

# 2014 Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal

## Espanola Field Office

### Introduction

The Espanola Field Office is located in the north central part of the state, in the Rio Grande Valley, just below the confluence of the Rio Chama and Rio Grande. The Rio Grande is New Mexico's main waterway and dissects the entire state from north to south, providing habitat and life to all species within the narrow corridor. The Espanola Field Office area consists of surface irrigated small farms and small rangeland livestock operations. Organic farming of produce is increasing in the area along with specialty crops such as herbs. Many individuals and families grow hay on irrigated land and graze federal lands with permits during the summer and in some cases year around. The area also includes two Native American pueblos, Santa Clara and Ohkay Owingeh, as well as various Spanish Land Grants that all have deep roots to the land and agriculture.

### Local Work Group

The East Rio Arriba SWCD invited members to the Local Work Group Meeting on September 11, 2013 at the East Rio Arriba SWCD office. At this meeting new items for the EQIP 2014 program year were reviewed and recommendations were received. Invitations were sent to federal agencies, state and local governments and to the two Pueblo Governors within the SWCD. Representatives from the East Rio Arriba SWCD, USFS(Coyote Ranger District), Rio Arriba County Planning and Zoning, and NRCS responded to the invitation and provided input for recommendations.

### Priority Resource Concerns

The priority resource concerns were reviewed and the Local Work Group and after discussion there was higher priority placed on specific resource concerns. Due to the recent environmental conditions and events (Drought and Flooding) water quantity, water quality, soil erosion, and soil quality are to be listed with a higher priority for resource concerns. The group would like these resource concerns and those applying to address them should receive a higher priority in ranking. Below are the recently updated resource concerns that NRCS reviewed and discussed along with an asterisks with those identified with a higher priority:

- \*Soil Erosion
  - Concentrated Flow
  - Irrigation Induced
  - Sheet and Rill
  - Stream bank
  - Wind
  
- \* Soil Quality

- Subsidence
- Compaction
- Organic Matter Depletion
- Concentration of Salts or other Chemicals
- \* Water
  - Excess Water-Ponding, flooding, seasonal high water table, etc.
  - Insufficient Water- Inefficient moisture management
  - Insufficient Water- Inefficient use of irrigation water
- \*Water Quality Degradation
  - Excess nutrients in surface and ground water
  - Excessive sediment and turbidity in surface water
- Air Quality
  - Objectionable odors
  - Particulate matter less than 10 micrometers in diameter
  - Reduced visibility
- Plant Condition
  - Forage Quality and Palatability
  - Noxious and invasive Plants
  - Productivity, health and vigor
  - Wildfire Hazard
- Fish and Wildlife
  - Inadequate Cover and Shelter
  - Inadequate food
  - Inadequate water
  - Threatened and Endangered Species of Concern
- Domestic Animals
  - Inadequate stock water
  - Inadequate quantities and quality of feed and storage

**State Allocation Process:**

The Local Work Group reviewed the process by which the financial allocation is derived based on private land acres in the East Rio Arriba Conservation District area. The Local Work Group agreed to accept the figures as presented.

**Funding Considerations:**

The Local Work Group was informed that the State will obligate funds by land use for non-tribal and tribal lands. The Local Work Group reaffirmed that the non-tribal funds will be split 33 percent to Irrigated Cropland and 33 percent to Grazing Land and 33% to Forested Land. If funds are available in either land use category then the funds can be moved to the land use in need of funds. If there is not a need then the money will return to the NW Area for redistribution. The group also decided the same conditions will apply to the tribal allocation as previously stated.

It was recommended by the group that all practices currently in the Field Office Technical Guide with cost associated in the cost docket, including management incentives **should be available for all resource concerns, for all land uses, and all programs offered.** In the past program years not all the resource concerns could be addressed because not all the conservation practices were available for that specific program. The group was informed that EQIP 2013 cost share rates will be flat rates and that “Historically under Represented Groups” (i.e. Limited Resource Producer, Beginning Farmer Ranchers, etc...) would receive 90 percent cost share unless a lower rate is approved by the State Technical Committee. No payment caps were suggested by the Local Work Group as long as the resource concerns were addressed. Please refer to the links for the cost docket and eligible practices to view the final practices, cost share rates and component costs. This state cost document will be a regional cost document encompassing Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico.

### **Ranking Criteria:**

The Local Work Group (LWG) reviewed ranking sheets and decided to adopt the NW Area Ranking questions for cropland, rangeland, and forest land. The ranking questions from the field office will be related soil erosion, soil quality, water, and water quality. It was recommended that all practices be included under all different types of funding categories.

In the past different practices have been excluded out of different types of land use categories but are sometimes needed to address resource concerns. An example of this is Stream bank and Shoreline protection (580), where there may be irrigated land that is close to a water body that may need to address erosion along the bank. In the past we could not include the component because it was not normally associated with irrigated land but more with wildlife or forest resource concerns. Thus it was not included as part of the alternative to address the resource concern on the producers land because there was not resource concern to match up with the component when ranked. Forested land ranking questions may be needed but the field office will adopt what the Area Office supplies for questions in regards to forested lands.

Due to the high volume of applications from previous years the group agreed that a local screening criteria would be used to assist in prioritizing projects that have a high, medium and low priority. By doing this more time can be spent focusing on conservation projects that are of high importance based on the resource concerns addressed. High priority will be given to those that already have an existing RMS level plan, were affected by the Los Conchos Fire, or previous producers that are including management practices to implement towards an RMS Level Plan. Medium priority will be assigned to those applications which address a resource concern in an existing **\*\*Progressive conservation plan** or applicant has request on file with NRCS for conservation planning assistance prior to December 1, 2012. Low priority will be assigned to those applications which do not meet the criteria for High or Medium.

In the case of a tie the field office will use the random number assigned through Protracts to break the tie. The highest number will be the landowner selected for contract development.

**Watershed Initiative:**

The idea of allocating a separate amount of funds from the area allocation was discussed with the Local Work Group. The group liked the idea and has determined before allocating EQIP dollars that a meeting will be scheduled to identify priority watersheds to concentrate financial and technical resources. Once critical watersheds have been identified a plan will be developed and potentially looked at for funding in 2015.

**Small Acreage Initiative:**

The Small Acreage Initiative was presented to the Local Work Group and discussed as an alternative to fund those producers with low income or who have small acreage and cannot compete with the larger land owners. The Small Acreage Initiative was discussed again with the Local Work Group by the District Conservationist and the group decided not to include the initiative because this need is being met with local cost share program from the East Rio Arriba SWCD. NRCS assists with the program technically whenever requested. The Local Work Group also felt that the ranking was selecting contracts that are addressing the priority resource concerns and representing a variety of income levels that represent the area.

## EQIP 2014 SCREENING CRITERIA

Screening Criteria will be used to assist in the evaluation of contract applications for possible funding. All HIGH PRIORITY applications will be ranked and funded before evaluating the MEDIUM PRIORITY applications. All MEDIUM PRIORITY applications will be ranked and funded before evaluating the LOW PRIORITY applications.

**Applications will be assigned a screening priority according the following criteria**

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**HIGH** – High priority will be assigned to those applications which address a resource concern in an existing **\*RMS** conservation plan, a producer affected by the Los Conchos Fire, or a previous producer that continues to develop, from a previous contract, to achieve an RMS level plan.

**MEDIUM** – Medium priority will be assigned to those applications which address a resource concern in an existing **\*\*Progressive** conservation plan or applicant has request on file with NRCS for conservation planning assistance prior to **December 1, 2012**.

**LOW** - Low priority will be assigned to those applications which do not meet the criteria for HIGH or MEDIUM.

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**\*RMS – Resource Management Systems.** These comprehensive plans are a combination of conservation practices and resource management activities for the treatment of all identified resource concerns to a level that meets or exceeds the quality criteria for resource sustainability on a land unit.

**\*\*Progressive** – Progressive plans are used to work towards an RMS when a producer is ready, willing, and able to make some, but not all of the decisions necessary to achieve an RMS level of management for all identified resource concerns on a land unit.

**YOUR APPLICATION FALLS INTO THE FOLLOWING SCREENING PRIORITY**

**HIGH**

**MEDIUM**

**Low**

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**NRCS Designated Conservationist**

**Copy Received**

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**Date**

**(Applicant Initials)**

**For applications in MEDIUM or LOW Priority, the producer will be given the opportunity to develop the necessary plans to move their application up to MEDIUM or HIGH priority for next funding cycle if requested.**