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NRCS ANNOUNCES INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL ENERGY CONSERVATION AND EFFICIENCY

Individual Energy Audits will Help Producers Reduce Energy Use

JACKSON, MS, January 20, 2011 — USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Al Garner today announced an initiative under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) designed to help agricultural producers transition to more energy efficient operations. Applications are being accepted through February 25, 2011. While this is a continuous signup, applications considered for 2011 funding must be received by the cut-off date.

Mississippi agriculture is facing rising energy costs, but for the most part, is unable to offset the increases by raising the cost of their products. Agriculture is totally market dependent and thus higher energy costs mean lower profits or deficit spending. So, in order to stay in business, agribusinesses must cut costs internally. Energy use in the equipment barns, animal confinement units, lighting, fans, equipment and tillage practices are areas where significant cost savings/energy conservation can occur.

NRCS in Mississippi will offer different levels of Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) plans depending on the producer's operation. The producer will hire a Technical Service Provider (TSP), <http://techreg.usda.gov/CustLocateTSP.aspx>, which is certified to complete an AgEMP. EQIP payments will be made directly to program participants for development of an AgEMP by a certified TSP.

"Reducing energy use on Mississippi's farms and ranches will not only help our agricultural producers become more profitable, but also help America become more energy independent," said Garner. "Through this initiative, producers will be able to receive individual on-farm energy audit evaluations."

For instance, switching from incandescent to U-tube fluorescent lights can save energy needed for lighting by 75 percent. In a 40,000-bird-broiler operation, this equates to a savings of nearly 18,000 kilowatt-hours per year. At a typical electric rate of eight cents per kilowatt, this becomes a savings of over \$1,400 per year per broiler house.

Dairy, beef, poultry, swine, and other agricultural operations are included in this energy efficiency initiative.

Energy audits will be individually tailored to ensure coverage of each farm's primary energy uses such as milk cooling, heating and cooling of livestock production facilities, grain drying, and similar on-farm activities. Simple changes in confined animal operations can help farmers and ranchers achieve significant cost and energy savings.

Interested producers should visit their nearest USDA Service Center to determine eligibility. Individuals are not eligible for EQIP until they have completed the Farm Bill eligibility requirements. Contact your local NRCS Office to begin this process. NRCS field offices are listed in the telephone directory under U.S. Department of Agriculture or on-line at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov>.

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