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### \$\$\$ for Integrated Pest Management? Act before February 16<sup>th</sup>

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For the second year in a row, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is setting aside funding earmarked for specialty crop growers who adopt Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices for growing fruits and vegetables. Growers need to act quickly, as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) applications for 2010 close on February 16<sup>th</sup>. In 2009, 15 specialty crop and organic growers received contracts for \$286,554, all of which contained the 595 Pest Management practice standard. Like 2009, specialty crop growers will NOT be competing against the general pool of applicants, only other specialty crop growers, which increases their chances of receiving a contract.

So what is EQIP? EQIP is a competitive conservation program that provides monetary ♦ incentives ♦ to growers who agree to use certain practices on their farm that protect key resources such as soil, water, air, plants, and animals. EQIP contracts are typically awarded to growers for up to three years, and are paid annually per acre for each practice standard used, such as the 595 Pest Management standard. In addition to receiving payments for pest management, growers may qualify for other incentive payments for adopting standards such as Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, Micro-Irrigation, Bed Shaping, Grassed Waterway, and Residue and Tillage Management (NoTill, StripTill, MulchTill, RidgeTill).

If you grow any of the following crops, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, peppers, pickles, potatoes, pumpkins, radishes, snap beans, squash, sweet corn, tomatoes, apples, pears, plums, peaches, cherries, blueberries, raspberries, or strawberries, you may qualify for incentive payments to adopt specific practice standards, such as Pest Management and others mentioned above. The 2009 pest management incentive rates per acre for sweet corn was \$42, for general vegetables was \$121, for strawberries was \$158, and for tree fruit was \$227. The incentive rates should be similar in 2010.

New in 2010 is a one time cost share payment for growers interested in building a high tunnel on their farm for season extension of fruit and vegetable production. In general, there is cost share for a structure up to 2178 sq. feet at a preliminary rate of just over \$2 per sq. foot. See your NRCS District Conservationist for more details.

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 or related practices over time. To see if your farm operation could benefit from EQIP, follow the steps outlined below.

**Step one**, take the appropriate updated 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). 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 the 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 you need to register at your county Farm Service Agency ( <http://www.fsa.usda.gov> ) where the local staff will give you more details about for this program.

**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 for EQIP reviewed. 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.

Good luck, and remember **the deadline for EQIP applications ends February 16<sup>th</sup>!**

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### Corrected Link

The link to the 2009 Northern Ohio Sweet Corn Evaluation did not work in previous newsletters but did work from the VegNet home page. If you are interested in this report, the link should work now (see below). All available 2009 on line research reports can be found in the right hand column of the VegNet home page

- [2009 Northern Ohio Sweet Corn evaluation \[PDF file - need Acrobat reader\]](#)