

Succeed with EQIP

A guide to help nursery growers successfully apply to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to support their use of conservation practices

Growers understand better than most people the value of production practices that conserve natural resources and protect the environment. They also know implementing those practices can be expensive because the initial costs can rarely be recovered from the sale of the plants. To better support growers' efforts, the 2002 Farm Bill increased the funding available to assist growers with the expense of initiating conservation practices. One of the programs funded by the Farm Bill is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP is a voluntary program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides payments to eligible growers for a wide range of practices at their nurseries. Among the practices for which growers can receive payments are integrated pest management, erosion control, conservation of water resources and nutrient management.

If you have had little experience with the Farm Bill, NRCS, or government conservation programs, taking advantage of these opportunities may seem challenging. This guide is intended to be a grower-friendly aid that helps you successfully negotiate the steps to applying for EQIP payments. Here are the four basic steps.

Step One – Contact your nearest NRCS office and tell them you want to apply for EQIP.

They will schedule a time for you to meet with NRCS staff to start your application. The application process is confidential. As part of this initial step, the NRCS District Conservationist or a conservation planner will help you fill out a pre-application form to see if you are eligible for the program. The pre-application form asks basic questions about your nursery. You fill in your name, county and the date. Then you circle the correct answers to seven questions on the form. Be sure to submit the pre-application form directly to the District Conservationist as soon as possible, because the date of submission will be used as part of the selection process if more funds are requested than are available.

Step Two- Work with NRCS to complete a site-specific conservation plan for your operation.

The District Conservationist or a conservation planner working with the District Conservationist will come to your nursery to help you identify practices that are eligible for EQIP or similar programs. You and the planner will develop a plan outlining conservation practices to implement. The goal is to work together to design a plan that makes sense for your nursery, both for resource conservation and maintaining your production.

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Locations of NRCS offices at USDA Service Centers

Grand Haven Service Center
16731 Ferris St
Grand Haven, MI 49417-9601
(616) 842-5852

Flint Service Center
1525 N Elms Rd
Flint, MI 48532-2034
(810) 230-8766

Berrien Springs Service Center
3334 Edgewood Rd
Berrien Springs, MI 49103-9553
(269) 471-9111

Ann Arbor Service Center
7203 Jackson Rd
Ann Arbor, MI 48103-9506
(734) 761-8789

Locate more Michigan USDA Service Centers at this NRCS web site: <http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip2003.html>
Click on the "Find a Service Center" option along the left side of the screen.

For your meeting with NRCS you will want to have available:

- Pest and nutrient management records from the past three years
- A layout or aerial photo of the nursery
- A list of areas where you have conservation concerns
- A list of plants grown and rotation schedules, if applicable

The District Conservationist will help you identify practices that make sense for your operation and will help you identify which resources (such as soil, water, air, etc.) those practices will address. In doing so he or she will also help you determine whether your application is likely to have priority for funding under EQIP. As a general rule, growers who are able to apply multiple practices that improve more than one resource, have a higher priority for funding.

Here are some practices to consider for your conservation plan. You may think of other practices that will also qualify.

Pest management	Field border	Riparian buffer/Filter strips
Irrigation water management	Critical area planting	Compost facility
Nutrient management	Grassed waterway	Cover crops
Ag chemical containment facility	Windbreaks	Residue management

Step Three - Complete the application

Once you have developed the conservation plan for your nursery, you and the District Conservationist will complete your application. If you are a Limited Resource Producer or Beginning Farmer you are eligible for higher payments (Check with the NRCS staff to determine if you qualify.).

Step Four - Submit the application to NRCS

Once you have completed your application, it will be ranked with other applications in the state based on the number of points it has received. The NRCS District Conservationist will contact you about whether or not your application is funded. If your application has been accepted, you will complete and sign a contract stating the payments and your obligations.

Useful resources on the Internet and through MSU Extension

For more information about EQIP and integrated pest management (IPM), visit:

<http://www.ipm.msu.edu/farmbill.htm>

Read about growers' experiences with this program at: <http://www.ipm.msu.edu/farmbill/growers.htm>

For the latest information on how nursery producers can benefit from participation in the conservation programs authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill see: <http://www.agcenter.org/progfarmbill.html>

For EQIP advice from MSU Extension, contact in Western Michigan - Tom Dudek (616-846-8250).

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