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## **NREC ADDRESSING CRITICAL WATER QUALITY AND CROP PRODUCTION ISSUES**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – The Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council (NREC) is taking significant steps in 2014 to ensure that Illinois farmers have the scientific research and educational programs they need to maximize harvest yields through the efficient use of nutrients while protecting the environment.

The NREC, which is funded by a 75-cent per ton fee on all fertilizer sold in Illinois, has awarded grants to fund projects that will, among other things:

1. Determine how nitrogen management systems utilized by farmers may reduce losses of nitrogen through tile drainage and increase crop yields.
2. Update crop removal numbers for phosphorus and potassium to ensure sound agronomic recommendations for replacing these nutrients in the soil after harvest.
3. Evaluate the agronomic and environmental benefits of cover crops and measure the impact that cover crops may have on reducing nitrogen losses in tile-drained fields.
4. Support the “Keep it for the Crop” and “Discovery Farms” outreach programs. KIC works with farmers and fertilizer dealers to establish on-farm nitrogen rate trials to provide farmers with a reliable, defensible nitrogen rate for their individual fields. The N-Watch soil nitrogen inventory and tracking program also is part of KIC and helps farmers better understand the conversion of ammonium to nitrate from both fall and spring nitrogen applications as well as when cover crops should be considered to sequester any residual nitrogen following harvest. Discovery Farms partners ag industry representatives with researchers to evaluate and communicate water quality and crop yield results from various on-farm practices.

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The U.S. EPA has directed Illinois and other states to develop and implement a nutrient reduction strategy that seeks to reduce nutrient losses to water by 45% in order to protect water quality for Illinois citizens and reduce the size of the hypoxia zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

“Through NREC, Illinois farmers and the fertilizer industry are strategically positioned to find solutions that balance the need for crop production gains to feed a growing population with water quality goals,” Illinois Agriculture Director Bob Flider said. “The research and education programs underway in Illinois are innovative and demonstrate this public-private partnership is working.”

“By supporting NREC, Illinois farmers are truly stepping up to be the problem-solvers when it comes to minimizing environmental impact, optimizing yields and maximizing nutrient utilization,” Dale Hadden, a farmer and NREC Council member, added. “These efforts are critical as Illinois agriculture engages with the state and federal agencies to demonstrate that we can reduce nutrient losses in ways that make economic and practical sense to farmers.”

For more information about NREC funded projects and activities, go to [www.illinoisnrec.org](http://www.illinoisnrec.org).

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