

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 a NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

USDA-NRCS, Ventura County

Oxnard Service Center
(805) 984-2358 ext. 101, ext. 109 for Spanish
Dawn Afman, District Conservationist

About the National Water Quality Initiative

The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) was established as a joint initiative with the NRCS and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to address agricultural sources of water pollution, including nutrients, sediment, pesticides, and pathogens related to agricultural production and in priority watersheds with streams or water bodies in one or more of the following categories:

- (1) **Impaired** – A stream or water body documented to be impaired and identified on a State's 303(d) list of impaired waters as designated by EPA.
- (2) **Threatened** – A stream or water body with water quality data documenting impairment but does not have a total maximum daily load (TMDL) implementation plan and is not listed on the 303(d) list of impaired waters as designated by the EPA.
- (3) **Total Maximum Daily Loads** – A stream or water body that has been on EPA's 303(d) list of impaired waters, but may have been removed because there is a TMDL plan for implementation.
- (4) **Critical** – a stream or water body upstream of an impaired segment or area, and is known to be a contributing source of the downstream impairment for a stream in one or more of the three categories above.

The Clean Water Act requires states, territories, and authorized tribes to develop lists of impaired waters. These are waters that are too polluted or otherwise degraded to meet the water quality standards set by states, territories, or authorized tribes.

The law requires that these jurisdictions establish priority rankings for waters on the lists and develop TMDLs for these waters. A TMDL is a calculation of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive and still safely meet water quality standards.

For more information on impaired waters and TMDLs visit the following link to the EPA website <http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/lawsguidance/cwa/tmdl/index.cfm>.

About the National Water Quality Initiative for Calleguas Creek

The subwatersheds, Los Posas Arroyo, Beardsley Wash, Revlon Slough and Mugu Lagoon, of the Calleguas Creek watershed have been identified by California NRCS as high priority small watersheds targeted for financial and technical assistance through NWQI.

The Calleguas Creek watershed drains an area of approximately 343 square miles in the eastern portion of Ventura County. The Arroyos Simi, Las Posas Arroyo, Conejo Creek and the Revlon Slough are tributaries

of the Calleguas Creek and empty into the Mugu Lagoon which is a system of salt-water marshes, tidal pools and duck ponds, with a bay adjoining the Pacific Ocean.

All main waterbodies of the Calleguas Creek watershed appear on the federal 303(d) list of impaired waterbodies which triggered the requirement to develop Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for specific pollutants identified as contributing to the impairment. The Calleguas Creek Watershed has TMDLs for Nitrogen Compounds Organochlorine (OC) Pesticides, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) and Siltation, Metals and Selenium, Toxicity and Salts.

California's Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) regulates agricultural discharges from irrigated agricultural lands to prevent agricultural discharges from impairing the waters that receive these discharges. As part of the ILRP, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board adopted a Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands within the Los Angeles Region (Conditional Waiver) on October 10, 2010.

To comply with the ILRP various agricultural organizations, water districts and growers joined together to form the Ventura County Agricultural Irrigated Lands Group (VCAILG) to act as one unified Discharger Group to comply with the Conditional Waiver.

The primary purpose of the VCAILG is to encourage collaboration on monitoring and reporting and to increase the effectiveness of management practices throughout a watershed to attain water quality standards. The VCAILG also plays an active role in the TMDL process and coordinates TMDL water quality monitoring in the Calleguas Creek watershed.

Water discharges from agricultural operations in the Calleguas Creek watershed include irrigation runoff, flows from tile drains, and storm water runoff. These agricultural discharges can affect water quality by transporting pollutants, including pesticides, sediment, nutrients, salts (including selenium and boron) and heavy metals, from cultivated fields into surface waters.

The Calleguas Creek watershed has supported a thriving agriculture industry for over a century with strawberries as the leading commodity followed by celery, raspberries, lemons and avocados. Approximately 64,000 acres of the land in the Calleguas Creek Watershed is used for agricultural purposes.

Avocado and citrus crops are typically grown in sloping foothill areas of the watershed and crops such as strawberries, peppers, green beans, celery and onions, as well as sod farms and nurseries, are grown in the Oxnard Plain. Many farms in Revolon Slough and Lower Calleguas Creek grow multiple crops during a single year.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production within the *Los Posas Arroyo, Beardsley Wash, Revlon Slough, and Mugu Lagoon watersheds of the Calleguas Creek in Ventura County* may be eligible for the National Water Quality Initiative for Calleguas Creek.

Approved NRCS Land Uses

Only applications for agricultural operations on approved NRCS land uses will be considered for financial assistance National Water Quality Initiative for Calleguas Creek. Approved land uses for this initiative are:

- **Cropland:** Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- **Rangeland:** 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.
- **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 Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through the National Water Quality Initiative for Calleguas Creek. 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.
 - **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 Salts in Surface Water:** Irrigation or rainfall runoff transports salts to receiving surface water in quantities that degrade water quality. White crusting of soil, irregular crop growth, and lack of plant vigor is an indicator of salinity. Salinity in surface water is an ecological factor, influencing the types of organisms that live in a body of water, and increases the cost of treating water for drinking.
- **Excess Salts in Groundwater:** Leaching of saline water to ground water in quantities that degrade water quality and limit use for other purposes, for example, public drinking water systems from shallow domestic wells. Groundwater recharge management of saline water in porous soils may include decreasing infiltration of excess saline irrigation water to manage salt concentrations below the root zone.
- **Excess 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.
- **Elevated Water Temperature:** Water temperature has important ecological consequences and potential negative impacts for human use. As water temperature rises, there is a corresponding decrease in the availability of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases important to aquatic life. Warm water also has the potential to increase the presence of dissolved toxic substances that may restrict the suitability of water for human use.

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 the National Water Quality Initiative for Calleguas Creek. 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. Conservation Activity Plans

| Practice | Conservation Activity Plan Name | Units | Lifespan |
|----------|--|-------|----------|
| 104 | Nutrient Management Plan - Written | no | 1 |
| 118 | Irrigation Water Management Plan - Written | no | 1 |
| 130 | Drainage Water Management Plan - Written | no | 1 |

Approved 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 for the National Water Quality Initiative for Calleguas Creek.

This initiative emphasizes a systems approach to address priority natural resource concerns. A cornerstone of this approach is to encourage implementation of a system of practices to address specific high-priority resource concerns as well as incorporate selection of practices that address the concept for avoiding, controlling, or trapping pollutants, or "ACT." The concept of ACT is defined as:

- **Avoiding (A):** Avoidance helps manage nutrients and sediment source control from agricultural lands, including animal production facilities. Practices such as Nutrient Management (590), Cover Crop (340), and Conservation Crop Rotation (328) help to reduce the amount of nutrients in runoff or leaching into priority water bodies and watersheds. Practices such as cover crops and crop rotation help take up nutrients to avoid potential runoff and pollution. Crop rotations that include differing crops, such as legumes, can limit amounts of commercial nutrients applied.
- **Controlling (C):** Land treatment in fields or facilities that prevents the loss of pollutants includes practices such as conservation tillage practices and residue management, which improve infiltration, reduce runoff, and control erosion. Specific practices such as No-till/Strip/Till/Direct Seed (329), Mulch Tillage (345), and Ridge Till (346) are foundation practices to recommend to producers in priority watersheds. Practices such as Cover Crop (340) will also do double duty by helping with avoidance as well as controlling.
- **Trapping (T):** The last line of defense against potential pollutants at edge of field, or in facilities to trap or treat. Practices such as Contour Buffers (332), Filter Strips (393), and the suite of wetland practices to create, enhance, and/or restore wetlands (658, 659, and 657) all serve to trap and uptake nutrients before entering water bodies.



The following tables list approved core and supporting practices for this initiative.

- **Core Conservation Practice:** A practice that is critical to addressing the targeted resource concern(s) for the National Water Quality Initiative for Calleguas Creek and achieving the desired environmental outcome(s).
- **Supporting Conservation Practice:** A practice that is needed to make the core practices function properly or to address a specific site or condition related to the identified resource concern(s).

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 | Avoiding | Controlling | Trapping |
|---------------|--|----------|-------------|----------|
| 472 | Access Control | X | | |
| 327 | Conservation Cover | X | | X |
| 328 | Conservation Crop Rotation | X | | |
| 656 | Constructed Wetland | | | X |
| 332 | Contour Buffer Strips | | | X |
| 330 | Contour Farming | | X | X |
| 331 | Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crops | | X | X |
| 340 | Cover Crop | X | | X |
| 342 | Critical Area Planting | | X | X |
| 554 | Drainage Water Management | | X | |
| 386 | Field Border | | X | X |
| 393 | Filter Strip | | X | X |
| 410 | Grade Stabilization Structure | | X | X |
| 412 | Grassed Waterway | | X | |
| 355 | Groundwater Testing | X | | |
| 561 | Heavy Use Protection | X | | |
| 436 | Irrigation Reservoir | | X | |
| 449 | Irrigation Water Management | | X | |
| 590 | Nutrient Management | X | | |
| 528 | Prescribed Grazing | X | | |
| 329 | Residue and Tillage Management, No Till | | X | X |
| 345 | Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till | | X | X |
| 391 | Riparian Forest Buffer | | | X |
| 390 | Riparian Herbaceous Cover | | | X |
| 395 | Stream Habitat Improvement and Management | X | | |
| 580 | Streambank and Shoreline Protection | X | | |
| 600 | Terrace | | X | |
| 612 | Tree/Shrub Establishment | X | | X |
| 601 | Vegetative Barrier | | | X |
| 638 | Water and Sediment Control Basin | | X | X |

Table 3. Supporting Conservation Practices

| Practice Code | Supporting Conservation Practice Name | Avoiding | Controlling | Trapping |
|---------------|---|----------|-------------|----------|
| 560 | Access Road | X | | |
| 309 | Agrichemical Handling Facility | X | | |
| 450 | Anionic Polyacrylamide (PAM) Application | | X | X |
| 314 | Brush Management | X | X | |
| 326 | Clearing and Snagging | | X | |
| 747 | Denitrifying Bioreactor | | X | X |
| 356 | Dike | | X | X |
| 362 | Diversion | | X | |
| 382 | Fence | X | | |
| 422 | Hedgerow Planting | X | | X |
| 315 | Herbaceous Weed Control | X | | |
| 603 | Herbaceous Wind Barriers | | X | |
| 595 | Integrated Pest Management | X | | |
| 428 | Irrigation Ditch Lining | X | X | |
| 464 | Irrigation Land Leveling | X | X | |
| 430 | Irrigation Pipeline | | X | |
| 441 | Irrigation System, Microirrigation | X | | |
| 443 | Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface | X | | |
| 468 | Lined Waterway or Outlet | | X | |
| 516 | Livestock Pipeline | X | X | |
| 484 | Mulching | | X | X |
| 500 | Obstruction Removal | | X | |
| 582 | Open Channel | | X | |
| 378 | Pond | | | X |
| 520 | Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil | | | X |
| 521A | Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane | | | X |
| 462 | Precision Land Forming | | | X |
| 533 | Pumping Plant | X | X | |
| 550 | Range Planting | | | X |
| 558 | Roof Runoff Structure | X | | |
| 367 | Roofs and Covers | X | X | |
| 557 | Row Arrangement | X | | |
| 350 | Sediment Basin | | | X |
| 574 | Spring Development | X | | |
| 442 | Sprinkler System | X | | |
| 570 | Stormwater Runoff Control | | X | |
| 578 | Stream Crossing | X | | |
| 587 | Structure for Water Control | | X | X |
| 606 | Subsurface Drain | X | | |
| 607 | Surface Drain, Field Ditch | X | | |
| 608 | Surface Drain, Main or Lateral | | X | |



| Practice Code | Supporting Conservation Practice Name | Avoiding | Controlling | Trapping |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| 620 | Underground Outlet | | X | |
| 642 | Water Well | X | | |
| 351 | Water Well Decommissioning | X | | |
| 614 | Watering Facility | X | | |
| 658 | Wetland Creation | | X | |
| 659 | Wetland Enhancement | | X | |
| 657 | Wetland Restoration | | X | |
| 644 | Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management | | X | |
| 380 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment | | X | X |
| 650 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation | | X | X |

