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Governor Dayton, USDA Secretary Vilsack and EPA Administrator Jackson team up on groundbreaking water quality certification program

State and Federal partnership will develop new Water Quality Certification Program

ST. PAUL – Today Governor Mark Dayton joined U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) committing the state and federal government to develop a new program that will enhance Minnesota’s water quality by accelerating farmers’ voluntary adoption of on-farm conservation practices.

“Water and food are two of society’s essential resources,” Governor Mark Dayton said. “Today, we are taking a bold step for a program, which keeps agriculture a cornerstone of our economy and also protect the health of our rivers, lakes and streams. It is vital that we have both.

“I also want to thank President Obama, Secretary Vilsack, and Administrator Jackson for their outstanding leadership in advancing this initiative. We look forward to a strong working partnership.”

The MOU, signed today at the Minnesota State Capitol, is the first step toward implementation of the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program. The initiative will be designed to accelerate progress toward water quality goals while also giving Minnesota farmers greater regulatory and cost stability. Participating farmers will be prioritized for cost-share funding from federal and state agencies reducing the uncertainty of their operating environment.

“Establishment of this program will protect our water resources by providing assurances and incentives to participating farmers that their good deeds – their strong commitment to conservation – will be recognized,” Vilsack said. “Farmers will know the rules of the game while the state, EPA and the public will know that this program will lead to cleaner water.”

"Clean, healthy waters are essential to the health of our people and to our nation's farmers," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "I believe that local conservation efforts, like those supported through this MOU, are among the most effective means for improving water quality in our nation."

Program details will be developed cooperatively in the months ahead among state and federal regulatory agencies, the partners will establish a Technical Advisory Committee to develop the certification program. The concept is that farmers who implement and maintain approved conservation plans will be assured that their operations meet water quality goals and standards. So long as the participating farmers meet program obligations, they will not be required to implement additional water-quality practices for the duration of their agreements.

Agencies participating in the agreement include the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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