

# 2011 Environmental Quality Incentives Program Proposal

## Local Work Group Summary for the Las Cruces Field Office

### Introduction:

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Las Cruces Field Office is located within the Chihuahuan Desert of Southern New Mexico. The field office provides assistance to the Dona Ana Soil and Water Conservation District and the Dona Ana County agricultural producers. The land area of the county is approximately 2,435,000 acres or 3,804 square miles. Approximately 1,822,000 acres (75%) of the total acres in Dona Ana County are managed by the BLM or other federal agencies and approximately 287,000 acres (12%) are administered by the New Mexico State Land Office. The deeded or private land in the county is around 326,000 acres (13%). Dona Ana County averages 8 to 10 inches of annual precipitation, the majority of which falls during July, August and September through high-intensity, short duration thunderstorms. The Mesilla Valley of Dona Ana County is the primary area for irrigated crops with approximately 90,000 acres under irrigation. Primary crops grown in the county are alfalfa, silage corn, cotton, chile, winter and spring vegetables, sorghum, and pecans. There are also working cow/calf cattle ranches and numerous dairies in Dona Ana County.

### Local Work Group:

The Local Work Group (LWG) met on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, 2010 at 1:00 pm in the USDA Service Center conference room at 2507 N. Telshor Blvd., Las Cruces. Invitations were sent out to 28 individuals on September 7, 2010 to federal, state, city, and local agencies, local organizations, and individuals who were thought to have an interest in this meeting.

Those in attendance were:

- John Hartung NRCS, Acting District Conservationist
- Kristi Justice NRCS, Soil Conservationist
- Mary Esther Grider Dona Ana SWCD Supervisor
- Bud Starnes New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA)
- Gary Esslinger Elephant Butte Irrigation District
- Debbie Luevano Farm Service Agency
- Dane Seifts Grande Construction, Inc.
- Brian Hanson NMDA – Paso del Norte Watershed Council
- Lane Hauser BLM – Las Cruces District
- Michael Baca New Mexico Environmental Department

The Agenda of the LWG meeting was to update the group on new rules for the programs that came out in the new 2008 Farm Bill. FY 2010 total dollars allocated and the numbers of contracts in Dona Ana County were both presented to the LWG. New Mexico's FY2011 EQIP/WHIP schedule of Activities/Deadlines was passed out with the announcement that the deadline for FY 2011 EQIP applications is going to be December 3, 2010 and hopefully contracts will be funded by February 11, 2011. Other items on the agenda included: how funds were allocated in the Las Cruces Field Office (irrigation, grazing, AFO/CAFO and small acreage producer initiative); review of FY2010 cost docket, since 2011 docket not yet available, paying particular attention to the dominant practices used in the Las Cruces field office; cost share rates; incentive payments; ranking criteria; organic and Dona Ana air quality initiatives; and proposal for CCPI watershed in Dona Ana County.

### **Priority Resource Concerns:**

The LWG reviewed the priority resource concerns identified by LWGs in the past and determined that they have not changed. Therefore, the priority resource concerns remain: Water Quantity, Water Quality, Soil Erosion, Plant Condition, Soil Condition, and Air Quality.

### **Funding Considerations:**

**LWG recommended allocating EQIP funds as follows (100%):**

- Irrigated Cropland – **45%**
- Drip/Sprinkler – 50% of 45% for Irrigated Cropland
- Surface – 50% of 45% for Irrigated Cropland
- Grazing Lands – **30%**
- AFO/CAFO – **20%**
- Small Acreage Producer Initiative – **5%**

Any sub-funds left under Cropland can be spent on either Drip/Sprinkler or Surface.

Financial Assistance Cap of \$100,000 per practice in a contract was again recommended by the LWG.

The LWG strongly recommended the use of payments for all management practices, which include:

- 102 (CNMP plan) - \$1,000/plan cap (\$2.50 x number of producing dairy cows (au) up to \$1000.00).
- 449 (Irrigation Water Mgmt. on cropland & CAFO) would like \$10.00/ac.
- 590 (Nutrient Mgmt. on Cropland & CAFO) would like \$10.00/ac.
- 595 (Pest Mgmt. on cropland, grazing land & CAFO) would like \$8.00/ac.
- 528 (Prescribed Grazing for brush mgmt before and/or after treatment) would like \$1.00/ac.
- 645 (Wildlife Habitat Mgmt. on Cropland) – cap of 2 bat boxes per farm.

### **Cost Share Rate Factors:**

LWG reviewed FY2010 payment schedule and agreed to use FY2011 payment schedule if all practices are at 75% cost share. No recommendations were suggested to lower any practices cost share rate.

Please refer to the FY 2011 EQIP cost list for final practice payment rates.

### **Ranking Criteria:**

LWG reviewed proposed ranking criteria and recommended to use as is and with points that are currently used.

Please refer to the ranking criteria links for specific information.

### **Watershed Initiative:**

LWG decided not to submit or use any of the field office allocation for a local watershed for FY 2011.

### **Small Acreage Initiative (SAI):**

LWG recommended continuing with Small Acreage Initiative but reducing the allocation percentage to 5% (see above Funding Considerations). The LWG would like criteria for SAI to remain the same as FY 2010 that read: Eligible Acreage, Income, and Practices – LWG will only allow producers with total farm acreage, including any leased land, of 20 acres or less of irrigated land apply for this pool. Household income must be \$60,000/yr or less. Cost share rate will change to 85% unless qualified under Limited Resource Producer (LRP), Beginning Farmer (BFR) or Socially Disadvantaged (SD). LWG will initiate a financial assistance cap of \$10,000 per contract (operation). In case of a tie, the highest (future) FIRS score will determine priority. Conservation practices allowed in this initiative are 428A concrete lined ditch, 430 series irrigation pipe, 442 sprinklers and 587 high flow turnouts, metal check gates, ports or corrugated pipe. Ranking criteria will be the same as regular cropland.

**Other:**

If any AWEP money becomes available, the LWG expressed a need in the county for converting dirt ditch laterals into pipelines or concrete lined ditch.

The Dona Ana SWCD, working with BLM and other interested parties, will be putting together a proposal followed by an application for a CCPI watershed in Dona Ana County in FY 2011.