



Great Lakes Protection Fund

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Funded Project

Reducing Phosphorus Loads from Agriculture: Creating a Pay-for-Performance Program Using Field-Specific Information

Project No.	986
Timeline	2013 – 2017
Award Amount	\$957,000
Team Leader	Dr. Jonathan Winsten, Winrock International Institute , jwinsten@winrock.org
Project Website	https://www.winrock.org/project/running-off-pollution-paying-midwestern-farmers-to-improve-water-quality/

This team piloted an innovative approach to reducing phosphorus loss from agricultural land by providing flexible, performance-based incentives that will benefit both farmers and the environment. Working in the upper reaches of the Milwaukee River watershed, the team used a pay-for-performance approach to pay participating farmers based on the amount of phosphorus farmers kept on their fields and out of nearby streams and rivers.

The team established field-level baseline conditions (using models and interviews with farmers), assessed the cost effectiveness of status quo conservation, and created a portfolio of possible actions for each participating farmer to take to reduce phosphorus lost from specific fields. The team designed the structure of the program to identify what level of phosphorus removal could be attained for what cost, and designed simple contracts for each farmer. The farmers found this “let the farmer decide what’s best for their land” approach appealing.

The team used the lessons learned from this work to create a detailed – yet easy to navigate – how-to toolkit for others to use to build pay-for-performance programs elsewhere in the Basin.