

Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District Small Farms Nutrient Management Program

Program Objective

The Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors approved funding for a small farm nutrient management program. Smaller acreage farms and ranches are faced with many management challenges when it comes to protecting and conserving natural resources on their property. Best management practices assist landowners in limiting nutrient contributions to water sources and help prevent denuded areas causing soil erosion.

The voluntary program's objective is to assist bona fide agricultural production, equine or container nursery landowners operating on 50 acres or less, with conservation planning and help meet the goals of reduced nutrient load requirements set in the Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Plan, mandated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

OSWCD Mission

The Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District mission is to provide services for soil and water conservation, proper utilization of natural resources, and to promote the continued use of land for agricultural purposes. The Board of Supervisors has identified a need for education on best management practice implementation on small acreage properties to assist in the promotion of natural resources conservation within the Lake Okeechobee watershed.

Program Overview

Site visits with landowners are offered at no cost to the participant. The landowner's current nutrient management strategies will be discussed and a Conservation Plan developed. The Conservation Plan will contain current management and proposed management strategies, along with a soil and conservation plan map. Conservation terminology definitions and maintenance recommendations are also included in the Conservation Plan.

Evaluation Program Eligibility

Conservation planning for this program is available to agriculture producers, equine facilities and container nurseries operating on 50 acres or less within Okeechobee County.

Participants willing to address natural resource concerns identified in their conservation plan are eligible to apply for financial assistance.

Application Development Costs

Neither the District nor its representatives shall be liable for any expenses incurred through the preparation, submission, or presentation of the funding Application.

The following is provided as guidance for applicants. The District Board will determine the priorities, the amount of funds to allocate, and the maximum cost-share made available to proposed projects for

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the program. Applicants that are unable to produce agricultural production records (farm, ranch, or nursery) or do not include all required documentation as outlined, may be deemed ineligible by the District Board. Applicants that are out of compliance with other governmental agencies may be deemed ineligible. Applicants will deliver or mail written proposals to:

Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District, 452 US Highway 98 North, Okeechobee, FL 34972. Applicants should include contact information, project location, hardware and implementation costs and a timeline.

Specific Requirements for Small Farm Projects:

- Agree to a site visit in order to develop a conservation plan
- Project funds must be spent within six months of obligation, extension may be granted for extreme circumstances.
- All receipts and invoices must show proof of payment with a canceled check or detailed credit card receipt.
- Applicant agrees to an irrigation evaluation if implementing an irrigation retrofit

Allowable Costs for Water Conservation Projects Include:

- Irrigation retrofits, including soil moisture sensors, rain sensors, irrigation head upgrades, etc.
- Other hardware and/or technology-based project that increases natural resources conservation
- Manure compost area

Non-Allowable Costs for Water Conservation Projects Include:

- Installation of new irrigation systems, irrigation wells, pumps, or the extension of an existing irrigation system to an area not previously irrigated
- Landscape materials, unless deemed necessary to address a concern
- Projects that are out of compliance with permit conditions or are proposed to bring a facility back into compliance or proposed as settlement for enforcement activities

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District Board funding support for the purchase and installation costs for common conservation fixtures/devices are shown below in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Samples of Allowable Funding Limits for Common Conservation Practices

Conservation Fixture/Device	Allowable Funding Limit
Irrigation controllers	Up to \$500 each
Rain sensors	Up to \$120 each
Soil moisture sensors	Up to \$145 each
Retrofit polytube/emitter on micro jet systems	\$1,146.98 per acre
Filter strips	\$0.07 per square foot
Mulching-erosion control blanket	\$0.09 per square foot
Livestock pipeline	\$0.80 per foot
Fence-barbed wire	\$1.21 per foot
Fence-woven wire	\$1.62 per foot
Fence-electric temporary	\$0.42 per foot
Fence-electric permanent	\$0.65 per foot
Fence- sensitive area	\$1.25 per foot
Pollinator habitat	\$0.65 per foot
Heavy use area protection	\$0.40 per square foot
Watering facility less than 100 gal	\$49.62 each
Nutrient Management-manure/compost	\$2.65 per acre
Nutrient Management- soil sampling	\$11.08 per acre
Shade structure-portable	\$2.03 per square foot
Shade structure-prefabricated	\$2.37 per square foot
Critical area planting	\$0.15 square foot
Windbreaks- 1 row trees	\$TBD per square foot

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The District will review projects based on program considerations and guidelines (no implied priority) as presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Water Conservation Considerations and Guidelines

Considerations	Guidelines
Supports mission of the District Board	Proposed project actively supports the District's mission
Cost effectiveness, expressed as dollars per 1,000 gallons saved (\$/kgals)	Demonstrates cost effectiveness in installation, design, and use
Project readiness	Application demonstrates readiness to be implemented on schedule. For example, design complete; applicable permits in place
Innovation	Showcases innovation using new technology or the method in which the Project or technology is being implemented
Past Performance	The Applicant has no record of failing to complete work under any District Board project
Quality and detail of project planning	Application demonstrates a high level of detail and planning
Resource concerns addressed	Number/amount of resource concerns addressed compared to other funding requests

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“Agricultural Producer”- any operation that can provide records of agricultural sales.

“Applicant” – All agricultural producers (ranch, farm, nursery or equine) submitting an Application to seek funding from the District Board pursuant to this Small Farms Nutrient Management Program.

“Application” – A written document from an applicant seeking funding from the District Board pursuant to this reimbursement program

“Approved Funding” – The allocation of monies to an Applicant based on estimated costs as presented in the Application

“Conservation Plan”- A natural resource problem-solving and management tool that includes strategies to maintain or improve yields, while also protecting soil, water, air, plant, animal and human resources

“District Board” – The Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District

“Equine”- any landowner that houses horses on their property

“Funding or Actual Funding” – An allotment of monies disbursed toward the payment based on percentage or actual costs incurred

“Ineligible” – A determination by the District Board that the Application does not comply with the material requirements of this reimbursement program or has a wetland violation determination

“Participant” – Either the agricultural producer requesting a conservation plan *OR* The recipient and end user of the conservation hardware. May or may not be the same as the Applicant

“Project” – The written description included in the Application that determines the eligibility for funding

“Project Cost” – The total cost of the project located within Okeechobee County

“Recipient” – The Applicant that has been awarded funding in support of a project