production of less water-intensive agricultural commodities or dry land farming; water quality or quantity restoration or enhancement projects; irrigation system improvement or irrigation efficiency enhancement; and activities designed to mitigate the effects of drought.

AWEP was established by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) and funding comes from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS implements AWEP by entering into EQIP contracts directly with agricultural producers.

Everyone receiving assistance through AWEP must meet EQIP requirements. Though participating AWEP producers do not need to have existing EQIP contracts, they must be eligible for EQIP. All partner proposals were selected competitively at the national level. Proposals for priority areas may have received higher rankings, and include property undergoing conversion of agricultural land from irrigated to dry land farming; projects that help producers meet regulatory requirements; and projects located where there is a high percentage of agricultural land and producers in a region or area.

More information about specific AWEP projects visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>, or visit the nearest USDA Service Center in your area.

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