

To: BMP CHALLENGE Project Team and Advisors  
From: Lori Steckervetz, BMP CHALLENGE Program Coordinator, Agflex, Inc.  
Re: Fourth Quarterly Report: BMP CHALLENGE and Water Quality Trading

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### **Executive Summary**

Our project is designed to meet water resource quality goals by promoting and supporting innovative strategies including the BMP CHALLENGE net returns guarantee and water quality credit trading. We will build broad awareness of these tools and competence in their use by developing and distributing a curriculum and support tools, and training in-state trainers to support conservation district, crop advisory professionals and others who work with farmers. We will manage the BMP CHALLENGE for corn farmers reducing nutrient use and tillage in DE, IA, IL, IN, MD, MI, MN, NC, NE, OH, PA, VA, WI. Water quality credit trading objectives will focus on MN and PA. BMP CHALLENGE received less than half the amount anticipated from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, limiting projects to the preparation of a trading template by James Klang, PE. The document will be used to document credits created by BMP CHALLENGE participants.

To date we have:

- Initiated the process of expanding the BMP CHALLENGE program into 3 additional States beyond the original 13 participating states
- Created and reviewed updates in the WQT curriculum and trainer materials;
- Started preparations for 3 BMP CHALLENGE and WQT workshops in Minnesota between the 2007 harvest and 2008 planting season;
- Distributed an electronic newsletter and a hardcopy brochure mailing in August and September respectively;
- Attended/presented a total of 5 meetings/field days;
- Held two monthly calls with the project team and advisors;
- Set the next quarterly call date as December 13, 2007.

Over the next quarter we will continue to build awareness of the project, with particular attention to promoting and expanding the enhanced nutrient option that was initiated in PA. We will continue to recruit additional advisory members from trading sectors, and seek to expand the BMP CHALLENGE beyond the initial 13 states into three new states (FL, ID,MO), allowing for an opportunity to recruit BMP CHALLENGE participants in a total of 16 states.

We will continue monitoring factors such as MN trading rules, corn prices, growth in corn acreage and corn-on-corn acres, and corn-belt wide changes in nitrogen rate recommendations for corn. We will continue to interact with MN state agencies and others on trading rule development and pursue additional funding to meet our match requirement.

The project is funded by USDA NRCS with matching funds from the Minnesota River Board for Minnesota activities, Bush Foundation for trading development in Minnesota and PA DEP for activities in Pennsylvania, with additional funders.

## I. Deliverables Update

<p>1. WQ trading and BMP CHALLENGE curriculum delivered to MN state agency, conservation districts, crop advisors and others to equip them to offer these opportunities to their producer clientele.</p>	<p>a. Updated WQT presentations were submitted by Jim Klang for comments to Project Team and Trainers. The team has commented on them and the edits (except for how to handle Idaho's program are complete). These training materials will provide a fuller explanation trading.</p> <p>b. Planning is underway for 3 dedicated MN BMP CHALLENGE and WQT workshops for state agency, SWCD, crop advisors, NRCS, watershed groups and other professionals who work with producers</p> <p>c. Calendar of industry and extension meetings has been created and continually modified with contact information.</p>
<p>2. Support package of existing tools for trainers, subset to be used as handout for seminars and available online.</p>	<p>a. Support package currently includes 2007 BMP CHALLENGE enrollment and implementation forms, presentation PowerPoint files and print-outs, curriculum outline with notes, water quality trading references, BMP CHALLENGE FAQ sheets and additional BMP information (i.e. alternative credit generating BMPs and management information).</p> <p>b. Website updated regularly, with current documents and information. Changes to be made during summer 2007, including style update, user profile setups, online forms and additional information pages.</p>
<p>3. Preparing three MN public agency/NGO trainers to train others on BMP CHALLENGE and WQ credit trading.</p>	<p>a. Three trainers have been identified for Minnesota:          -Adam Birr, MN Dept of Agriculture          -Shannon Fisher, MN River Board and Water Resources Center          -Ed Hohenstein, Seven Mile Creek Watershed Project</p> <p>b. Preparations are in progress for an in-person workshop with the trainers for the end of November to cover both BMP CHALLENGE and WQT materials in detail</p> <p>c. Current fall/winter Minnesota meeting possibilities:          Nov. 17-19, 2008 - MN Farm Bureau State Convention          Dec. 2-4, 2007 - MN Association of SWCD convention          Jan. 2008 - Minnesota Ag EXPO          Jan. 13-15, 2008 – MCIA Annual Meeting          Jan. 15, 2008 - MSGA Annual Meeting          Feb 26-28, 2008- MN Air, Water, Waste Environmental Conf          Mar. 5-7, 2008 - MN Erosion Control Assoc Annual Conference          Mar. 13-15, 2008 – Farm and Power Show</p>
<p>4. Inventory of potential point and non-point source traders, trades, values, credits, rates, forms, implementation and verification procedures.</p>	<p>The draft for the MN State rules for water quality trading is scheduled for July 2008. Klang is attending the larger advisory meetings and speaks with Marco Graziani and the MPCA team regularly. Until the early framework choices are made regarding how the program will be set up, the forms and definition of a credit and verification procedures are on hold. The advisory group is currently looking at other state rules from Ohio and Michigan to explore how to proceed in MN.</p>
<p>5. 75,000 brochures, 1,000-1,500 farmer inquiries generated to state agencies, crop advisors, watershed groups on BMP CHALLENGE and WQ credit trading.</p>	<p>a. Mailing consisting of a BMP CHALLENGE brochure, 2007 corn price update insert and an informational cover letter distributed in early September. The next mailing is scheduled for November 2007.</p> <p>b. 35,000 BMP CHALLENGE brochures were printed with approx. 10,000 distributed to date.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. Trading brochures to be developed and distributed once trading rules have been finalized.</li> <li>d. The 6<sup>th</sup> edition of an electronic newsletter containing both BMP CHALLENGE program information and recent agricultural and conservation news was distributed to 4121 contacts over the course of two separate mailings in August.</li> <li>e. Per the 2008 Outreach plan, a brochure and electronic newsletter schedule with designated dates of dispersal and topic outlines has been developed. Potential future E-newsletter topics include: MN Trading Court Ruling, Update on the Farm Bill, EPA Non-point Source Outreach Toolbox, implications of the EPA CO<sub>2</sub> regulation mandate for BMP CHALLENGE, a highlight on a main contact for a particular region, fall applications/tillage info, and updates on upcoming workshops, enrollment procedures, etc.</li> </ul>
<p>6. Ten point sources in MN prepared to trade, list of trades completed, acres, practices, credits, estimated resource improvements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Keiser &amp; Associates have contacted and identified ethanol plants in the MN River watershed, which are currently willing to use the point-point trading permit system, but are not at this time committed to using the more desirable point-nonpoint trading system.</li> <li>b. James Klang, PE, and Brian Brandt are continuing to work on a white-paper to help clarify how point and non-point perspectives view trading by interviewing potential buyers and sellers.</li> <li>c. The first draft calculations for the GIS analysis for the Cannon River and Seven-Mile Creek watersheds, prepared by Klang, David Legvold (Cannon River Partnership) and Kevin Kuehner (Seven-Mile Creek Watershed) are completed and currently under review.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Inventory of BMP CHALLENGE guarantees implemented, acres, practices, improvements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Nutrient BMP guarantees have been implemented on approximately 90 farmer fields, resulting in an average 25% reduction in nitrogen fertilizer use (pre-2007 data).</li> <li>b. Reduced tillage was implemented on the first 14 fields in 2006. Conservation equivalents not yet quantified.</li> <li>c. With the goal of expanding the Enhanced Nutrient option, which refers to an additional 15% reduction in BMP rates for nitrogen fertilizer use, beyond PA for the upcoming growing season, Brian Brandt is currently exploring a potential partnership with Environmental Defense in OH to add approximately 20 farmers.</li> <li>d. All results are recorded in a database.</li> <li>e. Approx. 50 fields are expected for 2007; 16 for nutrient guarantees, 16 for tillage guarantees, 20 enhanced nutrient guarantees. Total acreage is estimated at approx. 4,000 acres.</li> </ul>
<p>8. Reductions of 760K lbs of N use, 40K lbs. P loading; 30K tons sediment loading; 25 K lbs. NO<sub>2</sub>; 5K tons CO<sub>2</sub> from nutrient and tillage reduction on approximately 34K acres in MN and PA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Tacking in place for nutrient use.</li> <li>b. Tracking for other reductions to be developed.</li> </ul>

<p>9. Funding development including \$759,464 in matching non-federal funding, \$170,500 in program income and \$944,400 in-kind. Additional funding for program expansion.</p>	<p>a. Current grants amounting to \$983,000:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) – NRCS - \$683,000</li> <li>- Bush Foundation Grant (to AFT) - \$75,000</li> <li>- Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection - \$225,000</li> </ul>
<p>10. Quarterly and final progress reports including conference call and advisory meeting minutes.</p>	<p>a. Advisory conference calls and meetings scheduled for Dec, Jan and Mar through Aug 2009, including on in-person meeting per year.</p> <p>b. BMP CHALLENGE Project team (Brandt, Green, Steckervetz, and contractors) meets at least twice monthly by conference call to manage BMP CHALLENGE acreage recruitment and implementation.</p> <p>c. MN BMP CHALLENGE and WQ Credit Trading team (Fisher, Green, Kieser &amp; Associates, and Steckervetz) meets monthly by conference call, second Thursday of each month at 8:30am CST. Advisors welcome to participate. Call agenda and post-call notes circulated to project team and advisors.</p>
<p>12. Other</p>	

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**Advisory Group**

Participation is invited on monthly conference calls and requested for quarterly conference calls and one in-person meetings per year. Role includes reviewing plans and progress, responding to requests for information/assistance from project team.

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**Trainers**

Three Minnesota and three Pennsylvania public agency or NGO professionals who will be trained to offer the BMP CHALLENGE and WQ Credit Trading curriculum developed as part of this project. Goal is to identify individuals whose current role would be enhanced by this capacity. ***Pennsylvania Trainers yet to be determined.***

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### **III. Project Summary from Original Proposal to NRCS CIG**

Our project will build capacity by creating broad awareness and teaching in-state personnel to support CD, crop advisory professionals and others who work with farmers to meet conservation goals using new, innovative strategies. We will highlight, teach and implement BMP performance guarantees for corn farmers reducing both nutrient use and tillage in DE, IA, IL, IN, MD, MI, MN, NC, NE, OH, PA, VA, WI and point-nonpoint water quality credit trading in MN and PA.

BMP performance guarantees will focus on 51 million acres of corn in these 13 states. Our *BMP Challenge* has delivered a 24% nutrient use reduction in seven states over the past four years. We provide a financial safety net for farmers who reduce nutrient and sediment pollution using practices developed and recommended by land-grant scientists and state agencies. These practices save farmers money over time, but in any one year may result in lower yields and income. The program uses a side-by-side comparison in the farmer's field of his or her conventional practice on a "check" strip vs. reduced nutrient or tillage practice on the balance of the field. We compensate the farmer if net income declines as a result. Our 2005 survey indicates that 42% of corn farmers would try these new practices if guarantees were available.

Water quality credit trading is a new opportunity in the Susquehanna and Potomac River Watersheds in PA and the Minnesota River Watershed in MN. Point sources such as wastewater treatment facilities have greatly reduced nutrient emissions over the past 30 years and face very high costs for incremental gains. These funds can be more efficiently invested in improvements by farmers. Adequate controls are needed to ensure water quality goals are met. Accurate and effective education, training and technical support are needed to implement trading effectively.

Our experienced and nationally recognized team will work with state agencies and others to develop and implement a training curriculum, support tools and outreach for these innovative approaches, and work with conservation districts, crop consultants and other key influencers to equip them to competently offer and manage these opportunities with their client farmers. Support tools will include both new and existing materials and trained in-state technical support to help these professionals efficiently identify the best opportunities, calculate economic benefits to farmers and estimate water quality improvements, and verify and report implementation of conservation practices. Outreach will focus on CDs, crop consultants, Extension, ag organizations and other key influencers to drive farmer interest and inquiries to trained CD staff and crop consultants.

We will ease farmer recruiting to trading using our proven model of enlisting crop consultants, Extension and CD staff as recruiters, on-site BMP overseers and/or third-party verifiers for our guarantee program; assure farmers with yield/income guarantees so that they can put a comfortable value on their participation in trades, e.g., farmers are reluctant to trade nutrient use reductions for cash because they can't predict the yield impacts; verify/document credit production by farmers and so provide point-sources/regulators with the assurance they need; discover and institutionalize locally-acceptable credit estimation tools to provide certainty for participants; track multiple environmental benefits/environmental services; aggregate credits from multiple farmers to create a reserve pool such that if any one farmer cannot deliver promised credits for any reason, other credits are available to fill in; and offer this model as a turn key service solution to trading projects in other states as they begin to get ready for trading.