

Part 580 – Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Subpart A – Implementing Iowa General Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Landscape Conservation Initiatives

580.0 Purpose

This Iowa Conservation Programs Manual (CPM) provides District Conservationists (DCs) with guidance for administering Iowa programs, Landscape Conservation Initiatives, and general financial assistance (FA) funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

580.1 Background

To support efficient delivery of these focused opportunities to eligible producers, this Iowa CPM consolidates guidance for national program, landscape conservation initiatives and general FA to be offered through EQIP. DCs are to use this manual and exhibits to prepare to offer these opportunities in a timely manner when program funding is allocated each year.

580.2 Policy

This manual establishes routine actions to be completed by DCs to support program initiatives. Delivery and management of these initiatives are subject to all agency program rules and policies including:

1. Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 512, “Conservation Program Contracting”
2. Title 440-CPM, Part 515, “Environmental Quality Incentives Program”
3. NI-440-307, “Instructions for Implementing National Program and Landscape Conservation Initiatives
4. IA Instruction 440-399 – Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project

580.3 General Instructions

In order to support approved national program and landscape conservation initiatives, DCs are to complete the following actions in a timeframe that is consistent with state application period announcements, internal state ranking deadlines and national obligation deadlines:

- A. EQIP timelines will be announced through Iowa Bulletin by October 31, each year. This will include announcing changes from the previous fiscal year (FY), application batching dates, ranking deadlines and obligation deadlines.
- B. EQIP Program Description - review the current year Program Description on Iowa’s NRCS website for your county and revise to show changes for the upcoming FY. Exhibit A - EQIP WebInfo Template, must be used with no format changes, insert your local information into the template labeled (County Name) (Program Year) EQIP_WebInfo_Template (example: Polk18EQIP_WebInfo_Template) and e-mail to the area office (AO). The AOs are to review the website information, make any necessary corrections and place the files in the statewide shared drive at [“S:\Service_Center\NRCS_statewide_shared\440_PGM_Programs\EQIP\2018 EQIP\2018 EQIP Web Site Info”](#) no later than December 1, each year. If there are no planned changes in the Program Description contact your Area Program Specialist (APS). The APS will forward this information to the Public Information Team in the State Office (SO) to complete updates to the website.

- C. Website Practice List - the format of the practice list is unchanged. Review the “Current Year County Practice List” for your county and revise to show changes for the upcoming FY. If there are no changes to last year’s practice list, you can reuse last year’s list and change the date in the title to the upcoming program year. If you need to make changes from last year’s practice list (check for updated practice names and life spans), use Exhibit B – EQIP County Practice List. Exhibit B – EQIP County Practice List must be used with no format changes, insert your local information into the template labeled (County Name)(Program Year)County Practice List.docx (**example: Polk18CountyPracticeList.docx**) and email to the Area Office (AO). AOs are to review the practice lists, make any necessary corrections and place the files in the statewide shared drive at “S:\Service_Center\NRCS_statewide_shared\440_PGM_Programs\EQIP\2018 EQIP\2018 EQIP Practice Lists” no later than December 1, each year. If there are no planned changes in the practice list contact your APS. The APS will forward this information to the Public Information Team in the SO to complete updates to the website.
- D. Local Sub-Accounts – DCs must establish local sub-accounts that reflect identified resource concerns in their management unit to be addressed with EQIP. Input from local leaders will be used to support locally important resource concerns. Local sub-account names are to be based on resource concern, landuse or General EQIP. DCs also need to establish funding percentages for each sub account. By December 1, each year, DCs will notify their APS of their planned local sub-accounts and percent funding to be placed in their local sub-accounts.
- E. Local Practice List – DCs are to establish local practice lists to include conservation practices offered to address the identified resource concerns in their management unit. National initiatives and landscape conservation initiatives will have a practice list that is part of the initiative. The Wildlife Statewide Initiative will have a practice list for this sub-account. Conservation practices in these initiatives do not need to be on the local practice list to be used for an application in one of these sub-accounts. Practices used as part of the statewide Historically Underserved (HU) sub-accounts must be on the local county practice list.
- F. Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) – FA may be offered for developing the following CAP:
- 102 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP)
 - 104 Nutrient Management Plan
 - 106 Forest Management Plan
 - 108 Feed Management Plan
 - 110 Grazing Management Plan
 - 112 Prescribed Burning Plan
 - 114 Integrated Pest Management Plan
 - 118 Irrigation Water Management Plan
 - 128 Agricultural Energy Management Plan
 - 130 Drainage Water Management Plan
 - 138 Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition (Organic Initiative Only)
 - 142 Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan
 - 146 Pollinator Habitat Plan

All CAP must be contracted in single item contracts. Applications for practices to support a CAP plan for 102 CNMP, 106 Forest Management Plan and 128 Agricultural Energy Management Plan must remain in pending status until the CAP is completed. When the CAP is completed and all other eligibility criteria are met, the application for the practices may be moved to “Eligible” status in ProTracts.

- G. Conservation Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) CAP must be written prior to beginning design of the associated waste storage facility. If an EQIP plan of operations includes an animal waste storage,

management, or treatment facility, the participant must develop and implement as scheduled, a CNMP, prior to the design of the waste storage, management, or treatment facility. If an EQIP schedule of operations includes animal waste storage or treatment facility on an animal feeding operation (AFO), implementation of all practices cited in the CNMP is required by the end of the contract period, regardless of FA provided.

- H. No local practice list may have a cap for a waste storage/treatment facility of less than \$50,000. Practices are 313 – Waste Storage Facility, 316 – Animal Mortality Facility, 317 – Composting Facility, 359 – Waste Treatment Lagoon, 360 – Waste Storage Closure, 362 – Diversion, 366 – Anaerobic Digester, Controlled Temperature, 367 – Roofs and Covers, 368 – Emergency Animal Mortality Management, 520 – Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil Treatment, 521A – Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane, 522 – Pond Sealing or Lining, Concrete, 533 – Pumping Plant, 561 – Heavy Use Area Protection, 558 – Roof Runoff Management, 620 – Underground Outlet, 629 – Waste Treatment, 632 – Waste Separation Facility, 634 – Waste Transfer, 635 – Vegetated Treatment Area, 591 – Amendments for the Treatment of Agricultural Waste. If Conservation Practice Standard 561 – Heavy Use Area Protection is being used as a Winter Feeding Station, and the planned Animal Units (AU) are 120 or more, a CNMP will be required with the Winter Feeding Station.
- I. Contracts that include forestry practices require a 106 - Forest Management Plan prior to installation of the first practice. Contracts that include practices to convert to organic farming require an Organic Management Plan prior to installation of the first practice. All practices (contracted or not contracted) included in the management plans must be fully applied.
- J. Contracts that include 128 - Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) or audits as required for practices in the Energy Initiative, shall have energy plans or audits sent to the area engineer who will forward a copy to the SO Engineering Staff for administrative review before certification of plans or contracting of practices outlined in plans or audits. Applications for Energy Initiative practices will remain in “Pending” status until the AgEMP CAP or Energy Audit is completed. When the AgEMP CAP or Energy Audit is completed and all other eligibility criteria are met, that application for the Energy practices may be moved to “Eligible” status in ProTracts.
- K. Payments are based on the Regional Payment Schedule. The document, “FY20XX Iowa EQIP Practice Descriptions and Payment Rates.doc,” will be sent in a separate email to DCs around December 1 providing payment rates and a detailed description of the payment scenarios for each practice. Local and area sub-accounts will use the General EQIP Payment Rate of 50 percent. HU payment rates will be 75 percent. Initiative payment rates will be 75 percent and Initiative and HU payment rates will be 90 percent. The FY20XX Iowa EQIP Practice Descriptions and payment rates document will further explain the payment rates to be used.
- L. Selections of applications for funding (set to “Preapproved” in ProTracts) will be made within one week after the ranking deadline. There is a 60 day deadline to have selected applications to the Area Program Specialist (APS) for Second Level Review. Applications that are not moved to “Approved Status,” signed by participant and ready for Second Level Review within 60 days after selection for funding will be set to “Eligible Status” in ProTracts and funds pulled from that application. If a delay is not due to the participant, i.e. awaiting NRCS conservation planning, awaiting a permit, etc., NRCS will continue to work with the applicant to move the application to obligation.

M. Iowa will offer the following national initiatives and landscape conservation initiatives that are included in this manual. These initiatives will use Initiative and Initiative HU Payment Rates.

- Exhibit C – National On-Farm Energy Initiative (guidance) - Statewide
- Exhibit D – National On-Farm Energy Initiative Screening Worksheet
- Exhibit E – National Organic Initiative (guidance) – Statewide
- Exhibit F – National Organic Initiative Self-Certification Worksheet
- Exhibit G –High Tunnel System Practice (guidance) - Statewide
- Exhibit H –Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative – Offered in Slocum Creek Watershed in East Pottawattamie SWCD and the West Nishnabotna River Watershed in Mills and Fremont County through FY 2018.
- Exhibit I – National Water Quality Initiative (guidance) – Offered in Wall Lake Inlet in Carroll and Sac County, Badger Creek in Dallas, Madison and Warren County, Lower South Fork Chariton River in Appanoose and Wayne County, Lost Branch Chariton River in Lucas and Wayne County, Headwaters Wolf Creek in Lucas and Wayne County, and Upper South Fork Chariton River in Wayne County.
- Exhibit J – National Water Quality Initiative Screening Worksheet
- Exhibit K – Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project (guidance) – Statewide – See IA Instruction 440-399 - Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project for Iowa guidance.
- Exhibit L – Monarch Butterfly Screening Worksheet

N. Iowa will offer the following statewide sub-accounts. The HU sub-accounts will use HU Payment Rates. The Wildlife sub-accounts will use Initiative and Initiative HU Payment Rates.

- HU Beginning Farmer/Rancher
- HU Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher
- HU Socially Disadvantaged
- HU Tribal
- Wildlife – Forestry Habitat
- Wildlife – Grassland Habitat
- Wildlife – Riverine Habitat
- Wildlife – Wildlife Habitat Management

O. Differential Payment Rate for FY 2017 and following years, Iowa will offer the following conservation practices at the Initiative and Initiative HU Payment rates for General EQIP (this would include all local and area sub-accounts). These are practices that have high environmental impacts (based on conservation practice physical effects) on priority resource concerns in Iowa that are not widely accepted or adopted. These practices include:

Code	Conservation Practice
327	Conservation Cover
328	Conservation Crop Rotation
338	Prescribed Burning
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover
391	Riparian Forest Buffer
472	Access Control
512	Forage and Biomass Planting
528	Prescribed Grazing
554	Drainage Water Management

580	Streambank and Shoreline Protect
604	Saturated Buffer
605	Denitrifying Bioreactor
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
647	Early Successional Habitat Develop
650	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation
656	Constructed Wetland
657	Wetland Restoration
666	Forest Stand Improvement

- P. Iowa will use area Animal Feeding Operation (AFO) sub-accounts. AFO applications will be funded either through the area AFO sub-account, HU statewide sub-accounts or National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). For AFO applications, field office (FO) staff will complete preliminary conservation planning with the applicant by completing Exhibit M - IA-ENG-48 Data Inventory for Planning Livestock Waste Management Systems. Sections IA-C, IIA-C, and IIIA-C from the IA-ENG-48 form will be completed as a minimum. The completed IA-ENG-48 form will be provided to the AO by ranking deadlines to provide area engineering staff time to do a technical review of the application prior to potential obligation. Applications for AFO facilities will remain in “Pending” status until the CNMP is completed. When the CNMP is completed and all other eligibility criteria are met, the application for the facility may be moved to “Eligible” status in ProTracts.
- Q. Any practice cap levels set locally must be based on the amount of FA (caps are not allowed based on the amount of units except for interim practices). The following table lists statewide practice cap levels. These are lifetime caps 2014 Farm Bill for participant/operation. The Cover Crop cap was established in FY 2015 for the 2014 Farm Bill for contracts in FY 2015 and later. For FY 2018 and following years the Cover Crop cap is raised to the rate in the table below.

Iowa EQIP Payment Rate CAPs			
Practice Code	Practice Name	FY Cap	FY Caps for HU, and Initiative
329	Residue & Tillage Management, No-Till/Strip-Till	\$24,000.00	\$36,000.00
340	Cover Crop	\$36,000.00	\$54,000.00
345	Residue and Tillage Management – Reduced Till	\$10,000.00	\$15,000.00
590	Nutrient Management	\$16,000.00	\$24,000.00
595	Integrated Pest Management	\$10,000.00	\$15,000.00
325	High Tunnel System for		\$9,870.00
374	Farmstead Energy Improvement – Grain Dryer		\$50,000

- R. In order for land to be eligible for an irrigation-related practice, that land must have been irrigated in two out of the last five years. This means that irrigation must have been part of managing the cropping system to meet the needs of the plant and to maintain the yields of an irrigated crop. To ensure the practice meets the program purpose, the irrigation practice must be addressing an identified resource concern, such as Soil Erosion – Irrigation Induced or Water Quantity – Inefficient Water Use. To document irrigation history use Exhibit N - Irrigation History Checklist.
- S. Retrofitting of structural practices is allowable, provided that a higher level of conservation benefit (e.g., irrigation water conservation or water savings) can be documented and is supported by the practice standard. Retrofitting will only be allowed if it is more cost efficient than an alternative replacement system and meets the minimum requirements of the practice standard. Payment schedule scenarios that support retrofitting must be approved through the national payment schedule process prior to contracting. Retrofitting is not allowed to replace components that are required to be maintained for normal operation of the system within the approved practice lifespan.
- T. Toolkit: With the link between Customer Service Toolkit and Conservation Client Gateway, it is important that the correct producers are associated with the Conservation Plan at the plan level to protect Personally Identifiable Information (PII). If multiple producers are listed as associated customers on a Toolkit folder but not all customers are on the EQIP contract, a separate Toolkit plan must be developed to protect PII. The EQIP plan will be named Consplan-EQIP##### (use the last 5-digits of the EQIP contract to name the plan).
- Producers are associated at the plan level through the Create/Manage Plans  button under the Edit Plan Decision Maker link. If the Toolkit folder and the EQIP contract have the same associated producers, plan contract items in the Consplan-t##### plan.
- U. ProTracts Cost List - HU producers receive a higher payment rate. Statewide sub-accounts have been established for HU producers. The HU producers include: Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Tribal Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, or Veteran Farmers or Ranchers. A link to information on these types of producers is provided here: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/outreach/slbfr/>. The FY20XX cost list will be uploaded by the SO to ProTracts for each county. The cost list will be sent in a separate e-mail to the DC with a copy to the AO. These files will be used as the Toolkit cost list. Save the appropriate cost list spreadsheets on each computer that utilizes Toolkit in F:\FOTG\Section_1.

Some important things to remember about cost lists used in ProTracts are:

- Do not change the template format in any way, including the addition of headers/footers or footnotes.
- Cost list errors cannot be corrected in ProTracts. Errors are corrected by deleting the cost list, correcting the errors in the original spreadsheet, and uploading the cost list again.
- Deleting a cost list has no impact if it is not linked to any applications.
- If a cost list is linked to pending applications, the link is deleted along with all contract items. This ensures that applications are always linked to active cost lists.
- If a cost list is linked to an application selected for funding, the cost list associated with the application can be deleted if the application status is reset to pending.
- If a cost list is linked to an obligated contract, it cannot be deleted.

V. Ranking Criteria

Title 440-CPM, Part 515, Subpart H, Section 515.72, Application Ranking provides very specific guidance on establishing the ranking process and criteria. Local ranking criteria have been developed for each of the four separate common resource areas (CRA) and will be loaded into ProTracts by the APSs.

Exhibit Q - Iowa EQIP Prescreening Tool - 10/1/2017 is available to help prioritize applications for ranking in ProTracts. This prescreening tool is required for area AFO sub-accounts, the HU state sub-accounts, and any other sub-accounts with potential applications for livestock waste treatment practices. The use of the prescreening tool for all other EQIP sub-accounts is a local decision. Instructions for use of the prescreening tool are on the back of the form.

National and state ranking factors include questions about 303(d) Impaired Waters, Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), and Threatened and Endangered Species or Species at Risk (T&E). EQIP Ranking watershed maps based on 2014 IDNR Impaired Streams and Lakes (303(d)) have been placed on the FO servers. The maps will be available in each FO at:

F:\geodata\project_data\nrcs\eqip\EQIP_Ranking_FY2016_CountyName.pdf.

Links to information on these issues are provided here:

<https://programs.iowadnr.gov/adbnnet/>

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/WaterQuality/WatershedImprovement/WatershedResearchData/WaterImprovementPlans/PublicMeetingsPlans.aspx>

TMDLs must be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

For T&E species, select the county of the application and click on submit. Select the PDF for information on habitat improvements that benefit the species affected. Points can only be awarded if the practice benefits the species. For species that do not have a PDF, contact the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) private lands biologists or wildlife biologist who services your FO.

<https://programs.iowadnr.gov/naturalareasinventory/pages/Query.aspx>

Additional information on T&E Species may be found at:

http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/lists/iowa_spp.html

When habitat improvements may benefit or harm federally listed T&E species, NRCS must initiate consultation with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Decisions regarding ranking issues:

Local resource concerns will be developed locally. Local criteria must adhere to the above guidance and as a minimum:

- Address only the resource concern(s) from the FOTG identified for the local program.
- Address national priorities identified for the local program.
- Address only the resource concern(s) which the client wishes to address through the EQIP application in the ranking of that application.
- The degree of cost effectiveness will be calculated automatically as the application is ranked, through a formula which helps determine the extent of cost effectiveness and environmental benefits. This is done by multiplying the Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) for the practice by the Practice Service Life (PSL), then dividing by the associated Practice Average Cost (PAC).
- Limit practices to those well-adopted locally in solving the identified resource concern(s).