



Building Innovative Industry-Producer Partnerships to Reduce Hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico

Conservation Technology Information Center

Project/Task Description

By forming new partnerships between industry leaders and ag producers in the Mississippi River Basin, the Conservation Technology Information Center will bring innovative, effective approaches for addressing complex nutrient management challenges directly to the local level. This three-phase project will facilitate the identification of nutrient reduction strategies, the formation of local producer coalitions and the development of nutrient reduction management plans, using the best-available practices and methodologies, that will, ultimately, reduce the nutrient loads to the lower Mississippi River and reduce the size of the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone. At the conclusion of the final project phase, CTIC will produce a model approach for Mississippi River sub-basins to use industry-producer partnerships to implement locally led non-point source nutrient management solutions.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 Increase agricultural industry leaders' involvement in identification of effective approaches to address nutrient management challenges in the lower Mississippi Basin.

- Objective 1* Bring 20 industry leaders together for a one-day workshop focused on discussions of and solutions for the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Objective 2* Following the workshop, compile a report on the best available practices and methodologies for addressing non-point nutrient management issues in the lower Mississippi River basin.
- Objective 3* Obtain commitment from ag industry to work with local producer coalitions to adopt best available technology in development of local nutrient reduction management plans.

Goal 2 Increase applications of best-available practices and methodologies in local nutrient reduction management plans targeted at reducing nutrient loads to the Mississippi River.

- Objective 1* Connect with and support a local agricultural leadership coalition in each of the three Mississippi River sub-basins where sub-basin committees are currently functioning.
- Objective 2* Bring ag industry leaders to meet with local coalitions and to discuss best-available practices and methodologies appropriate for local conditions and nutrient reduction needs.
- Objective 3* Each coalition develops nutrient reduction management plans that incorporates best-available practices and methodologies and targets reduction of nutrient loads to Mississippi River.

Goal 3 Create a model for transferring best-available industry technology to the local level.

Objective 1 Support action plans of subwatershed coalitions.

Objective 2 Share successful efforts with organizations, associations, and other stakeholders in the appropriate regions.

To accomplish these goals, CTIC proposes a three-phase project, as described below.

Phase I: Ag Industry Leader Workshop

Drawing on its membership base and partnership network, CTIC will bring together ag industry leaders with experience in nutrient management for a one-day workshop. The workshop will be held in conjunction with a conference sponsored by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to address innovative cropland management practices that can be adopted into the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. Workshop topics will include an update on the Gulf of Mexico hypoxia zone, the role of agriculture in addressing nutrient loading concerns and discussion of best-available practices and methodologies that can help ag producers meet nutrient reduction goals. Examples of innovative management practices to be utilized may include the use of nitrogen inhibitors and drainage management techniques. At the end of the workshop, ag industry leaders will be asked to commit to visiting at least one ag producer leadership coalition in a Mississippi River sub-basin and helping identify appropriate practices and methodologies for those producers to use in nutrient reduction strategies.

Phase II: Building Local Producer Coalitions

In this phase, best-available industry practices and methodologies will be brought to the local level through producer coalitions in the Mississippi River sub-basins. For the last 4 years, CTIC has helped voluntary watershed groups form, get organized, develop plans of action and start making a difference for the environment and their communities. Through this phase, CTIC will apply that experience to help producer coalitions to address nutrient reduction goals in the Mississippi River basin. These coalitions will include producers and other watershed stakeholders, including Tribes, businesses, conservation groups, landowners/citizens and others.

Working with each of the three Mississippi River sub-basin committees, along with EPA and NRCS, CTIC will identify one existing or potential coalition/watershed group in each sub-basin. Then, through a series of workshops, CTIC will guide these coalitions through the development of an innovative nutrient reduction plan. In addition, ag industry leaders who gave commitment in Phase I will attend at least one workshop and provide guidance on best-available practices and methodologies for nutrient management plans. These innovative practices and methodologies will be included in the final innovative nutrient reduction plan developed by the coalition. CTIC will meet with each watershed group at least six times to help develop and finalize their local plan.

Phase III: Supporting Action Plans and Sharing Accomplishments

The implementation of local coalition nutrient management action plans will be supported through this funding. The successes and challenges of Phases I and II, the compilation of best-

available practices and methodologies for nutrient reduction in agriculture, the industry-producer partnerships and the local producer coalitions' nutrient reduction management/action plans will be presented to Gulf of Mexico program, EPA, NRCS and all stakeholders with outputs and outcomes of the project and will highlight the practices and methodologies and the innovative nutrient management plans that have been applied to reduce the nutrient and hypoxia problems of the Gulf of Mexico. Successes will be shared with other local stakeholders of each appropriate region, providing a template for further action. A summary report of the entire project will be compiled, produced, printed and distributed to project partners as well as CTIC members.