

National Bulletin: 440-24-9

Date: 11/15/2023

Subject: PGM–Fiscal Year 2024 Farm Bill Program Contract  
Obligation and Funds Assessment Guidance

**Action Required By: September 13, 2024**

**Purpose:** This national bulletin provides state conservationists (STC) and Caribbean and Pacific Islands area directors with guidance for accepting and processing applications, obligating funds, submitting funds assessment requests and returns, and monitoring fiscal year (FY) 2024 allocations for Farm Bill contracts.

**Expiration Date:** September 30, 2024.

**Background:** The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. No. 115-334 (2018)), hereinafter referred to as the 2018 Farm Bill, authorized NRCS to provide financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance (TA) to producers through the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Initiatives Program (EQIP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Land Management and Rental (LMR). In addition, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was enacted under Title II, Subtitle B “Conservation” of Pub. L. No. 117-169 on August 16, 2022, and implemented for the first time in FY 2023.

**Explanation:** States must use the guidance in this national bulletin, along with policy in 180 NPPH Part 600, “[National Planning Procedures Handbook](#),” 440 CPM Part 502, “[Terms and Abbreviations Common to All Programs](#),” 440 CPM Part 530, “[Working Lands Conservation Programs Manual](#),” 440 NI 307, “[Instructions for Implementing National Program and Landscape Conservation Initiatives](#),” 440 NI 310, “[NRCS Program Ranking through Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool \(CART\)](#),” 300 NI 311, “[Guidance for the Workload Prioritization Tool](#),” state advisory allocations letter; and training to prepare for and announce program opportunities, complete assessments, accept and process applications, and evaluate requests for funding.

States must follow applicable guidance in this national bulletin and related policy for RCPP-CSP and RCPP-EQIP obligations associated with new applications and contracts under active 2014 Farm Bill RCPP projects and RCPP-LMR producer contracts under active 2018 Farm Bill RCPP projects. This includes guidance for sign-up announcements and ranking. RCPP funds are managed on a project basis and do not follow the standard annual funds assessment process.

AMA, CSP, EQIP, RCPP-LMR, and programmatic initiative applications must be obligated by **September 13, 2024**.

**Signup Announcements and Application Cutoff Deadlines.** STCs must advertise program application periods and ranking deadlines following guidance in 440 CPM § 530.12. For special landscape-scale initiatives, states must not release sign-up information until notified by national headquarters (NHQ).

CSP FY 2024 renewal applications that were not funded may be considered for funding under the FY 2024 CSP classic signup. Participants will not need to submit a new application. Change the signup number in ProTracts to “CSP-2024-1.”

Renewal applications that were determined to be ineligible or were cancelled may re-apply by providing a new NRCS-CPA-1200, “Conservation Program Application.” Use the current version of NRCS-CPA-1200 on [eForms](#).

**Fund Availability.** NHQ will provide annual FA and TA instructions to STCs and area directors through the state advisory allocations letter and separate allocation letters for certain landscape and programmatic initiatives (e.g., AMA Risk Management Agency, Water Bank Program). See 440 CPM Part 530, Subparts B, P, Q, R, and S, and the state advisory allocations letter for mandatory funding targets.

**Funding Assessments.** NHQ will offer three funding assessment periods for states to request additional FA and TA funds for AMA, CSP General, EQIP Classic, landscape conservation initiatives, and national initiatives during the FY. State requests must be received by **January 5, 2024**, for the first period, **April 5, 2024**, for the second period, and **July 5, 2024**, for the third period. NHQ will assess requests based on the status of FA program obligations, including departmental and agency priorities, funding targets, and other criteria.

States must request funds through the [FAPD SharePoint](#) Funds Assessment Request site. Requests should clearly identify any priorities the funds will be used for (e.g., HU, Climate Smart, Livestock, Wildlife). States should ensure that internal deadlines allow the funds to be used by the nationally established deadlines.

States that are unable to use their entire allocations must return excess FA and associated TA funds, including national programmatic, landscape conservation initiative, other national initiative, and disaster assistance funds, as soon as possible for redistribution.

For 2018 Farm Bill projects, see 440 CPM § 530.501, “RCPP Funds Management,” 440 CPM Part 531, “Regional Conservation Partnership Program,” 440 NI 316, “Guidance for Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Programmatic Partnership Agreements,” and annually published project management guidance for more information on RCPP fund requests and associated PPA amendments. See 440 CPM Part 529 for 2014 Farm Bill projects.

**Returning Funds.** States must use the Allotment Planning and Management Tool to return FA and TA funds. Identify the funds being returned in the Notes section (e.g., CSP renewal, CSP-GCI, EQIP General, any landscape initiatives). All unused Farm Bill funds must be returned by **July 26, 2024**. Returns received after this date will be counted as unobligated at the end of the FY. State IRA allocations received will be fully obligated and not returned.

**Actions.** States must use NRCS-CPA-1200, “Conservation Program Application,” and program appendices available on [eForms](#) for all new applications received. Applicants may access and submit applications through [Farmers.gov](#). States are encouraged to set internal milestones for application processing and obligations to ensure national deadlines are met.

**AMA.** AMA is available in 16 states where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

**Programmatic Initiatives, Landscape Conservation Initiatives, and Other Initiatives.** States must follow 440 NI 310 to establish landscape conservation initiative subaccounts and ranking pools in CART. NHQ will monitor the programmatic initiatives. See 440 NI 307, “Instructions for Implementing National Program and Landscape Conservation Initiatives,” and 440 NI 313, “Guidance for Source Water Protection Targeting and Implementation to Meet the 2018 Farm Bill Provision,” for guidance related to these initiatives.

**Disaster Assistance.** For allocation requests related to natural disasters and emergency conservation assistance, see 440 CPM § 530.36, “Disaster Assistance,” and 440 NI 312, “Addressing Natural Disasters Using NRCS Financial Assistance Program Funds.”

**EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts (EQIP-CIC).** See 440 CPM § 530.408, “EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts.”

- A. States must allocate at least \$200,000 or 5 percent of their EQIP General allocation, whichever is greater, to EQIP-CIC. States must not allocate more than 20 percent of the EQIP General allocation to EQIP-CIC.
- B. EQIP-CIC offers the same payment rates as EQIP General for conservation practices. NRCS policy does not prevent a state from having multiple payment schedules; however, it is recommended to use only one payment schedule for both EQIP and EQIP-CIC to meet the program intent and avoid issues with payment rates.
- C. States must establish high priority areas, priority resource concerns, and eligible land uses following 440 CPM § 530.408.
- D. States must choose the “EQIP-CIC” account type in ProTracts, and all applications for EQIP-CIC must use the “Incentive” application type.
- E. EQIP-CIC has its own contract appendix, which can be found on [eForms](#).
- F. All training materials and supplemental information for EQIP-CIC can be found on the [NRCS Deputy Chief for Programs \(DCP\) SharePoint site](#) under Resources – Farm Bill Training Webinars – EQIP CIC Trainings.

**IRA-Funded Contracts.** The IRA extends program authorities to 2031. States may use IRA funds to obligate contracts for CSP Classic, CSP Renewal, EQIP General, EQIP initiatives, and EQIP-CIC. IRA is not a program; therefore, obligating contracts with IRA funds does not need a separate NRCS-CPA-1200 (see 440 CPM Part 530, Subpart M). Core practices and activities for IRA are listed on the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List for FY 2024.

- A. All IRA subaccounts must use the “IRA” subaccount type.

- B. Applications with IRA funding must have the IRA radio button on the ProTracts application page set to “Yes” before the application is preapproved. This selection may be changed when the application is in “Pending,” “Eligible,” or “Preapproved” status. Users may not change the selection for approved applications or obligated contracts.
- C. Additional guidance can be found at the [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\) SharePoint](#).
- D. CSP-IRA enhancement systems may meet or exceed the stewardship threshold requirements on the entire agricultural or forestry operation and support IRA priorities. When planning and contracting an IRA enhancement system with IRA funds, follow these guidelines:
1. The system must have at least one core enhancement from the approved [CSAF Mitigation Activities List for FY 2024](#) on each land use.
  2. The non-IRA (CSAF) enhancements of the system must be scheduled in the same land use and management system as the core IRA (CSAF) enhancement or the adjacent associated agricultural land, as applicable. Planners should also consider geographic proximity and management systems of where enhancements are planned within a land use.
  3. The non-IRA (CSAF) enhancements must be associated with a base practice in the management system that supports the IRA priorities. Planners may use the “IRA Enhancement System Decision Tree” to determine which enhancements can be scheduled as part of an IRA enhancement system. Additional guidance can be found at the [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\) SharePoint](#).
- E. For CSP-IRA, planners may schedule a bundle on a land use if it includes at least one core enhancement within the bundle. All current CSP bundles, except Grazing Bundle #2 (B000GRZ2), contain at least one core activity identified on the FY 2024 CSAF list. Bundles with at least one core enhancement will be identified as “primary” during planning.

**Note:** If a participant is already adopting the core enhancements within the bundle, the provisions of 440 CPM § 530.123 supersede the CSP bundle scheduling guidance in section 530.305(A)(vi) according to section 530.120(B)(2).

**Organic Transition Initiative (OTI).** The OTI will provide funding through EQIP to support producers transitioning to organic production by providing FA and TA to implement conservation practices that support the initiative. OTI is a separate initiative from the National Organic Initiative.

Guidance will be provided in a separate national bulletin for FY 2024 OTI implementation.

**Expedited and Streamlined Signup.** ACT NOW allows states to hold streamlined, targeted funding processes. See 440 CPM § 530.37 and [FAPD - ACT NOW Best Management Strategies](#) for additional guidance and best management practices.

States must follow this national bulletin and respective manuals until superseded by a new Farm Bill.

**Contact:** For questions related to information in this national bulletin, contact the Financial Assistance Programs Division (FAPD) Programs Branch chief or request information through the appropriate state contact at [FAPD SharePoint-Program Questions](#).

**Additional References:**

- 440 NI 314 – Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Waiver Process
- 440 NI 319 – NRCS Acceptable Signature Methods
- 440 NI 320 – Guidance for Implementing Conservation Planning Activity, Design and Implementation Activity, and Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity
- 440 NI 324 – Guidance for Form CCC-902 Filing Requirements for NRCS Program Applicants and Participants
- 450 NI 308 – Agricultural Air Quality Conservation Measures Reference Guides