Take Advantage of the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) for Specialty Crops Now! Signup Deadline is May 8th

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EQIP is a competitive conservation program where growers agree to certain practices and are ranked by the protection given to key resources on their operation such as soil, water, air, plants, and animals. The four scenarios developed for specialty crop growers are general vegetable IPM (cabbage, carrots, lettuce, peppers, pickles, potatoes, pumpkins, squash, radishes, snap beans, and tomatoes), sweet corn IPM, tree fruit IPM (apples, pears, plums, peaches, cherries), and strawberry IPM. Growers who currently grow any of the above listed crops are eligible to apply.

The payments are based on adopting specific pest management tactics under the NRCS Pest Management Standard. There are additional incentive payments if they also adopt any of the following practices: Conservation Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, Micro irrigation, Bedding, Nutrient Management, No-Till, and Mulch-Till.

For growers who currently grow any of the above listed crops are eligible to apply.

For growers who have not participated in conservation programs before, NRCS has put together a step-by-step guide on how to apply for conservation programs at the NRCS office for more details.

EQUIP detailed article about the EQIP Program

Growers who are interested in learning more about the sign up process are encouraged to read the detailed article published in the February 17th, 2009 edition of the VegNet newsletter (see below) and to contact their local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) office for more details.

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is a competitive conservation program administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). EQIP has been around for many years but this year there is a Special Project designation for specialty crops, meaning fruit and vegetable growers who sign up will only compete against other growers for this funding, not the larger pool of livestock, field crop, or other interests.

This should increase the number of contacts offered to fruit and vegetable growers.

Over the last six months, the OSU IPM Program has partnered with NRCS to increase the use of pest management tactics in conservation programs to protect natural resources. Together, we have generated four scenarios which specialty crop growers can apply for incentive payments in exchange for adopting specific pest management tactics under the NRCS Pest Management Standard.

The payments are based on adopting specific practices outlined in the IPM Elements (http://ipm.osu.edu/pageview.asp?id=10) for certain crops in each of the following scenarios: General Vegetable IPM (cabbage, carrots, lettuce, peppers, pickles, potatoes, pumpkins, squash, radishes, snap beans, and tomatoes) - $121/A; Sweet Corn IPM - $42/A; Tree Fruit IPM - $227/A; and Strawberry IPM - $158/A. In addition to receiving incentive payments for Pest Management - 595, growers may qualify for additional incentive payments if they also adopt any of the following practices: Conservation Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, Micro irrigation, Bedding, Nutrient Management, No-Till, and Mulch-Till.

The following is the February 17th, 2009 detailed article about the EQIP Program

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) incentives for specialty crop growers

The final versions will be posted to the website by March 1, 2009. The strawberry IPM element is currently being developed and will also be posted by this date. Once a grower has established a benchmark IPM score, they need to consider if it can be increased at least 10% every year of the contract by adopting additional practices, and if by the third year of the contract, at least 60% of the practices listed in an IPM Element can be adopted to maintain program compliance. For example, if your benchmark IPM score in sweet corn is 60%, by the end of the third contract year, the grower will need to use at least 90% of the practices outlined in the IPM element for sweet corn (10% adoption increase / year). If you do not have access to the internet, visit your local Extension office and they can print the IPM Elements documents for you.

If the number of contacts offered to fruit and vegetable growers increases, the additional incentive payments are likely to be more beneficial.

For growers who have not participated in conservation programs before, NRCS has put together a step-by-step guide on how to apply for conservation programs at the NRCS office for more details.

For more information about EQIP in general, please visit http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/program_application/applying_for_programs.html. Please note this is for general reference only as it applies specifically to last year's (2008) signup.

This article was meant to serve as an introduction for specialty crop growers to access EQIP funds for fiscal year 2009. When more details about the special project amount and opening day become available, we'll make sure that information gets released as soon as possible. If you have any more questions about EQIP, contact your local FSA office or NRCS District Conservationist.