National Bulletin: NB 300_13_3 Date: October 26, 2012

Subject: LTP – National Programmatic and Landscape Conservation Initiative Guidance – Fiscal Year (FY) 2013

Action Required By: November 9, 2012, and July 1, 2013

Purpose. To provide State Conservationists (STCs) and the Directors, Caribbean and Pacific Islands Areas, with guidance for administering FY 2013 national programmatic and landscape conservation initiatives funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).

Expiration Date. September 30, 2013

Background. To support efficient delivery of these focused opportunities to eligible producers, this bulletin consolidates guidance for certain national programmatic and landscape initiatives to be offered through EQIP, AMA, and WHIP during FY 2013. Although legislative authorities may be unresolved and funding allocations may not be finalized, State Conservationists are to use the attached guidance to prepare to offer these opportunities in a timely manner when clarity is achieved.

Explanation. This guidance establishes action items to be completed by State Conservationists to support initiatives. Delivery and management of these initiatives are subject to all agency program rules and policies including requirements in Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 512, "Conservation Program Contracting."

National Initiative	AMA	EQIP	WHIP
National Air Quality Initiative (NAQI)		Χ	
National On-Farm Energy Initiative (NOFEI)		Х	
National Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative (NSHTI)	X	Χ	
National Organic Initiative (NOI)		Χ	
Landscape Conservation Initiatives:			
Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW)			X
-Black-Footed Ferret (BF Ferret WLFW)			X
-Bog Turtle (Bog Turtle WLFW)			X
-Lesser Prairie Chicken (LP Chicken WLFW)		Χ	X
-New England Cottontail (NE Cottontail WLFW)			X
-Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (SWN Flycatcher WLFW)			Χ
-Greater Sage Grouse (Greater Sage Grouse WLFW)		X	Χ
-Gopher Tortoise (G Tortoise WLFW)			X
-Golden-Winged Warbler (G Winged Warbler WLFW)			X
Bay Delta Initiative (BDI)		Χ	
Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI)		X	
Illinois River Subbasin and Eucha - Spavinaw Lake Watershed Initiative (IRWI)		Х	
Mississippi River Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)		Х	Χ
Northern Plains Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (NP-MBHI)		Х	
Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI)		Χ	
Long Leaf Pine Initiative (LLPI)		Χ	
New England-New York Forestry Initiative (NE/NYFI)		Χ	
Everglades Initiative (EI)		X	
West Maui Coral Reef Initiative (WMCRI)		X	
Driftless Area Initiative (DAI)		Χ	

In order to support approved national programmatic and landscape conservation initiatives during FY 2013, STCs, are to complete the following:

- 1) ProTracts Subaccounts and Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (AERT).—States are to establish subaccounts and populate the ranking evaluation criteria in the ProTracts AERT and other actions as follows no later than COB Friday, November 9, 2012.
 - **a. ProTracts Subaccounts.**—Unless already populated in ProTracts by the national office, States are to establish an iteratively named and separate subaccount in ProTracts for each initiative offered and assign the appropriate "account type" as noted in the attached guidance documents. States may not establish "locally led" or "State" type subaccounts to support national initiatives.

- **b. Subaccount Resource Concerns.**—States must assign the natural resource concerns in AERT for each subaccount established in ProTracts, as noted in the attached guidance documents. For planning purposes, States should emphasize the primary resource concerns targeted by the initiative.
- **c. National Approved Land Uses**.—States must designate the approved land uses as eligible for each initiative as indicated in the attached guidance documents.
- **d. Approved Conservation Practices Core and Supporting Practices.**—The attached guidance will provide practices that are approved to support each national or landscape initiative. For purposes of this guidance, if core and supporting practices are used for an approved initiatives, the following definitions apply:
 - · Core Practice.—A conservation practice listed in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) that is essential to address the natural resource concerns identified by an initiative.
 - **Supporting Practice**.—A conservation practice listed in the FOTG that may be needed to facilitate the implementation of a core practice or, along with other approved practice, needed to address the natural resource concerns identified by the initiative.

National Programmatic Initiatives.—Carefully review the guidance provided for each initiative to determine which practices may be required to be offered. If a State does not need to offer one or more of the core practices (e.g., the practice is not needed to address a resource concern), the STC must notify the appropriate Financial Assistance Program Division (FAPD) team leader of which core practices are not needed. States are encouraged, but not required, to offer all supporting practices listed in the attached guidance documents. States may approve the use of additional supporting practices not listed in the attached guidance documents if the State Conservationist certifies that **all** the following conditions are met:

- 1. The proposed supporting conservation practice is needed to directly support a required or core practice.
- 2. The purpose of the proposed supporting conservation practice standard addresses one or more of the initiative's natural resource concerns.
- 3. The national Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) database indicates the proposed practice is assigned a "positive" value for the associated resource concern.

Landscape Conservation Initiatives.—Carefully review the guidance provided for each initiative to determine which practices are required to be offered. If a State does not need to offer one or more of the core practices (e.g., the practice is not needed to address a resource concern), the STC must notify the initiative coordinator, who will seek approval from the Initiative Lead Regional Conservationist. Changes to landscape initiative supporting practices, consistent with the criteria below, must be submitted to the initiative coordinator and approved by the appropriate Initiative Lead Regional Conservationist.

- 1. The proposed supporting conservation practice is needed to directly support a required or core practice.
- 2. The purpose of the proposed supporting conservation practice standard addresses one or more of the initiative's natural resource concern.
- 3. The national Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) database indicates the proposed practice is assigned a "positive" value for the associated resource concern.

States are responsible for associating core and supporting practices with the approved resource concerns in ProTracts AERT, as indicated in the attached guidance documents.

- **e.** Conservation Activity Plans (CAP).—The ProTracts application type of "planning" must be associated with each EQIP CAP application and ranking of these applications is <u>mandatory</u> during FY 2013. Additional guidance for administration of CAPs will be provided in a separate notice.
- **f. Screening Criteria**.—If included in the attached initiative guidance, States must utilize national screening criteria as provided to manage workload associated with the initiative. All eligible applications must have an assigned priority of "High," "Medium," or "Low" recorded in ProTracts.

- g. State Ranking Criteria.—State ranking criteria to support the national programmatic and certain landscape conservation initiatives during FY 2013 have been established as shown in the attached guidance documents. States are responsible for populating the ProTracts AERT with the established State ranking criteria for each initiative offered in their State. States may not modify any FY 2013 initiative State-level ranking criteria provided in this guidance.
- **h. Local Ranking Criteria.**—States must populate local ranking criteria in ProTracts AERT. Refer to attached guidance documents for examples of local ranking criteria to support the initiative. If example local ranking criteria are not provided in this guidance, States must develop criteria that support the goals of the initiative.
- i. Payment Schedules.—States must ensure that required core practices and any necessary supporting practices are included in the current program payment schedules uploaded to ProTracts. Each payment schedule uploaded into ProTracts should include both historically underserved (HU) and traditional participant payment rates. Historically underserved items should be prefaced with "HU" to allow for ease of identification during contracting and quality assurance.
- **(2) Application Periods.**—National Headquarters (NHQ) has established ranking periods and application deadlines to allow evaluation of all program applications from the beginning of the fiscal year through May 31, 2013. Unless specified in the attached guidance documents, State Conservationists must select and offer application periods consistent with the nationally established application and ranking periods. Additional guidance to States will be issued under a separate national bulletin.

Public Affairs - Outreach.—No State or local announcements in the media about any initiative may be made until after the national-level announcement, which will be issued either from the Department or the Chief. Announcements must be coordinated and issued through the national Public Affairs Division (PAD).

States must post initiative information to the State's Web site. Information provided must be consistent with policy at 440-CPM, Part 515, Subpart D, Section 515.32B. If core and supporting practices are required for the initiative, this information must also be presented on the State Web site.

Fund Management.—Once States have established their ProTracts subaccount and AERT, States **must** allocate the appropriate financial assistance funds to these subaccounts. At the end of the last ranking period, any unused funds must be returned by allowance change to NHQ. STCs may add additional general program financial assistance to support the national programmatic or landscape conservation initiatives provided an allowance change request has been entered into the Allowance Change Tool (ACT).

For any initiatives that may provide EQIP financial assistance for livestock related projects, State Conservationists must ensure that applications are properly associated with an appropriate "Livestock Type."

Obligation Deadline.—All program contracts must be obligated by COB Monday, July 1, 2013. Program funds not obligated by this date must be returned to NHQ by submitting an allowance change request through ACT no later than COB July 5, 2013, so that they can be used to address other initiative opportunities. Return of funds or request for additional funds should be done in accordance with 440-CPM, Part 512, Subpart I, Section 512.84, "Fund Allocation Changes." States will return the appropriate technical assistance (TA) funds with the return of any financial assistance. The TA return rate for each program will be provided in the State allocation letter.

Contact. If you have any questions regarding this guidance, contact the program manager or initiative coordinator listed in the appropriate attachment to this bulletin. If you have general questions about FAPD program rules or guidance, contact the appropriate FAPD team leader: Mark Rose, EQIP Team Leader, at (202) 690-2621 or mark.rose@wdc.usda.gov, and Maggie Rhodes, AMA and WHIP, at (202) 720-6700 or maggie.rhodes@wdc.usda.gov. If you have any questions regarding the technical aspects of these initiatives, contact the appropriate Science and Technology division director: Noller Herbert, Director, Conservation Engineering Division, at (202) 720-2520 or noller.herbert@wdc.usda.gov, and Terrell Erickson, Director, Ecological Sciences Division, at (202) 720-5992 or terrell.erickson@wdc.usda.gov.

/s/ ANTHONY J. KRAMER Deputy Chief for Programs

/s/

C. WAYNE HONEYCUTT, Ph.D. Deputy Chief for Science and Technology

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Attachment A
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Initiative Name and Acronym - National On-Farm Energy Initiative (NOFEI)

<u>Initiative Description/Summary</u>: Under the Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, Title II, Subtitle F – EQIP, Section 2501 provides authority for use of EQIP (as a national purpose) to specifically address energy conservation through practice implementation and for development of an Agricultural Energy Management Plan. During fiscal year (FY) 2013, the program is designed to assist producers in two ways:

- 1) Identify ways to conserve energy on their farms through an Agricultural Energy Management Plan (AgEMP) conservation activity plan (CAP), also known as an on-farm energy audit; and also
- 2) Provide assistance to implement various recommended measures through the use of conservation practice standards offered through this initiative, such as the Farmstead Energy Improvement 374.

Only through implementation of recommended measures and conservation practices will energy conservation, efficiency, and savings be achieved.

Approved or Participating States:

All States and Territories

Program Contact Information:

Andrea Clarke at (202) 720-5927; andrea.clarke@wdc.usda.gov

ProTracts Requirements:

1. Subaccount Guidance:

A single subaccount has been created in ProTracts to support the NOFEI called "FY 13 On-Farm Energy" using the account type "On-Farm Energy". No additional subaccounts may be established at the State or Local level to further support the NOFEI.

- 2. Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool Guidance Choice Lists and Matrix Data:
 - a. Approved Land Types States must assign the following applicable land types as eligible for this initiative:

Cropland
Pasture
Grazed Range
Native/Naturalized Pasture
Headquarters

Note: No additional land types may be added or used to support this initiative.

b. Approved Natural Resource Concerns:

Energy
Inefficient Energy Use – Equipment and Facilities Energy
Inefficient Energy Use – Farming/Ranching Practices and Field
Operations

Note: No additional resource concerns may be added or used in ProTracts AERT to support this initiative.

c. Core Practices Required to be offered for this initiative:

Practice Name	Practice Code
Agricultural Energy Management Plan - Headquarters	122
Agricultural Energy Management Plan - Landscape	124
Farmstead Energy Improvement	374
Irrigation Water Management	449
Pumping Plant	533

d. Supporting Practices that States may offer to support this initiative:

Practice Name	Practice Code
Conservation Crop Rotation	328
Cover Crop	340
Irrigation Reservoir	436
Residue and Tillage Management, Mulch Till	345
Residue and Tillage Management, No Till/ Strip Till/	329
Direct Seed	
Residue and Tillage Management, Ridge Till	346
Windbreak/ Shelterbelt Establishment	380

e. AERT Matrix – State shall populate the appropriate core and supporting practices in the ProTracts AERT tool and associate the following resource concerns as shown in the following table(s).

NRCS Approved Resource Concerns		Ineff	icient Energy Use	Ineffici	ent Energy Use –
NRCS Natural Resource Concern Categories for ProTracts Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (AERT) "C" = Core practice (Bold) required to be offered. "X" - Supporting practices are optional to be offered		Equipment and Facilities Energy	Rationale	Farming/ Ranching Practices and Field Operations	Rationale
Conservation Practice	Code				
Agricultural Energy Management Plan - Headquarters	122	N/A		N/A	
Agricultural Energy Management Plan - Landscape	124	N/A		N/A	
Farmstead Energy Improvement	374	С	Identified in AgEMP-HQ or On-Farm Energy Audit		
Conservation Crop Rotation	328			Х	Inclusion of legumes in crop rotation can reduce need for nitrogen inputs
Cover Crop	340			Х	Legume cover crops can reduce nitrogen inputs
Irrigation Reservoir	436			х	Allows for off peak or night time irrigation, will can result in reduced energy use for pumping
Irrigation Water Management	449			С	Improvement of Irrigation Efficiency can result in reduced

Pumping Plant	533	С	Identified in AgEMP- HQ or On-Farm Energy Audit	С	energy use for pumping Identified in AgEMP- Landscape and Efficient pumping plant reduces energy use
Residue and Tillage Management, Mulch Till	345			Х	Few tillage trips across the field and Less horsepower requirements
Residue and Tillage Management, No Till/Strip Till/Direct Seed	329			Х	No tillage operations, fewer trips across the field
Residue and Tillage Management, Ridge Till	346			Х	Fewer tillage passes and less aggressive tillage
Windbreak/ Shelterbelt Establishment	380	х	Reduces heating around farmsteads		

3. Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool Guidance – Ranking Criteria Questions:

The total ranking points associated with this initiative are to be distributed in AERT and approved

ranking questions as follows:

AERT Level	Maximum Points	Point Percentage
National Level Ranking Questions	250	25%
State Level Ranking Questions	400	40%
Local Level Ranking Questions	250	25%
Efficiency Score	100	10%
Total Points for this initiative:	1,000	100%

4. Additional Initiative Guidance:

a. Capturing Energy Benefits – An "Energy Benefits" button is available in ProTracts in order to capture the estimated energy savings for certain practices. As part of the NOFEI, this button must be checked "yes" for all contract items which are being implemented based on the recommendations provided as part of a completed on-farm energy audit. Checking "yes" will require the user to enter the numeric values for the estimated energy savings from the completed on-farm energy audit as well as information on green-house gases and air pollutants directly associated with the energy savings.

Note: The "Energy Benefits" should be checked "no" for AgEMP CAP applications since energy savings do not occur unless the recommended measures provided in an AgEMP CAP report are implemented.

5. The following are detailed instructions for populating ranking questions and points in ProTracts AERT.

National Level Ranking Criteria Requirements:

National ranking criteria are established in ProTracts by the national office.

National priorities must account for 250 points or 25% of total points.

Only the following national level ranking criteria apply to this initiative. All other national ranking criteria not listed are not applicable and should be answered "No" by Designated Conservationists:

FY 2013 EQIP Ranking Criteria

- 1. If the application is for development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering "Yes" to the following question. Answering "Yes" to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the national priority category.
 - 1a. The program application to support the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP)? If answer is "Yes", do not answer any other national level questions. If answer is "No", proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section
- 3. Clean and Abundant Water: Water Conservation Will the proposed project assist the producer implement conservation practices which:
 - 3a. Decrease aquifer overdraft.
 - 3b. Conserve water with irrigation system improvements and saved water will be available for other beneficial uses?
 - 3c. Conserve water in an area where the applicant participates in a geographically established or watershed-wide project?
- 4. Clean Air: Treatment of air quality from on-farm agricultural sources Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practice(s) which:
 - 4b. Reduce on-farm generated green house gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and volatile organic compounds (VOC)?
 - 4c. Increase on-farm carbon sequestration?
- 8. Energy Conservation—Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practices which:
 - 8a. Reduce energy consumption on the agricultural operation?
 - 8b. Increase on-farm energy efficiency with practices and improvements identified in an approved energy audit equivalent to criteria required in AgEMP (122, 124)?
 - 8c. Assist in implementing energy conservation measures that also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants.
- 9. Business Lines Conservation Implementation Additional Ranking Considerations Will the proposed project result in:
 - 9a. Implementation of all conservation practices scheduled in the contract on the CPA-1155 within three years of date of obligation?
 - 9b. Improvement of existing conservation practices or conservation systems already in place at the time the application is accepted?
 - 9c. Implementation of practice(s) which will complete an existing conservation system or suite of practices?

State Level Ranking Criteria Requirements:

State ranking criteria are established by the national office, but entered into ProTracts by States. State level ranking criteria must account for a total of 400 points.

To support this initiative, States must enter all the following State level criteria and points in ProTracts AERT for each approved subaccount.

	2013 EQIP NOFEI State Level Ranking Criteria	FY 2013 Points
1.	1. If the application is for the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering "Yes" to the following question. Answering "Yes" to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the state level questions.	
	1a. Is the program application for development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) for a TSP prepared Agricultural Energy Management Plan (122 or 124)? If answer is "Yes", do not answer any other state level questions. If answer is "No", proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section.	400
2.	Answer <u>both</u> of the following two questions regarding the producer's efforts to improve existing energy conservation systems in their farming operation.	
	2a: Are the practices included in the schedule of operation included as recommendations in an Agricultural Energy Management Plan (AgEMP) also known as a Comprehensive Type 2 onfarm energy audit (that meets the ASABE S612 On-Farm energy audit standard) which has been conducted in the last four years?	100
	2b: Is applicant using or has the applicant used a smart meter to monitor, evaluate, and or manage energy usage and time-of-use on their farming enterprise/operation?	50
3.	Select <u>all appropriate</u> categories of major energy efficiency activities that apply to the contract for this applicant. Is the applicant going to install:	
	3a: LIGHTING components (lamps, timers, sensors)?	10
	3b: VENTILATION components (fans, control systems, variable drives, humidity control)?	10
	3c: REFRIGERATION components (compressor, evaporator/chiller, motor, insulation)?	10
	3d: MILK HARVESTING components (pumps, motors, controllers)?	10
	3e: CONTROLLERS components (master system automation)?	10
	3f: OTHER MOTORS/PUMPS components (types, compressors)?	10
	3g: AIR HEATING/BUILDING ENVIRONMENT components (heater, insulation, recovery, variable drives)?	10
	3h: DRYING components (air flow, handling equipment)?	10
	3i: WASTE HANDLING components (collection and dispersal equipment/methods)?	10
	3j: AIR COOLING (airflow, control systems, evaporative)?	10
	3k: WATER MANAGEMENT components (wells, reservoir, recycled)?	10
	31: IRRIGATION components (motors/engines, pumps)?	10
	3m: AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES that use more energy efficient <u>engine driven equipment</u> (i.e., planting, tilling, harvesting, etc.)?	10
	3n: CROP/FEED STORAGE components?	10
	3o: MATERIAL HANDLING (equipment, motors, pumps) components?	10

4.	If appropriate, answer <u>one</u> of the following three questions regarding conservation practices offered in the EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative:	
	4a: Application includes three or more core or supporting conservation practice offered in the Initiative.	50
	4b: Application includes two core or supporting conservation practice offered in the Initiative.	15
	4c: Application includes <u>one</u> core or supporting conservation practice offered in the Initiative.	10
5.	If appropriate, answer <u>one</u> of the following three questions regarding percent of energy savings based on the measures/practices <u>producer intends to install</u> . <u>Percentage energy savings</u> = (total estimated energy saved / total current energy usage).	
	5a: Will the recommended measures/practices (to be installed through this contract) achieve a total estimated percent reduction in energy use (i.e., % energy savings) greater than 40%?	50
	5b: Will the recommended measures/practices (to be installed through this contract) achieve a total estimated percent reduction in energy use (i.e., % energy savings) between 40% and 25%?	15
	5c: Will the recommended measures/practices (to be installed through this contract) achieve a total estimated percent reduction in energy use (i.e., % energy savings) between 24 and 5%?	10
	Total Points:	400

Local Level Ranking Criteria Requirements:

Most local ranking criteria are approved and entered into ProTracts at the State level.

Local level ranking criteria must account for a total of 250 points or at least 25% of total points available. States must establish a maximum point total of 250 in ProTracts AERT. Each state MUST enter the following criteria #1 in the ProTracts Local level category in ProTracts:

	2013 EQIP NOFEI Local Level Ranking Criteria	FY 2013 Points
1.	If the application is for the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering "Yes" to the following question. Answering "Yes" to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the local level questions.	
	1a. Is the program application for development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) for a TSP prepared Agricultural Energy Management Plan (122 or 124)? If answer is "Yes", do not answer any other local level questions. If answer is "No", proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section.	250

States will develop all other local ranking criteria.

Cost Effectiveness Calculation:

By agency policy, the amount of points associated with the AERT cost efficiency calculation must be 100 points or 10% of total points available.

Screening Criteria Requirements:

The following screening criteria shall be used to support this initiative.

NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) National On-Farm Energy Initiative NATIONAL SCREENING CRITERIA WORKSHEET - Fiscal Year 2013

A Screening Worksheet must be completed for each eligible EQIP application.

Instructions:

This screening worksheet must be completed for each eligible producer applying for EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative assistance. Applications will be accepted on a continuous basis; however, application periods are established for purposes of evaluation, ranking, and funding decisions.

Completion of this worksheet and documentation does not constitute agreement to provide EQIP program benefits nor approval of a program contract. The original screening worksheet should be filed with the applicant case file or EQIP program file and unless the application is determined to be ineligible, the screening priority (high, medium, and low) must be recorded in ProTracts. Upon request, a copy of any completed screening worksheet may be provided to the applicant.

Detailed Screeni	<u>ng Criteria Worksheet – Complete for each</u>	h eligible EQIP	Applicant	
Applicant Name:		County:		
Application No:		Field Office:		
Evaluator Name:		Date:		
Priority Det	ermination for ProTracts – Select One:			
Or The application include identified in a recently	es at least 1 "Core" conservation practice necessary to im (within the last 4 years) completed Agricultural Energy Normal Energy Normal Energy Normal Energy Normal Energy Normal Energy Normal Energy audit meeting ASABE S612 Type 2 standard.	•		High Priority Status in ProTracts
practice necessary to in	gory: es 0 "Core" conservation practices but does include at lea mplement the recommendations identified in a recently (anagement Plan (122 or 124) or comprehensive on-farm e	(within the last 4 y	ears) completed	Medium Priority Status in ProTracts
Low Priority Category: All other applications	Low Priority Applications will not be ranked.			Low Priority Status in ProTracts
The priority dete	rmination of high, medium or low must be	recorded in P	roTracts for th	is applicant.
D.C. Approval:		Dat	e Approved:	