

USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities: Minnesota Working Group

On May 3rd, 2023, Minnesota Farmers Union convened a workshop on the need for a holistic understanding of how grant funds from USDA's Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities (PCSC) will be deployed within Minnesota, and for coordination across grant partners and farm organizations to ensure these programs support farmers and our natural resources. The workshop was held at Minnesota Farmers Union in St. Paul, MN.

Context for why this workshop was organized

Minnesota is listed on over 25 of the USDA's PCSC, a grant program that supports the development of climate-smart commodities, monitoring and verification processes, and partnerships with emphasis on historically underserved farmers and ranchers.

Grants range in size from \$5m to \$90m. The grant period is five years though projects may choose to complete their work in less time. Recruiting farmers into these programs is a primary goal of these projects, and many of these projects offer different payment rates, contract durations, and reporting requirements. Coordination among project stakeholders is critical for the success of Climate-Smart Commodities grant programs and ensuring benefits to farmers across the state. Agenda items included discussion of projects, approaches and scope, geographies, and other details. This event aimed to convene project stakeholders around concerns, areas of future discussions, shared learning opportunities, and resource building.

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were to:

1. Share information about the projects and associated partnerships that will be implemented in Minnesota.
2. Identify key questions and concerns, as well as opportunities for collaboration and future discussions.
3. Build awareness across organizations of which projects are going to be working in Minnesota.

Takeaways

A key takeaway includes the desire for continued coordination and discussion. The following themes and topics were identified as areas in need of further investigation and will be in future agendas for the working group's meetings:

- Climate-smart workforce development
 - Capacity of staff and hiring projects
- Technical service provider support
- Communication among stakeholders and partners
- Data management and governance
- Reporting requirements
- Farmer information marketing and recruitment
 - Competition among projects
 - Historically underserved producer outreach and engagement
- Stacking
 - Contract relationships
 - Additionality
 - Environmental claims through the supply chain
 - How do we communicate to farmers about how they need to be aware of enrolling acres
- Creation of a sustainable business environment
 - Markets after grants are over

Next Steps

The Minnesota Working Group will convene in the fall of 2023. The fall meeting agenda and location is TBD. For all questions and comments please contact Ariel Kagan, Climate and Working Lands Program Director, at ariel@mfu.org.