

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 Water Conservation EQIP Fund Pool targeted specifically to irrigated agricultural operations to address water conservation. The primary source of irrigation and frost control water for agricultural production in the Central Coast region is groundwater. The priority of the fund pool is to assist growers with water conservation measures that promote conservation of groundwater, with particular emphasis on areas with aquifers in overdraft status. Conservation treatments offered through this initiative can also improve infiltration of rainfall, storage of runoff for irrigation use and conservation of surface water used for irrigation.

Along the California central coast, groundwater is the primary source of irrigation and frost control water for agricultural production and primary purpose of this initiative is to promote conservation of groundwater resources with particular emphasis on areas with aquifers in overdraft status.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Alameda, Marin, Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and Sonoma* counties may be eligible for the Central Coast Water Conservation 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.

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.

- ❖ **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.
 - **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.
- ❖ **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)
118	Irrigation Water Management 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

Table 1. Eligible Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
324	Deep Tillage	ac	1
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	ac	1
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till	ac	1
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	1
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	ac	1
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
355	Groundwater Testing	no	1
362	Diversion	Ft	10
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	Ft	15
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
464	Irrigation Land Leveling	ac	15
484	Mulching	Ac	1
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
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1
601	Vegetative Barrier	ft	5
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
629	Waste Treatment	no	10
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 2. Practice Payment Rate Caps

Conservation Practice Code and Name	Regular Payment Rate Cap	Historically Underserved Payment Rate Cap
340 – Cover Crop	\$30,000	\$54,000
436 – Irrigation Reservoir <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tank 	\$30,000	\$54,000
441 – Irrigation System, Microirrigation	\$75,000	\$135,000
442 – Sprinkler System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handline 	\$15,000	\$27,000
558 – Roof Runoff Structures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gutters and downspouts 	\$30,000	\$54,000

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, Alameda County

Livermore Local Partnership Office
(925) 371-0154
Alyson Aquino, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, San Mateo County

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

USDA-NRCS, Marin County

Petaluma Service Center
(707) 794-1242
Jennifer Walsler, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Santa Barbara County

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

USDA-NRCS, Monterey County

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

USDA-NRCS, Santa Clara County

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

USDA-NRCS, San Benito 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

USDA-NRCS, San Luis Obispo County

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

USDA-NRCS, Sonoma County

Petaluma Service Center
(707) 794-1242
Jennifer Walsler, District Conservationist

