

**The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service
and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Water Quality Certification (MAWQCP)
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
Land Management (LM) Signup.**

Background

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Those who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of ten years. Through this program, certified producers receive:

- Regulatory certainty: certified producers are deemed to be in compliance with any new water quality rules or laws during the period of certification.
- Recognition: certified producers may use their status to promote their business as protective of water quality
- Priority for technical assistance: producers seeking certification can obtain specially designated technical and financial assistance to implement practices that promote water quality.

The RCPP MAWQCP Land Management Sign up offers financial assistance for implementation of on-farm conservation activities to agricultural producers who are seeking certification or already are certified. Eligible land is determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and is based on an identified resource concern. Eligible producers may apply for financial assistance on conservation activities that will address the identified resource concerns in the project area.

Application Period

Applications may be taken at any time. Producers must submit an RCPP application on or before **December 15, 2023**, to be considered for funding.

Eligible Project Area

Producers located within the MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification project area are eligible to participate in the project's RCPP-LM sign-up. The conservation activity(s) identified in the application must be located within Minnesota to be eligible for financial assistance through the RCPP-LM sign-up. **All Counties in Minnesota are eligible.**

Additional Project Eligibility

Applicability: Applicant is working towards certification or is a certified farm as identified on the affidavit.

Affidavit: All applications must have a fully completed and signed affidavit by **December 15, 2023**. For applications unfunded from prior years, a new affidavit must be provided.

Eligible Activities and Payment Rates

LM activities include NRCS-approved conservation practices and enhancements. “FY24_2129 RCPP LM Payment Schedule & Eligible Activities” provides the activities eligible for RCPP LM-#2129 MAWQCP project and payment rates.

Project specific cost list in CD: **Minnesota RCPP18 2129-1**

Eligible Land Uses

- Crop
- Farmstead
- Pasture
- Associated Agriculture Lands

Eligible Resource Concerns and Resource Concern Categories

Concentrated Erosion

- Bank erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyances
- channel
- Classic gully erosion
- Ephemeral gully erosion

Field Pesticide Loss

- Pesticides transported to groundwater
- Pesticides transported to surface water

Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss

- Nutrients transported to groundwater
- Nutrients transported to surface water
- Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater
- Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water
- Sediment transported to surface water

Soil Quality Limitations

- Aggregate instability
- Compaction
- Concentration of salts or other chemicals
- Organic matter depletion
- Soil organism habitat loss or degradation
- Subsidence

Wind and Water Erosion

- Sheet and rill erosion
- Wind erosion

Assessments

Planners must assess all RCPP applications using CART. **A maximum of 2 Resource Concerns/Primary Practice will be assessed. Only eligible Resource Concerns will be assessed.**

Prioritization Worksheet

No prioritization will be used.

Ranking

Ranking of the applications will be done according to the ranking system posted on the MN NRCS web site for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture RCPP-LM. All rankings will be conducted in CART. The efficiency score calculated in the CART ranking must be used when a tie breaker is needed between one or more RCPP-LM applications. When using the tie breaker, NRCS will select the application with the highest efficiency score first.

CART Ranking Pool-2129 LM Producer FY2024

Funding

Available RCPP-LM #2129 MAWQCP funds will be allocated based on the numerical ranking system set forth on the web site. All ranking will be conducted in CART. If insufficient funds are available to fund all eligible applicants, applications will be held and may be funded with extra RCPP- LM #2129 MAWQCP funds if available or deferred to the next ranking period.

Payment Limitations/Payment CAPs

Each RCPP- LM contract with a person or legal entity is limited to \$450,000 over the term of the contract, and each RCPP-LM contract with a joint operation (Farm Service Agency business type 2 or 3) or group projects may have a contract limit of up to \$900,000.

Payment caps have been set by the partner on some of the conservation activities.

Reference “FY24_2129 RCPP LM MAWQCP Payment Schedule & Eligible Activities” that provides the payment caps for each of the applicable conservation activities.

Program Ranking Questions (120 Points Max)

1. Does the application contain 1 or more activities (practice or enhancement) that addresses the Resource Concern Category: Field sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen Loss? **40 pts**
2. Refer to the 2023 MDA Affidavit, review the Affidavit for accuracy and identified on the MDA letterhead that the License Certifying Agent selected:
 - 2a. Are all activities included in the application needed to achieve or maintain certification as demonstrated by the MDA affidavit and supporting documentation? **80 pts**
 - 2b. Are all activities included in the application ones that will benefit the Priority Resource Concerns but some of the activities are voluntary and not needed to achieve or maintain for certification? **40 pts**
 - 2c. Are all activities included in the application are voluntary and not needed for certification? **0 pts**

Note: Maintain is defined as new land added to the producer operation to maintain certification and/or management changes by producer (ex. Producer removed hay crop out of their rotation because producer sold cows, management changed that impacts certification)

Resource Concern Ranking Questions (200 Points Max)

Field Sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen Loss Resource Concern - Nutrient Transport

- 1a. Does the application include one of the following practices to address nutrients in drainage tile discharge to surface water: Drainage Water Management (554), Wetland Restoration (657), Saturated Buffer (604) or Denitrifying Bioreactor (605) **OR** does the application only include a stand-alone conservation activity plan (CAP)? **If yes, do not answer further questions, if no, continue with remaining questions. 200 pts**
- 1b. Does the application include an activity to address nutrients transported to surface water: Nutrient Management – Precision Nutrient Application **OR** Prescription Nutrient Efficiency (590)? **30 pts**

1c. Does the application include practices that address the resource concern for groundwater in the following areas identified for source water protection: the DWSMAs subject to the MDA MN Groundwater Protection Rule, moderate vulnerability higher on the MDH DWSMA map layer, or townships $\geq 10\%$ of wells $\geq 10\text{mg/L}$ Nitrate-N) on the MDA Township Testing Program map layer? **15 pts**

Reference GIS CD Layer: RCPP LM_MAWQCP DWSMA Nitrate Test MN

Field Sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen Loss Resource Concern - Sediment Transport

2a. Does the application include one of the following practices that will result in perennial (2 years minimum) vegetative cover being established on cropland to a whole field or planning unit: Conservation Crop Rotation (328), Pasture and Hayland Planting (512) or Strip-cropping (585)? **50 pts**

2b. Does the application include at least one of the following practices: Water and Sediment Control Basin (638), Terrace (600), Grade Stabilization Structure (410), Grassed Waterway (412), Contour Buffer Strip (332), Riparian Forest Buffer (391) or Filter Strip (393) on cropland or Access Control (472) on pasture? **25 pts**

Soil Quality Limitations Resource Concern

3. Does the application include three consecutive years of – No Till/Strip Till (329) / three years scheduled Cover Crop (340)?

Note: Only select one answer for this question-340 doesn't need to be scheduled consecutive, only 329 needs to be scheduled consecutive on the same foot print

3a. 3 consecutive years of No Till/Strip Till (329) AND 3 years of Cover Crop (340)? **80 pts**

3b. 3 consecutive years of No Till/Strip Till (329) OR 3 years of Cover Crop (340)? **35 pts**

3c. None of the above **0 pts**

CONTRACT POLICY GUIDANCE RCPP LM # 2129 MAWQCP

The payment limit is established **per individual/entity per year (payment cap listed below) for the following practices:**

PRACTICE	MAXIUM NUMBER OF PAYMENTS	PAYMENT CAP
314	1	\$25,000
328	3	\$25,000
329	5	\$50,000
340	5	\$50,000
345	3	\$25,000
449	3	\$25,000
528	3	\$25,000
590	5	\$50,000
595	3	\$25,000

The practice must be planned on the same reoccurring fields, if scheduled more than 1 year.

Point of Contact (POC) RCPP LM # 2129 MAWQCP

RCPP LM Agreement: Michelle Legatt – Acting RCPP Coordinator

RCPP LM Contract Implementation: Andrea Horsman-CSP Program Manager

-Please route all questions through Area Office staff