

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 Wildlife-Friendly Livestock Pond EQIP Fund Pool

The purpose of the Wildlife-Friendly Livestock Pond Fund Pool is to target financial assistance funds for the implementation of conservation practices on eligible agricultural operations to support aquatic, riparian, and upland habitats for California Red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) and California Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*).

Eligible agricultural landuses for the fund pool are restricted to grazed rangeland because of the habitat needs of these two species. Natural areas such as associated agricultural lands not in agricultural production are also eligible.

Ponds may be restored to hold their original quantity of water and will therefore increase the potential to hold water in a field for livestock use. Improvements to livestock ponds may also improve inadequate stock water issues that compromise the ability of a land manager to properly utilize and manage forage.

Other possible treatments may reduce the amount of sediments coming into a pond, which in turn extend the number of years that pond will hold sufficient amounts of water.

Due to the high potential for listed species to be affected by the proposed projects, programmatic permits held by the NRCS, the Alameda County Resource Conservation District, and the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District may be utilized, when appropriate.

Complying with regulatory permits ensures that the goals of this initiative are met via habitat improvements for California Red-legged frog and California Tiger Salamander. All practices implemented with financial assistance from EQIP must follow Federal, State, and local regulations.

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.
- **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.

- ❖ **WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.
 - **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.

- ❖ **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.

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 | Units | Lifespan |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------|----------|
| 110 | Grazing 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.

All conservation practices included in an application for the Wildlife-Friendly Livestock Pond EQIP Fund Pool must directly improve the breeding habitat for the California red-legged frog and/or California tiger salamander.

- Conservation practice, 378 – Pond, can only be included in an application for this initiative if the pond is existing, was formally used as a livestock pond, is being rehabilitated for wildlife habitat, and is for not used for irrigation. New ponds are not eligible for financial assistance through EQIP.
- Conservation practices to address resource issues related to roads must reduce or eliminate excess sediments entering a livestock pond or a water body that flows to a livestock water pond; examples include, but are not limited to, 560 - Access Road and 587 - Structure for Water Control.

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 2. Eligible Conservation Practices

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 314 | Brush Management | ac | 10 |
| 315 | Herbaceous Weed Control | ac | 5 |
| 338 | Prescribed Burning | ac | 1 |
| 342 | Critical Area Planting | ac | 10 |
| 350 | Sediment Basin | no | 20 |
| 351 | Water Well Decommissioning | no | 20 |
| 355 | Well Water Testing | no | 1 |
| 356 | Dike | ft | 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 |
| 390 | Riparian Herbaceous Cover | ac | 5 |
| 391 | Riparian Forest Buffer | ac | 15 |
| 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 |
| 430 | Irrigation Pipeline | ft | 20 |
| 436 | Irrigation Reservoir | ac-ft | 15 |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 441 | Irrigation System, Microirrigation | ac | 15 |
| 462 | Precision Land Forming | ac | 10 |
| 468 | Lined Waterway or Outlet | ft | 15 |
| 472 | Access Control | ac | 10 |
| 484 | Mulching | 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 |
| 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 |
| 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 |
| 649 | Structures for Wildlife | no | 5 |
| 650 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation | ft | 15 |
| 654 | Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment | ft | 10 |
| 656 | Constructed Wetland | ac | 15 |
| 657 | Wetland Restoration | ac | 15 |
| 658 | Wetland Creation | ac | 15 |
| 659 | Wetland Enhancement | ac | 15 |
| 660 | Tree/Shrub Pruning | ac | 10 |

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|-----|--------------------------------------|----|----|
| 740 | Pond Sealing and Lining, Soil Cement | no | 20 |
|-----|--------------------------------------|----|----|

Practice Payment Rate Caps

For certain conservation practices a limit to the maximum amount of incentive funding 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 funding 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 3. Practice Payment Rate Caps

| Conservation Practice Code and Name | Regular Payment Rate Cap | Historically Underserved Payment Rate Cap |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 315 – Herbaceous Weed Control | \$6,500 | \$9,000 |

Submitting an EQIP Application

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Alameda County, Contra Costa County, and portions of Santa Clara County contained by the upper Alameda Creek watershed* may be eligible for the Wildlife-Friendly Livestock Pond EQIP Fund Pool.

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, Contra Costa County

Concord Service Center
(925) 672-4577
Hilary Phillips, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Santa Clara County

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

