



# **NEWS RELEASE**

**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**

*P.O. Box 1458  
220 East Rosser Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58501*

**Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service**

*Contact:  
Arlene Deutscher  
State Public Affairs Specialist  
(701) 530-2099*

**For Immediate Release**

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## **USDA RELEASES FINAL RULE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM**

BISMARCK, ND, June 4, 2003— USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has released the final rule for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The 2002 Farm Bill reauthorized and amended the program.

The final rule, published in the Federal Register on May 30, 2003, describes how the program will be implemented. A total of \$11 million dollars in Fiscal Year 2003 funds has been made available for EQIP in North Dakota.

“This is a valuable tool to help our State’s agricultural producers meet the significant environmental regulation they face, while continuing to be good stewards of the land. EQIP not only helps them implement conservation practices that protect our natural resources, but also meets air quality regulations and mitigates further damage to natural resources in areas severely impacted by the drought,” said Tom Jewett, NRCS State Conservationist.

The final rule revises the purpose of EQIP to optimize environmental benefits and clarifies definitions and terms—especially definitions for individuals, persons, and eligibility issues.

EQIP—one of the largest programs in the Farm Bill—is a voluntary conservation program that promotes environmental quality and assists producers to meet local, State and Federal regulations. EQIP funds help farmers and ranchers reduce soil erosion, improve water use efficiencies and protect grazing land by installing conservation practices that protect natural resources.

Agricultural producers interested in participating in EQIP can apply at any time at their local NRCS office or USDA Service Center. NRCS will evaluate each application and give higher priority to those applications that use cost-effective conservation practices; treat multiple resource concerns; address National, State or local priorities; and provide the most environmental benefits.

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EQIP sign-up information is on the Web at [http://www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip\\_general\\_description.html](http://www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip_general_description.html) or available from the local NRCS office. In addition to the application form, there is application information for each State, a list of practices and costs, and specifics on North Dakota's ranking process, including criteria used to evaluate applications. Now that the EQIP final rule has been released, NRCS will begin the ranking process and notify landowners if their application has been accepted. Applications on hand as of June 13, 2003, will be ranked for 2003 funding consideration. Applicants will be notified of funding approvals by mid-July.

The final rule and additional information on EQIP and other conservation programs can be viewed at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/index.html>

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