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Leading Harvest Awarded Walton Family Foundation Grant to Scale Sustainable Agriculture on Family Farms

Funding supports pilot program in the Upper Mississippi River Watershed to remove barriers, accelerate sustainability certification, and generate market opportunity for producers

Arlington, Va. (Thursday, October 29, 2020) – Leading Harvest, a leader in sustainable agriculture, today announced it has been awarded a Walton Family Foundation grant to support its work with farmers in the Upper Mississippi River Watershed. Leading Harvest will engage growers to adopt certifiable land management practices aimed at improving environmental, economic and social outcomes, including the quality of waterways flowing into the Mississippi River and mitigating environmental damage in the Gulf of Mexico.

The grant, which will help fund a pilot program providing education and training to crop farmers in the Upper Mississippi River Watershed, advances Leading Harvest’s efforts nationwide to grow its industry-leading [Farmland Management Standard](#). The Standard is the first scalable, industry-wide solution to the urgent issues facing our communities – from climate change and biodiversity, to the resilience of our croplands and communities. The Standard also includes indicators for water use and water quality, including fertilizer application and runoff protection.

“We thank the Walton Family Foundation for recognizing Leading Harvest’s innovative efforts to promote sustainable agriculture through our Farmland Management Standard,” said Kenny Fahey, executive director of Leading Harvest. “This grant will enable us to work directly with producers in the Mississippi River Watershed to both recognize as well as enhance their efforts in sustainable agriculture and increase their market position by certifying their environmental and social management systems.”

The pilot program will audit and certify sustainability activities, both those existing currently as well as facilitated through training initiatives, on family farms. The participating producers will benefit by receiving independent sustainability certification, which demonstrates to the supply chain and consumers responsible farm management. Leading Harvest will pilot strategies that accelerate scalability for certification and that can be replicated across regions.

“We find that the people closest to big environmental challenges are also closest to solutions. Leading Harvest’s innovative agriculture sustainability effort embodies our mission to advance conservation solutions that benefit nature, people and our waterways. We are proud to support this essential work in the Mississippi River basin,” said Moira McDonald, director of the Walton Family Foundation’s Environment Program.

The Walton Family Foundation works to support a more sustainable agricultural supply chain to protect water now and in the future.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture, family farms make up 96% of farms in the U.S.¹ With over 50 million acres of cropland in the upper basin of the Mississippi River Watershed, the region represents a significant opportunity to improve environmental, economic and social outcomes and bring the Standard to scale.

¹ <https://nifa.usda.gov/family-farms>

Farmers interested in participating in the pilot program can inquire by visiting www.LeadingHarvest.org/upperbasin. Leading Harvest will partner with K-Coe Isom, which was the first certification body to audit the Standard, to manage the auditing of pilot participants. Manomet, which led the development of the Standard, will work alongside Leading Harvest to manage the development of training and resources for producers to help make it simpler for them apply the Standard.

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About Leading Harvest

Leading Harvest is a nonprofit organization committed to increasing adoption of sustainability practices in agriculture. It was formally organized in April 2020 by and for all stakeholders across the agricultural value chain—from farmland owners to companies to communities. The organization provides assurance programs comprised of standards, audit procedures, training and education, and reporting and claim offerings that are optimized for flexibility, scalability, and impact. More information can be found at www.leadingharvest.org.

About the Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses, work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving K-12 education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org.