



# Illinois Producer's Guide for EQIP

Environmental Quality Incentives Program



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## Introduction

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to enhance agricultural and forested lands and help producers comply with environmental regulations. Through EQIP contracts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides assistance to eligible farmers to protect soil, water, wildlife habitat, air quality, and related natural resources.

## A Producer's Guide to Assistance through EQIP

### The Planning and EQIP Process

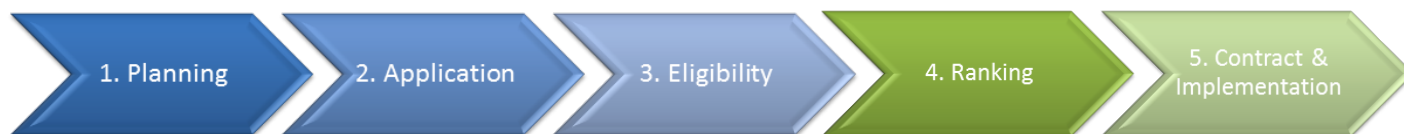
NRCS can assist if you want to address a resource concern on your land. NRCS will provide on-site planning assistance, discuss your goals, and evaluate the situation. We can explain how EQIP and other programs can provide assistance to address the resource concerns. NRCS will work with you to develop a conservation plan that identifies your needs.

Producers interested in EQIP can sign-up at any time by signing an application (NRCS-CPA-1200 form). The application form is available at your local NRCS field office or on the NRCS website.

After you submit an application, NRCS staff will evaluate the eligibility for EQIP. The NRCS staff will review your application answers and may ask questions. Using your conservation plan, NRCS will work on your application and explain program expectations.

A submitted EQIP application is not a guarantee of financial assistance to implement conservation practices. For eligible applications, the planned conservation practices and environmental benefit are evaluated with a series of questions and a ranking score is calculated from the answers. Applications with the highest priority and ranking score are selected first for funding, and then a contract is developed.

The contract will contain the practices you will be implementing and the payment rate amounts for each practice. Implementation of the conservation practice(s) can begin after a contract is finalized.



### EQIP Eligibility Requirements

EQIP applications are processed and evaluated by NRCS staff to check that you and the land are eligible for the program. When checking eligibility, some of the documentation must be reviewed by NRCS staff and you must ensure you can produce that documentation when requested. A few of the eligibility topics the NRCS staff will discuss with you are:

- Applicants must be a USDA customer and be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements.
- Applicants must have control of land for the length of the EQIP contract. Applicants must have the following documents during the application phase, before the contract is signed:
  - Landowners can produce control with a deed.
  - Tenants can show control with a lease. If you do not have a lease or it does not cover the length of the EQIP contract, you can have the landowner write a statement. The written statement should indicate the length you will have control, the land location/farm and tract numbers, the reason for giving control (i.e. NRCS program), the landowner's name, their signature, and the date they wrote the statement.
- Applicants who are a legal entity with a tax ID must provide NRCS the paperwork that shows who has signature authority for the entity and a DUNS number.
- When the applicant is a tenant and the contract includes the installation of structural or vegetative practices, permission from the landowner must be obtained. The acceptable types of permission includes: the landowner signing the contract or the landowner writing a statement authorizing the installation of structural or vegetative practices.

## Tips for Producers to Understand the Application Process

- Be active in the development of the conservation plan that will address your natural resource concerns.
- Review the conservation plan and schedule of operations (NRCS-CPA-1155) created by the NRCS field office before signing the contract (NRCS-CPA-1202), to ensure the plan is correct.
- Read the Appendix to Form NRCS-CPA-1202 (appendix) to fully understand the contract requirements.
- Be mindful that the EQIP contract is a legally binding agreement between the participant and the USDA. The applicant must understand the terms of the contract and agree to the terms by signing the contract.
- Do not start a practice until the contract has been finalized. The contract is considered finalized when you have signed the contract and then NRCS signs and obligates the funds.

## A Producer's Guide to the EQIP Contract

### Contract Implementation

After you sign the contract (NRCS-CPA-1202), NRCS will obligate funds for the identified practices and sign the contract. At this time, your contract is finalized and you can start practice implementation. The NRCS staff will provide job sheets, designs, or standards and specifications to help you understand the requirements for the practices before you begin implementation. NRCS will send reminder letters for the practices to implement each year and discuss implementation progress as the need arises throughout the year.

As the contract participant, you will receive a copy of your contract documents from the NRCS staff. The EQIP contract identifies the terms that the participant must carry out and includes the following responsibilities:

- Start or apply a conservation practice within the first 12 months after the contract is finalized.
- Ensure conservation practices are implemented in the timeframe indicated on the schedule of operations (NRCS-CPA-1155).
- Inform the NRCS field office immediately if circumstances arise that will cause a change to the contract or practice implementation.
- Install conservation practices to NRCS standards and specifications to receive the payment for practice installation.
- Install all conservation practices before the expiration date.
- Operate and maintain funded conservation practice(s) for their intent and lifespan, as identified on the schedule of operations (NRCS-CPA-1155) and operation and maintenance (O&M) agreement.
- Comply with all requirements as identified in the appendix.

### Contract Documents

The **contract (NRCS-CPA-1202)** is the agreement between NRCS and the contract participant(s). The contract and appendix describe the terms and conditions that the participant and NRCS must follow. The participant must implement and maintain the conservation practices identified in the schedule of operations (NRCS-CPA-1155) in accordance with NRCS standards and specifications. Upon practice implementation, NRCS will make payments to the participant(s) in the amount(s) described in the schedule of operations.

The **appendix** contains provisions of the contract that participants must follow. By signing the appendix, the participant(s) agrees to the terms and conditions.

The **schedule of operations (NRCS-CPA-1155)** is the plan for the EQIP contract. It identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, the land unit subject to the contract, and expiration date when all practice must be implemented. Each contract item contains the details and expectations of practice implementation, the payment rate for the practice amount planned, and length of practice maintenance. In addition to the schedule of operations a conservation plan map will be provided showing the location of planned practices.

### References:

#### Illinois NRCS programs website:

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/il/programs/financial/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/il/programs/financial/)

#### National NRCS website:

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/)

#### DUNS website:

<http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>

**DUNS/SAMS Fact Sheet** – available at the local NRCS office & on the IL NRCS EQIP website.