

Those interested in applying natural resource conservation measures on their farm or ranch are encouraged to sign up for program dollars by Nov. 15.

Farmers and ranchers interested in soil, water and wildlife conservation are encouraged to sign up now for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP is available from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Those interested in applying are encouraged to sign up before Nov. 15.

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program available to private landowners and operators. Through EQIP, farmers and ranchers may receive financial and technical help to install conservation practices on agricultural land.

According to Craig Derickson, NRCS State Conservationist, there are several options available to producers through EQIP.

“EQIP is one of our most versatile programs. It offers cost share and technical assistance to apply conservation measures on cropland and rangeland, as well as for animal feeding operations and establishing or enhancing wildlife habitat.

There are special initiatives to help conserve water in the Ogallala Aquifer, conserve energy on the farm or ranch, and provide assistance to convert to organic agriculture. There are many opportunities available, and NRCS staff can help landowners and operators sort out their EQIP options,” Derickson said.

EQIP has become one of the most widely applied conservation programs in Nebraska; enrolling over 600,000 acres last year with more than 8 million acres currently under contract statewide. The goal of EQIP is to provide a financial incentive to encourage landowners to install conservation practices that protect natural resources, resulting in cleaner air, water and more wildlife habitat.

“EQIP provides a good option for working lands. These contracts protect natural resources on land still in production and generating income. That’s a win-win situation for all Nebraskans,” Derickson said.

Individuals interested in entering into an EQIP agreement may file an application at any time, but the ranking of applications on hand to receive funding will begin Nov. 15 with a second round application ranking cutoff date of Jan. 17, 2014.

Producers will be required to attain a minimum ranking score to be accepted for the first round of funding. The more conservation work a producer agrees to install, the higher the ranking score, and the greater the probability of being approved for funding.

The first step is to visit the local NRCS field office and complete an application. Producers are encouraged to sign up soon since all funding for EQIP in Nebraska could potentially be obligated by early 2014.

For more than 75 years, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has helped agricultural producers with conservation plans. NRCS conservationists will work with landowners on their farm or ranch to develop a conservation plan based on resource goals. Conservation planning assistance is free and does not require participation in financial programs.

For more information about EQIP and the other available conservation programs visit the local NRCS field office or www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

