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Date: September 14, 2007

WASHINGTON BULLETIN WA300-7-21

SUBJECT: LTP - FY 2008 EQIP Implementation Plan

Purpose. To distribute the FY 2008 EQIP Implementation Plan

Expiration Date. September 30, 2008

**ACTION REQUIRED BY: September 26, 2007**

*LWG Implementation Package due to the  
Assistant State Conservationist-Programs*

Enclosed with this bulletin is the FY 2008 EQIP Implementation Plan. The plan provides guidelines to assist the District Conservationists in the development of their FY 2008 EQIP ranking criteria and implementation plan based on the recommendations from the Local Work Groups (LWGs). Also included, is information on the funding distribution and the timeline that will be used for implementation of the EQIP program for FY 2008.

If you have any questions, please contact the program liaison in your area.

R. L. "GUS" HUGHBANKS  
State Conservationist

Enclosure

DIST: E

## Washington EQIP Implementation Plan Fiscal Year 2008

### Objectives

Washington NRCS seeks to improve, enhance and protect natural resources on agricultural, forest and grazing lands by utilizing the financial and technical assistance available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

EQIP is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Washington State utilizing the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) and the multi-county Local Work Groups (LWGs) in an advisory capacity. The State Conservationist is responsible for efficient and effective management of EQIP funds within program and legal constraints. Through the advice of the STAC, LWGs and national guidance, Washington NRCS will:

1. Address the following priority natural resource concerns:
  - A. Surface and ground water quality and quantity concerns associated with non-point source pollutants
  - B. Reduction in soil erosion and sedimentation
  - C. Air quality concerns relating to PM <10 and odors
  - D. Protection of "at-risk species" habitat
  - E. Range and forest land health
  - F. Carbon sequestration
2. Provide opportunities for limited resource producers, beginning farmers, and underserved individuals to participate in the EQIP;
3. Utilize Technical Service Providers (TSP) to assist in the implementation and application of EQIP contracts;
4. Utilize cost share methods that will provide optimum environmental benefits and;
5. Improve efficiency in operations by streamlining the ranking, planning, contracting and payment processes and provide timely and effective quality assurance.

### Funding Distribution

EQIP financial assistance funds will be distributed to each of the 10 LWGs, a state wildfire pool, a state Tribal funding pool and for State Conservation Innovation Grants. The target allocation to the Tribal funding pool will be 12.5% of the state EQIP allocation. With the new farm bill forthcoming and the uncertainty of Ground and Surface Water (G&SW) fund availability, specific fund distributions will be determined at a later date.

## LWG Funding Pools

LWGs that utilize funding pools will manage the contract ranking, approval and obligation process using the following requirements:

1. Each LWG will be allowed to establish up to five (5) funding pools utilizing no more than 95% of their total budget. The remaining 5% will be retained in the general team pool. Any deviation from this must be submitted and approved by the State Conservationist.
2. An application which would be eligible in more than one pool in the LWG will be placed in the funding pool that has the highest estimated total practice cost for that resource concern or land use.
3. Each LWG will submit in their EQIP package, a description of their distribution and tracking process, including how the excess funds within each pool will be used.

## Ranking Criteria Development

Each LWG will develop a ranking process using the ProTracts Ranking Tool. Minimum changes from the process used in 2007 are recommended. The ranking process will follow these guidelines:

1. ProTracts tracking code will be used for all tie breakers.
2. ProTracts ranking tool includes national, state and local ranking questions. All teams will use the same national and state ranking questions (see Attachment - *National and WA State priorities.doc*). The LWG will develop the local ranking questions. The LWG will assign points for each national, state and local ranking question. The "Ranking Modifier" option in the ranking tool will be used to adjust the effective weighting of points between the national, state and local questions. A suggested weighting is: national 15-20%, state 15-20% and local 60-70%.
3. Ranking Criteria will be developed in accordance with the EQIP Manual (Part 515.72).
4. Ranking questions developed by the LWG will be written to clearly state the resource concern, condition or situation that currently exists, and the practice(s) or resource treatment that must be accomplished with the contract to earn the points associated with the question.
5. The local ranking questions will be structured so that the ranking can be completed without a field visit and by using a team-developed questionnaire that contains the necessary information to complete an in-office ranking. Each NRCS team will develop a questionnaire that can be used to gather enough information to rank an application. All applications will be ranked by the NRCS and peer reviewed to ensure consistency and fairness.

6. The ranking criteria shall be designed in a manner that avoids bias to any individual, group, or size of operation and that will allow applicants to compete fairly.
7. District Conservationists will work with their Area Program Liaison to develop their LWG's Ranking Tool in ProTracts. Submit only the changes you have made to your 2007 ranking.

#### Eligible Practices and Practice Hold-Downs:

Each LWG will develop an Eligible Practices List that will include the following items:

1. Practice hold-downs, if desired.
  - LWGs are encouraged to consider the effect of hold-downs on the overall success of the program. For simplicity, limit your hold down choices to the following amounts: \$5000, \$10,000, \$25,000, \$50,000, or \$75,000 per practice. If hold-downs are used, they will be for the contract length. Hold-downs on a per year basis are not permitted.
2. Rates and hold-downs to be used for beginning and limited resource farmers:
  - Certified limited resource producers and beginning farmers are allowed up to 90% cost-share. This will be automatically calculated in ProTracts.
3. The following rules are in effect for incentive payments in a contract:
  - Incentive payments for a given practice will be allowed for one to three years in a contract.
  - Residue management practices (329, 344, 345), must be scheduled for three consecutive years. Practices 590 and 595 must also be included in all contracts that have 329, 344 or 345 for the same three years.

- The following practices are considered incentive practices:

314	Brush Management
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till/Strip Till/Direct Seed
344	Residue Management, Seasonal
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Mulch Till
346	Residue and Tillage Management, Ridge Till
370	Atmospheric Resource Quality Management
449	Irrigation Water Management
472	Use Exclusion
528	Prescribed Grazing
585	Strip-cropping
590	Nutrient Management
595	Pest Management
633	Waste Utilization
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management

### EQIP Implementation Package

The EQIP Implementation Package will be submitted by each DC to the Assistant State Conservationist-Programs with a copy to the local Program Liaison by September 26, 2007. It shall include the following:

1. A narrative, not to exceed one page, describing the goals and objectives of the LWG.
2. FY 2008 ProTracts Ranking Tool. Area Program Liaisons will send a copy of the FY 2007 ranking tool, in spreadsheet format to each DC. The DC will make edits to questions, points, resource concerns and practices.
3. A description of funding pools (if used) and a plan describing how funds will be allocated, how applications will be selected, and how excess or insufficient funds in each pool will be managed;
4. An Eligible Practices List that includes:
  - Eligible practices
  - Practice hold-downs
5. Application/Inventory Questionnaire

Note - DCs do not need to send in a payment schedule spread sheet. The ProTracts payment schedule will be developed based on the statewide payment schedule and your Eligible Practices List.

## Process and Timeline

The following process and timeline shall be adhered to in the implementation of the FY 2008 EQIP plan:

DATE	ACTION
Sept. 28, 2007	LWG submits EQIP implementation package to the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs with a copy to your local Program Liaison.
Oct. 5, 2007	LWG EQIP implementation packages finalized by District Conservationist and program staff, approved by the State Conservationist and posted to WA NRCS website. Ranking Tools populated in ProTracts.
Oct. 9, 2007	Begin ranking <u>eligible</u> applications as soon as received. A cost estimate will be completed and entered in ProTracts for all ranked applications. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NRCS will rank <u>only</u> the applications that meet <u>all</u> program eligibility requirements and have been changed to "Eligible" status in ProTracts.</li><li>• An eligibility certification letter must be provided to each applicant who has incomplete eligibility information in ProTracts at the time of application (see attached letter).</li></ul>
Nov. 2, 2007	Applications received by close of business on November 2, 2007 will be considered for funding during the FY08 EQIP ranking period. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For applications received by Nov 2, 2007 that are not currently eligible, the applicant will have until Nov 16, 2007 to be eligible in ProTracts.</li></ul>
Nov. 16, 2007	Ranking and cost estimate for all <u>eligible</u> applications completed in ProTracts.
Nov. 20, 2007	Fund allocations will be made to each fund account (LWG, Tribal, and Wildfire) with <u>completed rankings</u> for <u>eligible applications</u> . Applications will be pre-approved up to the amount of the allocation and staff will proceed with contract development.
Apr. 11, 2008	All contracts of \$150,000 or more will be submitted through the Area Conservationist to the State Conservationist.
May 1, 2008	All contracts of \$150,000 or more will be submitted by the State Conservationist to the Regional Assistant Chief for approval.
May 16, 2008	EQIP contracts will be obligated as soon as ready. All EQIP contracts will be obligated by the Contracting Officers no later than May 16, 2008.