



# News Release

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## **USDA-NRCS INTRODUCES THE SUSTAINABLE EQUITY INITIATIVE AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED SIGN-UP IN MISSISSIPPI**

**JACKSON, MS, September 28, 2023** — Kurt Readus, State Conservationist of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Mississippi, announced today the Sustainable Equity Initiative (SEI) and Socially Disadvantaged signup in Mississippi through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#). All Mississippi agricultural producers and landowners who wish to be considered for this year's financial assistance in the first ranking period should apply by October 27, 2023.

The Sustainable Equity Initiative (SEI) addresses the unique challenges faced by many socially disadvantaged producers in Mississippi communities. Through the Sustainable Equity Initiative, NRCS Mississippi is leveraging resources and collaborating with partners and stakeholders to improve economic opportunity and quality of life in Mississippi counties.

The targeted counties for the Sustainable Equity Initiative (SEI) through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are Claiborne, Simpson, Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Lincoln, Lawrence, Jefferson Davis, Walthall, Pike, Amite, and Wilkinson.

NRCS conservationists work with producers to assess the conservation needs on their land to identify resource concerns and opportunities, help determine objectives, and recommend solutions.

NRCS accepts applications for its conservation programs year-round. Still, producers interested in EQIP-SEI should submit applications to their local [USDA Service Center](#) by **October 27, 2023** to be considered for the FY 2024 funding cycle. Participants must meet EQIP eligibility requirements. NRCS conservationists will work with producers to determine AA and complete necessary worksheets and rankings for the applicant to compete for funding.

Mississippi NRCS will be utilizing ACT NOW to process conservation applications in two funding pools in order to deliver financial assistance to EQIP applicants faster. New and existing applications received prior to October 27, 2023, which meet program eligibility requirements and the minimum ranking score threshold in one of the ACT NOW funding pools identified below, will be selected for immediate funding until designated funds are depleted. Through ACT NOW, applications will be batched and processed in the order they are received.

### **Funding Pools Ranking Threshold Score**

#### **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher (SDFR) and Sustainable Equity Initiative (SEI)**

- Area 1 – Minimum ranking threshold score of 165

- Area 2 – Minimum ranking threshold score of 135
- Area 3 – Minimum ranking threshold score of 125
- Area 4 – Minimum ranking threshold score of 185

Recently, NRCS reminded socially disadvantaged producers approved for funding through EQIP of the advanced payment option. This option allows them to get a portion of conservation practice payments in advance of the practice implementation.

A socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher is described as a group member whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of that group without regard to their individual qualities.

Under the advance payment option, historically underserved producers may request payments when they have final designs and job sheets and are ready to begin their EQIP practices. Advance payments provide at least 50 percent of the payment rate for each practice. The funds must be spent within 90 days of receipt, and practices must be completed as agreed to in an EQIP plan of operations. The participant can directly assign the payment to contractors and vendors.

NRCS provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. For additional information about IRA EQIP or to submit an application, landowners should contact to their local [USDA Service Center](#) for their county. For more information, visit [our website](#).

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