About NRCS EQIP Ranking

### Eligibility

Agricultural producers and owners of non-industrial private forestland and Tribes are eligible to apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm or ranch lands.

Applicants must:

* Control or own eligible land
* Comply with adjusted gross income limitation (AGI) provisions
* Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements
* Develop an NRCS EQIP plan of operations

Additional restrictions and program requirements may apply.

### Participant Responsibilities

Applicants are responsible for completing and filing all application and eligibility paperwork as required. If funded, participants are required to sign a contract and agree to implement the planned conservation practices to NRCS standards and specifications as scheduled.

### Socially Disadvantaged, Beginning, and Limited Resource Farmers/Ranchers, Military Veteran Farmers

The 2014 Farm Bill continues to address the unique circumstances and concerns of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, as well as beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers and Veteran Farmers. It provides for voluntary participation, offers incentives, and focuses on equity in accessing U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and services. Enhancements include increased payment rates and advance payments of up to 50 percent to purchase materials and services needed to implement conservation practices included in their EQIP contract.

Vermont is committed to reaching out to Historically Underserved individuals and groups. Historically Underserved participants may also receive higher payment rates in addition to being considered in high priority funding pools. See the [Small & Limited and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers page](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/outreach/slbfr/) for the NRCS definition of the Historically Underserved.

### National and State Priorities

The following national priorities, consistent with statutory resources concerns that include soil, water, wildlife, air quality, and related natural resource concerns, may 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 (TMDL) where available; the reduction of surface and groundwater contamination; and the reduction of contamination from agricultural sources, such as 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
5. Promotion of at-risk species habitat conservation including development and improvement of wildlife habitat
6. Energy conservation to help save fuel, improve efficiency of water use, maintain production, and protect soil and water resources by more efficiently using fertilizers and pesticides and
7. Biological carbon storage and sequestration

In addition, Vermont has identified the following priorities:

1. Water Quality
2. Soil Health
3. Soil Erosion
4. Forestry and Wildlife

### Decision Making Process for EQIP

Input from Outside Groups, Agencies, and Citizens: The list of eligible practices in [State], payment rates and limits, eligible resource concerns, and state scoring criteria are developed based on input and recommendations from the State Technical Committee (STC). The STC is made up of representatives from various agribusinesses, producer groups, conservation organizations, and federal, state, and tribal government agency representatives.

The Local Work Group process and scoring criteria, are based on input from the counties in the Local Work Groups (LWG).

The priorities set at the state and county level are those that the STC and LWG respectively determined were of the greatest need and would have the greatest positive environmental impact. The scoring process at both the state and local level was developed in order to select those projects that would provide the greatest environmental benefit, and therefore provide the greatest public good.