

## **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 Coast and Bay-Delta Pastureland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote pastureland health and ecological function while enhancing wildlife habitat values.

Primary resource concerns within the fund pool region include: inadequate livestock water; inefficient use of irrigation water; the structure and composition of the plant community on pasturelands; surface water quality impairment by excess nutrients, pathogens, and sediment; wildlife habitat addressing threatened & endangered species and other species of concern; and soil erosion both on streambanks and in gullies on pasturelands.

Typical conservation practices on pastureland include fence, prescribed grazing to control the harvest of vegetation, riparian herbaceous cover, and watering facilities to provide adequate amount and quality of drinking water. Forage production can be improved through proper stocking rates, rotational grazing, and/or removal and control of noxious weeds.

Maintaining water quality for a variety of beneficial uses is now mandated by the water board through Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program requirements. Conservation practices that maintain ground cover during the rainy season, such as developing a prescribed grazing plan with adequate cross-fencing and stock water, are common and cost effective approaches to addressing soil erosion and water quality concerns.

The Central Coast and San Francisco Bay-Delta regions are home to several threatened and endangered species, which may include San Joaquin kit fox, Swainson's hawk, Delta smelt, California red legged frog, Steelhead trout, Spotted owl, California tiger salamander, Santa Cruz Long Toed Salamander and California Fresh water shrimp. Salmonid habitats occur within some streams in the region and are an important wildlife resource concern.

With urban development and environmental pressures, the agriculture community must find sustainable farming practices to withstand these demands. Conservation practices to enhance wildlife habitat values include brush management, controlling invasive species, restoring riparian vegetation, restoring ponds, providing watering facilities, and windbreaks.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano and Sonoma* counties may be eligible for the San Francisco Bay-Delta Pastureland EQIP Fund Pool; please refer to the map at the end of this document for the boundaries of this EQIP 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.
  - **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.
  - **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.
- **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.
- **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 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                |
| 118           | Irrigation Water Management Plan - Written | no             | 1                |
| 130           | Drainage Water Management Plan - Written   | No             | 1                |
| 142           | Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan - Written   | No             | 1                |
| 146           | Pollinator 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](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               |
| 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               |
| 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                |
| 378           | Pond   | no             | 20               |
| 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                |
| 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           | Irrigation System, Sprinkler                       | ac             | 15               |
| 443           | Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface          | ac             | 15               |
| 447           | Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery <sup>1</sup> | no             | 15               |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name                | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 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               |
| 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               |

| Practice Code | Conservation Practice Name                        | Practice Units | Lifespan (Years) |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 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               |
| 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.

### 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 |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| 315 – Herbaceous Weed Control                    | \$30,000                 | \$54,000                                  |
| 373 – Dust Control on Unpaved Roads and Surfaces | \$20,000                 | \$36,000                                  |
| 382 – Fence                                      | \$50,000                 | \$90,000                                  |
| 430 – Irrigation Pipeline                        | \$50,000                 | \$90,000                                  |
| 441 – Irrigation System, Microirrigation         | \$50,000                 | \$90,000                                  |
| 442 – Sprinkler System                           | \$50,000                 | \$90,000                                  |
| 443 – Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface  | \$50,000                 | \$90,000                                  |
| 516 – Livestock Pipeline                         | \$50,000                 | \$90,000                                  |
| 560 – Access Road                                | \$40,000                 | \$72,000                                  |
| 614 – Watering Facility                          | \$50,000                 | \$90,000                                  |
| 642 – Water Well                                 | \$21,000                 | \$37,500                                  |

### 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, Alameda County**

Livermore Local Partnership Office  
(925) 371-0154  
Alyson Aquino, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, San Mateo County**

Half Moon Bay Local Partnership Office  
(650) 726-4660  
James Howard, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Contra Costa County**

Concord Service Center  
(925) 672-4577  
Hilary Phillips, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Santa Barbara County**

Santa Maria Service Center  
(805) 928-9269  
Jeff Rodriguez, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Marin County**

Petaluma Service Center  
(707) 794-1242  
Jennifer Walsler, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Santa Clara County**

Hollister Service Center  
(831) 637-4360  
Erika Boyland, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Monterey County**

Salinas Service Center  
(831) 424-1036  
Bobette Parsons, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Santa Cruz County**

Capitola Local Partnership Office  
(831) 475-1967  
Richard Casale, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Napa County**

Napa Field Office  
(707) 252-4189  
Vacant, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Solano County**

Vacaville Service Center  
(707) 448-0106  
Wendy Rash, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, San Benito County**

Hollister Service Center  
(831) 637-4360  
Erika Boyland, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Sonoma County**

Petaluma Service Center  
(707) 794-1242  
Jennifer Walsler, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, San Luis Obispo County**

Templeton Service Center  
(805) 434-0396  
Margy Lindquist, District Conservationist

