

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.

About the EQIP Fund Pool

The objective of the Eastern Sierra High Desert Cropland EQIP Fund Pool is to protect soil and water resources, enhance wildlife benefits and conserve energy. The region includes the greater San Bernardino County north of the San Bernardino Mountains, northern Los Angeles County north of the San Gabriel Mountains, Eastern Kern County including parts of the Tehachapi Mountains, the Kern River Watershed, which includes parts of southeast Tulare County, and Inyo and Mono Counties. Extreme differences in elevation occur from east to west, and most agricultural areas are at or above 2,000 feet elevation.

Common crops include hayland, small grains, Bermuda (for seed) and alfalfa; row crops, such as onions, carrots, broccoli and potatoes; tree crops, such as apples, apricots, cherries, plums, jujubes and pistachios; and vineyards.

The predominant natural resource concerns for cropland in the California High Desert and Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountain region includes:

- loss of topsoil by wind and water erosion,
- low soil carbon and the degradation of soil quality from over-tillage,
- spread of invasive and noxious weeds,
- water quality degradation to ground and surface waters,
- aquifer overdraft related to inefficient irrigation systems,
- wildlife habitat degradation from land clearing and habitat fragmentation, and
- soils low in carbon tend to have a low water holding capacity, poor soil structure and very susceptible to erosion.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Alpine, Inyo, eastern Kern, Mono, northern Los Angeles, northern San Bernardino and northern Tulare* counties may be eligible for the Eastern Sierra High Desert Cropland EQIP Fund Pool; please refer to the map at the end of this document for the boundaries of this EQIP Fund Pool.

Land Uses for the 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 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.
- **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 EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this 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.
- **Wind:** Wind erosion is the detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by wind. Symptoms of wind erosion may be identified by dust clouds, soil accumulation along fence lines or snowbanks, and a drifted appearance of the soil surface.
- **Classic Gullies:** Classic gullies are forms of erosion created by the concentrated flow of water. Classic gully erosion generally occurs in well-defined drainage ways and generally is not obliterated by tillage. Untreated classic gullies may enlarge progressively by head cutting and/or lateral widening.

❖ **SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Soil quality degradation effects rooting depth, plant growth, animal habitat and soil biological activity.

- **Organic Matter Depletion:** Soil organic matter is carbon-rich material that includes plant, animal, and microbial residue in various stages of decomposition. Managing for soil carbon can enhance soil productivity and environmental quality. Increasing soil organic matter levels can reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels. Ground and surface water quality can improve too because better structure, infiltration, and biological activity make soil a more effective filter.
- **Concentration of Salts or Other Chemicals:** Concentration of salts leads to salinity and/or sodicity. Saline soils are indicative of inadequate drainage to leach salts from the soil or upward migration of salt from shallow groundwater. Sodic soils are high in sodium relative to concentrations of calcium and magnesium. Salinity or sodicity occurs naturally from parent materials high in salts, such as marine deposits, or may result from the addition of fertilizers, soil amendments (gypsum, lime), manure or saline/sodic irrigation water.

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.
 - **Excessive 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.
- ❖ **AIR QUALITY IMPACTS** – Direct or indirect emissions of compounds to the atmosphere that impact air quality.
 - **Emission of Particulate Matter (PM) and PM Precursors:** Particulate matter is classified by its size, as PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀. PM_{2.5} is directly emitted from combustion and as dust from roads or tillage. PM_{2.5} is also formed by chemical reaction of PM precursor gases; oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and ammonia (NH₃). Sources of PM precursor gases can be engines, fertilizer application, and animal operations. PM₁₀ is typically mechanically generated and directly emitted from tillage operations, road and field travel, animal movement and harvesting operations.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **INEFFICIENT ENERGY USE** – The inefficient use of energy increases costs and dependence on non-renewable energy sources.
 - **Equipment and Facilities:** Inefficient energy use occurs whenever facilities, equipment, or machinery operate more hours than needed to meet management goals. It may also occur when facilities, equipment, or machinery become worn out, outdated, or are poorly controlled or maintained.

- **Farming/Ranching Practices and Field Operations:** Inefficient energy use occurs whenever equipment or machinery operates more hours than needed to meet management goals. It may also occur when equipment or machinery becomes worn out, outdated, or poorly controlled.

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) |
|---------------|--|----------------|------------------|
| 104 | Nutrient Management Plan - Written | no | 1 |
| 110 | Grazing Management Plan - Written | no | 1 |
| 114 | Integrated Pest Management Plan - Written | no | 1 |
| 118 | Irrigation Water Management Plan - Written | no | 1 |
| 130 | Drainage Water 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 identified in this EQIP Fund Pool. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

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. Eligible Conservation Practices

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 309 | Agrichemical Handling Facility | no | 15 |
| 311 | Alley Cropping | ac | 15 |
| 314 | Brush Management | ac | 10 |
| 315 | Herbaceous Weed Control | ac | 5 |
| 317 | Composting Facility | no | 15 |
| 320 | Irrigation Canal or Lateral | ft | 15 |
| 324 | Deep Tillage | ac | 1 |
| 326 | Clearing and Snagging | ft | 5 |
| 327 | Conservation Cover | ac | 5 |
| 328 | Conservation Crop Rotation | ac | 1 |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|--|----------------|------------------|
| 329 | Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till | ac | 1 |
| 330 | Contour Farming | ac | 5 |
| 331 | Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crop | ac | 10 |
| 332 | Contour Buffer Strips | ac | 5 |
| 338 | Prescribed Burning | ac | 1 |
| 340 | Cover Crop | ac | 1 |
| 342 | Critical Area Planting | ac | 10 |
| 345 | Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till | ac | 1 |
| 348 | Dam, Diversion | no | 15 |
| 350 | Sediment Basin | no | 20 |
| 351 | Water Well Decommissioning | no | 20 |
| 355 | Groundwater Testing | no | 1 |
| 356 | Dike | ft | 20 |
| 362 | Diversion | ft | 10 |
| 367 | Roofs and Covers | no | 10 |
| 373 | Dust Control on Unpaved Roads and Surfaces | sq ft | 1 |
| 374 | Farmstead Energy Improvement | no | 10 |
| 378 | Pond | no | 20 |
| 379 | Multi-Story Cropping | ac | 10 |
| 380 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment | ft | 15 |
| 382 | Fence | ft | 20 |
| 383 | Fuel Break | ac | 10 |
| 384 | Woody Residue Treatment | ac | 10 |
| 386 | Field Border | ac | 10 |
| 388 | Irrigation Field Ditch | ft | 15 |
| 390 | Riparian Herbaceous Cover | ac | 5 |
| 391 | Riparian Forest Buffer | ac | 15 |
| 393 | Filter Strip | ac | 10 |
| 394 | Firebreak | ft | 5 |
| 395 | Stream Habitat Improvement and Management | ac | 5 |
| 396 | Aquatic Organism Passage | mi | 5 |
| 410 | Grade Stabilization Structure | no | 15 |
| 412 | Grassed Waterway | ac | 10 |
| 422 | Hedgerow Planting | ft | 15 |
| 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 |
| 447 | Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery ¹ | no | 15 |
| 449 | Irrigation Water Management | ac | 1 |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 450 | Anionic Polyacrylamide (PAM) Application | ac | 1 |
| 460 | Land Clearing | ac | 10 |
| 462 | Precision Land Forming | ac | 10 |
| 464 | Irrigation Land Leveling | ac | 15 |
| 466 | Land Smoothing | ac | 10 |
| 468 | Lined Waterway or Outlet | ft | 15 |
| 472 | Access Control | ac | 10 |
| 484 | Mulching | ac | 1 |
| 490 | Tree/Shrub Site Preparation | ac | 1 |
| 500 | Obstruction Removal | ac | 10 |
| 511 | Forage Harvest Management | ac | 1 |
| 512 | Forage and Biomass Planting | ac | 5 |
| 516 | Livestock Pipeline | ft | 20 |
| 520 | Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil | no | 15 |
| 521A | Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane | no | 20 |
| 528 | Prescribed Grazing | ac | 1 |
| 533 | Pumping Plant | no | 15 |
| 554 | Drainage Water Management | ac | 1 |
| 557 | Row Arrangement | ac | 5 |
| 558 | Roof Runoff Structure | no | 15 |
| 560 | Access Road | ft | 10 |
| 561 | Heavy Use Area Protection | ac | 10 |
| 570 | Stormwater Runoff Control | no | 15 |
| 572 | Spoil Spreading | ac | 1 |
| 575 | Trails and Walkways | ft | 10 |
| 578 | Stream Crossing | no | 10 |
| 580 | Streambank and Shoreline Protection | ft | 20 |
| 582 | Open Channel | ft | 15 |
| 584 | Channel Bed Stabilization | ft | 10 |
| 585 | Stripcropping | ac | 5 |
| 587 | Structure for Water Control | no | 20 |
| 590 | Nutrient Management | ac | 1 |
| 595 | Integrated Pest Management | ac | 1 |
| 600 | Terrace | ft | 10 |
| 601 | Vegetative Barrier | ft | 5 |
| 603 | Herbaceous Wind Barriers | ft | 5 |
| 606 | Subsurface Drain | ft | 20 |
| 607 | Surface Drain, Field Ditch | ft | 15 |
| 608 | Surface Drain, Main or Lateral | ft | 15 |
| 610 | Salinity and Sodic Soil Management | ac | 1 |
| 612 | Tree/Shrub Establishment | ac | 15 |
| 614 | Watering Facility | no | 20 |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 620 | Underground Outlet | ft | 20 |
| 630 | Vertical Drain | no | 10 |
| 636 | Water Harvesting Catchment | no | 20 |
| 638 | Water and Sediment Control Basin | no | 10 |
| 647 | Early Successional Habitat Development/Management | ac | 1 |
| 649 | Structures for Wildlife | no | 5 |
| 650 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation | ft | 15 |
| 656 | Constructed Wetland | ac | 15 |
| 657 | Wetland Restoration | ac | 15 |
| 658 | Wetland Creation | ac | 15 |
| 659 | Wetland Enhancement | ac | 15 |
| 660 | Tree/Shrub Pruning | ac | 10 |
| 740 | Pond Sealing and Lining, Soil Cement | no | 20 |

¹Conservation practice, 447 – Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery, is an irrigation tailwater recovery system and practice payment rates will be based on eligible conservation practices included in the system.

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, Alpine County

Minden Service Center
(775) 782-3661
Jim Gifford, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Inyo County

Bishop Service Center
(760) 872-6111
Rob Pearce, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, eastern Kern County

Lancaster Service Center
(661) 945-2604
Tomas Aguilar-Campos, Tomas, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Los Angeles County

Lancaster Service Center
(661) 945-2604
Phillip Dixon, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Northern Mono County

Minden Service Center
(775) 782-3661
Jim Gifford, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Southern Mono County

Bishop Field Center
(760) 872-6111
Rob Pearce, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Northern San Bernardino County

Victorville Service Center
(760) 843-6882
Holly Shiralipour, District Conservationist

