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Agren awarded grant funds to support continued R&D

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has awarded a Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant to central Iowa-based small business, Agren, Inc (http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001ECCiL0Ri1beEGvcQZwrzyB_3fNHF2X3FbRpUSfpe9sYfGx2TGS0pHE8TNPxXR-WVtJ1sgEkt03qIrQVsLmjvw6n3OJH8K7wapMP3bqK2uxdaT3U1xsevW9L5tu9LUiPFLbbgRco862bmFEbBU4tD4F-B3XwBUegpuEYEMwFLCMw0iAfD_BpLUw==&c=_iN5SFEbKxTt5UyM7usrLdQqshBEDuMnsKkJVfb6_hPUnDDDz1IqHQ==&ch=qcduzcihozCHVWAFKm9YP-kiTcQuVDaRir3x6ehSizFOxTtPVOC5nw==)., to further technological innovations and solutions for American agriculture.

USDA SBIR has awarded over 2000 research and development projects since 1983, allowing hundreds of small businesses to explore their technological potential, and providing an incentive to profit from the commercialization of innovative ideas. Through federal funding and leadership for research, education and extension programs, NIFA focuses on investing in science and solving critical issues impacting people's daily lives and the nation's future.

The SBIR program exists to stimulate technological innovations in the private sector and to strengthen the role of federal research and development in support of small businesses. Companies initially apply for Phase I feasibility studies, which may be followed by Phase II research and development projects. Approximately 30-40 percent of Phase I projects continue onto Phase II.

Agren was originally awarded a Phase I grant in 2014 for their SoilCalculator application, which allows service providers to plug in various crop rotations, tillage systems, and conservation practices and view the resulting erosion predictions for up to three scenarios.

The Phase II award boosts Agren's capacity to deliver state of the art precision conservation software with over $400,000 granted for Agren's ongoing research and develop efforts in collaboration with the USDA Agricultural Research Service Sedimentation Laboratory and the University of Tennessee. This public-private partnership has resulted in the nation's most advanced and broadest effort to predict and control water erosion across agricultural fields. Main objectives of the project include continued validation of a first-of-its-kind ephemeral gully model, as well as architectural enhancements that will make the SoilCalculator tool more scalable and affordable for service providers.

SoilCalculator, in combination with Agren's suite of structural conservation planning tools, extends the foundational concepts of precision agriculture to soil and water management. Conservation practitioners can quickly and easily target appropriate management practices to landscape positions that contribute the most significant sediment loads and evaluate which practice alternatives provide the most environmental and economic benefit.

"I am excited for the new opportunities this effort brings to ag retailers and to growers! It has the potential to change how soil and water conservation is both implemented and measured. By incorporating conservation decisions into precision ag platforms, we can change the narrative on soil erosion and open the door for more meaningful private sector involvement," says Tom Buman, Agren CEO.