

## **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 objective of the San Joaquin Valley Pastureland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote improved irrigation efficiency and to protect water quality by pollutants that have the potential to enter local streams and rivers plus to improve soil health and wildlife habitat values. Pasture is a land use type having vegetation cover comprised primarily of introduced or enhanced native forage species that is used for livestock grazing. Pasture differs from range in that it primarily produces vegetation that has initially been planted to provide preferred forage for grazing livestock.

Pasture receives periodic renovation and cultural treatments such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. Pasture vegetation can consist of grasses, legumes, other forbs, shrubs or a mixture. Due to climate variation and pasture management, forage species composition often is in flux. The duration and number of grazing livestock significantly influences the persistence of one species over another.

Pasture lands provide many benefits other than forage for livestock. Wildlife use pasture as shelter and for food sources. Well managed pasture captures rainwater that is slowly infiltrated into the soil which helps recharge groundwater. Many small pasture livestock operations are near urban areas providing vistas for everyone to enjoy. Pasture is the basis of any livestock operation that is truly sustainable.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare* counties may be eligible for the San Joaquin Valley Pastureland 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.

- **Pasture:** Land composed of introduced or domesticated native forage species that is used primarily for the production of livestock. Pastures receive periodic renovation and cultural treatments, such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. Pastures are not in rotation with 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.
- **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 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.
  
- ❖ **EXCESS WATER** – Surface water or poor subsurface drainage restricts plant growth and land use.
  - **Ponding or Flooding:** Saturated soil increase the likelihood of diseases, losses of soil nitrogen due to denitrification and leaching of nitrate N, and soil damage by heavy equipment. Excess water can affect structures and slope stability. If the soil has a dense layer, especially a layer of clay, infiltration of water into the soil may be restricted and water may pond.
  
- ❖ **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.
  - **Excess 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.
  - **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.

- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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](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)
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
320	Irrigation Canal or Lateral	ft	15
324	Deep Tillage	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
351	Water Well Decommissioning	no	20
362	Diversion	ft	10
378	Pond	no	20
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	ft	15
382	Fence	ft	20
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	ft	15
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	ac	5
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	Irrigation System, Sprinkler	ac	15
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface	ac	15
447	Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery <sup>1</sup>	no	15
449	Irrigation Water Management	ac	1
464	Irrigation Land Leveling	ac	15
466	Land Smoothing	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
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
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
548	Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment	ac	1
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	ac	10
570	Stormwater Runoff Control	no	15

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1
603	Herbaceous Wind Barriers	ft	5
607	Surface Drain, Field Ditch	ft	15
608	Surface Drain, Main or Lateral	ft	15
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
642	Water Well	no	20
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
656	Constructed Wetland	ac	15
740	Pond Sealing and Lining, Soil Cement	no	20

<sup>1</sup>Conservation practice, 447 – Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery, is an irrigation tailwater recovery system and practice payment rates will be based on eligible conservation practices included in the system.

### Practice Payment Rate Caps

For certain conservation practices a limit to the maximum amount of financial assistance for a practice have been established. Maximum amounts are established in consultation with local partners and the level at which practice payments are set will allow limited financial assistance support to reach more participants. Please contact your local field office if you have questions. Practice payment rate caps are applicable to all instances of a practice this EQIP fiscal year.

**Table 2.** Practice Payment Rate Caps

Conservation Practice Code and Name	Regular Payment Rate Cap	Historically Underserved Payment Rate Cap
442 – Sprinkler System	\$40,000	\$72,000
449 – Irrigation Water Management	\$3,500	\$5,790
528 – Prescribed Grazing	\$2,000	\$,4000
590 – Nutrient Management	\$1,000	\$1,800

**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, Tulare County**

Visalia Service Center  
(559) 734-8732  
Joe Williams, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Kern County**

Bakersfield Service Center  
(661) 336-0967  
Jermaine Jenkins, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Sacramento County**

Elk Grove Service Center  
(916) 714-1104  
Dwane Coffey, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Kings County**

Hanford Service Center  
(559) 584-9209  
Hugo Calvillo, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, San Joaquin County**

Stockton Service Center  
(209) 472-7127  
Ora Van Steyn, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Madera County**

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

**USDA-NRCS, Stanislaus County**

Modesto Service Center  
(209) 491-9320  
Diana Waller, District Conservationist

**USDA-NRCS, Merced County**

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

