



# Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

This document contains information tailored to the Indiana EQIP Forestland Ranking Pool. Albert Land Management LLC is a registered NRCS Technical Service Provider (TSP) in Indiana as well as Kentucky. We are certified to complete the technical requirements for EQIP forestland funding applications, specifically (106) Forest Management Plans and (165) Forest Management Design and Implementation Activity Plans, exclusively. If you are interested in seeking information about other ranking pools under EQIP, such as ones more agriculturally-focused, we recommend you reaching out to your NRCS District Conservationist. Most of the basic program information detailed in this document was obtained from NRCS's website, however, we expanded upon some information which is most relevant to our clients as a TSP and to landowners looking to manage their woodlot and/or improve forest habitat for wildlife.

## How it Works

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers and non-industrial forest managers to conserve natural resources while strengthening their operations.

EQIP helps producers implement voluntary conservation practices that address a wide range of natural resource concerns including improving quality of air, soil, water and wildlife habitat, prevent soil erosion, increase soil health, and increase carbon sequestration or reduce greenhouse gas emissions to deliver climate benefits.

This voluntary conservation programs helps producers make conservation work for them. Together, NRCS and producers invest in solutions that conserve natural resources for the future while also improving agricultural operations.

Through EQIP, NRCS provides agricultural producers and non-industrial forest managers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls conservation practices. Using these practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat, all while improving agricultural operations. Through EQIP, you can voluntarily implement conservation practices, and NRCS co-invests in these practices with you.

## How can EQIP help?

EQIP supports producers and landowners who improve and sustain natural resources on their property by implementing various conservation and management practices.

For example, if you want to use EQIP conservation practices to improve timber production, renovate pastureland or agricultural fields, or improve wildlife habitat on your eligible land, NRCS offers technical assistance and EQIP offers financial assistance, through a contractual agreement.

If you decide to work with NRCS, you will receive a one-on-one consultation from a local NRCS conservation planner and/or a technical service provider (TSP) to evaluate your current management system and conduct an assessment of natural resources on your land. You will then work with the NRCS conservation planner or TSP to develop a conservation plan that addresses the identified resource concerns.

Once you choose the conservation practices or activities that best fit your needs, and if your application is selected for funding, EQIP offers payments for implementing these practices on your land with the expectation that you will operate while maintaining the practices for the expected lifespan (for forest/wildlife habitat conservation- this is usually at least 3 years).

## What lands are eligible for EQIP?

For eligibility purposes in Farm Bill programs, NRCS considers any land on which agricultural commodities, livestock or forest-related products are produced as eligible land. That land can include cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farmlands.

EQIP has no minimum acreage requirement; however, EQIP is a competitive program that awards points based on resource concerns to be addressed and other factors.

## Who is eligible to apply for EQIP?

Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian Tribes that have control of the land and currently manage it for agricultural, forest and livestock production.

Additionally, farm records must be established or updated with the Farm Service Agency for both the applicants and the land for your application to be eligible and evaluated. Farm records must indicate the applicant:

- Controls or owns eligible land; properties controlled under a trust are eligible
- Meets adjusted gross income (AGI) and payment limitation provisions; AGI limit of 900k annually
- Is in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements
- If you are an historically underserved (HU) or socially disadvantaged farmer/rancher or military veteran, you may be eligible for the advance payment option and higher payment rates (up to 25% more). HU individuals and military veterans are also given preference points.

## How do I apply for EQIP?

Contact your local USDA Service Center and let them know you are interested in EQIP. A conservation planner will work with you to determine your eligibility. Alternately, you may contract a TSP directly and they will aid you with getting in contract with the correct district conservationist as well as consult you on which conservation practices would be most beneficial to apply for.

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round and funding is provided through a competitive process. There are multiple application approaches one may consider. Alongside basic application and financial information, technical information about the property and the conservation practices being applied for are also required elements of an EQIP funding application.

Working directly with an NRCS Conservation Planner and/or DNR District Forester to complete the technical requirements/paperwork is free, however, applications are awarded on a points-based system, and these plans provided by NRCS/DNR generally receive less points and therefore are less likely to be awarded funding, unless you are also

applying for other conservation practices outside of forestry, such as those for soil conservation and those more agriculturally based. If you are solely interested in applying for funding and entering your application into the Forestland Ranking Pool, we recommend working directly with a TSP to complete the (106) and (165) plan elements of your application. Although this approach for applying for EQIP funding will result in upfront charges, this path results in more points awarded to your application and increases the chances your application will be selected for funding. There is also the option to apply for funding of the (106) and (165) plans provided by TSP's, however, you must then wait an additional year before entering the plans into the forestland funding pool, as an applicant may only enter one funding pool per year. To inquire about the upfront costs of the (106) and (165) plans, contact us or another NRCS TSP directly.

State-specific application ranking dates are set to evaluate applications for funding. If you apply after the application ranking date, your application will automatically be deferred to the next funding cycle. The annual application deadline for Indiana is typically early December.

Applicants are responsible for completing and filing all application and eligibility paperwork as required. If funded, participants are required to sign a contract and agree to implement the planned conservation practices to NRCS standards and specifications as scheduled.

If you are new to working with USDA, you will need to establish your Farm Record with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Establishing a Farm Record requires several forms and documents, so make an appointment with your FSA office as soon as possible.

## Indiana EQIP Forestland Conservation Practices & 2023 Payment Rates

It is important to note, payment rates are awarded as "cost-shares" and are intended to financially aid the landowner but are not intended to fully cover the associated costs of hiring a contractor to fulfill the EQIP contract requirements. You may expect cost-share rates to cover anywhere from 40% to 80% of the fees charged by TSP's and forestry contractors, but fees vary heavily by the location, contract timeline and size, and the specific practice(s).

While a landowner may opt to fulfill any/all of the conservation practices outlined in their contract and receive payment themselves, all contract holders are subject to annual inspections on behalf of NRCS to ensure practices meet NRCS standards and specifications. Payment rates for the specific practice/year may not be received if practices were not carried out properly, per spec, and in the timeframe outlined in their contract with NRCS.

It should also be noted the payment rates displayed below are for the 2024 Indiana application term ONLY and represent the maximum funding rates available by practice. NRCS reserves the right to award landowners partial, or no, funding by practice. EQIP payment rates for Kentucky also vary from the rates displayed. Contact us directly or visit Kentucky's EQIP webpage for more information.

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