USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Farm Bill 2008

At a Glance:

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

July 2008

Overview

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) is a voluntary conservation program under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). AWEP provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to assist them in applying agricultural water enhancement activities that conserve ground and surface water and improve water quality on agricultural lands. NRCS may carry out AWEP by entering into contracts with agricultural producers who apply directly or through partnership agreements with entities that apply on behalf of agricultural producers.

Legislative Changes

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) establishes AWEP and replaces the Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program.

AWEP's purposes – to promote ground and surface water conservation and improve water quality – are achieved by having producers implement agricultural water enhancement activities. These include:

- Water quality or water conservation plan development, including resource condition assessment and modeling;
- Water conservation restoration or enhancement projects, including conversion to the production of less water-intensive agricultural commodities or dryland farming;
- Water quality or quantity restoration or enhancement projects;
- Irrigation system improvement or irrigation efficiency enhancement;
- Activities designed to mitigate the effects of drought; and
- Other related activities deemed by the Secretary to help achieve water quality or water conservation benefits on agricultural land.

An agricultural producer may apply directly to NRCS for financial or technical assistance to implement agricultural water enhancement activities. Producers who apply directly to NRCS must be eligible for EQIP and selected applications will be subject to applicable EQIP requirements.

A producer may also apply for AWEP assistance through an entity that submits a proposal on behalf of a group of agricultural producers. An eligible entity may be a Federally-recognized Tribe, State, unit of local government, agricultural or silvicultural association, or other such group of agricultural producers.

An application submitted by an entity is selected competitively and must include the following:

- Description of the geographic area to be covered by the agreement;
- Description of the agricultural water quality or water conservation issues to be covered by the agreement;
- Description of agricultural water enhancement objectives to be achieved through the partnership;
- Description of the partners collaborating to achieve the project objectives, as well as

the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of each partner; and
- Description of the program resources required for the project.

In evaluating an application, NRCS may give higher priority to proposals that:
- Include a high percentage of agricultural land and producers in an region or area;
- Result in high levels of applied agricultural water quality and water conservation activities;
- Significantly enhance agricultural activity;
- Allow for monitoring and evaluation;
- Assist producers in meeting a regulatory requirement;
- Include the conversion of agricultural land from irrigated farming to dryland farming; and
- Leverage Federal funds with those provided by the potential partner.

Authorized Funding Levels
The 2008 Farm Bill provides $73 million for fiscal years 2009 and 2010; $74 million for fiscal year 2011; and $60 million for fiscal year 2012 and each year thereafter.

More Information
For more information and updates about AWEP and other Farm Bill topics, please refer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Web site http://www.usda.gov/farmbill or the Natural Resources Conservation Service Web site http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awep.