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Steve Yelverton and Rodney Cox are shown at a well built in Loango with the assistance of NRCS funds in a program similar to EQIP. Practices such as this well are installed to facilitate rotational grazing and to keep livestock out of streams and ponds.

## EQIP funds conservation projects

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By Michele Gerlach

Officials at the Natural Resources Conservation Service are urging residents to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) before the October deadline.

“We have a continuous sign up,” Steve Yelverton, District Conservationist said. “People can sign up at any time they want to do it.

“But once a year we cut it off and look at all the applications for the year. And that cut off is Oct. 17. The EQIP program, which is not a new project, helps residents who own property complete projects that relate to conservation practices,” Yelverton said.

“The whole thing is about protecting water quality and conserving the natural resources,” he said. “That’s the reason the Natural Resources Conversation Service does this.

“Their motto is ‘helping people help the land’. We believe in incentive based, voluntary conservation,” he said.

Yelverton said they work to facilitate conservation practices involving row crop and pasture land, forestry, livestock and poultry concerns and erosion.

“We’ll help put up cross fences, water lines, wells and troughs for rotational grazing,” he said. The benefits to the program are not limited to the residents involved but also to the community, he said.

“If you’re correcting problems on your farm, that’s not only affecting you,” Yelverton said. “That water runs off your farm, into the drainage ditch and runs down there into the creek. You’re helping the whole community whenever you’re taking care of your own water quality.”

Additionally, the government is interested in preserving the Longleaf Pine ecosystem, Yelverton said. “The Longleaf Pine ecosystem is one of the best wildlife things you can do,” he said. “There’s a lot of forage on the ground for your turkey, deer and quail. We’ve put a lot of money in the Longleaf Pine plantings,” he said. “That’s where a pile of our money goes, because there is a lot more timber land.”

Last year, 47 contracts were written for approximately \$480,000 to land owners that are doing these practices, Yelverton said.

“We write on average 50 contracts a year. So that’s 50 farms, 50 different people, around \$500,000 a year,” he said. “It’s real money for these land owners that have something that they want to do on their property.

“If they have anything they want to do, they need to come in and talk to us about it,” he said. “There may be a program for it.”

The land owner will be responsible for putting money into the project also, Yelverton said. Once approved, a plan will be put together to tell the owner exactly what they’re expected to do.

“Of course, we will help you with it in any way we can,” he said. “Last year we pretty much funded everyone that signed up.”

In the EQIP programs, eligible producers may receive a payment based on the statewide average cost of the installation of the conservation practice.

Yelverton is urging people that have any concerns or dreams for their farm, to come to talk to him and sign up for the program before Oct.17.

