

“Turn-Key” Assistance for Conservation Drainage Practices Offered for Eligible Farmers in Select Minnesota Counties

Farmers in 41 southern Minnesota counties, who have well-functioning tile drainage systems on cropland, may be eligible for timely, “turn-key” assistance with the planning, design, and installation of conservation drainage practices. Conservation drainage practices include drainage water management, denitrifying bioreactors, and saturated buffers to manage tile water for increased crop yields, efficient use of nutrients, and improved water quality. The 41 select southern Minnesota counties are those south of the Mississippi River, west of the eastern Sterns County line to the South Dakota state line, but excluding the karst topography counties in southeastern Minnesota.

Under “Managed Tile Drainage Systems”, a cooperative project with funding and technical oversight from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ecosystem Services Exchange (ESE) is providing this “turn-key” assistance to eligible farmers during 2021 and 2022. To be eligible for consideration, a farmer must have tile-drained cropland that has suitable slope and soil characteristics, and be in compliance with USDA’s Highly Erodible Lands and Wetlands Conservation Compliance Provisions, plus other applicable environmental laws and regulations. Available project funding is sufficient to conduct 68 site assessments and feasibility studies on farms for these conservation practices, leading to plans, designs, and implementation for a significant number of feasible sites with full support from ESE and at minimal cost to farmers.

A farmer who participates in this project will work directly with ESE’s conservation planners to arrange for a site assessment of field(s) for technical feasibility determinations and a full discussion of the options for participation (plan, design, and/or installation). Based on the farmer’s decisions, ESE will prepare a conservation plan and design to guide installation of selected eligible conservation practices. If practices are also chosen for implementation, the farmer will enter into an agreement with ESE for the selected installation work, including the timing of the installation consistent with the needs of the farmers and constraints of the project.

Interested farmers should contact the local NRCS office in one of the 41 designated Minnesota counties or Ecosystem Services Exchange (ESE) at (641)740-0890 or info@ecoexch.com. ESE is a certified technical service provider in operation since 2010 that works closely with farmers to help them plan, design, implement, and manage conservation drainage practices. ESE has a long collaborative history with USDA and many other public and private sector entities and has worked extensively with farmers on conservation drainage throughout the Midwest and Great Lakes states, including Minnesota.

