



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

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News Release

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USDA Invites Input on Environmental Quality Incentives Program Rule

LITTLE ROCK, Ark., December 16, 2019 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) seeks public comments on its interim rule for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), USDA’s flagship program that helps producers plan and implement 150-plus conservation practices on working lands. The rule – now available on the *Federal Register* – takes effect upon publication and includes changes to the program prescribed by the 2018 Farm Bill.

“The Environmental Quality Incentives Program gives farmers, ranchers and forest landowners the tools they need to improve their agricultural operations while conserving natural resources,” said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. “The 2018 Farm Bill further strengthens this popular conservation program to enable NRCS to better support locally led conservation efforts while also expanding producers’ ability to address significant resource concerns.”

NRCS will make available \$1.2 billion nationwide for interested producers in fiscal 2020. The Arkansas NRCS state office will announce signup periods for EQIP in the coming weeks.

Changes to EQIP include:

- Creating incentive contracts and payments for incentive practices to better support locally led conservation needs.
- Requiring NRCS to offer an advance payment option for historically underserved producers.
- Raising the payment cap for producers participating in the Organic Initiative to \$140,000 for contracts entered into between fiscal 2019 through 2023.
- Expanding the Conservation Innovation Grant program, which is funded through EQIP, to include opportunities for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials and Soil Health Demonstration Trials.

The 2018 Farm Bill created incentive contracts, which address up to three priority resource concerns within targeted watersheds and other high priority landscapes. While typical EQIP contracts last five years, these contracts last five to 10 years.

The Farm Bill also enabled increased payments for priority practices, through which NRCS can designate up to 10 practices in each state to receive the higher rates.

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Submitting Comments

NRCS invites comments on this interim rule through **Feb. 18, 2020**. Electronic comments must be submitted through [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) under Docket ID NRCS-2019-0009. All written comments received will be publicly available on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

NRCS will evaluate public comments to determine whether additional changes are needed. The agency plans on publishing a final rule following public comment review.

Applying for EQIP

NRCS provides producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement conservation practices through EQIP. Popular EQIP practices include cover crops, nutrient management, forest stand improvement, prescribed grazing, irrigation efficiency improvement, and practices related to water quality improvement. Implementing conservation practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat while improving agricultural operations.

EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis. If a producer's application is funded, NRCS will offer an EQIP contract for financial assistance for the cost of implementing the practices. Payment rates for conservation practices are reviewed and set each fiscal year.

For more information on how to sign up for EQIP in Arkansas, visit ar.nrcs.usda.gov or contact your [local NRCS field office](#).