

# **Application Evaluation and Program Ranking**

**Guidance for Developing Ranking Tools  
For Effective and Consistent Application Ranking**

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## Purpose of this Manual

The purpose of this manual is to provide business information on the setup and use of the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool for the following programs: Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

## Ranking Process

### Background

Any applicant who has eligible land may submit an application for participation in EQIP, WHIP, or AMA. The State Conservationist, in consultation with the State Technical Committee and local work groups, will develop ranking tools to prioritize and subsequently fund applications addressing priority natural resource concerns. The State Conservationist or Designated Conservationist will periodically select the highest ranked applications for funding, based on applicant eligibility and the NRCS ranking process. Development of ranking tools should consider the following:

- ❖ Degree of cost-effectiveness of the proposed conservation practices;
- ❖ Magnitude of the environmental benefits resulting from the treatment of national priorities reflecting the level of performance of proposed conservation practices;
- ❖ Magnitude of the environmental benefits resulting from the treatment of priority resource concerns reflecting the level of performance of proposed conservation practices;
- ❖ Treatment of multiple resource concerns;
- ❖ Use of conservation practices that provide environmental enhancements for a longer period of time;
- ❖ Compliance with Federal, state, local or tribal regulatory requirements with regards to natural resources; and
- ❖ Other locally defined pertinent factors.

## Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool

The Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool, integrated with ProTracts, provides a consistent framework, both across the NRCS and across the programs of EQIP, WHIP, and AMA to implement the application ranking process. The framework includes the following functions:

- ❖ Cost effectiveness tools using Practice Average Cost data (PAC in SmarTech)
- ❖ Comparison of environmental benefits using Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE in SmarTech)
- ❖ Selection of resource concerns (in ProTracts Manage Ranking Criteria)
- ❖ Magnitude of benefits and cost effectiveness (from the efficiency weighting factor)
- ❖ Consideration of national priorities and state and local issues (in ProTracts Manage Ranking Criteria)

These elements integrate in the application evaluation process with the ranking tool in ProTracts. States must use the Ranking Tools for all EQIP, AMA, and WHIP applications in all field offices beginning 10/1/06 per policy in [National Bulletin 300-5-13](#). Program applications for EQIP, AMA or WHIP cannot be approved in ProTracts without being ranked by the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool.

## Integration of Tools

The Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool is accessed through ProTracts and is directly integrated with CPPE and PAC in SmarTech. The Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) application is also coupled with these applications. State data steward permissions for CPS are granted to all enrolled ProTracts users with state level permissions. This manual section explains how changes in these integrated tools impact the ranking tool criteria and ranking results.

CPS practice status impacts the results by:

- ❖ Determining the list of eligible practices for selection in the Manage Ranking tool setup.
  - When the state data steward(s) activates new practice standards or deactivates retired practice standards, it changes the eligible practice choices in the Manage Ranking Tool practice choice list.
- ❖ Controlling which practices are eligible to be uploaded in a ProTracts cost list.
  - Any changes to CPS after a cost list is uploaded successfully to ProTracts will not filter out practices for contracts or modifications that are no longer active but will not permit upload of new cost lists with inactive practices.
- ❖ Controlling which practices are in the choice list for planning when accessed through the Toolkit domain data.
- ❖ Controlling the practice life span which is used in efficiency score.
- ❖ Changing life span of practices in CPS has the potential to impact efficiency scores in the ranking tool even if the CPS changes are made after the ranking tool is released.

- ❖ If practice data is changed in CPS after the ranking tools are released, applications that were ranked must be ranked again to permit consistent evaluation of applications.

#### Considerations & Ideas:



- ❖ State leaders for Technology and Programs should consider coordinating changes to the CPS practice list. Potential considerations for implementing CPS changes may include timing changes for fiscal year consistency, quality assurance considerations for programmatic or operational reviews, and the impacts to program ranking periods due to integration with other business tools.

**New for 2007:** A “snapshot” of the CPPE and PAC is taken when a ranking tool is released. Any changes to CCPE and PAC will not impact a released ranking tool, unless the tool is returned to draft status, edited, and the changes to the ranking tool are saved. This gives states the flexibility to make necessary changes to CPPE to remain aligned with eFOTG and adjust to new technical information in CPPE after the ranking tools are released for the year.

## Managing SmarTech



#### SmarTech Modules

-  [Conservation Practice Physical Effects](#)
-  [Practice Average Costs](#)

SmarTech is a software framework that integrates numerous conservation technology tools and helps share information between the tools. Access to SmarTech is available from

both the Programs or Technology tabs on the my.nrcs website or directly at <https://smartech.sc.egov.usda.gov/>. Practice Average Cost and Conservation Practice Physical Effects data used in the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool are entered and maintained in SmarTech.

[National Bulletin 300-5-12](#) explains the types of data that need to be developed by states for the ranking of EQIP contracts, but the general guidance is also applicable to AMA and WHIP. Note that all populated data for the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool needs to conform to the applicable Field Office Technical Guide(s).

## Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE)

- ❖ Edit permissions for CPPE are limited to employee’s home state when they have ProTracts permission level “State Program Manager.” Permissions are generally granted by the ProTracts State Coordinator.
- ❖ When similar impacts are anticipated from different practices for the same resource concern, the quantitative values need to be comparable in CPPE otherwise application ranking scores may differ.
- ❖ It is recommended that states use a cross-discipline team to develop and validate the CPPE data, and are encouraged to conduct cross-state boundary discussions to ensure consistency across geo-political boundaries as appropriate.
- ❖ Practices having zero impact have insignificant or neutral impacts, and may be appropriate for some practices. However, it is important to understand that the CCPE impact is multiplied by the practice lifespan as a component of the [efficiency score](#). States should review whether practices with zero impact are appropriately included in the list of eligible practices for a particular ranking tool.

Example scenario: Inequitable CPPE scoring for resource concerns

Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) and Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) have very similar resource concern impacts. However, Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) is listed as having a positive impact on T& E concerns. In contrast, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) is shown to have no impact on T&E species, with an impact value of zero. The CPPE values for these two practices should have been similar since they treat the same resource concerns at similar levels. Care should be taken when assigning CPPE values for conservation practices that have similar impacts, to ensure that they are assigned similar impact values to equalize ranking impacts on producer applications.

If Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) provides a positive impact to Habitat Fragmentation concerns, it may warrant consideration to select the same value for related resource concerns such as Inadequate Cover/Shelter.



Conservation Practice Physical Effects				
State:	<input type="text"/>	Resource Concern Category:	Fish and Wildlife	<input type="button" value="Go"/>
Resource Concern	Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)	Tree/Shrub Pruning (660)	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)	Use Exclusion (472)
Imbalance Among and Within Populations	0	0	2	0
Inadequate Cover/Shelter	0	0	3	0
Inadequate Food	1	0	3	0
Inadequate Space	0	0	0	0
Inadequate Water	0	0	1	0
Threatened and Endangered Fish and Wildlife Species	3	2	0	0
Habitat Fragmentation	2	1	2	3
T&E Species: Declining Species, Species of Concern	0	0	0	0



## Practice Average Costs (PAC)

- ❖ Guidance on development of appropriate PACs is available in a separate document on the programs page of my.nrcs under Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool
- ❖ Costs should be entered to reflect the average cost of the typical practice amount being implemented in a state, not for the actual practice reporting unit e.g.- foot, number, acre.
  - Example: terrace - \$18,000 would be entered as the average cost per typical practice amount (10,000 feet) being installed not \$1.80 which is reporting unit per foot cost. This cost is for comparing the efficiency of one practice with another.
- ❖ When practices reporting units are per foot and others per number or per acre the only consistent way of comparing overall practice efficiency is to compare practices on an equal scale using the cost of the typical practice amount being implemented. This aligns practice costs at a uniform level for comparing efficiency. Practice costs in the cost list for contracting purposes however will remain by actual practice reporting unit.
- ❖ Edit permissions for PAC are limited to an employee’s home state when they have ProTracts permission level “State Program Manager.” Permissions are generally granted by the ProTracts State Coordinator.
- ❖ It is recommended that states utilize a cross-discipline team to develop and validate the PAC data, and are encouraged to conduct cross state boundary discussions to ensure consistency across geo-political boundaries as appropriate.

**Tools for Calculating Practice Average Cost**

-  [Ranking Tool Cost Instructions](#)
-  [Ranking Cost Calculator](#)

**New for 2007:** The 2006 PAC data has been copied forward for your use and editing to reflect appropriate values for 2007. In the future, a copy feature will be added to the PAC application to allow the copying and subsequent editing of prior year cost data.

Practice Average Costs									
State: <input type="text"/>		<input type="button" value="Go"/>		<input type="button" value="Save"/>		<input type="button" value="Cancel"/>		<input type="button" value="Export"/>	
Code	Practice	Units	Current FY 2006		Average Costs from Prior Fiscal Years				
					N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
560	Access Road	ft	\$	0.00					
702	Agrichemical Mixing Facility	no	\$	0.00					
311	Alley Cropping	ac	\$	0.00					

- ❖ The N/A column indicates that the data was not copied from a prior year.

## Manage Ranking Criteria

Ranking Criteria | Ranking Tools | Save

Program:   
WHIP  
AMA

Fiscal Year:

State:

There are two distinct activities under Manage Ranking Criteria.

1. **Ranking Criteria** is used to create the master choice list of land uses, resource concerns, and practices that can be used in any of the ranking tools.
2. **Ranking Tools** is used to refine and limit the master choices in the Ranking Criteria to target the land use, resource concerns, and effective practices for a specific ranking tool. National, state, and local questions; point ranges; and efficiency factors are set up in the Ranking Tools section.

## Ranking Criteria

*Manage Ranking Criteria*

Ranking Criteria | Ranking Tools | Save

Program:

Fiscal Year:

State:

Land Use Master List

Resource Concern Master List

Eligible Practices Master List

### Selection of Land Use

- ❖ Refer to the NRCS land use designations in the National Planning Procedures Manual 180 [600.31\(c\)](#). to select the appropriate land uses and to ensure consistency between the selection of land uses in Managing Ranking Criteria and their selection in the Rank Application step in ProTracts.

### Selection of Resource Concerns

- ❖ States should coordinate the selection of resource concerns for practices to ensure consistency among area and field offices.
- ❖ States should prioritize their resource concerns to emphasize the most significant ones, and should consider limiting the scope of the choice list in each ranking tool to those concerns that are clearly designated priorities in the associated ranking questions.

## Selection of Eligible Practices

- ❖ Select only the practices that are appropriate for the ranking tools being developed.

## Ranking Tool

### Main Toolbar

### Ranking Tools

Ranking Tools				
New   Edit   Copy   Release   Print   Delete				
ProTracts Sub Account	Sub Account Status	Ranking Tool	Ranking Tool Status	Release Date
State AFO/CAFO 2007	Released			

The **Ranking Tools** menu bar is used to create a **New** ranking tool or **Edit** an existing ranking tool, **Copy** one tool to another, **Release** tools for Application Ranking, **Print** a blank ranking sheet, or Delete a tool that was incorrectly developed or will not be used for ranking.

### Copy

#### Copy Ranking Tools

Copy a draft or released ranking tool from the fiscal year  to a blank ranking tool.

Select a draft or released ranking tool from the year selected above:

- Colorado River - Riparian
- Colorado River - Water Quality/Quantity
- Colorado River - Water Quality/Waste Mgmt.
- EQIP - General FA
- EQIP - GSWC FA
- GSWC - Lower Arkansas
- Gunnison-Dolores - Water Quality/Quantity
- Lower Arkansas - Wildlife
- North Platte/White/Yampa-Water Quality/Quantity

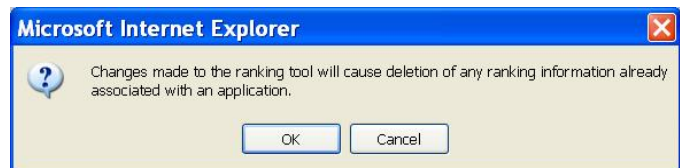
Select a sub account that needs a ranking tool for program FY 07:

- Yampa River - Riparian
- Yampa River - Water Quality/Quantity
- Gunnison-Dolores - Riparian
- Lower Arkansas - Riparian

**New for 2007:** This function provides the option to copy a ranking tool from one sub account into another sub account or from a prior fiscal year to current fiscal year. This new utility allows the user to create specific ranking tools and funding pools for narrowly-defined resource needs, with the efficiency of copying, and subsequently editing the ranking tools. There continues to be a one-to-one relationship between sub accounts and ranking tools.

### Releasing Ranking Tools

- ❖ All ranking tools should have a thorough review for accuracy and completeness before being released for use.
- ❖ If a ranking tool is used to rank applications and is subsequently edited (returned to draft status) after it has been released and used, all applications associated with that ranking tool will have to be re-ranked.



- ❖ Editing a released tool generates this displayed message. If no changes are made, the tool remains released and there is no negative impact to applications and no need to re-rank.

### **Print**

**New for 2007:** A blank ranking tool worksheet can be printed for hard copy review, testing and evaluating, quality control, etc. A similar function is available from the Rank Application menu and is useful to generate a hard copy to take to the field to complete.

### **Considerations & Ideas**

- ❖ Can use the **Save As** feature to export an electronic copy for posting on state program web site for public access to the ranking criteria.

### **Creating Individual Ranking Tools**



This menu is accessed by selecting either New or Edit on the main Ranking Tool toolbar, shown [on previous page](#). It has seven key areas for customizing criteria, unique to a specific ranking tool. These items can be set up in any order, by selecting the desired option from the toolbar. The description and guidance for each menu option can be reached from the hot links below:

- ❖ [Description/Land Uses \(including Efficiency Score Weighting\)](#)
- ❖ [Resource Concerns](#)
- ❖ [Practices](#)
- ❖ [National Priorities](#)
- ❖ [State Issues](#)
- ❖ [Local Issues](#)
- ❖ [Results Text](#)

In addition there are two tools to streamline ranking tool development:

- ❖ [Insert](#)
- ❖ [Selection Summary](#)

### **Guidance on Weighting of all Ranking Factors**

Careful consideration should be given to the weighting effect of the multipliers of the national priorities, state and local issues, and cost efficiency factors within each ranking tool. No minimum levels have been set within the software, but weights should be given to each factor; no factor should receive a weighting of zero.

The 2002 Farm Bill (PL 107-171, Subtitle D, Section D, Sec 1240(c)) states, "in evaluating applications for cost-share payments and incentive payments, the Secretary shall accord a higher priority to assistance and payments that:

1. Encourage the use by producers of cost-effective conservation practices.
2. Address national conservation priorities."

NRCS has established guidelines for the final rule for EQIP (Part 404(515.82(b)) that should be critically evaluated when developing the ranking tool multipliers and when ranking applications as follows:

- ❖ The degree of cost effectiveness of the proposed conservation practices.
- ❖ The magnitude of the environmental benefits, resulting from the treatment of national priorities, with the applications resulting in the greatest environmental improvements receiving a higher ranking.
- ❖ The resource concerns, listed in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), specific to the area being proposed for treatment and the associated national priority(s) addressed by this treatment.

### Guidance on Efficiency Score Weighting

Efficiency Score Multiplier		Save
Efficiency Score Multiplier:	<input type="text"/>	Scoring Ranges:

- ❖ States should consider the benefits of cost efficiency of conservation practices in the evaluation of applications.
- ❖ EQIP rules require that the degree of cost efficiency must be evaluated and considered in all ranking systems.
- ❖ Cost efficiency ensures that the applications selected for funding are providing the most benefit for the cost associated with the conservation practices to be implemented.
- ❖ States should set a value for the multiplier for cost efficiency that will be meaningful as a determining factor for the conservation practices being requested.
- ❖ States should review scoring from the test year as a means of determining the proper value for the multiplier.
- ❖ The efficiency score takes values from the CPPE matrix concern and cost information from the Practice Average Cost table to weigh the effect of a conservation practice on solving resource concerns.
- ❖ The efficiency score equation is:

$$\left( \frac{\text{CPPE practice effect} \times \text{practice service life}}{\text{Sum of associated PAC}} \right) \times \text{Cost efficiency multiplier}$$

- ❖ A guidance document for development and evaluating efficiency score multipliers is available at <https://my.nrcs.usda.gov/PortalStatic/EQIP/EfficiencyScoreCalculations>

### Guidance on Resource Concerns

- ❖ States are encouraged to set up separate funding pools for evaluating each major resource concern.
- ❖ There is potential that including all possible resource concerns for a resource management system may result in the funding of low priority resource concerns.

- ❖ States should gather input from local work groups and state technical committees to determine the factors used in the evaluation of resource concerns.
- ❖ Evaluation of resource concerns should be on a size-neutral basis so that the ranking is fair and equitable to all size operations and so as not to exclude any nontraditional participants based on the size of the operation.

#### Considerations & Ideas:

- ❖ State program managers and state technical leaders are encouraged to exchange ideas and evaluation methods for resource concerns common across state lines.

#### **Guidance on Practices**

- ❖ Select only the practices that are appropriate for the ranking tool being developed.
- ❖ Review and evaluate the CPPE to determine that the practices being selected have suitable impact ratings in the CPPE.

#### Considerations & Ideas:

- ❖ For management practices having several tier levels, States will need to develop additional questions to address the benefits of each level and will need to assign higher points for those practices that demonstrate additional levels of treatment.
  - For instance, if the state has multiple levels (components) of nutrient management payments, based on the level of management, only the average is used to assign the PAC. Therefore, the State should develop appropriate State Issue questions that will assign higher points to those components that have higher management in order to distinguish between the levels.
- ❖ States may want to consider adding questions for additional points to compensate for management practices with short life spans.
  - For instance, management practices are often high-cost, short-life practices relative to other practices. Therefore, States should develop appropriate State Issue questions to provide additional points to compensate for practices with short life spans. One example is "Does the application propose to contract irrigation water management?"

#### **Guidance on National Priorities**

- ❖ The meaning of "considerable", when addressing national priorities, means that a practice has a positive CPPE value for the resource concerns being addressed by the national priority.
- ❖ States are to ensure that national priorities will be applied consistently across all application rankings.
- ❖ The degree to which a state addresses national priorities in its ranking systems will be used as one of the factors in to determining state performance awards. This assessment will include the percent of the acres

obligated in contracts that address national priority resource concerns compared to the total acres that address all resource concerns.

- ❖ All National Priority questions must be given a point value greater than zero

### ***Benchmark and Planned Conditions for Ranking State and Local Issues***

- ❖ States should develop a series of questions to cover the various ranges in the difference between benchmark and planned conditions.
- ❖ It is suggested that States vary the points based on the degree of change. Increased points should be provided for conditions that provide additional benefits.

### ***Considerations & Ideas:***

- ❖ States may wish to consider use of a Wildlife Habitat Assessment Model or Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) to measure the difference between existing conditions and planned future conditions. The greater the difference between base and planned conditions the higher the ranking. HSI can be based on:
  - Land type such as forest, cropland, grassland, shrub land, or wetland
  - Individual species models, such as meadowlark, New England cottontail, and bobwhite quail.
- ❖ States should develop appropriate State Issue questions that provide for the various levels of potential benefits.
  - For instance, if the State will use an index that determines percentage of improvements, then the State Issue questions should have questions specific to the level of percentage change (5% increments, 10%, etc.) as determined to be important within the program goals of the State.

### ***Guidance on State Issues***

- ❖ States need to ensure that state priorities are applied consistently in all rankings.
- ❖ States should consider developing and issuing supplemental guidance as well as conducting training, on how to develop succinct and unambiguous State questions for the ranking tool and how to interpret the questions consistently.
- ❖ States should include identifiable resource benefits that further define the degree that the national priorities are being addressed, essentially 'tiering' state issues to further define national priorities for specific state resource concerns.

### ***Considerations & Ideas:***

- ❖ Preface each question by the national resource concern heading (e.g. Water Quality) to assist in grouping like concerns together.
- ❖ Supplement this manual with state specific guidance on ranking criteria and develop instructional materials for the implementation of ranking systems or develop hot links to state on-line guidance resources.

- ❖ States are encouraged to develop State Issue questions in a number and manner, including varied point assignments for the questions, thereby maximizing the point spread of ranked applications and minimizing ties between applications. A section of State Issue questions with five (5) questions at five (5) points each for a total of 25 points does not provide the same opportunity for separating applications apart in the ranking process that thirty (30) questions at varied points for a total of 200 points would.
- ❖ For management practices that have several tier levels, States may need to develop additional questions to address the benefits of each level and assign higher points for those practices demonstrating additional levels of treatment.
  - For instance, if the state has multiple levels (components) of nutrient management payments, based on the level of management, only a single average payment is used to assign the PAC. Therefore the State should develop appropriate State Issue questions that will assign higher points to those components that have higher management in order to distinguish between the levels.
- ❖ States may choose to add questions for additional points to compensate for management practices with short life spans.
  - For instance, management practices, in relation to other practices, are high-cost, short-life practices. Therefore, States should develop appropriate State Issue questions to provide additional points to compensate. One example is "Does the application propose to contract irrigation water management?"

### **Guidance on Local Issues**

- ❖ Local resource concerns will be solicited from local work groups and state technical committees, and approved by the state conservationist
- ❖ Local issues should be a reflection of the national priorities and state issues being implemented at the local level.
- ❖ The copy feature facilitates county rankings that are consistent with national priorities, state issues, and cost efficiency, while allowing flexibility at the local level where local funding pools have been utilized.
- ❖ States should consider developing and issuing supplemental guidance as well as conducting training on both how to develop succinct and unambiguous local questions for the ranking tool and how to interpret the questions consistently.

**New for 2007:** Use of local issues is optional to facilitate development of ranking tools to be used for addressing national priorities and state issues.

### **Considerations & Ideas:**

- ❖ Preface each question by a consistent resource concern heading (e.g. Water Quality) to assist in grouping similar concerns together
- ❖ Supplement this manual for specific guidance on local ranking criteria, develop instructional materials for the implementation of ranking systems, and develop hot links to state on-line guidance resources.



## Guidance on Results Text

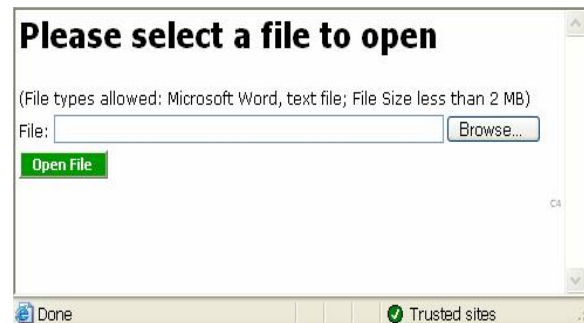
### Considerations & Ideas:

- ❖ Consider making the ranking results text as specific as possible to provide the applicant with precise information as to how each of the four sections of the ranking is scored.
- ❖ Consider providing the scoring range in the ranking results text to the applicant, thereby providing the applicant a better understanding of how their application scored.

The screenshot shows a web interface titled "Ranking Results Text". At the top, there are navigation tabs: "Results Text", "Description/Land Uses", "Resource Concerns", "Practices", "Local Issues", and "State Issues". Below the tabs, there is a "< Previous" link. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled "Local Issues: High Score" and contains the text: "High score range for this element is 120-85 points. Applications evaluated in this scoring range using this ranking tool represent those projects deemed high priority by the local working group to address the resource concerns in the Baby Bear and Papa Bear watersheds." The right column is titled "Medium Score" and contains the text: "Applications should not result in medium ranking score. Medium priority applications (as designated by LWG decision) entered in ProTracts will be evaluated based on ranking score after all High priority applications have been funded in the state." Both columns have vertical scroll bars on their right sides.

### Inserting a File:

**New for 2007:** Ranking tool descriptions and summary text can be developed in a separate text document and then use Insert to copy and paste text into the ranking tool. Creating and editing the results text in a separate tool (Word) prior to logging into the ranking tool allows faster completion of the Results Text screen. It also reduces the likelihood of encountering a session timeout.



### Selection Summary

- ❖ The selection summary is a tool to view everything that has been selected and is a method for determining if the ranking tool contains the intended information on resource concerns.

### Requirements for Providing access to Rank Applications

- The county or servicing office of the application must be linked to a sub-account.
- The sub-account associated with the ranking tool must have been released.
- The ranking tool must be released (draft ranking tools cannot be accessed by the field.)

## Rank Applications

The ability to rank applications is accessed through ProTracts **View Application**.

United States Department of Agriculture  
NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

ProTracts Program Contracts System

Tools Applications Contracts Cost Lists Forms Funds Reports Contact Us Help Log Off Session ends in 30 minutes if not active. # Active Sessions: 3

### EQIP 2002 Application

Application Applicant Info **Ranking** Delete Application Print Save

Program: EQIP 2002 Signup Date: 10/20/2006 Status: Preapproved Date: 11/28/06 Planner: Michael

Application FY: 2007 Signup Number: Application Number: 748E496A426 Estimated Cost: \$9,525.00 Application Cost: \$8,588.00

Location: PARK Servicing Office: PROGRAM DELIVERY POINT

Applicants: PATRICIA FA Fund Code: County Allocations - Irrigation

Ranking Score: ReRank

The **Rank Application** on the Application screen is active when the following information has been entered for the application and saved:

- **Program** = EQIP 2002, WHIP, or AMA
- Application status is **Pending** or **Eligible**
- **Program** FY >= 2007
- **Applicant** has been selected from SCIMS
- **Fund Code** has been selected
- **Livestock** question has been answered for EQIP applications

## Participant Signatures on Ranking Sheets

- ❖ All participants will receive their application ranking score from the appropriate administrative office responsible for the ranking.
- ❖ Applications approved for contracting require participant signature(s) on the ranking sheet before contract development begins.
- ❖ All other ranking sheets, such as deferred or cancelled, will not need to be signed by the participant unless specifically required by the State Conservationist.

## Considerations & Ideas:

- ❖ The signed ranking sheet is an additional requirement that must be met before manually checking the "other" box on applicant eligibility.

Ranking Score: 256.82

Application Priority: Medium

Tracking Code: 28663

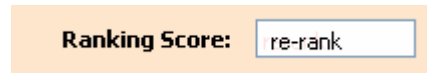
## Options for Tie Breaking

### Considerations & Ideas:

- ❖ To avoid tie breakers use a varied levels of points, based on the level of treatment or benefit, to create a greater point spread among the range of scores.
- ❖ To reduce the number of ties, use a greater number of questions, points, and variable levels of points.
- ❖ Use the Tracking Code function available within ProTracts. This option is available for each of the programs. Generally, state program managers or others assigned the role-based permission can assign tracking codes. This utility assigns tracking codes to applications after an application signup period ends and should be done only once per signup period. The tracking code is a random number assigned to each application for a fiscal year. Tracking codes can be used to break ties between applications with equal ranking scores. If two or more applications have the same ranking score and priority, the applications are then sorted by tracking code.

### What triggers “re-rank”

- ❖ If a ranking tool used to evaluate an application is edited (returned to draft status) after it has been released, all applications associated with that ranking tool **must** be re-ranked.
- ❖ Promoting a deferred application causes all ranking information associated with the application to be deleted.
- ❖ Since fund codes are tied to specific ranking tools, changing a fund code requires a re-ranking.

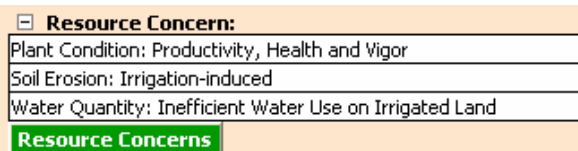


### Application Status Rules

- ❖ Only applications that have met all eligibility criteria (land and producer) should be ranked.
- ❖ An application may be ranked more than one time with the same tool, if the contract status is **pending** or **eligible**. Only the latest ranking data is saved. Historical ranking data is not saved.
- ❖ Applications, having a status of **pre-approved** or **approved** cannot be re-ranked without first using Manage Applications to change the status to **eligible** or **pending**.
- ❖ Promoting a **deferred** application causes all ranking information associated with the application to be deleted. States should not promote deferred applications until all potential appeals have been exhausted.

### Resource Concerns

**New for 2007:** Resource concerns are generated directly from the ranking tool and are now un-editable. Resource concerns can only be changed by re-ranking the application and selecting new concerns.



## Practices

- ❖ Practices that are selected for the application ranking process must be the same as the practices that are contracted (contract items). The ProTracts rule checker compares the practice codes of the contract items with the practices that were selected for ranking. If the practices match, then the rule checker continues checking the application.
- ❖ If a practice is selected for ranking, but the application has no corresponding contract item, the rule checker will display a warning message such as: "Nutrient Management was selected for application ranking, but the application has no corresponding contract item. This practice must be added to the application." Applications will not pass the rule checker until the practices match.
- ❖ If the application has one or more contract items for practices that were not ranked, the rule checker will display a warning message such as: "Contract item(s) 5, 9, 11 are for practices that were not selected for application ranking. You must re-rank the application with these practices." Application will not pass the rule checker until the practices match.

## Training and Support

### Where to get Help

- ❖ Questions, comments, and requests for training that originate from field users should be directed to state-designated support staff, and resolved at that level whenever possible.
- ❖ Questions, comments, and requests that have been raised by field users to the state-designated support staff and are unresolved, or those that originate at the state level should be directed by the state-designated contact to the appropriate national support desk, national program manager, software application sponsor, or national business tool contact for resolution.

Following this protocol, national contacts are as follows:

- ❖ Questions on the topics in this Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool manual specific to effective program ranking on AMA, EQIP or WHIP should be sent to the respective program manager for each program.
- ❖ Questions on appropriate setup and functions of the Practice Average Cost and the efficiency multiplier should be sent to NRCS National Economist.
- ❖ Business issues not referenced above should be sent to the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool sponsor.

The Help Menu documentation for using the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool software use is accessed through the standard ProTracts help menus within the ProTracts application or directly at <http://pro.nrcs.usda.gov/ProTracts/RoboHelp/GetStarted.htm>.

Questions on software errors or malfunctions using the ranking tool on applications within ProTracts should be sent to [ProTractsSupport@ftc.usda.gov](mailto:ProTractsSupport@ftc.usda.gov).

Online resources including this manual, replays of national teleconferences, new training and support resources are available from the Programs tab of my.nrcs at

<https://my.nrcs.usda.gov/program.aspx>

- ❖ States should periodically evaluate the ranking process to determine if the process is resulting in applications being selected for contracts that best meet the program objectives and make any identified improvements in any subsequent ranking tools.
- ❖ States should develop a training and implementation plan for the use of the ranking tool.



