

# 2011 Environmental Quality Incentive Program

## Local Work Group Summary for the Los Lunas Field Office

### Introduction:

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Los Lunas Field Office is located in the west-central part of New Mexico. The office is bordered by Socorro County on the south, Cibola County and Lucero uplift to the west, on the east by the Cibola National Forest and Torrance County and on the north by Bernalillo County. Los Lunas, is the county seat of Valencia County, is on the Rio Grande and is about 11 miles north of Belen. The office encompasses 1.46 million acres, which includes Valencia County, portions of five other counties: Bernalillo, Cibola, Sandoval, Socorro, and Torrance.

The growing season averages 183 days. The average date of last killing frost is April 20; average date of first killing frost is October 20. Average lake evaporation is 60 inches per year. The primary crops grown are Hay (both alfalfa and grass), Corn (silage), Sorghum, and Chile. Other crops such as grapes, apples, small vegetables, fruit and pecan trees are becoming more common. The remainder of the agricultural community, for the most part, is involved in ranching and dairy production. Primary concerns with the agricultural producers in the area include: irrigation and water issues, range water and plant conditions.

### Local Work Group:

A Local Work Group meeting was 8/31/2010 at the USDA Service Center. Representatives from the following groups or entities attended: Chair and Board Supervisors for Valencia Soil and Water conservation District, Pueblo of Laguna, Farm Services Agency, NMSU County Extension Service, Field Representative for Martian Heinrich, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, Isleta and Laguna Pueblo members, and NRCS Area Agronomist. In addition, attendees were also either local farmers or ranchers from within the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District boundaries.

### Priority Resource Concerns:

Priorities as determined by the Local Work Group is (in order of priority):

#### Irrigated Land

- Water Quantity – Inefficient Water Use on Irrigated Land
- Plant Condition – Plant Health, Vigor, Production
- Water Quality – Excessive Nutrients and Organics in Ground or Surface Water
- Soil Condition – Organic Matter Depletion

#### Range

- Water Quantity – Inefficient Water Use on Non-Irrigated Land
- Domestic Animals – Inadequate Stock Water
- Plant Condition – Noxious and Invasive Plants
- Soil Erosion – Sheet and Rill Erosion

#### Animal Feeding Operations

- Soil Condition – Contaminants – Animal Waste/Other Organics
- Water Quality – Excessive Nutrients and Organics in Ground or Surface Water

#### **Wildlife**

- Fish and Wildlife – Habitat Fragmentation
- Fish and Wildlife – Inadequate Cover/Shelter
- Fish and Wildlife – Species of concern

#### **Forested Land**

- Soil Erosion – Gully and Ephemeral
- Wildlife – Inadequate Cover/Shelter

**Funding Considerations: The LWG considered that the 2011 EQIP funding allocation should target the resource concerns as follows:**

Non-Tribal	Tribal
• 40% Irrigated land	60% Irrigated
• 30% Rangeland	40% Rangeland
• 20% Animal Feeding Operations	
• 5% Wildlife	
• 5% Forestry	

All practices funding in AFO/CAFO contracts will be subject to a \$100,000 per practice cap; all practices funding in other funding pools will be subject to a \$50,000 per practice cap.

#### **Cost Share Rate Factor:**

When rates were discussed with the LWG, the majority preferred higher cost share rate and all understood the final cost share percentages are set at the state level. The meeting attendees were supportive of contract and/or practice caps.

Discussed cost-share factor for Beginning Farmer-Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer-Ranch and Socially Disadvantaged applicants will be 25% higher than the non-HUA rate, up to maximum of 90%, unless a lower rate is approved by the State Conservationist.

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

#### **Ranking Criteria:**

Applications will be prioritized based on the amount of points earned under the "Local Issues" Section of the ranking evaluation sheet as follows:

- Irrigated Crop – 100 points
- Grazing Lands – 150 points
- AFO – 200 points
- Wildlife – 100 points
- Forested – 100 points

Applications earning less than these minimum points will be considered "Low" priority.

Please refer to the ranking criteria links for specific information.

**Tie Breaker:**

In the event two or more applications receive the same amount of points, ties will be broken by using efficiency points from Farm Irrigation System (FIRS) or (if still a tie or for range) the applicant that addresses the highest priority resource concern listed for that land use.

**Watershed Initiative: Not recommended for fiscal 2011.**

**Small Acreage Initiative:**

The vast majority of the producers served by the Los Lunas Field Office are presently small acreage producers. Therefore, a separate small acreage initiative was discussed and recommended.

**2011 EQIP Small Acreage Initiative Proposal**

The Small Acreage Initiative is intended to provide assistance to small acreage operators with fewer resource concerns and a limited income. The applicants sometimes have difficulty competing for EQIP funds. The STC will set aside funds for this initiative.

**Requirements:**

- Household income – recommend \$26,000/year income limit
- Maximum contract amount of \$3,000 per operation.
- Ranking criteria will be the same as regular EQIP.
- LWG has committed to setting aside must commit to setting aside \$15,000 of the Field Office allocation.

**Recommendations needed from District Conservationist:**

- This initiative will cover the entire Field Office area.
- Discussed a 10 acre limit for just irrigated crop land use
- Recommended producers enrolling for a series of cropland enhancement of conservation practices which could include a structural practice such as irrigation land leveling (464) and at least 2 or 3 other management practices such as nutrient, pest management, cover crop or residue no-till strip, or conservation crop convert practices.