

USDA COST-SHARE FOR CONSERVATION WORK HELPS MASSACHUSETTS VEGETABLE GROWERS WITH IPM, IRRIGATION REORGANIZATION AND MORE

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers technical expertise for planning and designing conservation practices that protect our water and air, increase soil productivity, manage agricultural waste and sustain agricultural land. The EQIP Program offers cost-share funds to make these practices affordable.

Participation is voluntary. Private landowners and operators who have produced and sold \$1000 or more of agricultural products for two of the last five years may participate in the EQIP program. Land considered for enrollment may be privately or publicly owned, where the land is under private control for the contract period, and installation of conservation practices will contribute to an improvement in the identified natural resource concern. Cost-share for irrigation related practices is available only on land that has been irrigated for two of the last five years. Land under a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract is not eligible during the term of the CRP contract.

Funds for EQIP come from the federal government's 2002 Farm Bill appropriations, and are administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Cost share methods and rates vary for the different conservation practices offered by the program. Determination of the government share is normally based on a fixed average cost per unit times the cost-share rate for an approved conservation practice. Cost-share rates range from 25% to 75%, and vary between practices based on program priorities. Limited resource farmers and beginning farmers are eligible for up to 90% cost share rates. Incentive payments may be available to encourage producers to adopt land management practices that are not already being applied. These include: nutrient management, waste utilization, pest management and irrigation water management.

Conservation Practices

Many conservation practices are well suited to vegetable operations. The following list gives a purview of the possibilities for crop management, erosion and water control measures, reorganization of irrigation systems, and waste management systems.

Conservation Practice	Unit
Crop Management Practices	
Agrichemical Mixing Facility	No.
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning	No.
Contour Farming	Ac.
Cover Crop	Ac.
Critical Area Planting	Ac.
Diversion	Ft.
Fence (deer)	Ft.
Nutrient Management	Ac.
Pest Management	Ac.
Residue Management - No Till/Strip Till	Ac.
Residue Management - Mulch Till	Ac.
Residue Management - Ridge Till	Ac.
Transition to Organic Production	Ac.
Erosion Control Practices	
Access Road (<i>erosion control for existing roads</i>)	Ft.
Field Border	Ft.

Filter Strip	Ac.
Grade Stabilization Structure	No.
Grassed Waterway	Ac.
Lined Waterway or Outlet	Ft.
Sediment Basin	No.
Stripcropping	Ac.
Subsurface Drain (<i>as a component of terrace, waterway, stripcropping, or other approved practice</i>)	Ft.
Terrace	Ft.
Underground Outlet (<i>as a component of terrace, waterway, stripcropping, or other approved practice</i>)	Ft.
Water & Sediment Control Basin	No.

Irrigation Practices (reorganization of existing systems)

Irrigation Water Conveyance	Ft.
Irrigation Storage Reservoir	No.
Irrigation System, Microirrigation	No.
Irrigation System, Sprinkler	Ac.
Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery	No.
Irrigation Water Management	Ac.
Pumping Plant	No.
Water Well (<i>multiple use wells will be pro-rated for agricultural use</i>)	No.

Agricultural Waste Management

Composting Facility	No.
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning	No.
Constructed Wetland	No.
Critical Area Planting	Ac.
Diversion	Ft.
Roof Runoff Structure	No.
Sediment Basin	No.
Waste Utilization	Ac.
Waste Water Treatment Strip	Ac.
Windbreak/Shelterbelt	Ft.

Pest Management Incentives:

The Pest Management incentive payment offers an IPM base payment (\$20-30/acre) and record keeping (\$10/acre) incentive rate, with additional money for add-on components for activities such as: pest monitoring systems, weather monitoring and disease forecasting, predator and parasitoid augmentation and conservation, crop rotation, utilizing less hazardous chemicals, adhering to DAR storage guidelines, improving coverage at the target zone, applying pesticides with retrofitted sprayers, perimeter trapping systems, and spot treatment.

How to get started:

You should visit a nearby NRCS office to sign up for EQIP. Next, a visit to your property will be scheduled. You will work with a conservation planner to inventory your resources and identify opportunities for conservation improvements. Together you will decide how to address your natural resource concerns. Your decisions will be recorded in a conservation plan. Your conservation plan will become part of your EQIP application and will be ranked against other farms in Massachusetts for a portion of available funding.

NRCS evaluates each application using a state-wide ranking procedure. Applications are scored by identifying the natural resource concerns, the extent of treatment and the environmental benefits to be achieved. Additional consideration is given to proposals that enhance compliance with environmental regulations, agricultural land protection, leveraged funds, agricultural production and cost effectiveness. Applications with the highest scores will be awarded contracts until all Massachusetts EQIP funds are obligated.

If your application ranks high and receives funding, NRCS will have you sign an EQIP contract and agree to do the conservation work according to a schedule and NRCS standards and specifications. Contracts last a minimum of two years and a maximum of 10, or at least one year past installation of the last practice. The contract will be carried out according to the conservation plan that you developed. All practices established with EQIP funding must be maintained for the life span of the practice.

USDA-NRCS Offices

Massachusetts State Office

451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350

Barnstable Field Office

270 Communications Way, Unit 1G, Hyannis, MA 02601
508-771-6476

Greenfield Field Office

55 Federal Street, Room 290, Greenfield, MA 01301
413-772-0384 ext 3

Hadley Field Office

195 Russell Street, Suite B6, Hadley, MA 01035
413-585-1000 ext 3

Holden Field Office

52 Boyden Road, Room 10, Holden, MA 01520
508-829-4477 ext 3

Pittsfield Field Office

78 Center Street, Suite 206, Pittsfield, MA 01201
413-443-1776 ext 3

Westford Field Office

319 Littleton Road, Suite 302, Westford, MA 01886
978-692-1904 ext 3

West Wareham Field Office

15 Cranberry Highway, West Wareham, MA 02576
508-295-5151 ext 2

For more information on the
Massachusetts EQIP program visit:
www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip.html