**Conservation Funds Available to Michigan Farmers**

EAST LANSING, Nov. 14, 2016 – Farmers and forest owners are encouraged to submit applications for U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation assistance by Dec. 16, 2016. Conservation financial assistance is available for implementing a wide variety of practices to reduce soil erosion, improve wildlife habitat, protect water quality and manage private forest land.

“USDA conservation programs can help farmers reduce erosion and protect water quality while maintaining or improving production,” said USDA State Conservationist Garry Lee.

Conservation financial assistance is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Complete applications received by Dec. 16, will be ranked and considered for fiscal year 2017 funding. Financial assistance is available for implementing designated conservation practices such as windbreaks, nutrient management plans, cover crops, forest management plans, crop residue and tillage management, animal waste storage facilities and many others. Applications are ranked and selected for funding on a competitive basis.

A portion of USDA conservation funding is targeted to state-level conservation priorities. These include funds for farmers seeking Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program verification, high tunnels in Wayne and Genesee counties, honey bee habitat, organic producers and producers transitioning to organic production, and energy conservation.

Conservation activities receiving financial assistance must be part of an agricultural or forest operation’s conservation plan. Producers should work with their local NRCS or conservation district staff to develop a conservation plan before applying for the program. Successful applicants enter into a contract with NRCS to implement conservation activities and are reimbursed for a portion of the cost.

NRCS provides higher levels of financial assistance for beginning farmers and historically underserved producers. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, producers and forest owners are encouraged to submit applications at any time. More information about conservation financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program is available at local NRCS offices and online at [www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/).