

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.

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. Visit <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/> to find the NRCS representative for your county.

About the Catastrophic Fire Recovery EQIP Fund Pool

The purpose of the Catastrophic Fire Recovery EQIP Fund Pool is to provide immediate resource protection in areas burned by catastrophic fires in the past three years on non-industrial private forestland (NIPF), grazing lands and croplands.

Priority resource concerns for NIPF and grazing lands include immediate soil erosion protection, minimize noxious and invasive plant proliferation, protect water quality, reduce fire hazard due to excess dead vegetation build-up, and restore livestock infrastructure necessary for grazing management. The State Conservationist has determined that the geographic scope of a Forest Management Plan and NIPF does not include areas within 100 feet from a building or a greater distance if required by state law, or local ordinance, rule, or regulation. Priority resource concerns for cropland include immediate soil erosion protection and protect water quality from pollutants that have the potential to enter local streams and river from lands that have been damaged during wildfires and fire suppression activities.

The immediate consequence of fire is the potential for soil erosion. Intense heat from fire can cause the soil to repel water, a condition called hydrophobicity. The potential for severe soil erosion is a consequence of catastrophic wildfire because as a fire burns it destroys plant material and the litter layer that protects the soil from eroding during severe rainstorms and moving off-site to surface water bodies, roads and other sites.

Immediate action to control soil erosion on burned forestlands and agricultural lands include treatments such as using damaged trees or woody residues to slow runoff water, creating check dams in drainages, conservation covers, erosion control structures and spreading straw to protect the soil and reseeding efforts. Most post-burn range sites are also susceptible to invasion by noxious weeds. Rangeland noxious weeds and soil erosion can be controlled through management and distribution of livestock to facilitate recovery of burned sites most at risk for erosion and weed proliferation. In some cases, range planting may be necessary if range seed source is absent.

Many existing forestland and agricultural land access roads and culvert systems may be severely damaged during fire suppression activities. In addition, emergency roads created during the fire event may need to be addressed - both are potential sources of sediment and turbidity in surface water bodies. Riparian zones with heavy biomass accumulation are often high intensity fire areas where temporary access trails were built for fire suppression and these trails can be direct sediment sources to riparian streams as well.

Following catastrophic fires noxious and invasive plants often proliferate on post-burn sites. Forests that are not planted with tree seedlings within one growing season of the fire will result in shrub regeneration that can capture sites where natural regeneration is not present. These shrub communities can be very aggressive and within one season will dominate the forest site, increasing the intensity of reforestation practices such as herbicide application, mastication or brush raking to ensure the success of tree plantings.

Trees and other vegetation burned by the wildfire also can be a longer term future wildfire hazard and an immediate public safety hazard related to falling trees. When large quantities of trees and shrubs are severely burned, the dead vegetation presents a fire hazard due the accumulation of excess flammable woody biomass. This debris also inhibits fire area restoration efforts, such as reforestation, to reestablish a healthy, fire resilient forest. Practices that remove, reduce or reconfigure the excess woody debris will contribute to achieving restoration and public safety goals.

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.

- **Forest:** Land on which the primary vegetation is tree cover (climax, natural or introduced plant community) and use is primarily for production of wood products or non-timber forest products.
- **Range:** Land used primarily for the production of grazing animals. Includes native plant communities and those seeded to native or introduced species, or naturalized by introduced species that are ecologically managed using range management principles.
- **Crop:** Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- **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.

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.
 - **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.

- ❖ **WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.
 - **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.
 - **Elevated Water Temperature:** Water temperature has important ecological consequences and potential negative impacts for human use. As water temperature rises, there is a corresponding decrease in the availability of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases important to aquatic life. Warm water also has the potential to increase the presence of dissolved toxic substances that may restrict the suitability of water for human use.
- ❖ **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.
 - **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.
 - **Wildfire Hazard, Excess Biomass Accumulation:** Accumulated plant residue (biomass) creates wildfire hazards that pose risks to human safety, structures, plants, animals, and air resources. While fire is an important and often beneficial part of the natural ecosystem, uncontrolled or “wild” fire poses a threat to life, health, and property.
- ❖ **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.

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

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
362	Diversion	ft	10
382	Fence	ft	20
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
412	Grassed Waterway	ac	10
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation ¹	ac	15
460	Land Clearing	ac	10
462	Precision Land Forming	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
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
548	Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment	ac	1
550	Range Planting	ac	5
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Protection	ac	10
570	Stormwater Runoff Control	no	1
572	Spoil Spreading	ac	1
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
606	Subsurface Drain	ft	20
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
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	ft	10

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
655	Forest Trails and Landings	ft	5
666	Forest Stand Improvement	ac	10

¹Conservation Practice Standard (CPS), 441 – Irrigation System, Microirrigation, is eligible to support establishment of non-production vegetative plantings only.