Commodity Credit Corporation, USDA

§ 1466.4 National priorities.

(a) The following national priorities, consistent with statutory resource concerns that include soil, water, wildlife, air quality, and related resource concerns, will be used in EQIP implementation:

1. Reductions of nonpoint source pollution, such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or excess salinity in impaired watersheds consistent with total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) where available; the reduction of surface and groundwater contamination; and the reduction of contamination from agricultural point sources, such as concentrated animal feeding operations;

2. Conservation of ground and surface water resources;

3. Reduction of emissions, such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and ozone precursors and depleters that contribute to air quality impairment violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards;

4. Reduction in soil erosion and sedimentation from unacceptable levels on agricultural land; and

Technical assistance means technical expertise, information, and tools necessary for the conservation of natural resources on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses. The term includes the following:

1. Technical services provided directly to farmers, ranchers, and other eligible entities, such as conservation planning, technical consultation, and assistance with design and implementation of conservation practices; and

2. Technical infrastructure, including activities, processes, tools, and agency functions needed to support delivery of technical services, such as technical standards, resource inventories, training, data, technology, monitoring, and effects analyses.

Technical Service Provider (TSP) means an individual, private-sector entity, or public agency certified by NRCS to provide technical services to program participants, in lieu of or on behalf of NRCS.

Wildlife means non-domesticated birds, fishes, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and mammals.
§ 1466.5 National allocation and management.

The Chief allocates EQIP funds to the State Conservationists to implement EQIP at the State and local level. In order to optimize the overall environmental benefits over the program duration, the Chief will:

(a) Use an EQIP fund allocation formula that reflects national priorities and that uses available natural resource and resource concerns data to distribute funds to the State level. This procedure will be updated periodically to reflect adjustments to national priorities and information about resource concerns and program performance. The data used in the allocation formula will be updated as they become available.

(b) Provide a performance incentive to NRCS in States that demonstrate a high level of program accomplishment in implementing EQIP. The Chief shall consider factors such as strategically planning EQIP implementation, effectively addressing national priorities and measures, State and local resource concerns, the program delivery effectiveness, the use of TSPs, and the number of contracts with historically underserved producers.

(c) Establish State level EQIP performance goals based on national, regional, and State priorities.

(d) Ensure that national, State and local level information regarding program implementation such as resource priorities, eligible practices, ranking processes, payment schedules, fund allocation, and program achievements are made available to the public.

(e) Consult with other Federal agencies with the appropriate expertise and information when evaluating the considerations described in this section.

(f) Authorize the State Conservationist, with advice from the State Technical Committee and local working groups, to determine how funds will be used and how the program will be administered to achieve national priorities in each State.

(g) Utilize assessment, evaluation, and accountability procedures based on actual natural resource and environmental outcomes and results.

§ 1466.6 State allocation and management.

The State Conservationist will:

(a) Identify State priority resource concerns, with the advice of the State Technical Committee, which directly contribute toward meeting national priorities and measures, and will use NRCS’s accountability system and other accountability tools to establish local level goals and treatment objectives;

(b) Identify, as appropriate and necessary, designated conservationists who are NRCS employees that are assigned the responsibility to administer EQIP in specific areas; and

(c) Use the following to determine how to manage EQIP and how to allocate funds within a State:

(1) The nature and extent of priority resource concerns at the State and local level;

(2) The availability of human resources, incentive programs, educational programs, and on-farm research programs from public, private, and Tribal sources, to assist with the activities related to the priority resource concerns;

(3) The existence of multi-county and/or multi-State collaborative efforts to address regional priority resource concerns;

(4) Program performance and results;