

## **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary, conservation program administered by NRCS that can provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices that address natural resource concerns. The purpose of EQIP is to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals; to optimize environmental benefits; and to help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

## **EQIP Application Sign-up and Cut-off Dates**

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round, but establishes cutoff dates to make funding selections for eligible, screened, and ranked applications.

To be ready for EQIP funding consideration, interested applicants will need to: (1) Develop a conservation plan, (2) Submit an application, (3) Meet program eligibility requirements, and (4) Approve their 'EQIP schedule of operations'.

The time needed to complete a conservation plan and process eligibility can vary, from a few weeks to more than a month, depending on the complexity of the farming operation.

## **Develop a Conservation Plan**

A conservation plan includes all practices, regardless of the program's financial assistance, that a producer or landowner has agreed to adopt for the agricultural operation and/or associated agricultural lands. Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan.

## **Submitting an Application**

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing and submitting the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation or non-industrial private forest land.

## **Program Eligibility Requirements**

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

## **'EQIP schedule of operations'**

The basis for an application is the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and is derived from the applicant's conservation plan. The EQIP 'schedule of operations' identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, timing of the implementation, practice location, and payment rates.

## **EQIP Screening, Ranking and Funding**

EQIP funding decisions are based on an application evaluation process that includes screening tools and ranking criteria. Screening tools are worksheets used to prioritize an application based on factors such as: a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'. Ranking criteria considers the anticipated benefit of a conservation system, or practice, in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' to a natural resource concern.

### About the EQIP Fund Pool

The purpose of the Central Coast Cropland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote surface and ground water quality, reduce irrigation water use, improve soil quality, provide suitable habitat for wildlife, and reduce energy use.

Counties within this fund pool are located along California's Pacific Coast; the area consists of over 8.2 million acres and is home to over a \$4 billion agricultural economy that relies on the combination of soils and climate that make it an ideal place to grow many of the specialty crops enjoyed throughout the world. Streams and rivers, like the Salinas, Pajaro, Santa Maria, and Cuyama Rivers, are important natural features of the area.

In the central coast fund pool region, water supply issues such as groundwater overdraft and saltwater intrusion are widespread; as a result, irrigation water management is a common technical assistance request.

Maintaining water quality is essential for a variety of beneficial uses and is now mandated by the Central Coast Water Board through Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) and Irrigated Ag Order requirements. Within the region, the need exists for continued outreach and education regarding erosion control practices for all agricultural land uses. Additional agricultural trends and concerns include transition to and organic production, energy conservation, invasive plant and animal species, food safety, and fish and wildlife habitat management.

Depending on the crop, producers trend towards drip and micro sprinkler systems although there are still ranches that are furrow irrigated. Farm managers are also employing a variety of practices to help improve surface and ground water quality/quantity such as cover crops, filter strips, grassed waterways, irrigation water management, integrated pest management and nutrient management. Attention to wildlife habitat is also a concern to local producers. Hedgerows are planted for pollinators, invasive species are being controlled and riparian habitats are being restored.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz* counties may be eligible for the Central Coast Cropland EQIP Fund Pool; please refer to the map at the end of this document for the boundaries of this EQIP Fund Pool.

### Land Uses for the EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address resource concerns on at least one land use type listed below will be considered for financial assistance from this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- **Crop:** Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- **Farmstead:** Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities.
- **Associated Agricultural Lands:** Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as odd areas, ditches and

watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.

- **Irrigated:** Where an operational irrigation system is present and managed to supply irrigation water.
- **Wildlife:** Where the applicant is actively managing for wildlife.
- **Grazed:** Where grazing animals impact how land is managed.

### Resource Concerns for the EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are general NRCS natural resource definitions, applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

❖ **SOIL EROSION** – Erosion removes topsoil, reduces levels of soil organic matter, and contributes to the breakdown of soil structure.

- **Sheet and Rill:** Sheet and rill erosion is the detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by rainfall runoff/splash and/or irrigation events. Symptoms of soil erosion by water include: small rills and channels on the soil surface, soil deposited at the base of slopes, sediment in streams, lakes, and reservoirs, and pedestals of soil supporting pebbles and plant material.
- **Wind:** Wind erosion is the detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by wind. Symptoms of wind erosion may be identified by dust clouds, soil accumulation along fence lines or snowbanks, and a drifted appearance of the soil surface.
- **Ephemeral Gullies:** Ephemeral gullies are forms of erosion created by the concentrated flow of water. Ephemeral gullies usually appear on cultivated fields during the planting or growing season, but are temporarily removed by cultivation. Ephemeral gullies can reappear at or near the same location on a yearly basis.
- **Classic Gullies:** Classic gullies are forms of erosion created by the concentrated flow of water. Classic gully erosion generally occurs in well-defined drainage ways and generally is not obliterated by tillage. Untreated classic gullies may enlarge progressively by head cutting and/or lateral widening.
- **Excessive Bank Erosion from Streams, Shorelines or Water Conveyance Channels:** Stream stability is an active process, and while streambank erosion is a natural part of this process, it is often accelerated when land use management alters the stream system. When a stream's sediment load increases, the shape and function of the stream change, and the normal transport of sediment to downstream bottomlands is affected and the quality of wildlife habitat, both on land and in-stream, can be impacted.

❖ **SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Soil quality degradation effects rooting depth, plant growth, animal habitat and soil biological activity.

- **Compaction:** Management-induced soil compaction results in decreased rooting depth that reduces plant growth, animal habitat and soil biological activity. Compaction can lead to increased runoff and erosion from sloping land or waterlogged soils in flatter areas by reducing water infiltration into the soil.

- **Organic Matter Depletion:** Soil organic matter is carbon-rich material that includes plant, animal, and microbial residue in various stages of decomposition. Managing for soil carbon can enhance soil productivity and environmental quality. Increasing soil organic matter levels can reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) levels. Ground and surface water quality can improve too because better structure, infiltration, and biological activity make soil a more effective filter.
- **Concentration of Salts or Other Chemicals:** Concentration of salts leads to salinity and/or sodicity. Saline soils are indicative of inadequate drainage to leach salts from the soil or upward migration of salt from shallow groundwater. Sodic soils are high in sodium relative to concentrations of calcium and magnesium. Salinity or sodicity occurs naturally from parent materials high in salts, such as marine deposits, or may result from the addition of fertilizers, soil amendments (gypsum, lime), manure or saline/sodic irrigation water.
- ❖ **INSUFFICIENT WATER** – Water resources are not optimally managed to support ecological processes, land use objectives and/or water conservation goals.
  - **Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water:** Irrigation water is not stored, delivered, scheduled and/or applied efficiently. Aquifer or surface water withdrawals threaten sustained availability of ground or surface water. Available irrigation water supplies have been reduced due to aquifer depletion, competition, regulation and/or drought.
- ❖ **WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.
  - **Excess Nutrients in Surface Water:** Nutrients, organic and inorganic, are transported to receiving surface waters through runoff in quantities that degrade water quality. Increased nitrogen and phosphorus levels in water can produce excessive aquatic vegetation and algal blooms resulting in reduced dissolved oxygen, harmful toxins, and increased water temperature.
  - **Excess Nutrients in Groundwater:** Nutrients, organic and inorganic, are leached into groundwater in quantities that degrade water quality and limit uses for other purposes, for example, public drinking water systems from shallow domestic wells.
  - **Pesticides Transported to Surface Water:** Pest control chemicals are transported to receiving surface waters in quantities that degrade water quality. Pesticides typically enter surface water when rainfall or irrigation exceeds the infiltration capacity of soil and resulting runoff transports pesticides to streams, rivers, and other surface-water bodies.
  - **Pesticides Transported to Groundwater:** Pest control chemicals are leached to groundwater in quantities that degrade water quality. Pesticides can reach water-bearing aquifers as a result of applications onto crop fields, spills near poorly sealed well heads, seepage of contaminated surface water, accidental spills and leaks, or improper disposal.
  - **Excessive Sediment in Surface Water:** Off-site transport of sediment to surface water can impact water quality and aquatic habitat. Not only does sediment carry nutrients and pesticides that can negatively impact water quality, but the physical characteristics of sediment can clog stream channels, silt in reservoirs, cover fish spawning grounds, and reduce downstream water quality.

- ❖ **AIR QUALITY IMPACTS** – Direct or indirect emissions of compounds to the atmosphere that impact air quality.
  - **Emission of Particulate Matter (PM) and PM Precursors:** Particulate matter is classified by its size, as PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>. PM<sub>2.5</sub> is directly emitted from combustion and as dust from roads or tillage. PM<sub>2.5</sub> is also formed by chemical reaction of PM precursor gases; oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>). Sources of PM precursor gases can be engines, fertilizer application, and animal operations. PM<sub>10</sub> is typically mechanically generated and directly emitted from tillage operations, road and field travel, animal movement and harvesting operations.
- ❖ **INADEQUATE HABITAT FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE** – Quantity, quality or connectivity of food, water, cover/shelter, habitat continuity and/or space is inadequate to meet requirements of identified fish, wildlife or invertebrate species.
  - **Habitat Degradation:** Conserving existing habitat and restoring habitat improves the odds that fish and wildlife communities will thrive. The availability and arrangement of food, water, cover, shelter, habitat continuity and space determine the number of organisms that a region can support, also known as carrying capacity. Increasing carrying capacity is critical to attaining long-term population stability.
- ❖ **INEFFICIENT ENERGY USE** – The inefficient use of energy increases costs and dependence on non-renewable energy sources.
  - **Equipment and Facilities:** Inefficient energy use occurs whenever facilities, equipment, or machinery operate more hours than needed to meet management goals. It may also occur when facilities, equipment, or machinery become worn out, outdated, or are poorly controlled or maintained.
  - **Farming/Ranching Practices and Field Operations:** Inefficient energy use occurs whenever equipment or machinery operates more hours than needed to meet management goals. It may also occur when equipment or machinery becomes worn out, outdated, or poorly controlled.

**Eligible NRCS Conservation Activity Plans**

Only applications for NRCS conservation activity plans listed in the table below are eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. A Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) can be developed for an applicant to identify conservation practices needed to address a specific natural resource need.

Information about CAP services from Technical Service Providers (TSP), including how to find a certified TSP in your State, can be found on the NRCS national TSP website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/technical/tsp/?cid=stelprdb1042981>

**Table 1. Eligible Conservation Activity Plans**

Practice Code	Conservation Activity Plan Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
104	Nutrient Management Plan - Written	no	1
114	Integrated Pest Management Plan - Written	no	1
118	Irrigation Water Management Plan - Written	no	1
146	Pollinator Habitat Enhancement Plan - Written	no	1

### Eligible NRCS Conservation Practices

All conservation practices planned for financial assistance must be included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and address a resource concern identified in this EQIP Fund Pool. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link for NRCS conservation practice standards:

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11\\_001020](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020)

**Table 2.** Eligible Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
309	Agrichemical Handling Facility	no	15
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
317	Composting Facility	no	15
320	Irrigation Canal or Lateral	ft	15
324	Deep Tillage	ac	1
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	ac	1
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till	ac	1
330	Contour Farming	ac	5
331	Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crop	ac	10
332	Contour Buffer Strips	ac	5
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	ac	1
348	Dam, Diversion	no	15
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
351	Water Well Decommissioning	no	20
355	Groundwater Testing	no	1
356	Dike	ft	20
362	Diversion	ft	10
367	Roofs and Covers	no	10
373	Dust Control on Unpaved Roads and Surfaces	sq ft	1
378	Pond	no	20
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	ft	15
382	Fence	ft	20
386	Field Border	ac	10
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	ft	15
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	ac	5

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
396	Aquatic Organism Passage	mi	5
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
412	Grassed Waterway	ac	10
422	Hedgerow Planting	ft	15
428	Irrigation Ditch Lining	ft	20
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
436	Irrigation Reservoir	ac-ft	15
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
442	Sprinkler System	ac	15
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface	ac	15
449	Irrigation Water Management	ac	1
450	Anionic Polyacrylamide (PAM) Application	ac	1
460	Land Clearing	ac	10
462	Precision Land Forming	ac	10
464	Irrigation Land Leveling	ac	15
466	Land Smoothing	ac	10
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ft	15
472	Access Control	ac	10
484	Mulching	ac	1
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
500	Obstruction Removal	ac	10
512	Forage and Biomass Planting	ac	5
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
520	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil	no	15
521A	Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	no	20
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
557	Row Arrangement	ac	5
558	Roof Runoff Structure	no	15
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	ac	10
570	Stormwater Runoff Control	no	15
572	Spoil Spreading	ac	1
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1
595	Integrated Pest Management	ac	1
600	Terrace	ft	10
601	Vegetative Barrier	ft	5
603	Herbaceous Wind Barriers	ft	5
606	Subsurface Drain	ft	20

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
607	Surface Drain, Field Ditch	ft	15
608	Surface Drain, Main or Lateral	ft	15
610	Salinity and Sodic Soil Management	ac	1
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
629	Waste Treatment	no	10
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin	no	10
647	Early Successional Habitat Development/Management	ac	1
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
650	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation	ft	15
656	Constructed Wetland	ac	15
657	Wetland Restoration	ac	15
658	Wetland Creation	ac	15
659	Wetland Enhancement	ac	15

### Practice Payment Rate Caps

For certain conservation practices a limit to the amount of financial assistance has been established. Practice payment caps are established in consultation with local partners and to allow limited financial assistance support to reach more participants. Please contact your local field office if you have questions. A maximum payment amount per contract or practice is not allowable. Payment rate caps are applicable per contract item number.

**Table 3. Practice Payment Rate Caps**

Conservation Practice Code and Name	Regular Payment Rate Cap	Historically Underserved Payment Rate Cap
314 – Brush Management	\$7,500	\$13,500
340 – Cover Crop	\$30,000	\$54,000
382 – Fence	\$25,000	\$45,000
373 – Dust Control on Unpaved Roads	\$30,000	\$54,000
436 – Irrigation Reservoir, Tank	\$30,000	\$54,000
441 – Irrigation System, Microirrigation	\$75,000	\$135,000
442 – Sprinkler System, Handline system	\$15,000	\$27,000
484 – Mulching	\$15,000	\$27,000
558 – Roof Runoff Structures	\$30,000	\$54,000
590 – Nutrient Management	\$15,000	\$27,000
595 – Integrated Pest Management	\$15,000	\$27,000

**NRCS Field Office Contact Information**

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants should contact a NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

**USDA-NRCS, Monterey County**

Salinas Service Center  
(831) 424-1036  
Bobette Parsons, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, San Benito County**

Hollister Service Center  
(831) 637-4360  
Erika Boyland, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, San Luis Obispo County**

Templeton Service Center  
(805) 434-0396  
Margy Lindquist, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, San Mateo County**

Half Moon Bay Local Partnership Office  
(650) 726-4660  
James Howard, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Santa Barbara County**

Santa Maria Service Center  
(805) 928-9269  
Jeff Rodriguez, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Santa Clara County**

Hollister Service Center  
(831) 637-4360  
Erika Boyland, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Santa Cruz County**

Capitola Local Partnership Office  
(831) 475-1967  
Richard Casale, District Conservationist

