

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, Merced County

Merced Service Center
(209) 722-4119, ext. 3
Jarrod Martin, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Stanislaus County

Modesto Service Center
(209) 491-9320, ext. 3
Diana Waller, District Conservationist

About the Bay-Delta Initiative for Middle San Joaquin Watersheds

The purpose of Bay-Delta Initiative for the Middle San Joaquin Watershed is to assist operators in the sub-watersheds of the Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced rivers and in the three shallow groundwater subbasins of the San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin: Modesto Subbasin, Turlock Subbasin and Merced Subbasin, in reducing pollution risks to both ground and surface water resources while conserving water. This initiative will provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in the target area who are willing to improve water quality by implementing conservation practices on agricultural operations.

This initiative will specifically target agricultural operations that have the capacity to adopt and apply:

- Water quality improvements on animal feeding operations with emphasis on improved nutrient management and erosion control.
- Water conservation on irrigated cropland with emphasis on improved irrigation water management.
- Water quality improvements on irrigated cropland with emphasis on improved nutrient management, erosion control and soil quality improvements.

Practices that address groundwater and surface water quality, water conservation, erosion reduction, and /or soil quality improvement on agricultural land will be considered.

On AFO facilities:

- Common systems approved for funding include practices that conserve nutrient storage capacity, systems that improve nutrient measurements and application distribution, and systems that provide barriers to groundwater contamination.
- Common practices include, but are not limited to, roof runoff structures (gutters), manure transfer pipelines, heavy use area protection (concrete slabs), tailwater return systems, waste transfer (flow meters), nutrient management and irrigation water management.

On cropland:

- Common systems approved for funding include practices that conserve water, systems that protect ground and surface water quality, systems that reduce soil erosion, and systems that improve soil quality.
- Common planned conservation practices to protect surface water quality and ground water quality include, but are not limited to, irrigation system, microirrigation, tailwater return systems, sediment basins, irrigation pipeline and pest management, nutrient management and irrigation water management.
- Common planned practices to reduce soil erosion and improve soil quality include, but are not limited to, residue and tillage management and cover crops.

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.
- **Grazed:** Where grazing animals impact how land is managed.

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.

- ❖ **SOIL EROSION** – Erosion removes topsoil, reduces levels of soil organic matter, and contributes to the breakdown of soil structure.
 - **Sheet and Rill:** Sheet and rill erosion is the detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by rainfall runoff/splash and/or irrigation events. Symptoms of soil erosion by water include: small rills and channels on the soil surface, soil deposited at the base of slopes, sediment in streams, lakes, and reservoirs, and pedestals of soil supporting pebbles and plant material.
- ❖ **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** – 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.
 - **Pesticides Transported to Surface Water:** Pest control chemicals are transported to receiving surface waters in quantities that degrade water quality. Pesticides typically enter surface water when rainfall or irrigation exceeds the infiltration capacity of soil and resulting runoff transports pesticides to streams, rivers, and other surface-water bodies.

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	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
102	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan - Written	no	1
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)
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	ac	1
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till	ac	1
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	ac	1
449	Irrigation Water Management	ac	1
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1
595	Integrated Pest Management	ac	1

Table 3. Supporting Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
309	Agrichemical Handling Facility	no	15
313	Waste Storage Facility	no	15
317	Composting Facility	no	15
320	Irrigation Canal or Lateral	ft	15
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
351	Water Well Decommissioning	no	20
359	Waste Treatment Lagoon	no	15
360	Waste Facility Closure	no	15
382	Fence	ft	20
386	Field Border	ac	10
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	ft	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
412	Grassed Waterway	ac	10
428	Irrigation Ditch Lining	ft	20
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
436	Irrigation Reservoir	ac-ft	15
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
442	Sprinkler System	ac	15
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface	ac	15

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
447	Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery ¹	no	15
464	Irrigation Land Leveling	ac	15
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ac-ft	15
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
520	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil	no	15
521A	Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	no	20
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
558	Roof Runoff Structure	no	15
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	ac	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
629	Waste Treatment	no	10
632	Waste Separation Facility	no	15
634	Waste Transfer	No	15
635	Vegetated Treatment Area	ac	10
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin	no	10

¹ Conservation practice, 447 – Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery, is an irrigation tailwater recovery system based on eligible component practices. Practice payment rates for conservation practice, 447 – Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery, will be based on eligible practice components.

Practice Payment Rate Caps

For certain conservation practices a limit to the amount of financial assistance has been established. Practice payment caps are established in consultation with local partners and to allow limited financial assistance support to reach more participants. Please contact your local field office if you have questions. A maximum payment amount per contract or practice is not allowable. Payment rate caps are applicable per contract item number.

Table 4. Practice Payment Caps

Conservation Practice	Standard Farmer/Rancher Payment Rate Cap	Historically Underserved Farmer/Rancher Payment Rate Cap
313 – Waste Storage Facility	\$130,000	\$234,000
441 – Irrigation System, Microirrigation	\$140,000	\$252,000
442 – Irrigation System, Sprinkler	\$140,000	\$252,000
449 – Irrigation Water Management	\$10,500	\$18,900
590 – Nutrient Management	\$10,500	\$18,900
595 – Integrated Pest Management	\$10,500	\$18,900

