

2011 Environmental Quality Incentive Program

Local Work Group Summary for the Portales Field Office

Introduction:

The Portales Field Office Local Work Group area serves two Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Border SWCD and Roosevelt SWCD, and includes land in both Chaves and Roosevelt Counties. The area is on the High Plains of east central New Mexico and ranges from the Texas state line on the east to the Pecos River on the west. The area includes dry cropland, irrigated cropland, dairies, and rangeland. Most of the irrigated cropland is served by the Ogallala (High Plains) Aquifer and is experiencing yearly decreases in pumped water yield. The area receives an average of 13 to 16 inches of annual precipitation and has a 180-day frost-free growing season. All of the cropland in the area is considered Highly Erodible Land.

Local Work Group:

The area represented by the Local Work Group comprises approximately 2.17 million acres with about 6% being irrigated cropland, 10% dry cropland, and 84% rangeland. There are 35 animal feeding operations (dairies) included in the area. Due to changes in the 2008 farm bill, the Local Work Group was opened to producers via Roosevelt and Border SWCD's newsletters, the Portales News Tribune calendar, the local radio station, and the Hispanic radio station. The meeting was held September 21, 2010 and was attended by 34 people consisting of local stakeholders, supervisors Roosevelt SWCDs, New Mexico Game and Fish, New Mexico State Land Office, Nature Conservancy, Roosevelt County Extension Agent and NRCS staff. Attendee list attached.

Priority Resource Concerns:

Resource concerns were identified by the LWG for the following land uses: Irrigated Cropland, Dry Cropland, Rangeland, Playa Restoration/Wildlife Habitat, and Livestock Manure Management. Irrigated Cropland priority concerns include reduction of aquifer usage, irrigation efficiency, soil erosion, air quality, and water quality. Dry Cropland priority concerns include soil erosion from wind and water, air quality, and soil condition. Rangeland priority concerns include range plant health and composition, water quantity, invasive/noxious plant infestation, livestock water availability, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat. Playa Restoration/Wildlife Habitat concerns primarily wildlife habitat, plant condition, water quantity/quality, and soil erosion. Livestock Manure Management (AFO) concerns include soil condition and water quality. Headquarters will be a separate land use with concerns of soil erosion and air quality.

New in the 2008 Farm Bill is an Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) which will be managed independently of normal EQIP and the proposal will be resubmitted as an NRCS administrative area-wide program for 2011.

Funding Considerations:

The funds provided for EQIP will be allocated in proportion to how they are received with the exception of 5.2% of the total being dedicated to Windbreaks and 2.3% dedicated to the Wildlife Habitat/Restore Playa Program. Funding requests will be ranked according to the ranking criteria developed for each land use and assigned to the EQIP funds that were received for that land use. Should there be insufficient funding requests in any category; the remaining funds will be allocated in direct proportion to the requests received in the other categories. It is projected that the total funding requests will exceed the available funds. The Manure Management land use is managed on a state-wide basis and it is not known at this time the funding amount that will be available to this area, but a minimum of 12.7% of the Portales LWG funds will be allocated for this land use.

The EQIP funds will be allocated as follows:

- Irrigated Cropland: 26.8%
- Rangeland: 32.9% with \$200,000 dedicated to the Upper Pecos/Long Arroyo Rangeland Watershed Initiative.
- Dry Cropland: 20.1% with \$100,000 dedicated to the Yellow House Dry Crop Watershed Initiative.
- AFO 12.7%
- Headquarters: 5.2%
- Playa: 2.3%

Cost Share Rate Factor:

Cost share rate factors for all practices used in the computation of a payment schedule for the state of NM must be used. The payment schedule will be available on the web at the New Mexico NRCS home page (Section I of the Field Office Technical Guide). The LWG recommends the following Payments with the Caps as shown:

Practice/Payments		Cap
643 (P Chicken)	3 years	\$50,000 maximum
528 (rotational grazing)	3 years	\$50,000 maximum
643 (playas)	3 years	Playa & Buffer 320 acres max.
IWM (Convert to grass)	3 years	Minimum 3 gpm/ac No cap
Wildlife Habitat	3 years	640 acres maximum
No Till/Strip Till Dry and Irrigated	3 years	320 acre maximum
Brush Control	Acres	\$65,000 maximum
Nutrient Management (apply manure or compost)	1 year	320 acre maximum

The LWG is recommending a payment for Restoration and Mgmt of Rare/Declining Habitats (643) when applied to enhance habitat for the Lesser Prairie Chicken. The payment will be awarded if a confirmed lek site is within two miles of EQIP contracted acreage and pastures are deferred from grazing for a time frame

specified as August 1 through June 1 on a minimum of 100 acres. This payment is capped at \$50,000 for 3 years. Prescribed Grazing will also be offered for producers who agree to utilize a more intensive grazing system than they currently utilize.

A payment is recommended on dry or irrigated cropland for producers who apply the practice of No-Till or Strip Till (329). The producer must agree to participate on the same field for three years. It is a stipulation that if a payment is received for no-till/strip-till, residues may not be baled or grazed on contracted acres. However, grazing will be allowed on planted wheat acres. Producers rely on the revenue generated from grazing livestock from November 1 through March 1. Graze out wheat is not allowed, and cattle must be removed by March 1. It has been determined that the grazing restrictions in past years have prohibited producers from applying for no till contracts. If crop residues are removed, the objective of increased soil organic matter will not be achieved. Soil condition as well may be compromised due to the increased possibility of limited stand establishment when compaction occurs due to livestock grazing. The LWG is recommending the practice be limited to no more than 320 acres for three consecutive years on dry or irrigated cropland. Producers are eligible for this payment one time only. Producers currently applying no-till/strip-till, or who have previously received cost share payments for this practice are not eligible.

Payments for Irrigation Water Management (reduction of aquifer usage) will also be offered and ranked in the irrigated cropland funding allocation. The payment will be offered only to producers with a minimum production requirement of 3 GPM/Ac. Producers may qualify for the payment if they agree to convert irrigated cropland to permanent native grass and maintain the grass for ten years. The payment will be paid for three years. Wells must have been used to grow irrigated crops the past 2 out of 3 years and there will not be an acreage cap. Any eligible well must be on the property of the applicant's farm. New wells drilled to qualify an applicant will not be considered.

A Wildlife Habitat payment was developed for EQIP 2008 to encourage producers to leave their Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program acreages in permanent vegetation after the water saving incentive had expired. This payment will also encourage producers to plant a good mixture of native plant species and to manage the acreage for wildlife after the native vegetation is established. The following guidelines have been established:

- Only cropland converted to permanent native vegetation since 2000 is eligible.
- A minimum of three native grasses, one forb, and one shrub must have been planted in the seed mixture.
- The shrub and forb components may be interseeded into at least 10% of an existing grass stand to obtain eligibility.
- On newly planted acreage, the Wildlife Payment will begin the year after the planting is completed.
- On land enrolled in GSWC, the Wildlife Payment will not begin until the year after the final IWM payment has been made.
- Former GSWC contracts will rank higher than other Dry Cropland applicants.

- A grazing plan will be developed and applied after the grass is established. Grazing will be allowed June and July to protect nesting bird habitat.
- The payment will be for three years with a maximum of 640 acres.
- Applications for the program will be ranked using the field office's Dry Cropland ranking.
- Funds for contracts will be drawn from the field office's Dry Cropland pool of funds or Watershed funds taken from the Dry Cropland funds.
- In the event of a tie in ranking score, the pro-rated Erodibility Index of the mapped soils in the field will be used as a tie breaker – the higher ranking being given to the higher E.I.

By allowing only acreage converted from cropland since 2000, existing rangeland and old soil bank acreage planted many years ago will not be eligible for enrollment. The forb component could include dryland alfalfa and/or clover. The shrubs could include winterfat, fourwing saltbush, sumac, plum, or sand cherry. Interseeding the forb and shrub should not be costly and therefore will not be cost-shared. A mixture of more than three native grasses, along with forbs and shrubs, will be required on newly planted acreage. The producer will bear the fencing expense if needed. The ranking questions for the Portales Field Office Dry Cropland result in priority funding of former GSWC Contracts and range plantings which incorporate the three species of native grass as well as the shrub and forb components which meet the criteria for the wildlife payment. The 640 acre cap will not apply to former GSWC acreages.

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

Cost Share Rate Factors for Limited Resource Producers, Beginning Farmers/Ranchers, and Socially Disadvantaged Producers:

The LWG did not recommend anything different than the state wide 90% cost share rate.

Ranking Criteria:

The Portales Field Office does not set High, Medium, or Low priorities. All applications are ranked.

The national ranking system will be used to rank all applications. The system allows for 40% of the total points to consider local issues. The local work group has indicated the relative importance of local resource concerns and this is reflected in the local concerns portion of each ranking sheet. The AFO ranking will remain the same as last year. The Range, Dry land, Irrigated, Playa, and windbreak have changed. The Yellow House Draw watershed will use the new Dry land ranking and the Upper Pecos/Long arroyo watershed will use the new Range ranking. See attached ranking sheets. Application rankings that result in a tie score will be separated as follows for each land use:

- Dry Cropland: Pro-rated erodibility index of contracted acreage soils
Higher index being ranked higher
- Irrigated Cropland: Pro-rated erodibility index of contracted acreage soils
Higher index being ranked higher

- Rangeland: Erodibility index of dominant soil
Higher index being ranked higher
- Manure Management: Age of the dairy
Older dairies ranking higher
- Wildlife Habitat (playa): *Larger upland drainage area ranks higher*
- Headquarters: Total length of windbreak
Longer length ranking higher
- Watershed Initiatives: Same criteria as above for Land Use

Please refer to the ranking criteria links for specific information.

Watershed Initiatives 2009, 2010, 2011:

In 2009 the Local Work Group initiated two Watershed Initiatives. The first is the *Upper Pecos/Long Arroyo Rangeland Watershed Initiative* (HUC 130600314, 1306000315, and 13060007). The primary goal of this Initiative is to diminish large areas of brush infestation while improving grazing management. This Watershed was chosen because of its severe infestation of brush and need for improved management. This area encompasses over 914,200 acres and lies in the western edge of Roosevelt County and eastern Chaves County to the Pecos River (located in the Border SWCD). Practices available for the project will include Brush Management (314), Prescribed Grazing (528), Livestock Pipeline (516), Livestock Water Facility (614), Water Well (642), Pumping Plant (533), Fence (382), and Wildlife Water Facility (648) and any practices normally offered on rangeland. Allocation for this Initiative is \$200,000 to be matched with funds from the State Conservationist. If matched by the State Conservationist, \$400,000 will be available to producers within the watershed to improve their grazing resource. All funds were expended in this Initiative with numerous applicants not funded due to lack of funds.

The second initiative is the *Yellow House Draw Dry Cropland Watershed Initiative* (HUC 1205000102). The primary goal of this Initiative is to control wind erosion and improve wildlife habitat and cover through the Wildlife Habitat Payment and No-Till. This hydrologic unit was selected because it has very highly erodible soils on it. The area encompasses approximately 173,000 acres west and south of Portales with the southern edge slightly south of Highway 70 and the northern edge west of Portales almost to the Chaves County line. This HUC is largely within the Roosevelt SWCD with some acres in the Border SWCD. Practices available for the project include Range Seeding (550), Prescribed Grazing (528), Wildlife Habitat Management (645), No-Till (329), Terraces (600) and any practices normally offered on dry cropland. \$100,000 will be allocated for the Initiative to be matched with funds from the State Conservationist. If matched by the State Conservationist, \$200,000 will be available to producers within the watershed to improve their resource. All funds were expended in this Initiative with numerous applicants not funded due to lack of funds.

In 2010 the Local Work Group initiated two Watershed Initiatives. The first was the Kakawate Dry Cropland Watershed Initiative. The second was the Kakawate Irrigated Watershed Initiative. These two Watershed Initiatives were not successful, with zero contracts written. Neither of these two Watershed Initiatives is being pursued for FY 2011.

Small-Acreage Initiative:

The Border-Roosevelt Local Work Group is not requesting a small-acreage initiative. Producers with small acreages have not had difficulty competing against larger producers with multiple resource concerns. EQIP funding has been adequate in recent years to fund most eligible applications, with the size of the operation or number of resource concerns not being a determining factor.