

Iowa Bulletin: 440-24-2

Date: 2/16/2024

Subject: PGM – Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Environmental Quality
Incentives Program (EQIP) and 2018 Farm Bill
Regional Conservation Partnership Program
(RCPP18) Classic Land Management and Rental
(LMR) Timelines and Guidance

Action Required By: September 13, 2024

Purpose: To provide the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and 2018 Farm Bill Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP18) Classic Land Management and Rental (LMR) timelines and guidance to all Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation planners and partners.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2024

Explanation: This bulletin provides program deadlines, program guidance, and eligibility requirements for EQIP and RCPP18. The NRCS can accept applications at any time. There will be two rounds of funding opportunities for EQIP and RCPP18. During 2nd round EQIP, all ranking pools will be ACT NOW eligible during the continuous sign-up period. RCPP18 ACT NOW 1st round eligible ranking pools will remain available in 2nd round.

1. EQIP and RCPP18 Timeline

Deadline	Activity
November 3, 2023	1 st Round General Application Deadline/ ACT NOW Continuous sign-up begins for eligible ranking pools (see separate announcement for identified ranking pools and thresholds)
February 23, 2024	1 st Round Ranking Deadline
March 1, 2024	OTI Application Deadline (they must include accurate cost estimates)
March 29, 2024	1 st Round Obligation Deadline
April 5, 2024	2 nd Round Application Sign-Up Deadline for General sign-up/ EQIP ACT NOW Continuous sign-up begins for all ranking pools and RCPP18 ACT NOW for eligible ranking pools
May 31, 2024	2 nd Round Ranking Deadline for General applications not utilizing the ACT NOW process (Note: applications eligible to rank must have been submitted by the April 5, 2024, application deadline)

July 19, 2024	2 nd Round Obligation Deadline for General applications/ ACT NOW Continuous sign-up closes
August 30, 2024	State Obligation Deadline for all applications (highly encouraged to be completed by this date)
September 6, 2024	RCPP18 Bulk Obligation Package Deadline to CD-DMS

Note: Bulk Obligation Packages are required to be uploaded to CD-DMS within 5 days of obligation to State Office.

September 13, 2024	National Obligation Deadline for EQIP applications (no longer the end of the month)
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Note: General applications refer to applications not utilizing the ACT NOW process.

2. FY2024 Ranking Pools

A. EQIP

FY24 AFO	FY24 IRA Source Water Protection	FY24 Source Water Protection
FY24 CPA, DIA and CEMA	FY24 IRA Wildlife	FY24 State Organic Transition Initiative
FY24 High Tunnel Initiative	FY24 MRBI	FY24 Wildlife
FY24 Historically Underserved	FY24 National OTI	FY24 WLFW NOBO
FY24 IRA Climate Smart General	FY24 Non-AFO	FY24 Urban (Specialty Ag)
FY24 IRA EQIP CIC	FY24 Non-Farm Bill Targets	
FY24 IRA Historically Underserved	FY24 NWQI	
FY24 IRA On-Farm Energy	FY24 Prairie Pothole	
FY24 IRA Soil Health	FY24 Prairie Strips	

B. RCPP 18 LMR

- 1894 Turkey River Watershed Partnership
- 1896 Iowa Systems Approach to Conservation Drainage
- 1976 North Raccoon Partnership for Soil and Water
- 2266 Midwest Ag Water Quality Partnership
- 2374 Cedar River Source Water Partnership
- 2448 SE Iowa Watershed Partnership
- 2570 Floyd River Water Quality Partnership
- 2696 Innovative Conservation Agriculture
- 2857 West Nishnabotna Water Quality and Infrastructure Partnership

3. Updates for FY2024

- A. Fence (Conservation Practice Standard (CPS 382) as a supporting practice **must** be scheduled with Prescribed Grazing (CPS 528) or Access Control (CPS 472) for financial assistance. Fence that is along the legal property-line is not eligible for financial assistance; see Financial Assistance Programs (FAP) booklet for exceptions. This is a step forward for working with participants on farmsteads and participants with different land uses next to each other within their property not their property line.
- B. Last year policy changed allowing up to 5 years of management practices to be contracted instead of only 3 years. With this adjustment, Iowa further updated our policy for EQIP and RCPP18 to allow Cover Crops (CPS 340) to be planned non-consecutively. Cover crops can be planted year 1 and year 3, with no cover crop year 2. While we have this flexibility now, management contracts **will not be planned more than 5 years**. As a reminder, cover crops are planned like any other management practice. Once the practice has been implemented, it can only be planned again in a new contract if the applicant is achieving a higher level of practice implementation. This is defined in Title 440 - Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 530 Working Lands Conservation Programs Manual, Section 403 H (440 CPM § 530.403H)
- C. The EQIP cost list was brought down to one list instead of having two separate cost lists: regular and an initiative list. This change will enable one cost to be communicated to participant. Within this single cost list variations still exist based on participant historically underserved (HU) status, priority 10 practices, and source water protection priority practices.
- D. The National Organic Transition Initiative (OTI) will be available again for FY2024. The application with an accurate cost estimate deadline is **March 1, 2024**. This is a **hard** deadline. Funds will be distributed to the States based upon these cost estimates. **Practice Organic Management (CPS 823) should not be scheduled more than 3 years for the initial transition period. If participant runs into constraints such as weather etc., then additional years could be added up to two years for a maximum of five years according to policy.** This is updated from last year's guidance. OTI is only for land in transition.
- E. The State Organic Initiative and the Historically Underserved pools will allow up to five years to be scheduled for practice Organic Management (CPS 823).
- F. Per new national policy located in 440 CPM, § 530.71C "Administrative Review of Participant Certification," States are no longer required to conduct a five percent random spot check on historically underserved participant's self-certifications. Additionally, do not attempt to verify a person's self-certification as a member of a socially disadvantaged group as no verification process exists for this certification type.

4. Reminders

- A. FY 2024 Environmental Quality Incentives Program-Conservation Incentives Contract (EQIP-CIC) is offered and there will be no changes in guidance this year. Refer to the Programs SharePoint EQIP folder under FY2023 for further information. Listed are the 3 priority resource concerns and the 11 priority practices for EQIP-CIC planning:
- (1) There is statewide eligibility on cropland and pastureland.
 - (2) The 3 priority resource concerns are:
 - Soil Quality Limitations
 - Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss
 - Livestock Production
 - (3) The 11 eligible annual payment practices are:
 - CPS Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
 - CPS Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till (329)
 - CPS Cover Crops (340)
 - CPS Forage Harvest Management (511)
 - CPS Prescribed Grazing (528)
 - CPS Drainage Water Management (554)
 - CPS Nutrient Management (590)
 - CPS Annual Forages for Grazing Systems (810)
 - CEMA Soil Health Testing (216)
 - CEMA Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management (217)
 - CEMA Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Assessment (218)
- B. Iowa will continue to have 10 high priority practices identified to receive an increased payment rate equivalent to 90 percent for the following practices: brush management (CPS 314), conservation cover (CPS 327), constructed wetlands (CPS 656), denitrifying bioreactor (CPS 605), saturated buffers (CPS 604), silvopasture (381), tree & shrub establishment (CPS 612), wetland creation (CPS 658), wetland enhancement (CPS 659), and wetland restoration (CPS 657).
- C. Make sure to attribute these modifiers if they pertain to your applications.
- The organic modifier is required for all organic certified and/or organic transitioning applications.
 - The grazed modifier is required for all pastureland applications and if grazing on cropland or farmstead.
 - The wildlife modifier is required for all wildlife applications.
- D. Payment caps are in place for Farmstead Energy Improvement Grain Dryer (CPS 374) at \$50,000 per individual and for Soil Carbon Amendments (CPS 336) at \$65,000/per contract/per individual and \$75,000/per contract/per HU individual.
- E. Multiple payments for implementing the same structural and vegetative practices on the same land within the practice lifespan are generally not allowed. 440 CPM § 530.406.B.(4)(i) outlines an exception for Brush Management (CPS 314) and/or Herbaceous Weed Treatment

(CPS 315), which allows up to 3 payments for either practice on the same land. Refer to our Programs SharePoint EQIP folder under the FY2023 folder and the FAP booklet for more information on the variance granted to Iowa.

5. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Funded Applications

- A. Use the guidance in this bulletin, along with policy in Title 180 National Planning Procedures Handbook, Title 440 Conservation Program Manual (CPM) Part 502, “Terms and Abbreviations Common to All Programs,” 440 CPM Part 530, “Working Lands Conservation Program Manual,” National Instruction 440-310, “NRCS Program Ranking through Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART),” and training to prepare for program opportunities, completing assessments, accepting and processing applications, and evaluating requests for funding. Follow 440 CPM Part 530 policy, including the newly added Subpart M, “Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) – Funded Contracts,” for additional guidance on IRA-funded contract obligations.
- B. IRA funds cannot be combined with any other United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program funds within a contract. If you have practices that are not eligible for IRA, those will need to be a separate application entered into Protracts NOT a separate CD assessment in CART. Required to complete all activities by September 30, 2031, no exceptions allowed. See 440 CPM § 530.121 and § 530.123 for additional guidance.
- C. Applications selected for IRA funding must have the IRA radio button on the ProTracts application page set to “Yes” **before the application is promoted to preapproved status** in Select Application Tool (SAT) and ProTracts. The radio button selection can only be changed if it’s in pending, eligible, or preapproved status. Users may not change this selection for approved applications or obligated contracts.
- D. EQIP contracts using IRA funds must include one or more core conservation practices or activities identified in the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities list for FY2024. Facilitating/supporting practices are allowed to be scheduled if they directly support the core IRA practice. These must be tied together in CART in order to receive funds. A copy of CSAF Mitigation Activities List FY2024 must be kept in the participant’s file for future reference.
- E. In addition to the appendix to Form NRCS-CPA-1202, NRCS must use 440 CPM § 530.129(A), “IRA Addendum to Appendix to for NRCS-CPA-1202.” The addendum supplements the general terms and conditions established in the appendix to Form NRCS-CPA-1202. Participants with an IRA-funded contract must sign both the contract appendix and IRA addendum at the time of obligation.

6. ACT NOW Eligibility and Obligation Requirements

- A. Applications for EQIP and RCPP18 ACT NOW will need to meet these criteria prior to ranking to be consider eligible.
 - 1. All general eligibility must be met as outlined in Title 440 Conservation Program Manual (CPM) Part 530, Subpart C “Application for Assistance” which defines

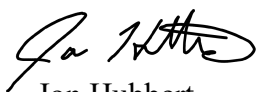
types of eligible applicants, producer types, how to establish farm records, certifications, which documents are required for eligibility determination, control of land (COL) requirements, and signature authority.

- a. Eligible applicants are a person, legal entity, Indian Tribe, Alaska Native corporation, or joint operation with signature authority. They have interest in the agricultural (Ag) operation, products, commodities or livestock produced.
 - b. Required documents for program eligibility are:
 1. Form NRCS-CPA-1200 “Conservation Program Application”
 2. Form AD-1026 “Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification”
 3. Form CCC-941 “Average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax Information”
 4. Form CCC-902 “Farm Operating Plan” which needs to be in determined status
 5. Form FSA-211 “Power of Attorney (POA),” signature authority for individuals, or Forms CCC-901 and CCC-902, signature authority for legal entities.
 - c. Control of land requirements state that participants must have possession of the land by ownership, lease, or other agreement. Applicants must obtain written concurrence from the landowner to apply a structural or vegetative conservation practice or activity using form NRCS-CPA-1257 “Landowner Concurrence for Structural or Vegetative Conservation Activities.”
2. All eligibility must be met as outlined in 440 CPM § 530.402, regarding applicant eligibility, land eligibility, and resource concern eligibility.
- a. Applicant eligibility means applicants must meet the definition of an agricultural producer (440 CPM §530.20), be within EQIP payment limitations (440 CPM § 530.406), and additional eligibility requirements to check if HU is self-identified on the CPA-1200. Further, utilize exhibit 530.143C, “Program Eligibility Matrices,” RCPP 2018 LMR tab of this manual for RCPP general eligibility requirements. This reference includes a tab for EQIP general eligibility requirements.

Note: RCPP does not have payment limitations like EQIP. RCPP does have a contract limitation of \$450,000.
 - b. Land may be eligible for enrollment in EQIP or RCPP LMR contracts if NRCS determines that the land is controlled by an eligible applicant and either is: (1) Private or Tribal agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or associated land on which an eligible conservation activity would help achieve the conservation benefits defined for an approved project, or (2) Publicly owned agricultural land or associated land, and the enrollment of such land. Document COL appropriately and on the CPA-6 notes in the folder.

- c. Resource concern eligibility means at least one natural resource concern must be identified and addressed with an eligible conservation practice or activity.
 3. Cultural resources Threatened and Endangered Species (T&E) and the CPA-52 must be addressed and completed prior to ranking.
- B. Due to the compressed timeline with ACT NOW, you must complete the planning and assessment requirements for ranking pool applicability early in the process. Ensure resource concerns, tracts and fields, acres and cost estimates are accurate. Complete all job sheets and practice implementation requirements (IRs), cultural resource evaluations, T&E and **preliminary** engineering designs. All environmental and cultural resource reviews must be completed prior to ranking. If cultural resources or **preliminary** engineering designs cannot be completed within the EQIP and RCPP18 ACT NOW timeframe, then the applicant is not eligible for ACT NOW funding. Confirm application details and practice deadlines with the applicant prior to submitting the ranked application for selection. These applications should be contracted without delay once they are preapproved.
- C. The field office will follow the same ranking and obligation procedures as used with general EQIP and RCPP18. Applications received for the identified ACT NOW ranking pools must be assessed and ranked **within 20 days** from when the application is eligible. Per 440 CPM § 530.37C, field offices “must process ACT NOW applications in order received when possible, accounting for participant availability for conservation planning decisions.” Applicants must be notified in writing as soon as possible about any records that must be filed or updated to meet EQIP eligibility (440 CPM § 530.141C ‘Intent to Proceed Letter’ and 530.142E “Conservation Program Application Checklist.”) Upon preapproval, applications must be submitted for 2nd level review within **10 days**. Obligation must occur **within one week** after the review process has started.
- D. Reminder for EQIP ACT NOW applications that meet or exceed posted ranking threshold criteria, notify your Area Program Specialist (APS) immediately to get your application submitted to the EQIP ACT NOW Submission Tracker. Please follow specific guidance sent February 7, 2024, via email on RCPP18 ACT NOW submission from the RCPP Program Specialist.
- E. For further guidance, refer to the EQIP ACT NOW Q&A document and PREPI presentation located in the Programs SharePoint→EQIP→FY2023 EQIP→FY23 ACT NOW.

Contact: If you have questions for EQIP, please contact Jessica Downey, EQIP Program Coordinator, at jessica.downey@usda.gov. If you have questions for RCPP18, please contact Christine Evans, RCPP Program Coordinator, at christine.evans@usda.gov.



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