

2014 Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal

For the Socorro Field Office

(Please provide the following information in narrative format. This template may be edited only to provide additional space within each section. *Field Office (FO) which does not follow this format will have their proposals returned*)

Introduction: The Socorro Field Office serves the Socorro Soil and Water Conservation District which is located close to the geographic middle of New Mexico. The great majority of the irrigated land lies within the floodplain of the Rio Grande. Virtually all of this land is surface irrigated from the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District canals and ditches. One legally recognized acequia is located on the East side of the Rio Grande and south of US60. All of its lands are also surface irrigated from a main ditch which is owned and maintained by the respective acequia members. There are several vineyards located outside of the floodplain which are drip irrigated. Approximately 75% of the irrigated land is considered hay land. Irrigated pasture, chili, oats, and corn are some of the other crops grown on the irrigated lands. All of the irrigated land is in the Chihuahuan Desert shrub Common Resource Area. The Socorro Field Office has over 1 million acres of native grazing lands. Land ownership is characterized by intermingled deeded, state, and federal lands. Common Resource Areas represented by grazing lands within the District include Upper Rio Grande Rift Valley, Chihuahuan Desert Shrub, Colorado Plateau Mixed Grass Plains, and the Central New Mexico Highlands.

Local Work Group: Membership of the LWG consists of local officials of the following entities:

- USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA – Farm Service Agency & County Committee
- Bureau of Land Management
- NM State Lands Office
- NM State Forestry
- Socorro Soil and Water Conservation District Board
- Socorro County Commission
- Socorro County Ag Extension Service
- City of Socorro
- Bureau of Reclamation
- New Mexico Game and Fish Department
- Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District
- NM Environment Department
- Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
- Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge
- NM Department of Agriculture Field Representative
- Area Stakeholders/Producers
- The LWG meeting was held on September 4, 2013 to discuss the implementation of the 2014 EQIP and WHIP programs. The following summary is offered as a proposal for EQIP 2014 implementation for the NRCS Socorro Field Office, based on the recommendations of the LWG and from within NRCS.

Priority Resource Concerns: The local resource concerns and priorities to be addressed with the implementation of the program are:

1. Water Quantity

- Irrigated Cropland:
 - Excess/Insufficient water -> Inefficient use of irrigation water
- Grazing Land:
 - Degraded Plant Condition -> Excessive Plant Pest Pressure
 - Livestock Production Limitation -> Inadequate livestock water

2. Soil Erosion

- Irrigated Cropland:
 - Soil erosion -> sheet, rill & wind erosion
- Grazing Land:
 - Soil erosion -> sheet, rill & wind erosion
 - Soil erosion -> Concentrated Flow erosion
- Irrigated Cropland:
 - Excess/Insufficient water -> Inefficient use of irrigation water

3. Plant Condition

- Irrigated Cropland:
 - Degraded Plant Condition -> Excessive Plant Pest Pressure
- Grazing Land:
 - Degraded Plant Condition -> Undesirable plant productivity and health
 - Degraded Plant Condition -> Undesirable plant productivity and health
 - Degraded Plant Condition -> Excessive Plant Pest Pressure

4. Water Quality

- Irrigated Cropland:
 - Water Quality Degradation -> Excess nutrients in surface and ground water
- Grazing Land:
 - Water Quality Degradation -> Excessive sediment in surface waters
- AFO/CAFO:
 - Water Quality Degradation -> Excess nutrients in surface and ground water

Funding Considerations: The Socorro LWG divided the local funding as follows:

- AFO/CAFO - 5 percent
- Grazing land - 35 percent
- Irrigated Cropland (including irrigated cropland) - 60 percent

These percentages may vary depending on the actual amount of money needed to fully fund the highest ranking irrigated, grazing lands, or AFO contracts. The requirement that 60 percent goes to livestock concerns should be met, due to the fact that a significant amount of the irrigated cropland is in irrigated pasture.

Cost Payment Rate Factor:

The LWG decided not to cost share management or incentives, due to the fact that the Socorro FO has more applications for structural practices than allocation of funds.

All eligible practices will be cost shared at 75 percent as proposed by the SO, except for the producers who certify as Historically Underserved (HU) which will receive the higher rate according to the approved incentive schedule.

The State or (Regional) Payment Schedule will be used. The LWG decided to lower the cost cap on rangeland practices from \$75,000 per practice to \$40,000 per practice. The LWG also decided to lower the cost cap on irrigation practices on cropland from \$75,000 per practice to \$60,000 per practice. The LWG also discussed the possibility of going over the cap if the engineering practice design calls for it to complete the practice.

Ranking Criteria:

The Socorro LWG decided to keep the 2014 priority resource concerns and ranking questions the same as last years. No changes were recommended.

The Ranking Criteria from the 2013 program will be used again if available.

Screening Criteria:

- All Applications:
 - Low Priority – Previously terminated contract.
- Irrigated Cropland:
 - High Priority- Drip/Micro irrigation, Sprinkler
 - Medium Priority- Irrigation delivery (428A, 430--) and 12 percent or greater increase in irrigation efficiency.
 - Low Priority – Less than 12 percent increase in irrigation efficiency
- Grazing Lands:
 - High Priority – Brush Management
 - Medium Priority – Water development and a positive increase in Rangeland Health
 - Low Priority :
 - a. Continuous grazing and /or no increase in Rangeland Health
 - b. Less than 25 percent of Local Issue Points in ranking criteria.
- AFO/CAFO:
 - The Socorro FO will use the South Area AFO ranking and screening criteria.

The following criteria will be used to break ties, which may occur when ranking applicants for each respective resource concern:

- Irrigated Cropland
 1. Highest change in efficiency (FIRS)
 2. Exact distance to surface water.
- Grazing Lands
 1. Use of tracking code in Protracts to assign a number to tied applications.
 2. Highest positive change in Biotic Integrity portion of Rangeland Health.
- Animal Feeding Operations (AFO/CAFO)

The Socorro FO will use the South Area AFO tie breaking criteria.

Watershed Initiative:

The Socorro LWG did not propose a Watershed Initiative this year.

Small Acreage Initiative:

The Socorro LWG decided not to allocate funds to a Small Acreage Initiative.