

## **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 Rangeland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote rangeland health and ecological function while enhancing wildlife habitat values.

The Central Coast Rangeland Fund Pool region is based on similar biological and physical components. The region includes San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. The region is predominantly Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 15, the Central California Coast Range and MLRA 14, the Central California Coastal Valleys. The region is also classified as the Central Coast Bioregion by the California Biodiversity Council.

Climatic conditions are Mediterranean characterized by late fall and winter rainfall, mild to moderate temperatures, summer fog along the coastline, and clear warm days inland most of the year. Topography ranges from flat to gently sloping coastal valleys; to coast mountain ranges; to interior valleys; to inland mountain ranges. Herbaceous vegetation is composed mostly of mixed annual species with minor amounts of native perennial grasses, blue and coast live oak, and chaparral-type brush species. The region shares common resource concerns including water quality degradation, soil erosion, degraded plant condition including invasive species, and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife. Shared emerging and ongoing resource issues include fuel management; threatened, endangered and species of special concern; and existing and potential regulatory requirements and permitting including the use of regional permitting.

Grazing patterns are typically year round using cow-calf or seasonal stocker herds. Forage production varies considerably year by year based on rainfall amounts and patterns, grazing pressure, livestock rest and rotation patterns, and species composition. Conservation practices that maintain ground cover during the rainy season, such as developing a prescribed grazing plan with adequate cross-fencing and stock water, are common and cost effective approaches to addressing water quality concerns. Conservation practices to enhance wildlife habitat values include stream habitat improvement, aquatic organism passage, upland wildlife habitat management, fish and wildlife structure and wildlife watering facilities.

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 Rangeland 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 concern 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.

- **Range:** Land used primarily for the production of grazing animals. Includes native plant communities and those seeded to native or introduced species, or naturalized by introduced species that are ecologically managed using range management principles.
- **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.
- **Grazed:** Where grazing animals impact how land is managed.
- **Wildlife:** Where the applicant is actively managing for wildlife.

### 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.
  - **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.

- ❖ **INSUFFICIENT WATER** – Water resources are not optimally managed to support ecological processes, land use objectives and/or water conservation goals.
  - **Inefficient Moisture Management:** In dryland conditions, inefficient moisture management can result in increased runoff, reduced soil moisture and diminished groundwater recharge. In some grassland and forestland systems, brush management can help restore a natural water regime.
  
- ❖ **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.
  - **Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-solids or Compost Applications Transported to Surface Water:** Pathogens and other chemicals are carried by soil amendments applied to the land and subsequently transported to receiving surface waters in quantities that degrade water quality. Many potential pathogens (disease-causing microorganisms) can be found in manure, bio-solids or compost.
  - **Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-solids or Compost Applications Transported to Groundwater:** Pathogens and other chemicals are carried by soil amendments applied to the land and subsequently 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. Many potential pathogens (disease-causing microorganisms) can be found in manure, bio-solids or compost.
  - **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.
  - **Elevated Water Temperature:** Water temperature has important ecological consequences and potential negative impacts for human use. As water temperature rises, there is a corresponding decrease in the availability of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases important to aquatic life. Warm water also has the potential to increase the presence of dissolved toxic substances that may restrict the suitability of water for human use.
  
- ❖ **DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION** – Plant condition degradation can result in stress, disease, insect damage and result in changes to the structure and composition of plant communities.
  - **Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health:** Plants must be adapted to the site and provided with appropriate amounts of nutrients, water, and sunshine, and protected from unchecked animal, weed, insect, and disease pests. Plants established in the wrong climate or soil may be under stress and may never thrive, no matter how much fertilizer or water supplied. Natural events, such as drought, or mismanagement can cause plant stress. Plants under stress are more susceptible to disease and insect damage.

- **Inadequate Structure and Composition:** Plant communities, such as - wetland habitat, unique ecosystems or targeted plant communities, have insufficient diversity, density, distribution patterns, and three-dimensional structure necessary to achieve ecological functions and/or management objectives.
  - **Excessive Plant Pest Pressure:** The term “pest” can be any animal, plant, insect, bacteria, or virus that results in plant damage or competes for space, nutrients, or water (e.g., weeds). Heat, drought, wind, sun, and cold create stress on plants that make them more susceptible to pests.
  - **Wildfire Hazard, Excess Biomass Accumulation:** Accumulated plant residue (biomass) creates wildfire hazards that pose risks to human safety, structures, plants, animals, and air resources. While fire is an important and often beneficial part of the natural ecosystem, uncontrolled or “wild” fire poses a threat to life, health, and property.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION** – Livestock require five major classes of nutrients: energy, protein, minerals, vitamins, and water. All five are essential for normal health and production.
- **Inadequate Livestock Water:** Water quantity and distribution of suitable water sources can affect livestock based on the basic need to meet daily intake requirements and issues related to grazing patterns. Livestock travel distance to water can result in surplus/deficient forage availability and excessive/insufficient plant utilization.
- ❖ **INEFFICIENT ENERGY USE** – The inefficient use of energy increases costs and dependence on non-renewable energy sources.
- **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)
110	Grazing Management Plan - Written	no	1
142	Fish and Wildlife Habitat 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)
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
338	Prescribed Burning	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
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
378	Pond	no	20
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	ft	15
381	Silvopasture Establishment	ac	15
382	Fence	ft	20
383	Fuel Break	ac	10
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
394	Firebreak	ft	5
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	ac	5
396	Aquatic Organism Passage	mi	5
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
422	Hedgerow Planting	ft	15
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
460	Land Clearing	ac	10

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
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
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
520	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil	no	15
521A	Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	no	20
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
548	Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment	ac	1
550	Range Planting	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
574	Spring Development	no	20
575	Trails and Walkways	ft	10
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
582	Open Channel	ft	15
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
601	Vegetative Barrier	ft	5
606	Subsurface Drain	ft	20
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
630	Vertical Drain	no	10
636	Water Harvesting Catchment	no	20
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin	no	10
642	Water Well	no	20
647	Early Successional Habitat Development/Management	ac	1
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
650	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation	ft	15
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	ft	10
657	Wetland Restoration	ac	15
658	Wetland Creation	ac	15
659	Wetland Enhancement	ac	15
660	Tree/Shrub Pruning	ac	10
666	Forest Stand Improvement	ac	10

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
740	Pond Sealing and Lining, Soil Cement	no	20

### 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanical or Chemical</li> <li>• Biological with goats</li> </ul>	\$7,500 \$2,500	\$13,500 \$4,500
315 – Herbaceous Weed Control	\$15,000	\$27,000
378 – Pond	\$20,000	\$36,000
382 – Fence	\$50,000	\$90,000
550 – Range Planting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native species</li> </ul>	\$5,000	\$5,000
558 – Roof Runoff Structures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gutters and downspouts</li> </ul>	\$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, x.101  
Bobette Parsons, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, San Benito County**

Hollister Service Center  
(831) 637-4360, x.110  
Erika Boyland, District Conservationist

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

Templeton Service Center  
(805) 434-0396, x.102  
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, x.105  
Jeff Rodriguez, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Santa Clara County**

Hollister Service Center  
(831) 637-4360, x.110  
Erika Boyland, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Santa Cruz County**

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

