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Transmitted via Email

December 4, 2009

MINNESOTA BULLETIN NO. 300-10-1

SUBJECT: LTP – EQIP – 2010 PROGRAM

Purpose. To initiate the 2010 EQIP and Local Work Group process.

Expiration Date. January 21, 2010.

NRCS District Conservationists will, again, use Local Work Groups (LWG) as part of the locally-led process to formulate and implement a local FY 2010 EQIP. Ideally the locally-led process is designed to establish the local resource priorities to be addressed regardless of any change in policies. However, some 2010 national policy changes may influence how your LWG addresses their local priorities, and how your local EQIP applications are scored and ranked to determine funding.

While the basic framework of EQIP remains unchanged, national policy requires that applications be grouped and ranked by similar land use or type of operations. This means, for example, that cropland applications will compete against cropland, pasture against pasture, etc. To accomplish this, separate funding pools will be established for each competing group with each group/pool having its own state and local issues in AERT.

In addition, the national questions in AERT have been revised to be more specific. National questions will comprise 25% (250 points) of the final score, with local issues also comprising 25% (250 points) and the remaining 50% (500 points) divided between the state issues and the efficiency score. The changes to the national issues and the new funding pools will result in some revision to the organization of the Minnesota state issues; however, the basic questions should remain the same.

Minnesota is proposing six local draft pools for EQIP 2010. These pools are subject to review by the state technical committee, and then approval from the Regional Conservationist prior to use by the offices. However, at this stage, offices should use these draft pools to help them in their LWG process. The draft local funding pools are:

- Cropland
- Pasture/hayland
- Livestock concerns (all non-grazing operations)
- Forestry/woodland
- General (all other applications)
- Historically Underserved (socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning farmers)



The pools serve as a means to group similar applications. They are not an indication of your local resource concerns or the priority your LWG assigns to your resource concerns. The LWG process should remain as it has been. The LWG identifies/reaffirms the local resource concerns. The LWG prioritizes the resource concerns. If needed, the LWG establishes priority practices to address the priority resource concerns. The LWG develops local questions which will give higher scores to those applications that address the priority resource concerns.

The intent in Minnesota is to continue to use a single ranking worksheet in each county to address all applications. Offices would continue to answer those questions that are applicable to each individual application. The difference in the system will be that after the applications are scored, each application will compete only in that funding pool. Applications for livestock operations will not compete against cropland, etc. This change may influence your decisions regarding the distribution of points to your questions.

Two additional pools will be used for statewide competition and selection. These will be for Organic applications and Ring Dike Initiative applications. The state office will develop the state and local issues for these applications and make the selection of approved applications.

Across the state, many organizations and individuals continue to express interest in participating in LWGs. To facilitate participation, Minnesota will again post the schedule for all local listening sessions and LWG meetings on the Minnesota NRCS web site. With the 2008 farm bill, the LWG membership has been expanded to include anyone who requests membership and is deemed to have knowledge of local resource concerns. See CPM 501.15 C regarding selection of members.

For 2010 we have established a cut-off date for scoring and ranking applications of February 26, 2010. We will finalize the 2010 EQIP Practice Payment Schedule in January. Offices can and should proceed to establish the foundation of their 2010 EQIP. On a practice basis, offices should expect the 2010 EQIP to be very similar to the 2009 EQIP.

2010 EQIP Groundwork Action Items:

- 1. Establish dates for your listening session and LWG meeting during the month of January 2010.** As soon as you and your SWCD have set dates for your LWG meeting, inform your area office. Email the time, location, and date of those meetings to Rhonda Osterman, rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov, to be posted to the web site. Each county's LWG meeting date should be posted a minimum of two weeks in advance.
- 2. Conduct local listening sessions in January 2010.** Field offices coordinate with SWCD to gather local input on resource concerns and priorities.
- 3. Hold LWG meetings.** The goal is to have LWG meetings completed by January 30, 2010. Again, coordinate with your SWCD. Have local input or listening sessions prior to, or in conjunction with, the LWG meetings. Determine, prioritize, and record the local resource concerns that EQIP will address.
- 4. Complete the attached LWG worksheet and send to your ASTC (FO).** Review the attached sample worksheet for example local questions and instructions. Areas should

send the worksheets electronically to Sid Cornelius. Each worksheet will be posted to the state web site. The locally developed questions will be incorporated into the county ranking tool. Each county will have its own ranking tool.

5. **Participate in a question and answer teleconference on the LWG, scoring, and ranking process on January 5, 2010.** Time and call-in information will be provided.
6. **Receive training on the 2010 EQIP.** This training is scheduled for January 2010.
7. **February 12, 2010** is the state goal to have the all county ranking tools in place and ready for use in the 2010 sign-up process.
8. The current national deadline is to have EQIP obligations committed to contracts by April 1, 2010. Funds not committed by that date would be subject to being re-allocated to other states.

Questions should be directed to your ASTC (FO) or, from the area level, to Tim Koehler, Assistant State Conservationist or Sid Cornelius, Resource Conservationist.

/s/

WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist

Attachments (3)

DIST: ASTC (FO)
DC
ARC
Area Engineers
Program Specialists
EQIP State Office Team