

Program Background & Purpose

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), authorized by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, provides a voluntary conservation program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural and management practices on agricultural land.

Program Objectives:

- Reduce non-point pollution in impaired waters and drinking water recharge areas
- Conserve ground and surface water resources
- Reduce greenhouse gases and objectionable odors
- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation
- Promote wildlife habitat conservation for at-risk species
- Promote plant and animal productivity, health and vigor

Eligibility Requirements for Participation

Producer Eligibility:

To be eligible to participate in EQIP, an individual, entity or joint operation must meet the following criteria:

- ✓ Be an agricultural producer (*produced and sold \geq \$1,000 ag-products in 2 of last 5 years*);
- ✓ Have an interest in the farming operation associated with the land being enrolled;
- ✓ Have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract;
- ✓ Be in compliance with federal highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions;
- ✓ Be within program payment limitations (\leq \$450,000 EQIP payments); and
- ✓ Be within Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) requirements (*make \leq \$2.5 million*).

Land Eligibility:

Land eligible for enrollment in EQIP must be used for agricultural commodities or livestock production. The program is primarily for privately owned land, but public land is eligible if the land is under private control and the participant has written authorization from the landowner to apply the conservation practices. Land in other conservation programs is eligible if the contract does not pay for the same practices on the same land and the practices do not defeat the purpose of either program. Irrigated land must have been irrigated for two of the last five years prior to application to be eligible for irrigation practices.

How to Apply

To apply, applicants must submit a signed and dated [Form NRCS-CPA-1200](#), Conservation Program Contract Application, to the [local NRCS office](#). Applications are accepted on a continuing basis throughout the year. Cutoff dates are scheduled to allow for ranking, prioritization and selection of applications for funding. To be considered for the first round of funding in Massachusetts 2007 EQIP, [applications and eligibility information](#) must be submitted by [February 15, 2007](#). Applications taken after that date will be processed with the subsequent cutoff and batching of applications. Visit your local NRCS Field office for assistance in reviewing all of the necessary documentation – please call to schedule an appointment.

Certifications Required

Before NRCS can proceed further, the applicant must have the following certifications completed and filed at the USDA Service Center.

Description	Document/Form	Where to File
Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation (HEL/WC) Certification	AD-1026	FSA
Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Certificate	CCC-526	FSA
Member's Information (for entity and joint operations only)	CCC-501A	FSA
Signature authority of an individual requesting benefits for an entity or joint operations.	AD-211 ²	FSA

²⁾ Depending on the type of operation, signature authority documentation can include articles of partnership, affidavits, valid power of attorney, court orders of appointment, certified evidence of probate, last will & testament, trust agreement, letter of authorization/administration, charter, bylaws or resolution.

Conservation Plan Requirement

A conservation plan must be developed and signed by the applicant before the application will be considered as complete. The plan serves as a record of decisions and provides supporting information for treatment of identified resource concerns. Work with field office staff to complete the [conservation planning worksheet](#) and to develop a conservation plan.

Conservation Practices

There are many conservation practices approved for this year's cost share program. The following list summarizes the possibilities for crop management, erosion and water control, reorganization of irrigation systems and wildlife habitat management:

Crop Management: Agrichemical Mixing Facility, Contour Farming, Cover Crop, Deep Tillage, Diversion, Forage Harvest Management, Nutrient Management, Pest management, No-Till/Strip-Till, and Transition to Organic Production.

Erosion Control: Critical Area Planting, Field Border, Filter Strip, Grade Stabilization Structure, Grassed Waterway, Lined Waterway or Outlet, Streambank and Shoreline Protection, Stripcropping, Terrace, Water and Sediment Control Basin.

Irrigation System Reorganization: Irrigation Water Conveyance, Microirrigation System, Sprinkler Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery System, Irrigation Water Management, Pumping Plant and Structure for Water Control. Specific to Cranberries: Dike, Land Smoothing, Open Channel, Pond Sealing/Lining.

Livestock Management: Anaerobic digester, Composting Facility, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan, Constructed Wetland, Fence, Heavy Use Area, Manure Transfer, Roof Runoff Structure, Sediment Basin, Waste Storage Facility, Waste Utilization, Waste Water Treatment Strip, Windbreak/Shelterbelt. Specific to Grazing Systems: Animal Tails/Walkways, Brush Management, Fence, Pasture/Hayland Planting, Pipeline, Pond, Prescribed Grazing, Spring Development, Stream Crossing, Water Well, Watering Facility.

Wildlife Habitat: Early Successional Habitat Development/Management, Field Border, Riparian forest Buffer, Riparian Herbaceous Buffer, Upland and Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management.

Application Ranking and Selection

To evaluate applications, Massachusetts uses the NRCS national ranking tool customized to fit Massachusetts geographic resource concerns and types of agricultural operations. Massachusetts ranking criteria are based on the environmental benefit and program objectives to be accomplished. Points accumulate for proposals that will result in reductions in non-point source pollution, lower greenhouse gas emissions, save water or promote at-risk species habitat. Credit is given to proposed measures that have more far reaching impacts, such as those that are more durable and/or complete treatments of a problem, support land that is protected from development; improve resource conditions of environmentally sensitive areas; or help applicants meet regulatory requirements. A print version of [Massachusetts Ranking Tool](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/) is available online at <http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Selection of Applications

NRCS approves the highest ranked applications for funding until all funds are obligated. Notification of application eligibility and status will be mailed directly to the applicants. Approval letters can be expected by April. Applications that are not selected due to lack of funding will be held open or deferred in the case that additional funds become available.

Contracting

All applicants should read the Appendix to Form NRCS-CPA-1202 Conservation Program Contract to understand the terms and conditions of accepting federal dollars under these programs. The Appendix must be signed and dated by the applicant upon notification of approval and before contract development. All contracts must be developed, signed and finalized by June 1, 2007.

Central Contract Requirements

- Starting a practice before the contract is signed by NRCS causes the applicant to be ineligible for payment for that practice, unless a waiver has been granted by the State Conservationist in advance.
- Participants must complete or start at least one practice within the first 12 months of the contract. And no practices will be scheduled in the tenth year of a contract
- A CNMP must be developed prior to installing a waste storage/treatment facility; implementation of the CNMP must be completed no later than 3 years after installation of the waste facility.
- Participants agree to maintain conservation practices for the service life of the practice which may exceed the length of the contract. In the event that practices are not adequately maintained, NRCS will request reimbursement of the payments made to the participant.
- Participants agree to allow NRCS access to land under contract for provide technical assistance, certify installation or inspect practices during the life span of the practices.
- Upon cancellation of the contract, the participant will refund NRCS all payments made under the contract, with interest, unless the cancellation is due to circumstances beyond the participant's control.
- In the event the participant violates the terms of the EQIP contract, the participant agrees to pay an amount equal to 20 percent of the total financial and technical assistance obligated to the participant, at the time of the termination. This payment is for recovery of administrative costs and technical services, and is not a penalty.

Understanding Cost Share

NRCS cost share is designed to accelerate implementation of needed conservation work, or to provide an incentive to adopt new practices or technology. The [cost share rate](#) is the government's share of installing the practice, based on an [average cost](#) established for this geographic area. Average cost is a fixed amount, as are [flat rates](#), published in the [annual program cost list](#). The cost list is used as the basis for all contracts in that fiscal year and cannot be changed for site-specific circumstances. If the project ends up costing less, the participant benefits; if it costs more, the participant bears the extra costs. The minimum requirement is that the practice meet NRCS standards and specifications. Payment is made to the participant upon completion and certification of the practice. The payment amount is calculated based on the following formula: $[\text{average cost} \times \text{number of units} \times \text{cost share rate}]$.

Program rules limit cost share to the least-cost alternative needed to address the identified resource concerns. The least-cost alternative limitation is only applicable to cost-share payments and does not limit choice of treatment options. For example, if a 2 wire fence addresses the resource concern but the participant selects a higher cost alternative like a board fence, EQIP will cost share the minimum (i.e. the cost of a 2 wire fence) and the additional costs will be borne by the participant.

For more details on costs, see the EQIP2007 Cost List and EQIP2007 Cost List Notes available at your local NRCS Office or online at <http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip.html>

USDA-NRCS Offices

Massachusetts State Office

451 West Street
Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350

Hadley Field Office

195 Russell Street, Suite B6
Hadley, MA 01035
413-585-1000 ext 3

Westford Field Office

319 Littleton Road, Suite 205
Westford, MA 01886
978-692-1904 ext 3

Barnstable Field Office

270 Communications Way, Unit 1G
Hyannis, MA 02601
508-771-6476

Holden Field Office

52 Boyden Road, Room 10
Holden, MA 01520
508-829-4477 ext 3

West Wareham Field Office

15 Cranberry Highway
West Wareham, MA 02576
508-295-5151 ext 2

Greenfield Field Office

55 Federal Street, Room 290
Greenfield, MA 01301
413-772-0384 ext 3

Pittsfield Field Office

78 Center Street, Suite 206
Pittsfield, MA 01201
413-443-1776 ext 3

For more information on the Massachusetts EQIP program visit: www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip.html

Agency Responsibilities:

The [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) has overall leadership for the program and is responsible for establishing policies, priorities, and guidelines for EQIP, and will also provide technical assistance. Farmers may elect to use a [certified third-party provider](#) for technical assistance. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is responsible for accepting and processing program applicant payment eligibility documentation.

U.S. Department of Agricultural (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (Voice and TDD).