



Many kinds of conservation practices qualify for incentive payments. The particular practices that would be appropriate to your farm will depend on the needs of your operation, what resources need to be protected, and the conservation plan that you develop with the NRCS staff in your district. There are many conservation practices that are well suited to vegetable operations. Potential practices that might be part of your conservation plan:

<b>Conservation Practice</b>
<b>Crop Management Practices</b>
Agrichemical Mixing Facility
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning
Contour Farming
Cover Crop
Critical Area Planting
Diversion
Fence (deer)
Nutrient Management
Pest Management
Residue Management - No Till/Strip Till
Residue Management - Mulch Till
Residue Management - Ridge Till
Transition to Organic Production
<b>Erosion Control Practices</b>
Access Road (erosion control for existing roads)
Field Border
Filter Strip
Grade Stabilization Structure
Grassed Waterway
Lined Waterway or Outlet
Sediment Basin
Stripcropping
Subsurface Drain (as a component of terrace, waterway, stripcropping, or other approved practice)
Terrace
Underground Outlet (as a component of terrace, waterway, stripcropping, or other approved practice)
Water & Sediment Control Basin
Irrigation Water Conveyance
Irrigation Storage Reservoir
Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation
Irrigation System, Sprinkler
Irrigation Water Management
Pumping Plant
Water Well (multiple use wells will be pro-rated for agricultural use)

## USDA COST-SHARE FOR CONSERVATION WORK HELPS VEGETABLE GROWERS

Farmers understand better than most people the value of farming 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 their crops. 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 offers technical expertise for planning and designing conservation practices that protect 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.

Many vegetable farmers have had little experience with NRCS or other government conservation programs. Taking advantage of these opportunities may seem challenging. This article is intended to guide you in the steps you need to get started.

### **Who Can Participate?**

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, as long as 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.

### **What Kinds of Conservation Practices are Covered?**

<b>Agricultural Waste Management</b>
Composting Facility
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning
Constructed Wetland
Critical Area Planting
Diversion
Roof Runoff Structure
Sediment Basin
Waste Utilization
Waste Water Treatment Strip
Windbreak/Shelterbelt

### **Pest Management Incentives:**

Implementing Integrated Pest Management on the farm often saves money, but may also involve some initial investment or some new practices that growers are not sure, at the outset, will pay off. The Pest Management incentive payment helps offset the cost of trying these new practices. EQIP offers an IPM base payment on a per-acre basis, and covers activities such as pest monitoring, using action thresholds, weather monitoring and disease forecasting, releasing beneficial insects, crop rotation, utilizing less hazardous chemicals, adhering to DAR storage guidelines, improving sprayer coverage, applying pesticides with retrofitted sprayers, perimeter trapping systems, and spot treatment.

### **How to Get Started:**

1. Contact your nearest NRCS office and tell them you want to apply for or EQIP.

Schedule a visit to sign up for EQIP. 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 farm. There is a rolling application process, so applications can be submitted at any time. However, it is best to submit pre-application form directly to the District Conservationist as soon as possible, so that your application can be completed in time to be included in the state ranking process.

2. Work with NRCS to draft a conservation plan for your farm.

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 avail-

able funding.

3. Complete the application.

Once you have identified the resource concerns and practices to address those concerns, 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.

4. Submit the application to NRCS

Once you have submitted your application to NRCS, 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.

### **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](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip.html)

--This article was adapted for Massachusetts from guidelines developed by Michael Brewer and Joy Landis, Michigan State University IPM Program (“Succeed with EQIP”) and by staff at the Massachusetts NRCS office (“How EQIP Works in Massachusetts”).