

# Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Livestock Emphasis Action Plan



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Historically, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has worked with all sectors of the animal agriculture industry, including grazing and animal feeding operations (AFO). For a number of reasons, however, NRCS assistance has varied from State to State and from animal sector to animal sector. But with the significant amount of concentration in most animal sectors, especially in swine and poultry, there have been increasing demands by the animal industry, environmental regulators, the public, and Congress for NRCS to provide increasing assistance, both technically and financially, to AFOs.

Congress recognized the mounting pressures in agriculture, animal agriculture specifically, and authorized new authorities and historic increases in funding through the 2002 Farm Bill. In the 2002 Farm Bill Managers' Report, Congress articulated that the...*Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a valuable tool to help producers avoid the need for future regulation, and the Secretary shall manage the program to maximize this purpose.* While much of the focus was on the anticipated delivery of new regulations affecting confined animal production, the Managers also pointed to opportunities in grass-based systems to...*encourage the use of grazing systems, such as year-round, rotational or managed grazing systems, that enhance productive livestock operations.*

With regard to regulatory challenges, EQIP has two objectives. The first is to help producers comply with local, State, and Federal regulatory requirements. The second is to help producers address natural resource concerns in a manner that makes regulatory action unnecessary.

NRCS employees at all levels must embrace these two objectives for EQIP as well as providing ongoing technical assistance through the Conservation Technical Assistance Program. Animal agriculture is directly tied to soil, air, and water quality and NRCS sees direct conservation assistance to this sector as a critical part of its mission.

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The 2002 Farm Bill directed a significant amount of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) resources at animal agriculture operations, including 60 percent of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding. In order to reach this goal, NRCS has developed the National Animal Agriculture Conservation Framework (December 2003). This National Framework is built from State and Basin Area efforts and presents a vision for voluntary, proactive efforts to foster environmentally sound and economically viable livestock and poultry production. It envisions collaboration among Federal, State, tribal, and local governments; producers; the public; and the private sector to bring the initiative, resources, and commitment to support environmental stewardship in animal agriculture.

Recently, NRCS has identified 24 action items to place emphasis within EQIP on meeting livestock and poultry producers' natural resource conservation and environmental protection goals. These 24 action items have been grouped into five broad categories.

### **I. Determining Opportunities**

<b>Action No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
1	Conduct analysis of FY 2003 contracts associated with livestock and inform State Conservationists for their consideration in the management of EQIP.	5/2004	Complete
7	Encourage State Conservationists to invite livestock and poultry organizations to participate on State Technical Committees and provide input to local work groups.	7/2004	Complete
21	Discuss with Regional and State Conservationists the concerns expressed by livestock organizations about the barriers to participation in EQIP.	7/2004	Complete
22	Encourage State Conservationists to ask all livestock and poultry interest groups for feedback to State Management Teams concerning implementation of this action plan.	7/2004	Complete
8	Learn the concerns of livestock and poultry producers and communicate those concerns to State Conservationists.	9/2004	Complete
6	Develop tools to collect and disseminate resource concern and species information on unfunded and active EQIP contracts. Develop reports showing meaningful summary statistics available both internally and to the public.	12/2004	Complete

**II. EQIP Ranking Criteria**

<b>Action No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
2	Develop and share innovative approaches used by States to more effectively meet livestock operations conservation needs by querying states for ideas and disseminating examples by national bulletin.	8/2004	Complete
9	Encourage States to evaluate EQIP ranking criteria for air and water quality concerns to ensure that all national priorities are being considered. Reemphasize that the criteria should be size neutral, cost-effective, environmentally sound, and clear.	7/2004	Complete
13	Determine whether local priorities and ranking criteria are consistent with State and national program priorities.	9/2004	Complete
5	Assess EQIP application ranking criteria and systems used nationwide and develop a national ranking process framework that is web-based. This framework approach will provide national consistency while still providing the ability to address local resource needs.	10/2005	Complete

**III. Information and Training**

<b>Action No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
24	Send an informational memo to all NRCS employees outlining the importance of CNMPs and the importance of the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program in providing CNMPs.	9/2004	Complete
12	Incorporate livestock and poultry training experiences in NRCS "Boot Camp" training for new field personnel. Develop opportunities for on-farm experiences, e.g. "Walk a Mile in My Boots," for field personnel.	10/2004	Complete
14	Support three regional "Watershed Working Lands Summits" in St. Louis, MO (June 22-24, 2004); Sacramento, CA (October 18-20, 2004), and Richmond, VA (November. 6-8, 2004)	11/2004	Complete
11	Develop and implement an electronic animal science training course to help NRCS personnel develop a better understanding of livestock production practices.	7/2005	Complete

**IV. Policy & Guidance**

<b>Action No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
4	Develop policy guidance to address potential concerns where cost-sharing is provided for portable equipment; revise EQIP Manual.	5/2004	Complete
3	Inform State Conservationists via memorandum that the revised EQIP Manual will provide them authority, with proper controls and accountability, to make selected portable equipment for manure handling and application eligible for cost-share assistance.	6/2004	Complete
10	Provide livestock and poultry organizations with current policy on case file confidentiality. Provide notification when a proposed confidentiality rule becomes open to public comment.	6/2004	Complete
17	Clarify EQIP policy for cooperative contracts by national bulletin.	6/2004	Complete
23	Develop a self-assessment guide to communicate expectations to State Conservationists.	9/2004	Complete

**V. Working with Organizations**

<b>Action No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
15	Offer to speak at national livestock and poultry organizations' annual meetings to explain EQIP and answer questions. Include information on cooperative contracts.	6/2004	Complete
16	Inform producers about cooperative contracts under EQIP to address conservation needs involving multiple farms by submitting articles to national livestock and poultry organizations.	9/2004	Complete
18	Continue collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency to help livestock and poultry producers meet concentrated animal feeding operation regulatory requirements. Expand collaboration to include the Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators (ASIWPCA) and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA).	9/2004	Complete
20	Develop a guide that would convey the purpose, role, and operation of State Technical Committees, as well as how to participate. Work with livestock and poultry organizations to disseminate to their members.	9/2004	Complete
19	Implement the NRCS National Animal Agriculture Conservation Framework (NAACF).	Ongoing	Complete