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1. EQUIP Deadline is May 8th, 2009

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

◆ –Jim Jasinski, Joe Kovach Ohio State University Extension Integrated Pest Management Program

Sign up for EQIP began April 6<sup>th</sup> **and will close May 8<sup>th</sup>**.◆ Growers who are interested in learning more about the sign up process are encouraged to read the detailed article published in the February 17<sup>th</sup>, 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 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 contracts 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 ◆ 595◆.◆ 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, cucumbers, 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 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009 detailed article about the EQIP Program***

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Incentives for specialty crop growers** ◆ Jim Jasinski, OSU Extension, IPM Program  
Specialty crop growers who are interested in pest management now have another reason to consider adopting practices that are potentially environmentally and economically beneficial, namely monetary incentives to adopt integrated pest management (IPM) practices.◆ At a recent meeting between the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Ohio State University (OSU) IPM program, and OSU fruit and vegetable specialists, four individual scenarios were developed to help growers qualify for funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2009.◆ 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.◆ EQIP contracts are typically awarded for up to three years, and are paid annually as a per acre incentive for adopting specific pest management practices.◆ Each IPM scenario describes activities such as scouting, crop rotation, cover crops, insect, weed, and disease monitoring, etc.◆ The incentive rates for fiscal year 2009 for each of the four scenarios are as follows: General vegetable IPM, \$121/A; Sweet corn IPM, \$42/A; Tree fruit IPM, \$227/A; and Strawberry IPM, \$158/A.◆

Unlike other years where EQIP funds have been available for pest management but fruit and vegetable growers had difficulty scoring and ranking high enough to be offered contracts, specialty crop growers will NOT have to compete against animal agriculture, field crop farmers, or any other entity except other specialty crop growers.◆ The IPM Program and NRCS staff have been negotiating a ◆special project◆ status for a portion of the state EQIP funding to be allocated only to specialty crop growers.◆ The amount of funding within the ◆special project◆ has yet to be determined but will be known once EQIP officially opens, which has not been announced yet.

So what does this mean to specialty crop growers?◆ For growers who already do a fair amount of pest management on their farm operation, it does not necessarily mean you will receive incentive payments to continue those practices, only if you add new ones.◆ In fact, EQIP is designed primarily to protect resources (soil, water, air, plants, animals) and is aimed at growers who can demonstrate continued adoption of specific pest management practices over time.◆ To see if your farm operation could benefit from EQIP, there are several steps outlined below.◆

**Step one**, take the appropriate OSU IPM Element self assessment tool online (<http://ipm.osu.edu/pageview.asp?id=10>) and establish your benchmark IPM score for the appropriate crop(s).◆ While all the vegetable and tree fruit IPM elements are posted at the OSU IPM website, they are currently being revised and updated specifically for use in EQIP. **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.  
**Step two** to qualify for government programs such as EQIP is to register at your county Farm Service Agency (FSA).◆ At the FSA office (<http://www.fsa.usda.gov>) expect to fill out paperwork related to contact information, average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) for years 2005–2007, and form AD-1026 which determines if your proposed fields are classified as highly erodible land or wetlands.◆ If your farming operation has partners or is set up as a corporation, there are additional forms to fill out for each member of the partnership.◆ There is also a stipulation if your AGI is greater than \$1 million from non-farm sources, and less than 66.6% of your total AGI is derived from farming, you are ineligible for this program.◆ Lastly, if you grow on rented land that you wish to enroll in a conservation program, you will need documentation from the land owner stating this program and its terms are acceptable.

**Step three** is to contact your local NRCS District Conservationist (<http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory/directories.html#These>) and set an appointment to have your FSA documentation reviewed for EQIP eligibility and have your farm operation inspected for resource concerns.◆ Based on your benchmark IPM score and the resource concerns outlined by your District Conservationist, you should have enough information to determine how suitable your operation is for a formal EQIP application.

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 [http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/program\\_application/applying\\_for\\_programs.html](http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/program_application/applying_for_programs.html).◆

For more information about EQIP in general, please visit <http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/eqip2008.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.