

NB 300-15-2 LTP - National Programmatic Initiative Guidance – Fiscal Year (FY) 2015

National Bulletin: 300-15-2 **Date:** October 23, 2014

Subject: LTP – National Programmatic Initiative Guidance – Fiscal Year (FY) 2015

Action Required By: November 25, 2014

Purpose. To provide State Conservationists (STCs) and the Directors, Caribbean and Pacific Islands Areas, with guidance for administering FY 2015 national programmatic initiatives funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program.

Expiration Date. September 30, 2015

Background. To support efficient delivery of these focused opportunities to eligible producers, this bulletin consolidates guidance for certain national programmatic initiatives to be offered through EQIP and AMA during FY 2015. State Conservationists (STC) are to use the attached guidance to prepare to offer these opportunities in a timely manner when program funding is allocated. Additional guidance to support national landscape initiatives will be issued at a later date.

Explanation. This guidance establishes action items to be completed by STCs to support initiatives. Delivery and management of these initiatives are subject to all agency program rules and policies including requirements in Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 512, "Conservation Program Contracting."

<u>National Programmatic Initiatives</u>	AMA	EQIP	National Lead
National On-Farm Energy Initiative (NOFEI)		X	Rebecca MacLeod
National Organic Initiative (NOI)		X	Lindsay Haines
Season High Tunnel System for Crops Practice	X	X	Michael Whitt
National Air Quality Initiative (NAQI)		X	Aaron Lauster

In order to support approved national programmatic initiatives during FY 2015, STCs, are to complete the following:

1) ProTracts Subaccounts and Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (AERT).—States must use the attached guidance documents to populate the AERT and other related actions for the established subaccounts **no later than COB Tuesday, November 25, 2014.**

2) Approved Conservation Practices - Core and Supporting Practices.—The attached guidance identify conservation practices that are approved to support each national initiative. For purposes of this guidance, if required core or supporting practices are used, the following definitions apply:

- **Core Practice.**—A conservation practice or activity listed in the FOTG that is essential to address the natural resource concerns identified by an initiative.
- **Supporting Practice.**—A conservation practice or activity listed in the FOTG that may be needed to facilitate the implementation of a core practice or, along with other approved practice, needed to address the natural resource concerns identified by the initiative.

Carefully review the guidance provided for each initiative to determine which practices are required to be offered. If a State does not need to offer one or more of the core practices (e.g., the practice is not needed to address a resource concern), the STC must notify the appropriate Financial Assistance Program Division (FAPD) team leader by email which practices will not be offered (notification is not a waiver

request). If additional supporting practices will be offered by States to support these initiatives, the selected practice must also be consistent with the following criteria:

1. The proposed supporting conservation practice is needed to directly support a required or core practice.
2. The purpose of the proposed supporting conservation practice standard addresses one or more of the initiative's approved natural resource concerns.
3. The Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) database indicates the proposed practice is assigned a "positive" value for the associated resource concern.

States are responsible for associating required, core, and supporting practices with the new nationally approved resource concerns in ProTracts AERT, as indicated in the attached guidance documents.

3) Conservation Activity Plans (CAP).—The ProTracts application type of "planning" or "plan organic" must be associated with each EQIP CAP application and ranking of these applications is mandatory during FY 2015. National Bulletin 300-15-XX provides additional guidance to implement CAPs.

4) Screening Criteria.—If included in the attached initiative guidance, States must utilize nationally approved screening criteria to manage workload associated with the initiative. If the initiative includes screening criteria, all eligible applications must have an assigned priority of "High," "Medium," or "Low" recorded in ProTracts.

5) Payment Schedules.—States must ensure that required, core, and any necessary supporting practices are included in the current program cost lists uploaded to ProTracts and supported by approved FY 2015 payment schedules. Each cost list uploaded into ProTracts must also include both historically underserved (HU) and traditional participant payment rates. Payment rates for historically underserved participants must be prefaced with "HU" in the scenario name to allow for easy identification during contracting and quality assurance activities. Only existing approved payment schedules and rates already approved for FY 2015 are to be used to support these national initiatives – no new payment schedules or scenarios need to be developed.

6) Application Periods.—National Headquarters (NHQ) has established ranking periods and application deadlines to allow evaluation of all program applications from the beginning of the fiscal year through May XX, 2015. State Conservationists must select and offer application periods consistent with the nationally established application cutoff periods. Additional guidance to States has been issued under National Bulletin 300-15-XX.

7) Public Affairs - Outreach.—State Conservationists must announce the opportunity for programmatic initiatives at least 30 days in advance of application deadline. States must also post initiative information to the State's Web site at least 30 days prior to announcement of application deadline. Information required to be included in the announcement and on the State's Web site is provided in policy at 440-CPM, Part 515, Subpart D, Section 515.32B.

8) Fund Management.—States must utilize their general allocation funds to support the national initiatives. With the exception of the EQIP Air Quality Initiative, STCs should allocate and manage funds to provide a balance to meet historical needs of national initiatives as well as State priorities.

For any initiatives that may provide EQIP financial assistance for livestock related projects, State Conservationists must ensure that applications are properly associated with an appropriate "Livestock Type."

Contact. If you have any questions regarding this guidance, contact the appropriate program manager or initiative lead listed above.

/s/

ANTHONY J. KRAMER
Deputy Chief for Programs

[Attachment A](#)
[Attachment B](#)
[Attachment C](#)
[Attachment D](#)