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NRCS Offers Urban Ag Assistance in Cook County

Champaign, IL March 7, 2019 — Urban agriculture is growing and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help Cook County farmers conserve and improve the natural resources on their farm. Ivan Dozier, Illinois NRCS State Conservationist, explains, “Urban farms are valuable neighborhood resources and NRCS can assist producers with conservation efforts and financial assistance to install conservation practices such as hoop houses, or what NRCS calls a high tunnel, pollinator plantings, and cover crops.”

The urban landscape has many challenges and NRCS can help with financial and technical assistance to manage natural resources of soil, water, and plants and improve the crops being produced. The financial assistance from NRCS is provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Individuals or groups can apply for EQIP financial assistance by filling out the program application and establishing records at their local USDA Service Center. Two USDA offices service Cook County. The farm’s location will determine the point of contact and phone number to call (see details below).

NRCS accepts applications year-round and keeps applications on file until application deadlines and funding cycles are established. Two application deadline dates have been established -- **April 19, 2019** and **May 17, 2019**. Each deadline will have its own funding cycle for applications to be ranked and compete for funding.

NRCS staff will assist applicants through the sign-up process and explain the steps and requirements. NRCS will evaluate applications for eligibility and rank them, based on resource concerns and practices identified. Applications that rank the highest will be selected for funding and NRCS will develop a contract with those farmers that outlines specific practices and sets up an implementation schedule.

For the past few years, urban farmers in Cook County have been using EQIP to install high tunnels to extend the growing season and establish native flowering plants that attract and support pollinator species. EQIP is available to urban farmers and is a good way to solve the natural resource issues on your site.

If interested, individuals or groups should contact NRCS staff at the phone numbers listed below or visit the Illinois NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/il/programs/financial/eqip/

NRCS Contacts:

Trenton Rader--South Cook County (South of Cermak Rd) at (815) 937-8940 ext. 3 or 815-462-3106 ext. 3

Jim Rosopop--North Cook County (North of Cermak Rd) at (630) 584-8240 ext. 3.

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