

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **Illinois EPA Awards \$156,000 Grant to American Farmland Trust *Advancing Water Quality Goals in the Illinois Vermilion Headwaters Watershed***

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA) recently awarded a \$156,000 Section 604B Clean Water Act grant to American Farmland Trust (AFT) to work with members of the Vermilion Headwaters Watershed (VHW) Partnership, to advance watershed planning efforts that address local water quality issues and inspire action to achieve desired improvements. AFT and its partners will use stakeholder input to develop a Nine-Element Watershed-based Plan for the VHW Partnership that builds capacity for ongoing stakeholder engagement to achieve water quality goals directly related to the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy.

This watershed has been identified as one of the top five non-point source nitrogen loading watersheds in Illinois and is a major contributor to nitrogen loading in the Mississippi River. The VHW Partnership currently uses conservation planning models to inform goals and implements strategies that will achieve nutrient reductions at the field and watershed scale. Since 2015, more than \$1.7 million has been invested in conservation practices in the watershed as an extension of AFT's partnership with the Livingston and Ford County Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"This watershed-based plan will advance and prioritize efforts to help solve difficult water-related problems in the Vermilion Headwaters Watershed," **said Illinois EPA Director John J. Kim.** "The work of AFT will also provide farmers with the technical and financial assistance needed to improve environmental performance without sacrificing productivity."

"I have been leading our collaboration with the Vermilion Headwaters Partnership since 2019 and firmly believe that water quality improvements can be achieved using a systematic approach. I look forward to working with partners, community members, and farmers to identify priority areas and opportunities to reduce non-point source nitrogen loading," **stated Jean Brokish, AFT Midwest program manager.**

The Vermilion Headwaters Watershed is a 305,426-acre rural watershed encompassing parts of Livingston, Ford, Iroquois, and McLean Counties in Illinois. The Partnership estimates that one way to achieve water quality goals would be to implement an additional 80,000 acres of conservation cropping systems, which includes practices such as reduced tillage, cover crops, nutrient management, and tile water treatment.

Farmers interested in improving water quality and soil health can learn more by visiting <https://farmland.org/vhw>.

*[American Farmland Trust](#) is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through our **No Farms No Food** message. Since our founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.8 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally-sound farming practices on millions of additional acres and supported thousands of farm families.*

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