

## **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary, conservation program administered by NRCS that can provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices that address natural resource concerns. The purpose of EQIP is to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals; to optimize environmental benefits; and to help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

### **EQIP Application Sign-up and Cut-off Dates**

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round, but establishes cutoff dates to make funding selections for eligible, screened, and ranked applications.

To be ready for EQIP funding consideration, interested applicants will need to: (1) Develop a conservation plan, (2) Submit an application, (3) Meet program eligibility requirements, and (4) Approve their 'EQIP schedule of operations'.

The time needed to complete a conservation plan and process eligibility can vary, from a few weeks to more than a month, depending on the complexity of the farming operation.

### **Develop a Conservation Plan**

A conservation plan includes all practices, regardless of the program's financial assistance, that a producer or landowner has agreed to adopt for the agricultural operation and/or associated agricultural lands. Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan.

### **Submitting an Application**

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing and submitting the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation or non-industrial private forest land.

### **Program Eligibility Requirements**

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

### **'EQIP schedule of operations'**

The basis for an application is the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and is derived from the applicant's conservation plan. The EQIP 'schedule of operations' identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, timing of the implementation, practice location, and payment rates.

### **EQIP Screening, Ranking and Funding**

EQIP funding decisions are based on an application evaluation process that includes screening tools and ranking criteria. Screening tools are worksheets used to prioritize an application based on factors such as: a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'. Ranking criteria considers the anticipated benefit of a conservation system, or practice, in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' to a natural resource

### **NRCS Field Office Contact Information**

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants should contact the NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

### **USDA-NRCS, Sutter County**

Yuba City Service Center  
(530) 674-1461  
Alan Atkins, District Conservationist

### **About the Bay-Delta Initiative for Lower Snake River EQIP Fund Pool**

The purpose of the Bay-Delta Initiative for the Lower Snake River is to minimize negative impacts to water quality within the Sutter County section of the Lower Feather River Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 18020159 that drains to the Lower Snake River, Wadsworth Canal, and Gilsizer Slough. These waterways are at risk of being added on the Clean Water Act (CWA) 303(d) listing as impaired. Impaired waterways do not sufficiently attain or maintain water quality standards for pollutants.

Lower Snake River had three 2011 exceedances for organophosphate pesticides and is a potential candidate to be listed on the CWA 303(d) list as an impaired waterway. Both Wadsworth Canal and Gilsizer Slough are 303 (d) listed as impaired for pesticides with agriculture as the potential source. Specifically, Wadsworth Canal is listed for Chlorpyrifos exceedance, the Gilsizer Slough listed for Oxyfluorfen exceedances, and both waterways are listed for Diazinon exceedances.

Oxyfluorfen is a herbicide used for broad spectrum pre- and post-emergent control of annual broadleaf and grassy weeds in a variety of tree fruit, nut, vine, and field crops. The largest agricultural markets for Oxyfluorfen are wine grapes and almonds. Diazinon is pesticide applied to orchards growing plums, peaches, and almonds to control destructive pests such as spider mites, boring insects, and aphids.

In addition to pest management, other contributing factors to organophosphate in surface waters include stormwater and irrigation water runoff and concentrated flow erosion across croplands. This initiative provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers who are willing to improve irrigation systems, implement irrigation water management, pest management, and adopt vegetative filtering practices on irrigated cropland.

The Bay-Delta Initiative for the Lower Snake River is targeted specifically to irrigated agricultural operations that have the capacity to adopt and apply:

- Water conservation on irrigated cropland with emphasis on improved irrigation water management.
- Water quality improvements on irrigated cropland with emphasis on improved pest management and year round erosion control.

This initiative can provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in the target area who are willing to improve water quality by implementing conservation practices on agricultural operations.

### Land Uses for the Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address resource concerns on at least one land use type listed below will be considered for financial assistance from this Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- **Crop:** Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- **Farmstead:** Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities.
- **Associated Agricultural Lands:** Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as – odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.
- **Irrigated:** Where an operational irrigation system is present and managed to supply irrigation water.

### Resource Concerns for the Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concerns listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are general NRCS natural resource definitions, applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- ❖ **INSUFFICIENT WATER** – Water resources are not optimally managed to support ecological processes, land use objectives and/or water conservation goals.
  - **Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water:** Irrigation water is not stored, delivered, scheduled and/or applied efficiently. Aquifer or surface water withdrawals threaten sustained availability of ground or surface water. Available irrigation water supplies have been reduced due to aquifer depletion, competition, regulation and/or drought.
- ❖ **WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.
  - **Excess Nutrients in Surface Water:** Nutrients, organic and inorganic, are transported to receiving surface waters through runoff in quantities that degrade water quality. Increased nitrogen and phosphorus levels in water can produce excessive aquatic vegetation and algal blooms resulting in reduced dissolved oxygen, harmful toxins, and increased water temperature.
  - **Pesticides Transported to Surface Water:** Pest control chemicals are transported to receiving surface waters in quantities that degrade water quality. Pesticides typically enter surface water when rainfall or irrigation exceeds the infiltration capacity of soil and resulting runoff transports pesticides to streams, rivers, and other surface-water bodies.

### Eligible NRCS Conservation Practices

All conservation practices planned for financial assistance must be included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and address a resource concern in the applicant's conservation plan. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

Every application approved for funding must include at least one core practice unless the contract will complete a conservation system that supports core practices documented as applied for the land.

- Core conservation practices are critical to addressing the targeted resource concern(s) for this Bay-Delta Initiative and achieving the desired environmental outcome(s).
- Supporting practices are those practices needed to make the core practices function properly or to address a specific site or condition related to the identified resource concern(s).

All applications selected for financial assistance through this Bay-Delta Initiative must include documentation that an alternative containing the core practices was presented to the decision-maker.

For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link for NRCS conservation practice standards:

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11\\_001020](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020)

**Table 1. Core Conservation Practices**

Practice Code	Core Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
422	Hedgerow Planting	ft	15
449	Irrigation Water Management	ac	1
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1
595	Integrated Pest Management	ac	1

**Table 2. Supporting Conservation Practices**

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan
320	Irrigation Canal or Lateral	ft	15
386	Field Border	ac	10
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	ft	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
412	Grassed Waterway	ac	10
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
436	Irrigation Reservoir	ac-ft	15
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
442	Sprinkler System	ac	15
447	Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery <sup>1</sup>	no	15
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ft	15

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20

<sup>1</sup>Conservation practice, 447 – Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery, is an irrigation tailwater recovery system based on eligible component practices. Practice payment rates for conservation practice, 447 – Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery, will be based on eligible practice components.

