

How EQIP Works in Massachusetts

General Program Description

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers to implement conservation practices.

Any producer engaged in livestock or crop production on eligible land may apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, pastureland, private non-industrial forestland, and other farm lands as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Applications for EQIP may be made at local NRCS offices and USDA Service Centers in Massachusetts. While EQIP provides for continuous sign-up, a cut-off date of **February 1, 2005** has been set to ensure adequate time to evaluate, rank and approve applications for funding.

Massachusetts ranks and approves applications based on one statewide process, developed in accordance with national guidance and in conjunction with priorities identified by the State Technical Committee and local work groups. The state and local committees are comprised of public and private agencies interested in natural resources protection, and advise NRCS on the implementation of EQIP in Massachusetts. The committees requested and evaluated input on resource concerns, practices needed to treat the resource concerns, financial incentives and program implementation.

Eligible Practices and Cost Share Rates

A list of eligible practices with variable cost share rates was developed through a practice evaluation process adopted by the State Technical Committee. Conservation practices proposed for funding were assessed based on criteria established in the 2002 Farm Bill. Practices were assessed based on typical applications across the state and the general impact on resource concerns, environmental benefit, cost effectiveness, regulatory compliance, innovation, agricultural production, socio-economic value, national program management priorities and local commodity group priorities. Practices identified as producing the greatest benefit were assigned higher cost-share rates than medium and low beneficial practices. For more information see *Massachusetts EQIP Practice Evaluation Workbook*.

A total of 71 conservation practices have been approved for cost-share in Massachusetts, with an average cost share rate of 68%. Practices that work to improve water quality, in general, receive 75 percent cost share, while other cost share rates range from 25% to 50%. *Limited Resource Producers* and *Beginning Farmers* may receive 90% cost share for all eligible conservation practices. Incentive payments (flat rates paid over three years) are offered to encourage adoption of management practices that are not already being applied to the land.

For details see Massachusetts 2005 EQIP *Practice List*, *Cost List*, and *Cost List Assumptions*.

Ranking Criteria

Massachusetts uses one statewide process to evaluate applications. Ranking criteria and priorities are defined in Massachusetts *2005 EQIP Application Evaluation Matrix*. Applications are scored by identifying the natural resource concerns and the extent of treatment and environmental benefit to be achieved.

The basic formula for calculating environmental benefit is:

$$\text{Resource Concern} \times \text{Environmental Gain} \times \text{Location Factor} \times \text{Priority Factor}$$

Possible *resource concerns* encompass the quality and/or quantity of soil, water, air, plants, or animals (SWAPA). Greater *priority* is given to water quality projects, followed by water conservation and soil erosion measures. *Environmental gain* is assessed using NRCS *Resource Quality Criteria* (see the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide, Section III, at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg>).

Location factors prioritize applications that would impact environmentally sensitive areas, including:

- 1) IMPAIRED WATER: Massachusetts 2002 Integrated List of Impaired Waters (*waters requiring a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)*), and Massachusetts Nonpoint Source Pollution Action Strategy;
- 2) DRINKING WATER: Wellhead Protection Areas (Zone II), Interim Wellhead Protection Areas, Outstanding Resource Waters, Sole Source Aquifers and private wells;
- 3) OTHER WATERS: groundwater and surface water (*aquifers, wetlands, streams, lakes, etc.*);
- 4) FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT (Estimated Habitat, Priority Habitat, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Designated Shellfish Areas, and presence of anadromous fish runs or cold water fisheries).

Consideration also is given to proposals with features that enhance public investment, such as: conservation treatment of protected agricultural lands, compliance with environmental regulations, leveraged funds, adoption of whole-farm plans and conservation systems, sustainable and improved agricultural production, and innovation.

EQIP Process:

The following steps identify the overall program process:

1. Producer files a program application (CCC-1200 form) at the local USDA Service Center. At the time of application, the producer should ensure the following forms are completed and on file at the USDA Service Center: AD-1026 (HEL/WC provisions); CCC-501A and CCC-502 (entity and joint operation information; CCC-526 (AGI Certification); and a completed NRCS 2005 EQIP Application Worksheet.
2. Producer works with NRCS to develop a conservation plan to record decisions regarding conservation practice(s) and a schedule of operation. Technical assistance for conservation planning is available from USDA, either through your local NRCS staff or Certified Technical Service Providers (TSP). To find a TSP in your area, go online to <http://techreg.usda.gov/>
3. NRCS approves highest ranked applications for funding until all funds are obligated. Notice of approval, disapproval or deferral of applications is expected by April 15th.
4. Contract is developed, signed and dated by applicant and NRCS.
5. Practice implementation may begin as soon as contract is signed.
6. Participant applies to NRCS for payment upon completion of work. Supporting documentation and receipts may be required. Payments will be received within 30 days of approval.

For More Information

Please contact Richard DeVergilio, Massachusetts EQIP Program Manager, by phone (413) 253-4379, or email Rick.DeVergilio@ma.usda.gov. Or contact NRCS at your local USDA Service Center.

USDA Service Centers		
Barnstable	270 Communications Way, Unit 1G, Hyannis, MA 02601	508-771-6476
Dighton	84 Center St, Dighton, MA 02715-1229	508-669-6621
Greenfield	55 Federal Street, Room 290, Greenfield, MA 01301	413-772-0384 ext 3
Hadley	195 Russell Street, Suite B6, Hadley, MA 01035	413-585-1000 ext 3
Holden	52 Boyden Road, Room 10, Holden, MA 01520	508-829-4477 ext 3
Pittsfield	78 Center Street, Suite 206, Pittsfield, MA 01201	413-443-1776 ext 3
Westford	319 Littleton Road, Suite 302, Westford, MA 01886	978-692-1904 ext 3
West Wareham	15 Cranberry Highway, West Wareham, MA 02576	508-295-5151 ext 2