

2014 Program Delivery Proposal

For the Lordsburg Field Office

Introduction

The Lordsburg Field Office is located in the town of Lordsburg, county seat of Hidalgo County, in the southwestern corner of New Mexico. The field office provides assistance to the Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) with a total of about 2.4 million acres. Approximately 55% is state and private lands and 45% federal lands. There is a variety of landscapes ranging from 4,000 feet up to 8,500 feet in elevation. Annual precipitation ranges from 4 to 12 inches throughout most of the county, but the southwestern part of the county averages up to 16 inches. A severe drought cycle continues and has impacted most operations. Soils are extremely variable and complex with over 80 mapped soils occurring. They include sandy to gravelly clay or silt clay loams which make up nearly two thirds of the mapped area, deep loamy soils in the Gila River valley, alkaline playas, and rough and broken rock land with very shallow soils. Vegetation includes blue and black grama, tobosa, dropseeds, bush muhly, creosote bush, yucca, Mormon tea, mesquite, and juniper. The only known native population of buffalo grass west of the continental divide is also found in Hidalgo County. Approximately 98% of the land in Hidalgo County is native rangeland with about 2% in cropland or other uses. Ranching operations are primarily cow/calf producers, with cattle grazed on a year-round basis. The primary crop grown on irrigated land is alfalfa, with some corn, chile, milo, cotton and permanent pasture also grown. In the past two years, significant acres have been converted to pecans with additional acres planned for conversion. Cropland is mainly located south of Interstate 10, with the majority being in the area of Cotton City, Animas, and Playas. Pumped groundwater is the only source of irrigation in these areas. The exception to this is the Virden Valley, along the Gila River in the northwest part of the county, which uses a combination of diverted river water and pumped water to irrigate. The population of Hidalgo County is 5,600 with over 27 percent of the population falling below the poverty level. The present economy of the area is based on agriculture with less emphasis on mining or related operations than in the past.

Local Work Group (LWG)

The Hidalgo SWCD held a Local Work Group Meeting on September 10, 2013 at the USDA Service Center in Lordsburg, New Mexico. Invitations were sent out to federal, state, and local agencies. Eight participants were in attendance and provided input for the initial development of the new 2014 EQIP program year. The purpose of the meeting was to update the Local Work Group (LWG) on outcome of the 2013 EQIP Programs and recommend changes to the 2014 EQIP Program. The LWG was made

aware of lack of a new Farm Bill, possible budget constraints, operations currently under a Continuing Resolution as well as the changes pending with implementation of the Field Office of the Future plans in New Mexico. Changes were made to the priority resource concerns to match the new 2014 list of resource concerns and definitions. Participation was strong from the Hidalgo SWCD.

Priority Resource Concerns

Rangeland resource concerns in priority order are:

- Animal – Inadequate livestock water
- Plant Condition – Excessive plant pest pressure from undesired plants
- Energy - Equipment
- Soil – Sheet, Rill and Wind Erosion

Irrigated Cropland - The following two sets of priority resource concerns were decided upon:

Virден Valley in priority order:

- Insufficient Water- Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water
- Soil- Excessive Bank Erosion and Organic Matter Depletion
- Plant Condition- Productivity, Health and Vigor; Excessive plant pressure
- Energy- Farming Practices and Field Operations
- Animal – Habitat Degradation

The rest of the county in priority order is:

- Insufficient Water- Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water
- Soil- Wind Erosion
- Energy- Farming Practices and Field Operations
- Plant Condition- Productivity, Health and Vigor; Excessive plant pressure
- Animal – Habitat Degradation

Funding Considerations

The local funding allocation will be split accordingly:

Irrigated Cropland: 63%

The funding allocated to irrigated cropland will be further subdivided into:

- Virден Valley 13%

- and the rest of the county 87%.

Rangeland: 37%

These funds will remain interchangeable if not obligated within their primary land use.

An incentive for chemical control of noxious weeds listed on the NM Noxious Weed Lists A & B will be initiated. Payment rate provided in the payment schedule will be used for Class A and/or B. This incentive shall not stand alone and should be in addition to at least one other practice in the contract.

A \$92,500 financial assistance cap has been established per practice; cap will be kept the same.

Cost Share Rate Factor

LWG will accept the cost share rate of 75% for structural practices according to a payment schedule. LWG did not recommend a lower rate.

Please refer to the South Area Payment Schedule for a list of eligible practices and payment rates. The payment rates will be set by area.

Ranking Criteria

The following screening criteria were developed to place applications by ranking and environmental benefit for initial funding consideration.

Cropland

- Low Priority – scores < 125 pts
- Medium Priority – scores of 126 - 300 pts
- High Priority – scores > 300 pts

Since low priority applications do not address resource concerns this category will not be considered for funding until all medium and high priority applications are funded.

Any ties in irrigation will be broken using the following hierarchy:

- The highest change in efficiency (FIRS)
- The highest change in Soil Condition Index

Grazing Land

- Low Priority – score <120 pts
- Medium Priority – scores of 120 – 200 pts
- High Priority – scores > 200 pts

Since low priority applications do not address resource concerns this category will not be considered for funding until all medium and high priority applications are funded.

Any ties in grazing land will be broken using the following hierarchy:

- The highest average wind erodability index for the soils affected.

Watershed Initiative This will be the final year of the AZ-NM CCPI.

Small Acreage Initiative The LWG will not pursue a Small Acreage Initiative for this fiscal year.