

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 purpose of the Central Sierra Pastureland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote the wise use of our dryland and irrigated pastures while improving soil health, and protecting water quality and wildlife habitat values. We will promote improved nutrient and irrigation management and improved efficiencies to protect water quality by all pollutants that have the potential to enter our surface waters.

Pastureland is a designated land use that has vegetative cover comprised primarily of introduced, enhanced, or native forage species that is used for livestock grazing. Pasture differs from range in that it primarily produces vegetation that has been managed or planted to improved species for livestock grazing.

Pasture can be periodically renovated with cultural treatments such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. Pasture vegetation consists of grasses, legumes, forbs, and shrubs in various combinations. Forage composition may vary from year to year because of management or climate variations. The number of grazing animals and duration of livestock grazing significantly influences the persistence of one species over another, and should be addressed in the grazing management plan. Pasture lands provide habitat and food source benefits to various wildlife species.

Well managed pasture captures rainwater that is slowly infiltrated into the soil for groundwater recharge. They may occur in close proximity to urban areas where they provide visual and open space benefits to the public. Pastures can be a standalone small feeding operation or an integral part of a larger sustainable livestock business.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Mariposa, Nevada, Placer, western Sierra and Tuolumne* counties may be eligible for the Central Sierra Pastureland 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.

- **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.
- **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 QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Soil quality degradation effects rooting depth, plant growth, animal habitat and soil biological activity.
 - **Compaction:** Management-induced soil compaction results in decreased rooting depth that reduces plant growth, animal habitat and soil biological activity. Compaction can lead to increased runoff and erosion from sloping land or waterlogged soils in flatter areas by reducing water infiltration into the soil.
- ❖ **EXCESS WATER** – Surface water or poor subsurface drainage restricts plant growth and land use.
 - **Ponding or Flooding:** Saturated soil increase the likelihood of diseases, losses of soil nitrogen due to denitrification and leaching of nitrate N, and soil damage by heavy equipment. Excess water can affect structures and slope stability. If the soil has a dense layer, especially a layer of clay, infiltration of water into the soil may be restricted and water may pond.
- ❖ **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 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 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.
- ❖ **DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION** – Plant condition degradation can result in stress, disease, insect damage and result in changes to the structure and composition of plant communities.
 - **Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health:** Plants must be adapted to the site and provided with appropriate amounts of nutrients, water, and sunshine, and protected from unchecked animal, weed, insect, and disease pests. Plants established in the wrong climate or soil may be under stress and may never thrive, no matter how much fertilizer or water supplied. Natural events, such as drought, or mismanagement can cause plant stress. Plants under stress are more susceptible to disease and insect damage.
 - **Inadequate Structure and Composition:** Plant communities, such as - wetland habitat, unique ecosystems or targeted plant communities, have insufficient diversity, density, distribution patterns, and three-dimensional structure necessary to achieve ecological functions and/or management objectives.
 - **Excessive Plant Pest Pressure:** The term “pest” can be any animal, plant, insect, bacteria, or virus that results in plant damage or competes for space, nutrients, or water (e.g., weeds). Heat, drought, wind, sun, and cold create stress on plants that make them more susceptible to pests.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION** – Livestock require five major classes of nutrients: energy, protein, minerals, vitamins, and water. All five are essential for normal health and production.
 - **Inadequate Livestock Water:** Water quantity and distribution of suitable water sources can affect livestock based on the basic need to meet daily intake requirements and issues related to grazing patterns. Livestock travel distance to water can result in surplus/deficient forage availability and excessive/insufficient plant utilization.
- ❖ **INEFFICIENT ENERGY USE** – The inefficient use of energy increases costs and dependence on non-renewable energy sources.
 - **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 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 1. Eligible Conservation Practices

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|--|----------------|------------------|
| 314 | Brush Management | ac | 10 |
| 315 | Herbaceous Weed Control | ac | 5 |
| 320 | Irrigation Canal or Lateral | ft | 15 |
| 324 | Deep Tillage | ac | 1 |
| 326 | Clearing and Snagging | ft | 5 |
| 327 | Conservation Cover | ac | 5 |
| 338 | Prescribed Burning | ac | 1 |
| 340 | Cover Crop | ac | 1 |
| 342 | Critical Area Planting | ac | 10 |
| 348 | Dam, Diversion | no | 15 |
| 355 | Groundwater Testing | no | 1 |
| 356 | Dike | ft | 20 |
| 350 | Sediment Basin | no | 20 |
| 351 | Water Well Decommissioning | no | 20 |
| 362 | Diversion | ft | 10 |
| 367 | Roofs and Covers | no | 10 |
| 373 | Dust Control in Unpaved Roads and Surfaces | sq ft | 1 |
| 378 | Pond | no | 20 |
| 379 | Multi-Story Cropping | ac | 10 |
| 380 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment | ft | 15 |
| 381 | Silvopasture Establishment | ac | 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 |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|--|----------------|------------------|
| 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 |
| 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 |
| 548 | Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment | ac | 1 |
| 554 | Drainage Water Management | ac | 1 |
| 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 |
| 574 | Spring Development | no | 20 |
| 575 | Trails and Walkways | ft | 10 |
| 578 | Stream Crossing | no | 10 |
| 580 | Streambank and Shoreline Protection | ft | 20 |
| 584 | Channel Bed Stabilization | ft | 10 |
| 587 | Structure for Water Control | no | 20 |
| 590 | Nutrient Management | ac | 1 |
| 592 | Feed Management | ani unt | 1 |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 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 |
| 612 | Tree/Shrub Establishment | ac | 15 |
| 614 | Watering Facility | no | 20 |
| 620 | Underground Outlet | ft | 20 |
| 636 | Water Harvesting Catchment | no | 20 |
| 638 | Water and Sediment Control Basin | no | 10 |
| 642 | Water Well | no | 20 |
| 647 | Early Successional Habitat Development/Management | ac | 1 |
| 649 | Structures for Wildlife | no | 5 |
| 650 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation | ft | 15 |
| 654 | Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment | ft | 10 |
| 656 | Constructed Wetland | ac | 15 |
| 657 | Wetland Restoration | ac | 15 |
| 659 | Wetland Enhancement | ac | 15 |
| 660 | Tree/Shrub Pruning | ac | 10 |
| 666 | Forest Stand Improvement | 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.

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 3. Practice Payment Rate Caps

| Conservation Practice Code and Name | Regular Payment Rate Cap | Historically Underserved Payment Rate Cap |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 442 – Irrigation System, Sprinkler | \$40,000 | \$72,000 |
| 449 – Irrigation Water Management | \$3,500 | \$5,790 |
| 528 – Prescribed Grazing | \$2,000 | \$4,000 |
| 590 – Nutrient Management | \$1,000 | \$1,800 |

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 or non-industrial private forest land.

USDA-NRCS, Amador County

Jackson Local Partnership Office
(209) 223-6535
Vacant, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Calaveras County

Jackson Local Partnership Office
(209) 223-6535
Vacant, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, El Dorado County

Placerville Service Center
(530) 295-5630
Danny Marquis, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Mariposa County

Mariposa Local Partnership Office
(209) 966-3431
Robyn Smith, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Nevada County

Grass Valley Service Center
(530) 272-3417
Pam Hertzler, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Sierra County

Grass Valley Service Center
(530) 272-3417
Pam Hertzler, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Placer County

Auburn Service Center
(530) 885-6505
Jennifer Johnson, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Tuolumne County

Jackson Local Partnership Office
(209) 223-6535
Vacant, District Conservationist

