

## EXHIBIT CM - To National Instruction 440-310

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program - Conservation Incentive Contract (EQIP-CIC) Ranking Guidance

#### A. Ranking Pools

- 1) States must create ranking pools using the EQIP-CIC National Ranking Template and guidance in 440-CPM-530-D and -530-R-530.408.
- 2) Each High Priority Area (HPA) must have its own ranking pool.
- 3) To ensure the practices selected correspond to the appropriate land use in CART, States should set up a separate ranking pool for each land use within an HPA.

Note: As an alternative to separate ranking pools, States may consider utilizing one ranking pool if the Priority Resource Concerns (PRCs) are the same across the land uses within the HPA and use categories to separate the land uses in ranking.

In certain cases, States may combine different land uses with different PRCs; however, States should use extreme caution with this approach due to the potential for CART to fund practices that do not address a PRC on the land use.

#### B. Weighting of Resource Concern Categories

- 1) Only PRC categories will be evaluated.
- 2) States will adjust weighting of the resource concern categories to address the PRCs for each associated HPA and fund pool.
- 3) If only one PRC is selected for an HPA, the weighting of that PRC category will be 100 percent. If a State selects more than one PRC, then the state will add the weighting of each PRC category until 100 percent is reached.

#### C. Applicability and Ranking

##### 1) Applicability Question:

- a) States must use the following question to determine applicability for the EQIP-CIC ranking pool:
  - i) Land unit qualification = ANY
  - ii) Does the assessed practice schedule intersect the boundary of a State High Priority Area (HPA)? = (Yes/No)
  - iii) States will use a State-developed HPA geodata layer for the applicability question to use separate funding pools for each HPA.

##### 2) Ranking Questions:

- a) States must include the following ranking question under the “Program Questions” for all EQIP-CIC ranking pools to provide preference points for covered producers (BFR, SDFR, or VFR) participating in the CRP-Transition Incentive Program (CRP-TIP) during the two-year period covered by the CRP-1R, “CRP-TIP Contract”. State Conservationists, in consultation with State Technical Committees, will determine how many additional points to provide CRP-TIP assessments within the range of 5 to 20 points.
  - i) Is the applicant a covered producer participating in the CRP-TIP and NRCS is

evaluating the assessment during the two-year period covered by the CRP-1R?  
(Yes/No) (5 – 20 points).

- 3) States must develop the program questions and resource questions using the following criteria:
  - a) Priority should be given to applications that address eligible priority resource concern categories.
  - b) How effectively and comprehensively the planned conservation practices or activities address the identified natural resource concerns.
  - c) The magnitude of the expected conservation benefits resulting from the conservation practices or activities and the priority of the natural resource concerns.
  - d) Use of approved conservation practices or activities that provide long-term conservation benefit.
- 4) States must not exceed 200 points total for each category - Resource and Program Questions.

D. Tie Breaker

- 1) States should ensure that each ranking pool is customized to focus on priority resource concerns and minimizes duplicate ranking points.
- 2) In the event of a tie, States must use the efficiency score calculated in CART when a tie breaker is needed between one or more EQIP assessments within a ranking pool. When using the tie breaker, NRCS must select the application with the highest efficiency score first.
- 3) In the event the efficiency scores are tied, States must fund all tied assessments or none of the tied assessments.