

## Succeed with EQIP

### **A guide to help fruit growers successfully apply to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to support their use of conservation practices**

Fruit growers in Washington can now sign up for a program that provides financial assistance to support the additional cost of using environmentally sound farming practices such as Integrated Pest Management.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides payments to eligible growers for the use of a wide range of practices on their farms. Getting started with government programs can be difficult for growers. This guide presents the basic steps for applying for EQIP financial assistance.

#### **Contact your local NRCS office and set up an appointment to let them know you are interested in applying for EQIP**

The Conservationist will guide you through the process of applying. While there may seem to be a lot of paper work involved, most of it is for the NRCS staff to fill out and they are skilled in simplifying the process for growers. Of course, the information in your application will be kept confidential.

At your first meeting, the NRCS Conservationist will explain the program to you and help you sign up and complete an application if you are interested. The conservationist will ask you what you want to do on your farm. Here are examples of the types of practices you might consider for your farm.

Integrated Pest management – includes use of monitoring, mating disruption and use of reduced risk pesticides (for a definition of reduced risk pesticides, see below).

Nutrient management – use of soil and leaf samples to assist in determining fertilizer needs.

Irrigation water management – monitoring soil moisture to determine how often and how much to irrigate.

Irrigation system improvements - conversion of rill irrigation or impact sprinkler to microsprinkler or drip irrigation.

Wildlife plantings such as hedgerows, riparian buffers, and field borders.

Windbreaks to reduce potential for pesticide drift into streams.

There may be other practices you and the conservationist will identify. Each of these practices can be included in a contract because it protects a natural resource. For example, IPM would benefit water and air quality. In general, growers who are willing to apply multiple practices that improve more than one resource are more likely to have their applications approved.

The deadline for submitting applications for this year is November 17.

## **Here is what you should bring with you to your first meeting**

Before your appointment, stop by the FSA (USDA Farm Services Agency) office in the same building as the NRCS office. There you will sign a proof of ownership or lease for the property you are farming and for which you wish to apply. You will need to supply your name, address, social security number, tax ID# if you file taxes under a different number than your SS#, and some kind of documentation of who owns the land, such as a deed or tax statement. If you already have an FSA loan this step is not necessary. At your NRCS meeting, plan on spending 1 ½ - 2 hours with the conservationist. You will discuss your plans for your orchard and will spend a lot of time on paperwork.

## **After you have applied**

Applications are ranked with other applications in your area based on a system of points. The number of points assigned to each of the practices you want to use on your farm are related to the amount of environmental benefit resulting from these practices. Again, applications that include multiple practices have a higher priority for funding because they offer greater conservation benefits. All applications within a given area are ranked using the same criteria to assure that everyone is treated fairly.

The NRCS District Conservationist will let you know whether or not your application is funded. If your application has been accepted, you will complete and sign a contract specifying the cost share and the work you will do on your farm. Contracts will be signed between January 15 – March 15.

## **For more information or to find the NRCS office in your county**

Look in your phone book under United States Government – Agriculture Dept. – Natural Resources Conservation Service

OR check: <http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/about/>. Click “Find a service center” at the left, to access the directory.

\* Reduced risk pesticides: low-impact on human health, low toxicity to non-target organisms (birds, fish, and plants), low potential for groundwater contamination, lower use rates, low pest resistance potential, and compatibility with Integrated Pest Management.