



Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District

900 Washington St NW, Preston, MN 55965

Phone: 507-765-3878 ext. 123

www.fillmoreswcd.org

Pilot project to demonstrate conservation agronomy services for the promotion and enrollment of Minnesota's Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) in Fillmore County, MN Request for Proposals

Proposals DUE: September 18th, 4:00 PM

Total Project Budget: Not to Exceed \$250,000

I. Project Description

Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is soliciting proposals from qualified agricultural retailers, cooperatives, crop consulting firms, and related agricultural service providers to deliver conservation agronomy services and promote enrollment in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) within Fillmore County, Minnesota.

II. Project Details

Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is seeking proposals from qualified agricultural retailers, cooperatives, crop consulting firms, and other agricultural service providers to deliver conservation agronomy services and promote participation in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) within Fillmore County, Minnesota.

This project will provide funding for a Conservation Agronomist (CA) embedded within a private ag retail setting for the express purpose of delivering conservation services that would not otherwise occur. The position does not subsidize or replace private-sector agronomic work; rather, it fills a well-documented gap in conservation-focused technical assistance in nitrate-sensitive areas, where no business incentive exists for retailers to provide these services independently. By meeting farmers where they already seek agronomic advice, the CA expands capacity to implement MAWQCP, advance 4R-aligned nutrient management, and accelerate adoption of priority conservation practices. This model directly reflects the public-private partnership approach emphasized in the 2025 Minnesota Nutrient Reduction Strategy, which calls for increasing workforce capacity and strengthening private-industry involvement to reach middle adopters. The CA's role is strictly conservation-oriented and will not include, or be evaluated on, retail sales or recommendations contrary to 4R nutrient stewardship principles.

Fillmore County lies within one of Minnesota's most environmentally sensitive agricultural landscapes. The county's karst geology, shallow soils, sinkholes, springs, and fractured limestone bedrock create direct pathways for nitrate and other contaminants to



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enter groundwater and surface water resources. As a result, implementation of conservation practices and nutrient management best management practices is critical to protecting drinking water supplies, improving local water quality, and maintaining the long-term sustainability of agricultural production.

This project is funded for about two-years by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and is intended to increase the adoption of voluntary conservation practices that improve water quality, soil health, nutrient management efficiency, and long-term farm profitability. This will be done using the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) Assessment process and other tools. Fillmore SWCD will serve as the fiscal agent and contract administrator for the project. Kanati Land Management will serve as a conservation planning and technical assistance partner. The MDA will provide technical guidance, training support, and final review and approval of MAWQCP certifications.

The selected contractor will serve as the primary point of contact for their clients interested in MAWQCP participation. Through existing grower relationships and agronomic expertise, the contractor will conduct outreach, complete MAWQCP assessments, provide nutrient management assistance, identify conservation opportunities, and coordinate with Fillmore SWCD, Kanati Land Management, and MDA to help producers achieve certification and implement additional conservation practices.

A primary goal of this project is to leverage the trusted relationships that agricultural retailers and crop advisors have with local producers. By integrating conservation planning and MAWQCP services into existing agronomic relationships, the project seeks to increase participation among producers who may not otherwise engage with conservation programs. The project will provide producers with individualized technical assistance, improved understanding of nutrient management practices, access to financial assistance opportunities, and a pathway toward achieving Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification.

The selected contractor will be compensated through a performance-based contract.

Payments will be made quarterly based on documented completion of project deliverables and achievement of measurable outcomes. Proposers will be required to submit a pricing schedule for the services and deliverables outlined within this Request for Proposals.

Outcome goals for the CA position by June 30, 2028 include:(full list of desired outcomes can be found in Section VI. Project Outcomes):



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- Complete 45 or more MAWQCP assessments and abbreviated nitrogen rate management plans.
- Complete 30 or more new MAWQCP certifications totaling over 20,000 crop acres.
- Implement 40 or more new conservation and nutrient management practices.
- Promote the adoption of nitrogen management best practices, including nitrogen stabilizers, nitrogen rate reductions, and improved fertilizer timing and placement practices.
- Increase adoption of cover crops, grassed waterways, prairie strips, and other conservation practices that reduce nutrient losses and improve water quality.
- Improve producers' understanding of how their nutrient management practices compare to University of Minnesota Best Management Practice (BMP) guidelines.

Through this partnership, Fillmore SWCD, Kanati Land Management, MDA, and the selected contractor will work collaboratively to improve water quality, increase conservation practice adoption, strengthen farm resilience, and expand participation in Minnesota's nationally recognized Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program.

III. Contract Period

Anticipated contract start date: Late September 2026

Contract end date: June 30, 2028

IV. Deliverables

Billable deliverables include the following:

Deliverable	Deliverable Group*
Promotion of MAWQCP to clientele.	1
Creation of producer files and completion of MAWQCP assessments using approved MAWQCP tools.	2
Mapping field boundaries, existing conservation practices, and resource concerns.	2
Meeting with producers to evaluate nutrient, tillage, and pest management practices, use of tile and irrigation, and locating open intakes.	3
Conducting field reviews and identifying resource concerns and conservation opportunities.	4
Utilization of available web-based planning tools and training provided by MDA, including Risk Assessment and Planning Tool, Stream Power Index, nitrogen rate planning (in-development), and cover crop performance (in-development) and other approved tools.	5, 6



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Completing abbreviated nitrogen rate management plans.	6, 7
Providing agronomic recommendations consistent with University of Minnesota BMP guidance.	6, 7
Promoting conservation practices and coordinating implementation assistance.	7, 8
Coordinating with Fillmore SWCD, Kanati Land Management, and MDA.	All groups
Participation in virtual and in-person training and meetings with project partners.	10
Submitting quarterly reports and invoices	10

*See Section 7 for more information on Deliverable Group.

Applicants may propose additional deliverables not listed above.

V. Roles and Responsibilities

Selected Retailer/Conservation Agronomist

Serve as the primary point of contact for producers, complete MAWQCP assessments, provide agronomic assistance, coordinate with project partners, and track project outcomes.

Fillmore SWCD

Serve as fiscal agent, administer contracts, review invoices, monitor performance, and coordinate project reporting.

Kanati Land Management

Provide conservation planning, technical assistance, implementation support, and cost-share assistance when conservation practices are needed.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Provide technical guidance, training support, maintain MAWQCP standards, and finalize certifications.

VI. Project Outcome Goals

The Selected Retailer/Conservation Agronomist shall lead in completing the following:

- 30+ new MAWQCP certifications completed
- 45+ MAWQCP risk assessments completed
- 45+ abbreviated nitrogen rate management plans completed
- 20,000+ new MAWQCP certified acres
- 5,000+ new acres with nitrogen stabilizers
- 5,000+ acres of nitrogen rate reductions of 20+ pounds N per acre
- 1,000+ acres switched from fall-applied MAP/DAP/AMS to non-ammoniated products



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In partnership with Fillmore SWCD and Kanati Land Management

- 40+ new conservation practices and nutrient management improvements
- 3,000+ acres of new cover crops
- 50,000+ feet of new or rehabilitated grassed waterways
- 5+ acres of targeted prairie strips
- 5+ new grade stabilization structures

VII. Budget and Payment Structure

The total contract amount shall not exceed \$250,000. Payments will be made quarterly and based on an hourly rate to complete approved deliverables. **Applicants shall submit a proposed CA position hourly pricing schedule for all deliverables and services included in their proposal.** Include an estimation of time to complete tasks. MDA estimated ranges provided below.

Deliverable Group	Type	Estimated level of effort*	Details
1	Outreach/ Education		Promote MAWQC
2	MAWQC Tech Assist.	1-5 hours per farmer	Create producer file using cloud-based MAWQC Risk Assessment and Planning Tool (RAPT), map field boundaries and existing practices (may include obtaining release form for FSA maps/shapefile field boundaries) and complete narratives.
3	Tech Assist.	1-3 hours per farmer	Meet with farmers to assess current nutrient, tillage, and pest management practices. Verify nutrient management records/rates. (Visit #1)
4	Tech Assist.	1-3 hours per farmer	Conduct field walkovers of existing conservation practices and identify potential resource needs. Use SPI and ACPF tools to prioritize high-risk runoff areas. (Visit #1 or #2)
5	Tech Assist.	1-2 hours per farmer	Update mapping for existing practices and resource needs per field visit and use of SPI and ACPF
6	Tech Assist.	2-5 hours per farmer	Run baseline assessment using MAWQCP tools, including nutrient management worksheets detailing nutrient rate, source, timing, and placement and pest management check lists. Run options to meet Certification threshold as needed. Compare farmers' current practices to University of Minnesota BMP guidelines using N rate planning budget tool (in development).



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7	Tech Assist.	1-2 hours per farmer	Determine resource concerns and provide solutions. Provide agronomic and nutrient management services. Print and share N rate planning tool reports; provide management recommendations if needed. Review conservation practice menu options with clients and encourage selection of at least 1–2 new practices—one for nitrate reduction and one for runoff/soil/pesticide loss reduction. (Visit #2 or #3)
8	Cost-Share		Promote conservation practice incentive programs.
10	Admin/Training		Invoicing; attend trainings and meetings. Communication with advisory committee.

VIII. Evaluation Criteria

Submitted project proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Criteria	Points	Considerations
Ability to achieve key outcomes within the project timeline	20	Enroll and certify 30+ farmer clients in the MAWQCP and conduct 45+ risk assessments within two years. Ability to assist middle adopter farmers in making changes to improve their water quality index score.
Commitment to Conservation-Focused Technical Assistance	20	Ability to maintain a clear separation between conservation assistance and retail sales activities. Ability to sustain the conservation agronomist business model beyond the 2-year contract.
Conservation agronomy experience and readiness	20	Experience implementing 4R nutrient stewardship, regenerative ag programs and nutrient management planning services
Service area alignment with townships that have elevated nitrate in drinking water	20	Service area and client base that intersect with Bristol, Harmony, Bloomfield, Forestville, Carimona, Preston, Amherst, Preble, Norway, Pilot Mound, and Arendahl
Partnership and Collaborative Capacity	10	Ability to collaborate with Fillmore SWCD, Kanati and MDA to achieve project goals
In-kind support	10	Ability to contribute initial staff on boarding salary. Provide vehicle, office, phone, computer and other resrouces to fully suport the CA position.
TOTAL	100	



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IX. Project Timeline

The following timeline is provided for planning purposes. Fillmore SWCD reserves the right to modify the schedule as necessary to meet project requirements and project objectives. All project activities must be completed no later than June 30, 2028.

Date	Milestone
August 2026	Request for Proposals (RFP) released
September 2026	Proposals due to Fillmore SWCD, review, and scoring.
September-October 2026	Fillmore SWCD Board approval and contract execution. Project Kickoff meeting.
September–December 2026	Producer outreach, project promotion, MAWQCP enrollment, and initiation of assessments
January 2027	First quarterly report and invoice due
January–March 2027	Continue outreach, assessments, nutrient management evaluations, and certification assistance
April 2027	Second quarterly report and invoice due
April–June 2027	Continue producer engagement, certification assistance, conservation planning referrals, and implementation support
July 2027	Third quarterly report and invoice due; annual project review meeting
July–September 2027	Continued outreach and delivery of project services
October 2027	Fourth quarterly report and invoice due
October–December 2027	Continued assessments, certifications, and conservation practice implementation support
January 2028	Fifth quarterly report and invoice due
January–March 2028	Focus on completing remaining assessments, certifications, and conservation practice goals
April 2028	Sixth quarterly report and invoice due
April–June 2028	Final producer assistance activities, certification completion, and final outcome tracking
June 30, 2028	All project activities completed
July 31, 2028	Final report, final invoice, and project deliverables submitted to Fillmore SWCD



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X. Proposal Submittal Format

Proposals shall be concise and contain the following information:

1. Cover Letter and Company Qualifications

Provide a brief description of the organization, including:

- Company background and history
- Service area within Fillmore County, specifically in townships with elevated nitrate, including Bristol, Harmony, Bloomfield, Forestville, Carimona, Preston, Amherst, Preble, Norway, Pilot Mound, and Arendahl.
- Ability to sign up 40+ producers into MAWQCP.
- Experience with 4R nutrient stewardship and implementation
- Experience applying conservation agronomy services
- Experience with conservation planning, nutrient management, and MAWQCP, if applicable

2. Project Approach

Describe how your organization will:

- Conduct producer outreach and recruitment
- Utilize existing staff or hire a conservation agronomist to complete MAWQCP assessments, certifications and nitrogen rate evaluations
- Coordinate with Fillmore SWCD, Kanati Land Management, and MDA
- Achieve project goals and performance measures

3. Pricing Proposal

Submit a proposed pricing schedule for project deliverables and services (budget). The total proposed amount shall not exceed \$250,000.

4. References and Insurance

Provide references for similar work and documentation of applicable insurance coverage.

Please submit your proposal as a sealed bid by **September 18th , 4:00 PM** to the attention of:

Riley Buley, District Administrator
Fillmore SWCD
912 Houston St. NW
Preston, MN 55965
507-887-0241
riley.buley@fillmoreswcd.org