

Environmental Quality Incentives Program in Hancock County



What is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program?

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, agricultural producers may receive financial and technical assistance to address resource conservation needs on eligible lands.

The primary resource concerns in Hancock County are:

- Soil erosion control
- Forestland Management
- Surface and ground water quality improvement
- Grazing Land Management
- Animal Waste Management

What is an EQIP Contract?

An EQIP Contract is a binding contract between an eligible producer and NRCS that provides cost-share funds to install approved conservation practices to address resource concerns.

Cost-share is NOT a grant. In cost-share, the landowner initiates and pays for all conservation treatments specified in the NRCS contract. Once those activities are certified as complete and as meeting NRCS standards and specifications, NRCS will reimburse the landowner based on average costs and cost-share rates established in the contract.

Cost share rates vary by practice from 50% to 75%. Limited resource producers or beginning farmers may qualify for cost-share rates up to 90%.

An EQIP contract lasts from three to ten years depending on plan specifics. Under the agreement, the landowner agrees to maintain practices and allow NRCS access to monitor the practice for its specified life expectancy (i.e. grassed waterway-10 years).

Eligibility

In order to be eligible to apply for an EQIP contract, the applicant must be determined to be an eligible producer by NRCS and Farm Service Agency (FSA). If you are a new USDA program applicant, please contact NRCS in Ellsworth and call the FSA office closest to you, in either Machias (255-3612 ext 2), Bangor (947-3555 ext. 2) or Belfast (338-1964 ext. 2) for information on eligibility requirements.

Hancock County Soil & Water Conservation District &
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Any agricultural producer engaged in livestock or crop production on eligible land and producing more than \$1,000 in farm products, may apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, pasture land, and private non-industrial forestland.

Required Steps for an EQIP Contract

Step One—Application

Stop by the Conservation District and NRCS Office and ask to sign up for the EQIP Program. You will need to complete a questionnaire and official application to be considered for the program.

Step Two—Initial Onsite Visit

The land offered for EQIP must be determined eligible by NRCS. Eligible land must be owned by the producer or the producer must have a written long term lease. The land must have a resource concern identified by a certified conservation planner that can be addressed through the installation of conservation practices.

Step Three—Develop a Conservation Plan

A Conservation Plan:

- Describes landowners goals and resource concerns.
- Lists conservation practices that can address resource concerns or problems.
- Reviews the potential impact of conservation practices on Cultural Resources, including Native American sites and historic buildings and sites. (Required)
- Reviews the potential impact of conservation practices on wildlife, including endangered, threatened and at-risk species. (Required)
- Determines the environmental impact before and after the installation of conservation practices.

If a conservation plan includes animal waste management practices, it is necessary for the producer to have an approved Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) prior to applying for cost-share assistance.

Step Four—Apply for an EQIP Contract

An NRCS planner converts your conservation plan into a potential EQIP contract and submits it for funding. Each field office receives an annual allocation to fund EQIP contracts for that year. This usually happens during the winter or in early spring. There is a ranking procedure that determines which applications receive funding. The ranking process is based on addressing resource concerns. The highest ranked applications are funded first.

Step Five—Install Conservation Practices

Once a contract is funded, and all documents are signed, the producer can begin installing conservation practices.

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