

Project Title. Implementing perennial vegetation strategies on farms in the Mississippi River Basin and sharing best practices through regional stakeholder networks.

Project Background: To meet the goals of the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), changes to agricultural practices are needed, but to date have been insufficient to meet targeted reductions in nutrient, sediment and flow. Perennial crops, pastures, agroforestry, and cover crops, collectively referred to as continuous living cover (CLC), strategically established on the agricultural landscape will significantly reduce nutrient and sediment loss from farms, thereby advancing MRBI goals related to water quality.

Green Lands Blue Waters (GLBW) is a consortium of scientists, policy experts, farmers, and community organizers, from five land grant universities and over a dozen non-governmental organizations including collaborators from government agencies in Middle-America, from the Upper Midwest to the Gulf of Mexico. We formed this collaborative in 2004 in order to leverage and gain traction with our collective resources in effecting systemic transformation in the agricultural system based on CLC. Our regional network is in place, our local partners, Rural Advantage, Martin SWCD and GBERBA, have a proven record of success with similar projects, and our project team has the skills and experience for implementing and achieving the objectives of this project.

Component 1 - Regional Network of Working Groups for CLC Strategies. GLBW has identified five priority CLC strategies: 1) perennial edible grains, 2) CLC for livestock production, 3) agroforestry, 4) perennial biomass, and 5) cover crops. For each of these strategies, GLBW partners have made progress with establishing working groups that promote and support regional knowledge sharing and collaboration. Each working group is unique so our strategy with each is different. We view these working groups as independent. GLBW seeks to define the lead institution for each group and help them develop a long-term strategy to finance working group's project activity and administrative support.

Component 2 - Middle Minnesota Continuous Living Cover (CLC) Working Group. Significant change at the watershed and community levels will be realized when producers systematically implement best practices from all five regional working groups at scales that are economically significant and ecologically sound; increase farm profitability; create or strengthen local business that supply farm inputs and deliver outputs to market; create jobs; and generate community development.

We will establish a two stage learning agenda to advance the adoption of higher level conservation practices and more sustainable agricultural production systems within the targeted area. The first will be an Agricultural Mentor Training/Learning Group. This group will include agriculture and natural resource people who are working with agricultural producers in varying capacities right now. Examples of this audience are SWCD, NRCS, Technical Service Providers, Extension, Certified Crop Advisors, Agronomists, Adult Farm Management Instructors, Vocational Agriculture Instructors, Watershed Technicians and others. We will hold nine mentor training sessions over the grant period. Each training will involve two experts on the training topics and knowledge transfer for these higher level BMPs and sustainable agricultural production systems. Example topics include cover crops, grazing/livestock, perennial grains, energy crops, agroforestry, new farm production systems and soil health. We will work to have the participants receive CEU's for these sessions. It will be expected that these mentors will transfer the knowledge gained back to their constituents.

The second stage, which will follow on the afternoon of the mentor training, will be for agricultural producers. This will not be a repeat of the morning training but rather an extension of learning with the mentors interacting with the attendees and provide additional uplift for their own personal learning and the producer learning. This will be focused toward producer issues for each topic area.

Component 3 - Farm-based Demonstrations of Continuous Living Cover (CLC) Our project will demonstrate the latest advances in agriculture using CLC and promote associated value chains in the targeted watersheds. The Agricultural Specialist will work with local resource managers, EQIP eligible producers and Working Group experts to establish demonstration plantings of a variety of CLC practices. DeHaan, will work directly with the producers planting intermediate wheatgrass. GBERBA and Martin SWCD staff will work directly with producers in their jurisdiction to establish perennial plantings. The Agricultural Specialist and Conservation Agronomist will collaborate with all of the partners for field days and other outreach and education activities.

