# The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

# Introduction

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to plan and implement conservation practices that improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related natural resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. EQIP may also help producers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

### Who Can Apply

Owners of land in agricultural or forest production or persons who are engaged in livestock, agricultural or forest production on eligible land and that have a natural resource concern on that land may apply to participate in EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm or ranch lands.

Eligible applicants must:

* Be agricultural producer (person, legal entity, or joint operation who has an interest in the agricultural operation, or who is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management).
* Control or own eligible land.
* Comply with adjusted gross income (AGI) for less than $900,000.  Note: Federally recognized Native American Indian Tribes or Alaska Native corporations are exempt from the AGI payment limitations.
* Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements.
* Develop an NRCS EQIP plan of operations that addresses at least one natural resource concern.

Additional program requirements may apply.

### How EQIP Works

#### Financial Assistance Payments Are Made On Completed Practices

Financial assistance payments through EQIP are made to eligible producers, to implement approved conservation practices on eligible land or to help producers develop Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) to address specific land use issues.
Payments are made on completed practices or activities identified in an EQIP contract that meet NRCS standards. Payment rates are set each fiscal year and are attached to the EQIP contract when it is approved.  Payment rates for each conservation practice can be found at each NRCS State Programs website.

#### Historically Underserved Producers May Be Eligible For Higher Payment Rates

Historically underserved producers (limited resource farmers/ranchers, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged producers, Indian Tribes and veteran farmer or ranchers) who self-certify on Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application are eligible for a higher practice payment rate to support implementation of contracted conservation practices and activities.

Historically underserved producers may also be issued advance payments up to 50 percent of the established payment rate to purchasing materials or contracting services to begin installation of approved conservation practices.

Self-certified socially disadvantaged farmer/rancher, beginning farmers/ranchers, and veteran farmer/rancher producers may elect to be evaluated in special EQIP funding pools.  More information can be found on the State Programs website or from your local NRCS office.

For additional information about historically underserved producers categories, see the [Socially Disadvantaged, Beginning, and Limited Resource Farmers/Ranchers, Veteran Farmers](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/people/outreach/slbfr/?cid=nrcsdev11_001040) page.

#### Payment and Contract Limitations

Payments received by producers through EQIP contracts after February 7, 2014 may not exceed $450,000 for all EQIP contracts entered into during the period 2014 to 2018.

The EQIP Organic Initiative contracts are limited to $20,000 per fiscal year and $80,000 during any 6-year period for persons or legal entities.  There is no authority to waive the annual payment limitation or total payment limitation.

Federally recognized Indian Tribes are not subject to payment or EQIP contract limitations.

The EQIP Organic Initiative contracts are limited to $20,000 per fiscal year and $80,000 during any 6-year period for persons or legal entities. There is no authority to waive the annual payment limitation or total payment limitation.

Federally recognized Indian Tribes are not subject to payment or EQIP contract limitations.

### Conservation Activity Plans

A Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) can be developed for producers to address a specific natural resource concern on their agricultural operation. Each CAP is developed by a certified Technical Service Provider (TSP), who is selected by the EQIP participant.

See [2017 Conservation Activity Plans](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=nrcseprd1299298) for a list of available CAPs.

Technical assistance payments for TSPs do not count against the financial assistance aggregate payment limitation or the contract financial assistance payment limitation.
For more information about TSP services, contact your local NRCS office or[visit the TSP website](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/technical/tsp/?cid=stelprdb1042981).

#### Application Periods May Differ By State

NRCS accepts and processes EQIP applications on a continuous basis.

**However, each state may establish deadlines for one or more application periods in which to consider eligible applications for funding.**

Applications submitted after these dates will be evaluated and considered for funding during later funding opportunities. **Producers must submit a complete program application, establish “farm records”, and other documentation to support eligibility**to be considered for financial assistance through EQIP.

### How To Apply For EQIP

#### Complete EQIP Application At Your Local NRCS Field Office

To apply for EQIP, visit your local NRCS field office, in your [local USDA Service Center](http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app).

Download and [complete the EQIP application form](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/PA_NRCSConsumption/download?cid=nrcseprd413429&ext=pdf) (Form NRCS-CPA-1200), to establish or update "farm records" with the Farm Service Agency, and submit all other required information to the local NRCS field office prior to application deadlines.

Step-by-step assistance can be found at [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/home/?cid=stelprdb1193811).

### General (Local and State) EQIP

States offer a variety of EQIP funding opportunities to address priority local or state resource concerns. Producers may apply at the local NRCS field office where the eligible land to be enrolled is located. Refer to [State Programs Links](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=stelprdb1044009#links) for more information available subaccounts (funding pools).

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| **Program Name** | **Program Description** |
| EQIP | Provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers through contracts up to a maximum term of ten years in length. These contracts provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. |
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### National EQIP Initiatives

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| **Program Name** | **Program Description** |
| **National EQIP Initiatives** |
| [Air Quality Initiative](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/air/?cid=nrcs143_008546) | Provides financial assistance to implement approved conservation practices in annually designated regions to address significant agricultural air quality resource concerns such as greenhouse gas emissions, air borne particles, and other air pollutants. |  |
| [On-Farm Energy Initiative](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=stelprdb1046252) | Enables agricultural producers to identify ways to conserve energy on the farm through development of Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMPs), and by providing financial assistance to implement conservation practices recommended in AgEMPs or other approved on-farm energy audits. |  |
| [Organic Initiative](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=nrcs143_008224) | Provides financial assistance to help implement conservation practices for organic producers and those transitioning to organic to address natural resource concerns. It also helps growers meet requirements related to National Organic Program (NOP) requirements and certain program payment limitations. |  |
| [High Tunnel System](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=stelprdb1046250) | The purpose of the "High Tunnel System" conservation practice (code 325) is to assist producers to extend the growing season for high-value crops in an environmentally safe manner. The practice has the potential to assist producers to address plant health and vigor. |  |
| [Strikeforce Initiative](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/) | The USDA StrikeForce Initiative's mission is to increase investments and create opportunities in persistent poverty-stricken rural communities using a multi- agency approach to achieve its mission. The Secretary of Agriculture launched StrikeForce in 2010 as a pilot project in persistent poverty areas in rural Arkansas, Georgia and Mississippi. By 2015, StrikeForce efforts have expanded in an additional 17 States and U.S. territory in Puerto Rico. |  |
| **National Landscape Initiatives** |
| [Landscape Initiatives](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/initiatives/?cid=stelprdb1042113) | These initiatives enable NRCS to more effectively address priority natural resource concerns by delivering systems of practices, primarily to the most vulnerable lands within geographic focus areas. |  |

### Other EQIP Programs

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| **Program Name** | **Program Description** | **Who Can Apply** |
| [Conservation Innovation Grants](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/cig/?cid=nrcs143_008205) (CIG) | Using EQIP financial assistance, CIG awards competitive grants to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. | Non-Federal governmental or nongovernmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals. |
| [Colorado River Basin Salinity Project](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/alphabetical/?cid=stelprdb1044198) | Helps producers in this river basin reduce salinity preventing salts from dissolving and mixing with the river's flow. Different States apply varying criteria. Contact your local NRCS field office to find out more. | A person, legal entity, Indian Tribe, native corporation, or joint operation with signature authority that is an agricultural producer. |