
December 16, 2003

WEST VIRGINIA BULLETIN NO: WV300-4-2

SUBJECT: LTP -FY2004 Farm Bill Actions and Timelines

Purpose: To provide information to Field Offices regarding FY2004 Farm Bill Actions and Timelines, including specific EQIP timelines.

Expiration Date: This Bulletin expires September 30, 2004

This Bulletin is to provide information and guidance to West Virginia NRCS staff regarding the FY2004 Farm Bill program actions and timelines. We hope to receive budget allocations in a timely manner that will allow us to meet the timelines. Field staffs need to move forward with planning and scheduling the necessary work items to allow NRCS to implement the expected increased program activity during FY2004. ASTC(FO)'s and DC's are strongly encouraged to share this information with the Local Work Groups to keep them informed of upcoming activities.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Jim Piper, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations Management, at 304-284-7543.

/s/

**LILLIAN V. WOODS
State Conservationist**

Attachments

**DIST: All Offices
Jim Piper, ASTC-FO, NRCS, Morgantown, WV
John Rader, SED, FSA, Morgantown, WV
Clare Cottrell, Chair, FSA State Committee**

Farm Bill Actions and Timelines for FY2004

EQIP

Final Manual – Date of availability not known. Training will be provided to Service Center employees after the Manual is received.

Field Office Staffs need to emphasize Continuous Sign Up with farmers and landowners.

Field Office Staffs need to get conservation plans and maps completed in Toolkit NOW for highly ranked unfunded applications.

State office has requested reports from NHQ regarding planned practices in EQIP contracts. The State Conservationist will advertise for Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to assist with Farm Bill workloads.

The STC has asked LWGs to give advice to the STC by Feb. 6, regarding the 2004 Farm Bill Programs, including EQIP Priority Resource Concerns, Ranking Criteria, and Eligible Practices.

The STC asked State Technical Committee to review and give recommendations at the Feb. 26, 2004 meeting.

Cost List – STC will determine the cost share rates with advice from LWGs and State Technical Committee.

Limited Resource Farmers and Beginning Farmers – Will ask LWGs and the State Technical Committee for advice. The STC is considering a cost share rate at 15% above the standard rate. There are some national issues that need to be addressed regarding documentation needed for a Beginning Farmer, and how to spot check the documentation.

All FY2004 applications and contracts are to be tracked in ProTracts. All conservation plans, maps, and contract support documents will be done in Toolkit, and the contract documents uploaded into ProTracts. ProTracts training to be provided to FOs in January.

March 4 – Have EQIP program decisions including resource issues, ranking sheets, and cost lists posted on NRCS web site.

End of Ranking Periods:

Mar. 19 - (completed contracts due May 21, CCC reps to sign 5/26-6/11)

May 28 – (completed contracts due July 30, CCC reps to sign 8/4-8/20)

FY2004 EQIP TIMELINE

Starting Now! DC's should be working to develop conservation plans and maps in Toolkit for the highly ranked unfunded applications that have been deferred from FY2003 or before. Having the plans and maps completed in Toolkit will make the FO's work easier during the rest of FY2004. The workloads in all of the programs can be expected to increase, and the new Conservation Security Program (CSP) is expected to be implemented later in FY2004.

Nov. 1 – Feb. 6, 2004 LWGs meet and provide advice regarding any changes in LWG Priority Resource Concerns, Ranking Criteria, and Practice Lists. DCs to send information in electronic format to Jim Piper, with a cc to Herb Andrick and their ASTC(FO). DC's will clearly identify any recommended changes in the ranking criteria and cost list from FY2003. The State Conservationist must approve any changes.

Jan. 20-30, 2004 ProTracts training to be provided to FOs.

Jan. 30 – Mar. 30 DCs to assure that all existing EQIP (and other Farm Bill program) applications are entered into ProTracts. Also enter new applications as received. Conduct Public Outreach.

Feb. 6-19 The State Technical Committee's EQIP Sub Committee will meet and prepare recommendations for the State Technical Committee Meeting.

Feb. 26 State Technical Committee meeting to provide recommendations to the State Conservationist.

Mar. 5 State Conservationist provides guidance to FO's regarding EQIP implementation and provides initial EQIP allocation for the Local Work Group.

Mar. 5 Each Local Work Group's Ranking Criteria, Practice List and cost share rates to be put on NRCS Web site. DCs can start ranking existing applications.

Mar. 5 NRCS and Local Work Group members announce availability of EQIP information and end of ranking period (two weeks after information is on the web). Conduct concentrated Public Outreach.

Mar. 8-12 Training to be provided to FO staff regarding State Conservationist's decisions.

Mar. 19 End of Ranking Period

Apr. 16 DCs complete ranking of applications.

Apr. 23 All EQIP applications and ranking data are entered into ProTracts. DCs will select applications for contract development, based on ranking points and funding availability, from the ProTracts database. The "Lead DC" in the LWG will coordinate and confirm applications selected for contract development with the other DCs, the ASTC(FO),

and the ASTC(Operations). Do not skip over a higher ranked application to fund a lower ranked application.

Apr. 23 DC notifies the applicants selected for contract development via letter, using ProTracts.

Apr. 23 The State Office will provide a summary of selected applicants and dollars by county, to permit FSA to make initial allocations to the FSA county offices.

May 21 EQIP Plan of Operations and Contract support documents to be prepared for contract approval. DCs will promptly notify the ASTC (FO) and ASTC(Operations) in writing of any problems with applicant cancellations. Additional applicants will be selected for contract development according to the ranking list in ProTracts. Do not skip over a higher ranked application to fund a lower ranked application. All conservation plans and contract support documents will be developed in Toolkit. The contract support documents will be uploaded into ProTracts, according to the guidance and instructions for the use of ProTracts.

May 26 NRCS will notify FSA of the final dollar amount of the contracts in each county, so that FSA can make any needed adjustments in the county final allocations. The State Office will obtain this information through ProTracts.

May 26 DCs will notify EQIP applicants not selected for contract development that their applications will be deferred to the next ranking period, using letters in ProTracts.

June 2 FSA will adjust the county final allocations.

May 26 – June 11 The NRCS CCC Representatives will sign contracts. The local DC and the NRCS CCC Representative signing the contracts will confirm with the local FSA office that the required dollar amount has been allocated before signing the contracts. If the necessary dollars have not been allocated to the FSA Office, the CCC Representative will contact Jim Piper, ASTC (Operations) at the NRCS State Office.

To be determined by FSA FSA County Offices to have contracts entered into System 36.

June 30 Local Work Groups to provide advice for the FY2005 Farm Bill programs.

July 30 The State Technical Committee provides recommendations to the State Conservationist regarding all FY2005 Farm Bill programs.

Sept. 30 All FY2005 Farm Bill program information is on the web and available to the public. FO's perform public information activities and Outreach.

Oct 29 End of first EQIP ranking period for FY2005.

FY2004 EQIP TIMELINE

(2nd Ranking Period, if needed)

May 28 End of Ranking Period

June 25 DCs complete ranking of applications.

July 2 All EQIP applications and ranking data are entered into ProTracts. DCs will select applications for contract development, based on ranking points and funding availability, from the ProTracts database. The “Lead DC” in the LWG will coordinate and confirm applications selected for contract development with the other DCs, the ASTC(FO), and the ASTC(Operations). Do not skip over a higher ranked application to fund a lower ranked application.

July 2 DC notifies the applicants selected for contract development via letter, using ProTracts.

July 2 The State Office will provide a summary of selected applicants and dollars by county, to permit FSA to make initial allocations to the FSA county offices.

July 30 EQIP Plan of Operations and Contract support documents to be prepared for contract approval. DCs will promptly notify the ASTC (FO) and ASTC(Operations) in writing of any problems with applicant cancellations. Additional applicants will be selected for contract development according to the ranking list in ProTracts. Do not skip over a higher ranked application to fund a lower ranked application. All conservation plans and contract support documents will be developed in Toolkit. The contract support documents will be uploaded into ProTracts, according to the guidance and instructions for the use of ProTracts.

Aug. 6 NRCS will notify FSA of the final dollar amount of the contracts in each county, so that FSA can make any needed adjustments in the county final allocations. The State Office will obtain this information through ProTracts.

Aug. 6 DCs will notify EQIP applicants not selected for contract development that their applications will be deferred to the next ranking period, using letters from ProTracts.

Aug. 13 FSA will adjust the county final allocations for the second ranking period.

Aug. 6 - 20 The NRCS CCC Representatives will sign contracts. The local DC and the NRCS CCC Representative signing the contracts will confirm with the local FSA office that the required dollar amount has been allocated before signing the contracts. If the necessary dollars have not been allocated to the FSA Office, the CCC Representative will contact Jim Piper, ASTC (Operations) at the NRCS State Office.

Sept. 30 FSA County Offices to have contracts entered into System 36.

WHIP

State Technical Committee recommended no changes to Ranking Criteria at the Nov. 20 meeting. The Committee also recommended minor changes regarding the cost list.

End of Ranking Periods:

Jan. 1 – (completed contracts due in SO by Mar. 15)

Apr. 1 – (completed contracts due in SO by June 15)

June 15 – (completed contracts due in SO by Aug. 31)

Field Office Staffs need to improve planning cost estimates for higher priority applications sooner than we have had in the past. Field Office Staffs need to continue to get highest priority applications into Toolkit.

State Office is coordinating with DNR regarding TSP assistance for wildlife habitat designs.

WRP

State Technical Committee recommended to add water quality as a purpose on the Ranking Criteria at the Nov. 20 meeting.

End of Ranking Periods:

Dec. 15

Mar. 1

June 1

GRP

NRCS anticipates a Proposed Rule for comment this winter. A Final Rule is needed to proceed with full implementation in FY2004.

CSP

DCs who didn't provide a 2001 cost list for their county will need to forward the list to Jim Piper by Feb. 20, 2004.

NRCS anticipates a Proposed Rule for comment this winter. A Final Rule is needed to proceed with full implementation in FY2004.

Need budget appropriation. Currently, the Omnibus budget bill indicates that \$41,443,000 will be appropriated for CSP nationally in FY2004.

AMA

Status of NRCS funding is not known.

State Technical Committee will give recommendations at the Feb. 26, 2004 meeting. Hopefully, funding decisions will be known by this time.

CREP

Additional training will be provided to DCs who serve as NRCS representative at their local sites in the county or counties they service.

Large potential workload still exists. Total acres that are available for CREP in WV are 9,160 acres. To date, there have been 73 approved contracts on 1065 acres (14.6 ac. average per contract). The remaining acres available are 8095 ac. (Based on average of 14.6 ac/ contract, the estimated workload would be another 554 contracts.)

FRPP

Presented Draft State FY2004-2007 FRPP Plan to State Technical Committee on Nov. 20 for their review. State Technical Committee will provide recommendations at the Feb. 26, 2004 meeting.

Request for Proposals anticipated to be published in the Federal Register approximately March/April 2004.