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 is 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 Interior Coast Range and Valley Rangeland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote rangeland health and ecological function while enhancing wildlife habitat values. Cattle, sheep and goats are raised on the western rangeland hills and mountains of the San Joaquin Valley, as well as rangeland areas of the valley itself. Ranch managers understand the need to have a prescribed grazing plan that maintains ground cover during the rainy season and evenly distributes livestock across their land.

To successfully implement a prescribed grazing plan, adequate cross-fencing and a stock water system must be maintained. Ranchers are focused on reducing sediment and animal waste in streams; and, they understand that wildlife is a major component of a healthy ecosystem. With wildlife in mind, including threatened and endangered species, ranchers are working to control invasive species, provide watering facilities to wildlife, and restore riparian vegetation and ponds.

On rangeland, minimizing and eliminating sediment and animal water in streams is a priority resource concern. 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. Typical conservation practices can include fence, prescribed grazing to control the harvest of vegetation, riparian herbaceous cover, and watering facilities to provide adequate amount and quality of drinking water.

Other important resource priorities on rangeland include pest plant infestations, intensively used riparian corridors, degraded wildlife habitat and barriers to wildlife migration. Conservation practices that enhance forage productivity for livestock and reduce erosion and sediment delivery to streams include fencing, livestock pipelines, tanks and troughs provide the necessary infrastructure for effective livestock management in conjunction with a prescribed grazing plan. Conservation practices to enhance wildlife habitat values include controlling invasive species, restoring riparian vegetation, restoring ponds and providing watering facilities.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, western Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare* counties may be eligible for the Interior Coast Range and Valley 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 idle center pivot corners, 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.

- 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.

❖ 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.
- Petroleum, Heavy Metals, or Other Pollutants Transported to Surface Water: Heavy metals, petroleum and other pollutants have the potential to be transported to surface water.
- Petroleum, Heavy Metals, or Other Pollutants Transported to Groundwater: Heavy metals, petroleum and other pollutants have the potential to be transported to groundwater.
- 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.

❖ 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 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

Table 1. Eligible Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
319	On-Farm Secondary Containment Facility	no	15
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
348	Dam, Diversion	no	15
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
351	Water Well Decommissioning	no	20
356	Dike	ft	20
362	Diversion	ft	10
378	Pond	no	20
382	Fence	ft	20
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
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
396	Aquatic Organism Passage	mi	5
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
460	Land Clearing	ac	10
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ft	15
472	Access Control	ac	10
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

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
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
576	Livestock Shelter Structure	no	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
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
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
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
740	Pond Sealing and Lining, Soil Cement	no	20

Practice Payment Rate Caps

For certain conservations 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
382 – Fence	$32,000	$48,000
382 – Fence – Difficult Installation	$50,000	$75,000
516 – Livestock Pipeline	$21,000	$37,500
528 – Prescribed Grazing	$5,000	$9,000

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, Fresno County
Fresno Service Center
(559) 276-7494
David Durham, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Kern County
Bakersfield Service Center
(661) 336-0967
Jermaine Jenkins, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Kings County
Hanford Service Center
(559) 584-9209
Hugo Calvillo, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Madera County
Madera Service Center
(559) 674-4628
Johnnie Siliznoff, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Merced County
Merced Service Center
(209) 722-4119
Jarrod Martin, District Conservationist

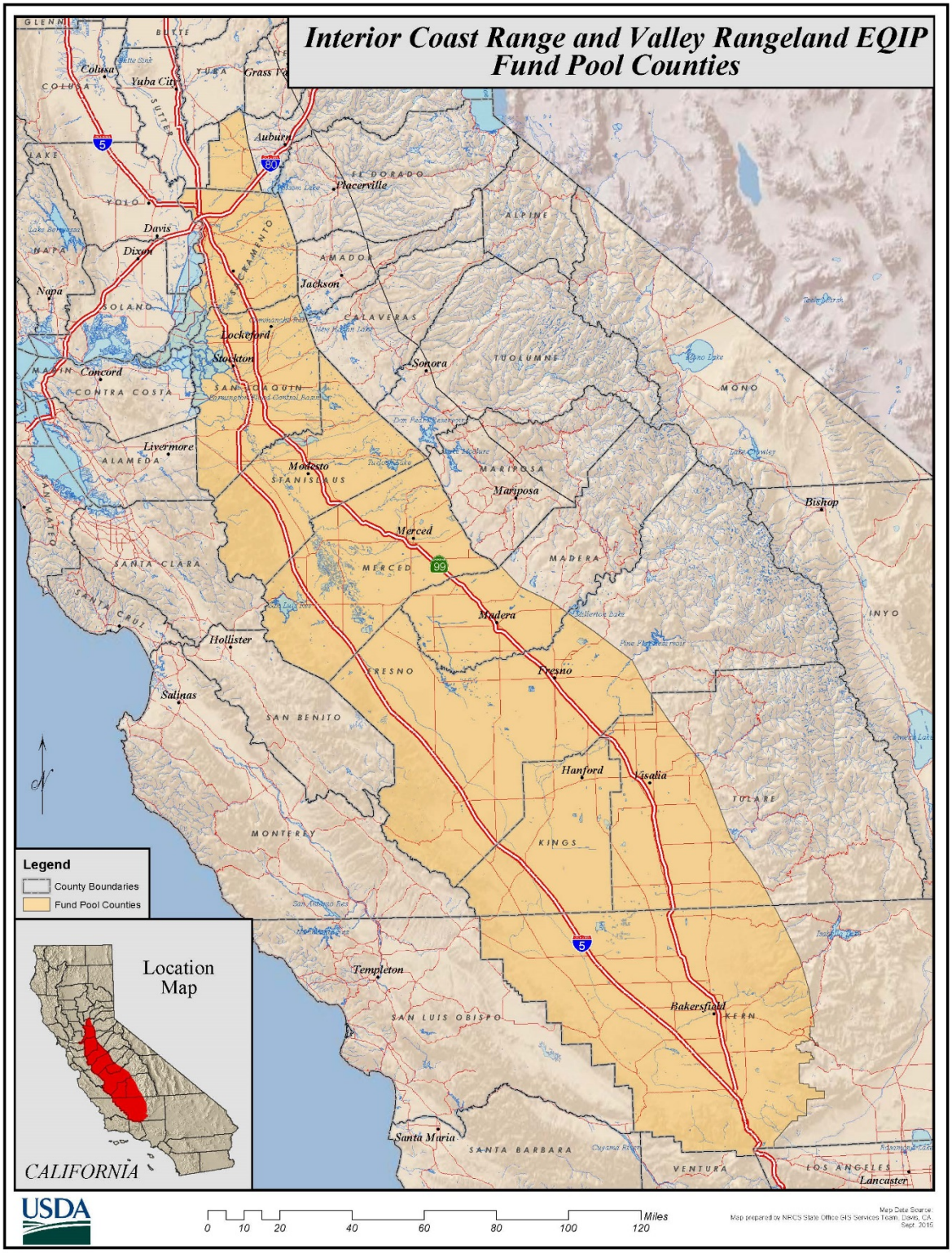
USDA-NRCS, Placer County
Auburn Service Center
(530) 885-6505
Jennifer Johnson, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Sacramento County
Elk Grove Service Center
(916) 714-1104
Dwane Coffey, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, San Joaquin County
Stockton Service Center
(209) 472-7127
Ora Van Steyn, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Stanislaus County
Modesto Service Center
(209) 491-9320
Diana Waller, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Tulare County
Visalia Service Center
(559) 734-8732
Joe Williams, District Conservationist


Interior Coast Range and Valley Rangeland EQIP Fund Pool Counties
Legend
County Boundaries
Fund Pool Counties
Location Map
CALIFORNIA
Miles
0 10 20 40 60 80 100 120
Colusa
Yuba City
Grass Valley
Auburn
Placerville
Davis
Dixon
Napa
Jackson
Lockeford
Stockton
Concord
Sonora
Livermore
Modesto
Mariposa
Bishop
Merced
Madera
Fresno
Hollister
Salinas
Hanford
Visalia
Templeton
Bakersfield
Santa Maria
Lancaster
GLENN
BUTTE
COLUSA
YUBA
SUTTER
LAKE
YOLO
NAPA
SOLANO
EL DORADO
ALPINE
AMADOR
CALAVERAS
TUOLUMNE
MONO
MARIN
CONTRA COSTA
SAN JOAQUIN
ALAMEDA
STANISLAUS
MARIPOSA
SAN MATEO
SANTA CLARA
MERCED
MADERA
INYO
SANTA CRUZ
FRESNO
SAN BENITO
TULARE
MONTEREY
KINGS
SAN LUIS OBISPO
KERN
SANTA BARBARA
VENTURA
LOS ANGELES