



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
6013 Lakeside Blvd.  
Indianapolis, IN 46278

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November 9, 2005

INDIANA BULLETIN NO. IN 300-6-2

**SUBJECT:** LTP – Implementation of Fiscal Year 2006 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Purpose: To establish the process, policy and actions necessary to implement the FY 06 EQIP program in Indiana, to release the Indiana EQIP 2006 State Guidelines and to rollout the FY06 EQIP program.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2006

Background: Changes have been made to the EQIP program to improve implementation, reduce duplication and eliminate confusion. These changes include the development of a National Ranking Tool, consolidation of Indiana guidance documents, revision of the Quality Assurance process and the requirement of written conservation plans prior to ranking.

Indiana will fully implement the National Ranking Tool for FY 06 EQIP applications. This tool replaces E-Score and will be used exclusively for EQIP ranking. The tool is located within the ProTracts software and is scheduled to be available on the ProTracts production site by mid November. It will be usable as soon as local resource concerns have been identified. Additional instructions specific to the National Ranking Tool will be provided later.

The Indiana EQIP 2006 State Guidelines have been consolidated into one document and now include General EQIP provisions, the schedule of implementation, the FY 06 EQIP cost list and special provisions or considerations that apply to specific practices. The EQIP 2006 State Guidelines are attached to this bulletin and will be posted on the Indiana NRCS web site.

The Quality Assurance process has been revised to reflect changes in EQIP policy and the National Ranking Tool. The Quality Review Checklist and instructions are being provided under separate cover.

A workload prioritization tool has been developed to assist District Conservationists prioritize conservation planning visits where application workload exceeds planning capacity. The Workload Prioritization Tool and instructions are being provided under separate cover.

DIST: 0

Special instructions and provisions for processing FY 06 EQIP applications are as follows:

The basic information on **all** applicants will be entered in ProTracts first and the 1200 will be generated for the applicants' signature on page one as an application. All interested persons have the right to sign a 1200 application. Review the 1200 appendix with the producer and provide them a copy.

Producers must provide the following:

1. Evidence of signatory authority when an entity is involved.
2. Evidence of control of the land for the contract period.

Since this is a basic eligibility requirement the producer needs to provide this information early in the process, preferably before planning activity is started.

Once the application is entered in ProTracts select the applicant information menu item to check eligibility. Run the "Update Eligibility" feature to see if updates to AGI, HEL/WC and payment limitations are applied to this application. Determine if the applicant and land meet the basic EQIP program eligibility requirements.

For eligible applicants, proceed with scheduling a field visit with the producer and prepare the conservation plan. A field visit and conservation plan is **required** to be completed before ranking can occur. There is no benefit in waiting until the end of the sign up cutoff to begin the conservation planning process. We intend to have planning completed on all applicants. Offices with large application workload will need to use the Workload Prioritization Tool to prioritize conservation planning efforts.

If the applicant is ineligible **stop any further work** on the application until all eligibility issues are resolved. Determine what the eligibility issue is and generate the "Program Eligibility Certification Letter" from ProTracts. Provide this letter in person to the producer or mail it Certified-Return Receipt. This letter explains what eligibility element(s) the producer does not meet and what needs to be done. It is the applicants' responsibility to provide the required information within 30 days of the letter. If the information is not provided within the 30 days, NRCS has no obligation to follow-up and will continue servicing other applications.

Upload the conservation plan to ProTracts and rank eligible applications using the National Ranking Tool in ProTracts. Ensure that all practices used in the ranking are included in the conservation plan and contract, and that all practices in the plan and contract treat the resource concerns identified in the ranking. There should be no practices in the contract that were not in the ranking.

When the plan and ranking are complete, advise the Area Conservationist or designee that the application is ready for Quality Review. When the Quality Review is completed the reviewer will change the application status to "eligible" in ProTracts. The plan and ranking can be edited at this point but the Quality Review process must be completed again.

Plans, ranking and Quality Reviews must be completed within 30 days of the cutoff date on all applications that meet the established sign up cutoff dates.

Funding decisions will be made on the 31<sup>st</sup> day after the scheduled cutoff dates. The Programs staff will change the status of applications selected for funding to “Approved” and notify District Conservationists. Once they are “Approved”, applications, rankings, plans and contracts cannot be edited. If edits are necessary the application will have to be moved to pending and will be eligible for consideration in the next round of funding, if one is available. Contact the Programs staff to reset an application to pending.

District Conservationists will print out the “Approved” 1200 with the Programs staff electronic signature and have the applicant(s) sign section 10 of the 1200, and page 10 of the appendix. After these are signed check the Applicant signature “signed” box in ProTracts and notify the Area Conservationist or designee that the contract is ready for NRCS obligating signature. Once NRCS signs the contract it is officially a contract.

If you have questions on EQIP implementation or quality assurance contact Jim Dunaway at 317-290-2300 Ext. 334, or Dwayne Howard at Ext. 386.

/s/

JANE E. HARDISTY  
State Conservationist

Attachment