

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals; optimize environmental benefits; and help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

EQIP is a continuous sign-up, voluntary, conservation program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides financial and technical assistance for approved conservation practices based on a current conservation plan.

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

How EQIP Works

EQIP initiatives are funding opportunities created to assure funds are available to resource priorities across various land use types, for special emphasis resource needs and to assure that underserved groups have access to assistance.

Applications for an EQIP initiative will be evaluated based on screening and ranking criteria that consider the environmental benefits of planned conservation practices as identified by local, state and national priorities. The basis for an EQIP application is a conservation plan.

Requesting Conservation Planning Assistance

Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan; the basis for any EQIP application is a conservation plan.

Some of the benefits of developing a customized conservation plan include: helping you to comply with environmental regulations; preparing you for various conservation programs opportunities and identifying immediate or potential resource problems that could hurt your production.

About the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative

The purpose of the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative is to assist agricultural producers with chipping woody debris from removed orchards or vineyards that are no longer being irrigated due to the extreme drought conditions. These crops are located in areas where surface water deliveries are severely curtailed or suspended and no other sources of water are available for continued irrigation.

Chipping the woody debris in lieu of burning will avoid smoke emissions created from agricultural burning; reducing ozone precursors and particulate matter emissions, and reducing smoke impacts to downwind receptors. Removing the orchard or vineyard expeditiously will help reduce the threat of harboring pests and disease.



**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
Fiscal Year 2014 EQIP Program Description
California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative**

Applying the chipped debris to the fallowed land surface from where the orchard or vineyard originated stabilizes the surface area to limit fugitive dust emissions from occurring due to wind erosion and helps improve soil health by increasing soil carbon, organic matter and water retention. The wood chips may also be hauled away to a nearby composting facility or to a biomass-fueled power plant where the chips are consumed as renewable fuel for producing electricity.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designates the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin as “Extreme Nonattainment” of the 1997 and 2008 8-hour Ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS); and “Nonattainment” of the 1997 and 2006 PM2.5 NAAQS. Current drought conditions will exacerbate degradation of the ambient air quality in the region, which can result in air pollutants exceeding national and state ambient air quality standards and impacting public health and welfare. The expeditious removal of the non-irrigated orchards and vineyards will assist with reducing the potential treat and spread of pests and diseases to nearby crops.

To help protect the air quality resource, the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative is available to eligible producers within in the following counties of the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin: *Fresno, Kings, Kern, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare.*

Submitting an EQIP Application

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, and submitting the application to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or have an agricultural operation.

USDA-NRCS, Fresno County
Fresno Service Center
(559) 276-7494
David Durham, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Merced County
Merced Service Center
(209) 722-4119
Malia Hildebrandt, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Kern County
Bakersfield Service Center
(661) 336-0967
Jermaine Jenkins, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, San Joaquin County
Stockton Service Center
(209) 472-7127 ext. 3
Ora Van Steyn, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Kings County
Hanford Service Center
(559) 584-9209
Hugo Calvillo, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Stanislaus County
Modesto Service Center
(209) 491-9320 ext. 3
Diana Waller, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Madera County
Madera Service Center
(559) 674-2108
Jennifer Johnson, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Tulare County
Visalia Service Center
(559) 734-8732
Joe Williams, District Conservationist

Approved NRCS Land Uses

Only applications for agricultural operations on approved NRCS land uses will be considered for financial assistance through California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative. Approved land uses are:

- **Cropland:** Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- **Farmstead:** Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities.
- **Associated Agricultural Lands:** Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as idle center pivot corners, odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.

Approved NRCS Resource Concerns

Only applications for agricultural operations that address approved NRCS resource concerns will be considered for financial assistance through the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative. Approved resource concerns are:

❖ **SOIL EROSION**

- **Wind Erosion:** Detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by wind that degrades soil quality.

❖ **AIR QUALITY IMPACTS**

- **Emissions of Particulate Matter (PM) and PM Precursors:** Direct PM emissions from fugitive dust and smoke, and indirect PM emissions from NOx and ammonia from other sources, that can cause impacts to human health, plants and animals.
- **Emission of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs):** Open burning contributing to atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ and CH₄.
- **Emissions of Ozone Precursors:** Emissions of ozone precursors (NOx and VOCs), resulting in formation of ambient ground-level ozone that cause impacts to human health, plants and animals.

Approved NRCS Conservation Practices

Only applications on agricultural operation that include approved NRCS conservation practices will be considered for financial assistance through California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative.

Table 1. Eligible Conservation Practice

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Units	Lifespan
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10

For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020 the website link for all NRCS conservation practice standards.

Application Screening Criteria

The purpose of screening criteria is to prioritize applications into ‘High’, ‘Medium’ or ‘Low’ categories prior to application ranking. All eligible applications for the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative will be screened and applications in the ‘High’ priority category will be ranked. ‘Medium’ priority applications will be ranked only if funding is available. An application screening worksheet will be used by NRCS to screen applications submitted for the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative; the following is for reference.

High Priority Category:

Application screening priority is ‘High’ if question 1 and 2 below is true.

1. For the orchard or vineyard removal, the conservation practice in the EQIP application schedule of operations is intended to address the immediate impacts of the drought and the applicant intends to implement the scheduled conservation practice within three (3) months of contract obligation; and,
2. The applicant does not have sufficient water for irrigating the orchard or vineyard, and the fields will be fallowed this season (foregoing the planting of the normal cash crop due to reductions in water supply).

Medium Priority Category:

Application screening priority is ‘Medium’ if question 1 and 2 below is true.

1. For the orchard or vineyard removal, the conservation practice in the EQIP application schedule of operation is intended to address the immediate impacts of the drought and the applicant intends to implement the scheduled conservation practice in more than three (3) months of contract obligation; and,
2. The applicant does not have sufficient water for irrigating the orchard or vineyard, and the fields will be fallowed this season (foregoing the planting of the normal cash crop due to reductions in water supply).

Low Priority Category:

Application screening priority is ‘Low’ if the following is true.

1. All other applications that do not screen as ‘High’ or ‘Medium’ priority.

Application Ranking Criteria

The purpose of the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative ranking criteria is to evaluate the environmental benefits of conservation treatments included in an EQIP application, i.e. the EQIP schedule of operations and conservation plan.

An application ranking score is based on national, state and local ranking criteria and the cost-efficiency of conservation practices in the EQIP application. The cost-efficiency score is based upon broad averages of the cost and environmental benefits of each practice in the EQIP application.

The following sections list the national, state and local ranking criteria for the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative and are provided for reference; applications will be evaluated electronically by NRCS using the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool (AERT).

National Ranking Criteria

Only questions 4 and 9 are applicable to the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative; all other questions will be answered “No” in the AERT.

- 1) If the application is for development of a **Conservation Activity Plan (CAP)**, the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering “Yes” to the following question. Answering “Yes” to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the national priority category.
 - a. Is the program application to support the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP)? If answer is “Yes”, do not answer any other national level questions. If answer is “No”, proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section.

- 2) **Clean and Abundant Water: Water Quality** - Will the proposed project assist the producer to:
 - a. Meet regulatory requirements relating to animal feeding operations, or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?
 - b. Reduce sediment, nutrients or pesticides from agricultural operations located within a field that adjoins a designated "impaired water body" (TMDL, 303d, etc.)?
 - c. Reduce sediment, nutrients or pesticides from agricultural operations located within a field that adjoins a "non-impaired water body"?

- 3) **Clean and Abundant Water: Water Conservation** - Will the proposed project assist the producer implement conservation practices which:
 - a. Decrease aquifer overdraft?
 - b. Conserve water from irrigation system improvements and saved water will be available for other beneficial uses?
 - c. Conserve water in an area where the applicant participates in a geographically established or watershed-wide project?

- 4) **Clean Air: Treatment of air quality from agricultural sources** - Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practice(s) which:
 - a. Meet on-farm regulatory requirements relating to air quality or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?
 - b. Reduce on-farm generated greenhouse gases such as CO₂ (Carbon Dioxide), CH₄ (Methane), and N₂O (Nitrous Oxide)?
 - c. Increase on-farm carbon sequestration?

- 5) **Soil Health:** Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practice(s) which:
 - a. Reduce erosion to tolerable limits (Soil "T")?
 - b. Improve soil tilth, organic matter, structure, health, etc.?

- 6) **Healthy Plant and Animal Communities Wildlife Habitat Conservation** - Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practice(s) which:
 - a. Benefit on-farm habitat associated with threatened and endangered, at-risk, candidate, or species of concern as identified in a State wildlife plan?
 - b. Help retain wildlife and plant habitat on land exiting the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)?

- 7) **High Quality, Productive Soils, Healthy Plant and Animal Communities:** Will the proposed project assist the producer implement practices which:
 - a. Help manage or control noxious or invasive plant species on non-cropland?
 - b. Increase, or improve habitat to benefit pollinator or other targeted wildlife species?
 - c. Properly dispose of livestock carcasses?
 - d. Are identified in an Integrated Pest Management plan?
 - e. Are identified in a Nutrient Management plan?
 - f. Apply principles of adaptive nutrient management?

- 8) **Energy Conservation** - Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practices which:
 - a. Reduce energy consumption on the agricultural operation?
 - b. Increase on-farm energy efficiency with practices and improvements identified in an approved energy audit equivalent to criteria required in Ag EMP (122,124)?
 - c. Assist in implementing energy conservation measures that also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants?

- 9) **Business Lines - Conservation Implementation Additional Ranking Considerations** - Will the proposed project result in:
 - a. Implementation of all conservation practices scheduled in the contract on the CPA-1155 within three years of date of obligation?
 - b. Improvement of existing conservation practices or conservation systems already in place at the time the application is accepted?
 - c. Implementation of practice(s) which will complete an existing conservation system or suite of practices?

State Ranking Criteria

All questions are applicable to the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative.

1) **State Category One – Orchard or Vineyard Removals**

Conservation treatment will result in chipping of removed:

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. Citrus trees
- b. Vineyard
- c. Almond or Walnut orchards
- d. All other types of orchard trees.

2) **State Category Two – Orchard or Vineyard Condition**

The current condition of the orchard or vineyard prior to implementing the conservation treatment:

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. The orchard or vineyard is standing and has not been pushed over or piled.
- b. The orchard or vineyard has been pushed over, but not piled.
- c. The orchard or vineyard has been pushed and piled.

3) **State Category Three – Proximity to Public Areas**

Conservation treatment will reduce particulate matter emissions within proximity to public use areas such as but are not limited to, homes (five or more dwellings not owned by applicant), urban areas, sub-divisions, schools, parks, and federal and state highways. A public use area is:

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. Less than one mile from the planned land unit.
- b. Greater than one mile from the planned land unit.

4) **State Category Four – Wind Erodibility Group and Index**

Wind erodibility group (WEG) is a grouping of soils that have similar properties affecting their resistance to soil blowing in cultivated areas. The groups indicate the susceptibility to blowing.

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. Soils of planned treatment unit are predominately classified as WEG 1 or 2.
- b. Soils of planned treatment unit are predominately classified as WEG 3, 4 or 4L
- c. Soils of planned treatment unit are predominately classified as WEG 5 or 6.

Local Ranking Criteria

All questions are applicable to the California Air Quality Chipping EQIP Initiative.

1) Local Category One – SOIL EROSION: Wind Erosion

- a. Conservation treatment on land where orchards were removed due to drought conditions results in chipped material spread on fields to protect bare soil from wind erosion.

2) Local Category Two – AIR QUALITY IMPACTS - Emissions of Particulate Matter (PM) and PM Precursors

For the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) PM₁₀ attainment designations please view the EPA Region 9 Air Quality Map, *Designations in US EPA Region 9 for the 24-Hour Particulate Matter PM₁₀ National Ambient Air Quality Standards*, at:

http://www.epa.gov/region9/air/maps/r9_pm10.html

Conservation treatment for the planned land unit will minimize particulate matter emissions and the planned land unit is classified within one of the following designations for **24-Hour Particulate Matter PM₁₀**:

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. Attainment (Maintenance)
- b. Nonattainment/Serious
- c. Nonattainment/Moderate
- d. Attainment/Unclassified

3) Local Category Three – AIR QUALITY IMPACTS - Emissions of Particulate Matter (PM) and PM Precursors

For the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) PM_{2.5} attainment designations please view the EPA Region 9 Air Quality Map, *Designations for the Annual Particulate Matter PM_{2.5} National Ambient Air Quality Standards*, at:

http://www.epa.gov/region9/air/maps/r9_pm25-annual.html

Conservation treatment for the planned land unit will minimize particulate matter emissions and the planned land unit is classified within one of the following designations for **Annual Particulate Matter PM_{2.5}**:

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. Nonattainment
- b. Unclassifiable/Attainment

4) **Local Category Four – AIR QUALITY IMPACTS - Emission of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs)**

Conservation treatment on land where orchards were removed due to drought conditions results in all chipped material:

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. Spread on fallowed fields to sequester carbon and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- b. Used on-farm for animal bedding, spreading on unpaved roads and traffic areas and/or composted.
- c. Shipped off-farm to a composting facility or a biomass-fueled power plant.

5) **Local Category Five – AIR QUALITY IMPACTS - Emissions of Ozone Precursors**

For the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) ozone attainment designations please view the EPA Region 9 Air Quality Map, *Designations in US EPA Region 9 for the 2008 8-Hour Ozone (O₃) National Ambient Air Quality Standards*, at:

http://www.epa.gov/region9/air/maps/r9_o38hr.html

Conservation treatment for the planned land unit will minimize ozone precursor emissions and the planned land unit is classified within one of the following designations for *the 2008 8-Hour Ozone (O₃)*:

(Select “Yes” to Only One Answer)

- a. Nonattainment/Extreme
- b. Nonattainment/Severe-15
- c. Nonattainment/Serious
- d. Nonattainment/Moderate
- e. Nonattainment/Marginal
- f. Unclassifiable/Attainment