

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.

NRCS Field Office Contact Information

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants should contact the NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

USDA-NRCS, Kern County

Bakersfield Service Center

(661) 336-0967

Jermaine Jenkins, District Conservationist

About the Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool

The purpose of the Bay-Delta Initiative for the Southern Tulare Basin is to positively impact surface and ground water conservation efforts by:

- Expanding implementation of nutrient management practices
- Improving the timing, placement and uniformity of dairy waste water on cropland
- Retrofitting older, poor performing irrigation systems
- Promoting conversion of flood/furrow irrigated operations to more efficient microirrigation
- Reducing impacts from pesticides, salinity, and agrochemicals
- Improving water management through intermediate and advanced monitoring and record keeping.

The focus area of this initiative is defined as the southern third of the Tulare Lake Basin bounded on the east by the Southern Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Transverse Range in the south, the Temblor Range in the east, and the Kern County line in the north.

The Bay-Delta Initiative for the Southern Tulare Basin is specifically targeted for irrigated agricultural operations that have the capacity to adopt and apply Conservation Activity Plan practice 104 – Nutrient Management or at least one of the core practices listed in *Table 2*.

This initiative can provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers who are willing to address water quantity and/or water quality located within the Southern Tulare Basin priority area. Ranking and fund pool materials have been developed to assure that program funds are available to address resource priorities. Specific considerations and practice limitations exist and vary depending on location and whether or not projects are situated within designated special focus area boundaries.

Land Uses for the Bay-Delta Initiative 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 Bay-Delta Initiative 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.
- **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.

Resource Concerns for the Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concerns listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this Bay-Delta Initiative 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** – 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 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.

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 initiative. 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
104	Nutrient 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 in the applicant's conservation plan. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this Bay-Delta Initiative EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

Every application approved for funding must include at least one core practice unless the contract will complete a conservation system that supports core practices documented as applied for the land.

- Core conservation practices are critical to addressing the targeted resource concern(s) for this Bay-Delta Initiative and achieving the desired environmental outcome(s).
- Supporting practices are those practices needed to make the core practices function properly or to address a specific site or condition related to the identified resource concern(s).

All applications selected for financial assistance through this Bay-Delta Initiative must include documentation that an alternative containing the core practices was presented to the decision-maker.

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. Core Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Core Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
449	Irrigation Water Management	ac	1
484	Mulching	ac	1
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1

Table 3. Supporting Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
309	Agrichemical Handling Facility	sqft	15
313	Waste Storage Facility	no	15
320	Irrigation Canal or Lateral	ft	15
359	Waste Treatment Lagoon	no	15
366	Anaerobic Digester	no	25
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	ft	15
428	Irrigation Ditch Lining	ft	20
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
436	Irrigation Reservoir	ac-ft	15

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
442	Sprinkler System	ac	15
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface	ac	15
464	Irrigation Land Leveling	ac	15
520	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil	no	15
521A	Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	no	20
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	ac	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
629	Waste Treatment	no	10
632	Solid/Liquid Waste Separation Facility	no	15
634	Waste Transfer	No	15
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin	no	10

