United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS

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

December 8, 2006

INDIANA BULLETIN NO. IN 300-7-6

SUBJECT: LTP- Instructions for Implementation of Fiscal Year 2007 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Release of Indiana Amendment 1 to the Conservation Programs Manual, 440-V-CPM, Part 515 (EQIP).

Purpose: To establish the process and actions necessary to implement the FY07 EQIP program in Indiana, rollout the FY07 EQIP program, and release the "EQIP Indiana State Guidelines" as Indiana Amendment 1 to the Conservation Programs Manual, 440-V-CPM, Part 515 (EQIP).

Expiration Date: September 30, 2007

Background: Changes have been made to the EQIP program to improve implementation and reduce confusion. Changes include the consolidation of Indiana guidance documents and cost lists into one document, and extension of the requirement of written conservation plans prior to ranking. To incorporate these changes into permanent Indiana policy an Indiana amendment to the Conservation Programs Manual is hereby issued.

The EQIP Indiana State Guidelines have been consolidated into one document and include General EQIP provisions, the schedule of implementation, the current FY EQIP practice list with costs and caps, and special provisions or considerations that apply to the Indiana EQIP program. The attached Indiana Amendment 1 "EQIP Indiana State Guidelines" should be filed in 440-V-CPM, behind part 515 if you keep a hard copy of 440-V-CPM. The EQIP Indiana State Guidelines will be posted on the Indiana web site under Programs, EQIP. It will also be available in the Indiana E-Directives web page at http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/manual_supplements.html Title 440.

Nationally the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool (AERT) in ProTracts will be used to rank all applications. AERT includes National, State and local priorities. The tool is located within the ProTracts. Field offices will be able to utilize the ranking tool as soon as local resource concerns have been identified and sent to the Area office.

A workload prioritization tool was developed last year to assist District Conservationists prioritize conservation planning visits where application workload exceeds planning capacity. The Workload Prioritization Tool and instructions will be re-issued under separate cover.

DIST: 0

Special instructions and provisions for processing FY07 EQIP applications are as follows:

The basic information on **all** applicants will be entered in ProTracts first and the NRCS-CPA-1200 will be generated for the applicants' signature as an application. All interested persons have the right to sign an NRCS-CPA-1200 application. Review the 1202 appendix with the producer and provide them with a copy.

Producers must provide the following to meet basic EQIP eligibility requirements: 1. Evidence of signatory authority when an entity is involved, 2. Evidence of control of the land for the contract period, and 3. Evidence of meeting the agricultural producer requirement.

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 if not already done. A field visit and conservation plan is ***required*** to be completed before ranking the application. There is no benefit in waiting until the end of the sign up cutoff to begin the conservation planning process. 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. If eligibility appears to be affected by FSA resetting the eligibility flags, then work with FSA to get current information entered in. If the applicant is ineligible because necessary paperwork has not been filed with FSA, then determine specifically what the eligibility issue is and generate the "Program Eligibility Certification Letter" from ProTracts.

Provide the "Program Eligibility Certification Letter" from ProTracts 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 service other applications.

Upload the conservation plan to ProTracts and rank eligible applications using the Application Evaluation and 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 "Preapproved" in ProTracts.

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" NRCS-CPA-1202 with the Programs staff electronic signature and have the applicant(s) sign it and the NRCS-CPA-1202 appendix. The applicant and DC will also need to sign the NRCS-CPA-1155 and the Ranking Report from AERT. When all of the above documents are signed, check the Applicant signature "signed" box in ProTracts.

Scan the signed 1202 signature page and include it in an e-mail notifying the Area Conservationist, or designee, that the contract is ready for NRCS obligating signature. Once NRCS signs the contract it is officially a contract and subject to cancellation/termination and cost recovery policy.

If you have questions on EQIP implementation, or quality assurance contact Jim Dunaway at 317-290-2300 Ext. 334, or Harold Thompson at Ext. 320

/s/

JANE E. HARDISTY
State Conservationist

Attachment