

2014 Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal

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, on normal years, receives an average of 13 to 16 inches of annual precipitation and has a 180-day frost-free growing season. This has not been the case these last three years. The area has seen an unprecedented drought, having received about six inches of rainfall over a two year period! However, the area has received from 5 to 8 inches since June and all hope the drought has abated. 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, 14% dry cropland, and 80% rangeland. There are about 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 09, 2013 and was attended by 23 people consisting of for local stakeholders, four supervisors from Border and Roosevelt SWCDs, New Mexico State Land Office, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Nature Conservancy, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, and NRCS staff from Ft. Sumner, Portales, and Clovis. 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, Windbreaks, and AFO/CAFO (Dairies). The attached table lists each land use and the Resource Priority Concerns established by the Local Workgroup.

Funding Considerations and Recommendations for CAPS:

State Allocation Process:

The land types and acreages provided for the 2012 program were again accepted by the Local Work Group and are shown below:

<u>County</u>	<u>SWCD</u>	<u>Irrigated Cropland</u>	<u>Ogallala Aquifer</u>	<u>Dry Cropland</u>	<u>Rangeland</u>	<u>AFOs</u>
Chaves	Border	0	0	0	866,032	0
Roosevelt	Border	0	0	22,813	187,331	0
Roosevelt	Roosevelt	134,680	134,680	301,109	771,824	60
TOTAL:		134,680	134,680	323,922	1,825,187	60
New Mexico Total:		1,290,244	475,020	554,300	37,253,011	210
% of state total:		10.44%	28.35%	58.44%	4.90%	28.57%
% of FO total:		5.90%		14.18%	79.92%	

The funds provided for EQIP will be allocated as described below. 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 EQIP funds will be allocated as follows:

- Irrigated Cropland: 16.8%
- Rangeland: 42.9% with \$200,000 dedicated to the Rangeland Watershed Initiative.
- Dry Cropland: 20.1% with \$100,000 dedicated to the Dry Crop Watershed Initiative.
- AFO 12.7%
- Headquarters: 5.2%
- Playa: 2.3%

Practice Limitations and CAPS are as follows:

<u>Practice</u>	<u>Payments</u>	<u>CAPS</u>
645 (P Chicken)	3 years	\$50,000 maximum
528 (rotational grazing)	3 years	\$50,000 maximum
643 (playas)	3 years	\$100,000 maximum
No Till/Strip Till Dry and Irrigated	3 years	No Cap
Brush Control	Acres	\$65,000 maximum
Waste Transfer (apply manure or compost)	1 year	\$40,000 maximum

Cost Share Rate Factor:

Local Workgroup (LWG) did not recommend any changes to the state’s recommended Cost Share rates of 75% for most practices (90% for Historically Underserved Clients). However, LWG is *strongly* against a five state wide cost docket as they know it is not representative of costs for any area, much less for five states. They recommend a Cost Docket be developed for each *field office* and at a very minimum, an Area Wide Cost Docket. The payment schedule will be available on the web at the New Mexico NRCS home page (Section I of the Field Office Technical Guide).

Special Land Management Practices:

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 continues to recommend the practice not be capped on acreage for three consecutive years on dry or irrigated cropland. Producers are eligible for this payment one time only. Producers who have previously received cost share payments for this practice are not eligible.

The **Playa Restoration Program** will also be considered as a separate land use for the 2013 EQIP Program in hopes it will remain a part of the five state docket. This practice will encourage producers to fence out playas to improve the surrounding vegetation and lessen unwanted runoff into Playas. The CAP will remain the same as previous years. In order to qualify more than 50% of the Playa and watershed must reside on the applicant's property, unless the other 50% is already in the program.

Ranking Criteria, Priority Applications:

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 as well as the attached Priority Resource Concerns. The AFO and Windbreak ranking will remain the same as last year. **The Range and Irrigated Cropland Ranking changed slightly to allow for Critical Area Treatment and fencing/pumping of dirt tanks to improve Water Quality on Rangeland and allow fencing and water development to facilitate seeding irrigated land to perennial grasses.**

Wildlife/Windbreaks, Dry Cropland, Playa and Dry Watershed ranking were not changed. 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

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): Area of playa bottom in acres

Larger playa ranks higher

Headquarters: Total length of windbreak

Longer length ranking higher

Watershed Initiatives: Same criteria as above for Land Use

Watershed Initiatives 2014, 2015, 2016:

The Local Workgroup decided to leave the Watershed Boundaries with the changes adopted for the 2013 program. The primary goal of the Range 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 Watershed encompasses an area that lies approximately eight miles west of Elida, NM to the Pecos River (located in the Border and Roosevelt SWCDs). 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 other 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.

The second initiative is the *Boone Draw/Little Salt Lake and Causey Wells Dry Crop Land*. The primary goal of this Initiative is to control wind erosion and improve wildlife habitat and cover through Reseeding Cropland to grass and No-Till. This hydrologic unit was selected for its very highly erodible soils. The area encompasses approximately 500,526 acres west and south of Portales with the southern edge just North of Lingo and the northern edge almost to the Curry 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.

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.