REDUCING PHOSPHORUS (P) LOADS FROM AGRICULTURE:
DEMONSTRATING PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE CONSERVATION IN THE MILWAUKEE RIVER WATERSHED

PROJECT GOAL AND BACKGROUND
The Reducing Phosphorus (P) Loads from Agriculture project will pilot an innovative approach to reducing phosphorus (P) loss from agricultural land by providing flexible, performance-based incentives that will benefit both farmers and the environment.

The three-year project will focus on the West Branch of the Milwaukee River, a 58 square-mile Wisconsin watershed, 40 miles northwest of Milwaukee. Approximately 75% of West Branch land is in agricultural use, which is typical of rural areas in the Great Lakes Basin.

Using a pay-for-performance approach, the project will pay participating farmers based on the amount of P loss they can reduce from their farms. The Wisconsin P Index will be used to estimate the level of P loss on each farm. The project will also work with wastewater treatment plants and other regulated sources of P loss in the Great Lakes Basin to generate demand for cost-effective P loss reductions from agriculture. This demand will perpetuate the rewards for the farmers, whose P loss reductions will in turn help improve water quality.

WHY USE A PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE APPROACH?
A pay-for-performance approach to conservation generates rewards based on the achievement of farm-level environmental performance targets. Farmers will earn the largest incentive payments from choosing the most effective actions for their specific fields. This approach is in contrast to current practice-based programs that limit flexibility and innovation; the practice-based approach provides cost-share for only a select set of best management practices.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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