

2014 Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal

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 county comprises 1,458 square miles, bordering on Bernalillo County to the north, Socorro County directly to the south, Cibola County to the west, and Torrance County to the east. The county seat is located in the Village of Los Lunas. Valencia County is on the Rio Grande, 20 miles south of the state's largest city, Albuquerque.

The Los Lunas field office workload covers Valencia County, portions of the other five counties: Bernalillo, Cibola, Sandoval, Socorro and Torrance. Also included in this field office boundaries are Pueblo of Isleta and Pueblo of Laguna. Valencia County farmers constitute one of the largest users of river (Rio Grande) water for flood and underground irrigation for agriculture. These same farmlands are under severe pressure to develop and urbanize, increasing the demand for water. There exists a great need for water conservation and irrigation efficiency in the valley. NRCS has been the lead agency locally in assisting these farmers reach their goals and help conserve water.

Main agricultural use is for Hay (Alfalfa), Hay (all other), Corn (silage), Sorghum, and Chile. Currently, we are seeing more variety crops such as grapes, apples, small vegetables, fruit and pecan trees. Total cropland acres are approximately 95,370 and Rangeland is 603,601. Irrigation season usually starts in March and ends in October. There are approximately 5 dairies and three confined animal operations in the county. 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. 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 held on 9/4/2013 at the USDA Service Center. Representatives from the following groups were invited: Board Supervisors for Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District, Pueblo of Laguna Natural Resources, Laguna Grazing Associations, Tribal Officials, Isleta Natural Resources staff, Farm Services Agency, Laguna Pueblo members, Valencia County Planning & Zoning Department, New Mexico Department of Agriculture Field Representatives, NMAD Weed Coordinator, Valencia Farm and Livestock, Bureau BIA-Southwest Regional Office, BLM-Rio Puerco Field Office and neighboring SWCD supervisors, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, Game and Fish, and NRCS staff.

Priority Resource Concerns:

Irrigated Land

Water Quantity – Inefficient Water Use of Irrigated Water
Degraded Plant Condition – Undesirable plant productivity and health
Degraded Plant Condition – Excessive plant pest pressure
Soil Quality Degradation – Organic Matter Depletion
Soil Quality Degradation - Compaction
Water Quality Degradation – Excessive Nutrients in Surface and Ground Waters

Range

Soil Erosion – Sheet, Rill, & Wind Erosion
Degraded Plant Condition - Excessive plant pest pressure
Degraded Plant Condition – Undesirable plant productivity and health
Insufficient Water - Inefficient Moisture Management
Livestock Production Limitation - Inadequate Stock Water
Livestock Production Limitation – Inadequate Feed and Forage
Soil Erosion – Excessive Bank Erosion from Stream Shorelines

Animal Feeding Operations

Water Quality Degradation – Excessive Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, bio-solids
Air Quality Impacts – Emissions of Greenhouse Gases - GHGs

Wildlife

Inadequate Habitat Fish and Wildlife – Habitat degradation

Woodland

Soil Erosion – Sheet, Rill, & Wind Erosion
Degraded Plant Condition - Excessive plant pest pressure
Inadequate Habitat Fish and Wildlife – Habitat degradation

Funding Considerations: The LWG considered that the 2013 EQIP funding allocation should target the resource concerns as follows:

Non-Tribal

- 40% Irrigated land
- 30% Rangeland
- 10% Animal Feeding Operations
- 15% Wildlife
- 5% Forestry (Forest Grazing)

Tribal

- 60% Irrigated
- 40% Rangeland

All practices funding in AFO/CAFO contracts will be subject to an \$80,000 per contract cap; all practices funding in other funding pools will be subject to a \$30,000 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 75% for the non-HU rate, and up to maximum of 90%, unless a lower rate is approved by the State Conservationist.

Ranking Criteria:

Los Lunas Field Office will adopt the 2014 NW Area Irrigated Cropland and Grazing Land Ranking Questions generated by the Northwest Area. Points are assigned based on the resource concerns the LWG wishes to address by priority. Field Office Ranking Questions will be generated by the LWG wishes discussed at the Local Work Group meeting and the highest ranked applications will be awarded contracts until funds are exhausted.

Tie Breaker:

In the event two or more applications receive the same amount of points, ties will be broken by using the Tracking code function available in Protracts. Tracking code will be used to break ties between applications with equal ranking scores. There was a concise that the highest number would be used to break the ties.

Watershed Initiative: Watershed Initiative: Not recommended for fiscal 2014.

Small Acreage Initiative:

The purposes of the Small Farmer/Rancher Initiative is to provide an avenue whereby producers with small acreage that historically have not participated or for those that want to address one or two resource concerns and have had difficulty competing with applications addressing multiple resource concerns are afforded an opportunity to participate.

The resource concerns identified are the following:

- Soil Erosion
- Degraded Plant Condition
- Water Quantity
- Water Quality Degradation
- Inadequate Habitat Fish and Wildlife – Habitat degradation

The Local Work Group had made a commitment to allocate \$20,000.00 of their FY 2014 funds to this Initiative. Total household income will be the same criteria as used for the Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher.

The Small Farmer/Rancher Initiative program will target those producers having:

- 15 acres or less of Irrigated Cropland
 - The initiative will include the entire Field Office Area.
- The Ranking Criteria developed for the regular EQIP and will be used for ranking application that fall under this initiative.
 - In the event that dollars remain in any category, the remaining funds will be allocated in direct proportion to the requests received in the other categories or returned to the regular EQIP.