

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 Eastern Sierra High Desert Pastureland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote improved irrigation efficiency; to protect water quality; to maintain plant productivity; to improve wildlife habitat value.

Pasture, often called improved pasture, or tame pasture, is defined as grazing land permanently producing introduced or domesticated native forage species receiving varying degrees of periodic cultural treatment to enhance forage quality and yields. It is primarily harvested by grazing animals.

In the western US, irrigation is common. Due to climatic variation and pasture management, forage species composition often is in flux. The intensity and timing of grazing significantly influences the composition of forage species.

Pasture lands provide many benefits other than forage for livestock. Wildlife use pasture as shelter and for food sources. Well managed pasture captures precipitation that infiltrates into the soil which helps recharge groundwater.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Alpine, Mono, Inyo, eastern Kern, eastern Tulare, northern San Bernardino, and northern Los Angeles* counties may be eligible for the Eastern Sierra High Desert 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 EROSION** – Erosion removes topsoil, reduces levels of soil organic matter, and contributes to the breakdown of soil structure.
 - **Excessive Bank Erosion from Streams, Shorelines or Water Conveyance Channels:** Stream stability is an active process, and while streambank erosion is a natural part of this process, it is often accelerated when land use management alters the stream system. When a stream's sediment load increases, the shape and function of the stream change, and the normal transport of sediment to downstream bottomlands is affected and the quality of wildlife habitat, both on land and in-stream, can be impacted.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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.
 - **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.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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.
 - **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)
110	Grazing Management Plan – Written	no	1
142	Fish and Wildlife Habitat 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)
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
320	Irrigation Canal or Lateral	ft	15
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
338	Prescribed Burning	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
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
378	Pond	no	20
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	ft	15
381	Silvopasture Establishment	ac	15
382	Fence	ft	20
383	Fuel Break	ac	10

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
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
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
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
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
500	Obstruction Removal	ac	10
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
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

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
582	Open Channel	ft	15
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1
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
630	Vertical Drain	no	10
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
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
Phillip Dixon, 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 Service Center
(760) 872-6111
Rob Pearce, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Northern San Bernardino County

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

