



United States Department of Agriculture

# News Release

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## **USDA-NRCS IN MISSISSIPPI ANNOUNCES ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM SIGN-UP**

**JACKSON, MS, September 29, 2023** — Kurt Readus, State Conservationist of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Mississippi, announced today the statewide deadline for the first application period of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding. While customers can apply year-round, this application deadline is for all general EQIP, including national and state initiatives. The national initiatives include On-Farm Energy Initiative, Longleaf Pine Initiative, Mississippi River Basin Initiative, National Water Quality Initiative, EQIP Conservation Incentives Contracts, Organic Transition Initiative, and Working Lands for Wildlife. The state initiatives include Migratory Bird Resurgence Initiative, Mississippi Surface Water Conservation Program, Concentrated Flow Initiative, Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry, StrikeForce 2.0 Initiative, Urban Agriculture Initiative, Soil Health Cropland Initiative, Soil Health Pastureland Initiative, High Tunnel Initiative, Small Ruminant Initiative, Feral Swine Initiative, Small Limited Resource Farmer Initiative, and Specialty Crop Initiative. All Mississippi agricultural producers and landowners who wish to be considered for this year's financial assistance in the first ranking period should apply by October 27, 2023.

“Through EQIP, NRCS provides agricultural producers and non-industrial forest managers with financial resources and one-on-one assistance to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls conservation practices,” said Mississippi's NRCS State Conservationist, Kurt Readus. “Producers can improve the health, productivity, resiliency, and profitability of their agricultural operations by using these practices.”

NRCS conservationists work with producers to assess the conservation needs on their land to identify resource concerns and opportunities, help determine objectives, and recommend solutions.

EQIP was initially established under the 1996 Farm Bill and reauthorized in the 2018 Farm Bill. Assistance is available to help producers and landowners plan and implement conservation practices to improve water quantity and quality, build healthier soil, improve grazing and forest lands, conserve energy, enhance organic operations, establish or improve wildlife habitat, and achieve other environmental benefits on cropland and pasture, forestland and associated agricultural land including farmsteads.

Popular practices include those that increase the use of agricultural water, manure handling, and storage systems, such as waste storage structures; soil health improvements, such as cover crops and no-till; pasture improvements, such as prescribed grazing and watering systems; forest improvement, such as forest stand improvement; and habitat improvement, such as early successional habitat management.

Interested producers can apply at their local USDA Service Center by submitting a *Conservation Program Application* (NRCS-CPA-1200). Participants in EQIP must meet eligibility requirements. NRCS conservationists will work with producers to determine eligibility and complete necessary worksheets and rankings for the applicant to compete for funding.

Recently, NRCS reminded historically underserved producers approved for funding through EQIP of the advanced payment option. This option allows them to get a portion of conservation practice payments in advance of the practice implementation.

A historically underserved producer is described as one of the following:

- **Beginning Farmer or Rancher** – is new to farming or ranching or has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10-consecutive years.
- **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher** – is a group member whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of that group without regard to their individual qualities.
- **Veteran Farmer or Rancher** – has served in the armed forces and has not operated a farm or ranch, has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10-consecutive years, or first obtained veteran status during the last ten years.
- **Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher** – has a household income at or below the national poverty level. Eligibility can be determined by using [this online tool](#).

Under the advance payment option, historically underserved producers may request payments when they have final designs and job sheets and are ready to begin their EQIP practices. Advance payments provide at least 50 percent of the payment rate for each practice. The funds must be spent within 90 days of receipt, and practices must be completed as agreed to in an EQIP plan of operations. The participant can directly assign the payment to contractors and vendors.

NRCS provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. More information on NRCS conservation programs can be found at <https://www.ms.usda.gov/> under the financial assistance tab.

**COVID-19 Guidance:** NRCS is under Covid-19 limitations. NRCS employees are limited in the amount of direct contact we can have with customers, both for your safety and ours. This does not mean field offices will not assist you. It only means that you may need to be more persistent and always contact the office by phone or email before making an office visit. We've provided a link to our online field office locator: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov>. By using this locator tool, applicants can find contact information for your local field office. COVID-19 is new for all of us, but we have found a way to operate and assist producers to treat environmental concerns.

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