NRCS Maryland Announces AMA and EQIP Signup for 2020 Funding, Apply by March 20, 2020

Annapolis, Md., February 12, 2020 – Farmers and forest landowners will want to plan ahead and sign up early for USDA conservation funding. Terron Hillsman, USDA–Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist in Maryland, announced farmers and forest landowners interested in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) need to apply by March 20, 2020, for funding in 2020. Applications are being taken at all USDA Service Centers in Maryland.

Applications for the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program must also be received by March 20, 2020 to receive funding consideration in 2020.

EQIP is the primary program available to farmers and landowners for farm and woodland conservation work, offering payments for over 110 basic conservation practices. Last year, Maryland received nearly $13 million in funds for EQIP practices. AMA is a smaller program that focuses on high tunnels and water management systems.

“The new Farm Bill allow NRCS to support conservation that ensures cost-effective financial assistance for improved soil health, water and air quality, and other natural resources benefits. Through EQIP, for example, the funding cap was raised for organic producers, there are new enrollment options through incentive contracts, an advance payment option is available for historically underserved producers, and much more,” said Hillsman. “By getting EQIP applications in early, NRCS staff will have time to visit individual farms and assist in planning conservation practice needs.”

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All eligible applications received by March 20, 2020, will be evaluated, prioritized and ranked for funding in 2020. Farmers may contact their local USDA Service Center to get started on producer eligibility and planning.

Separate funding opportunities are also now open for Beginning Farmer, Organic, Seasonal High Tunnels, and Soil Health, as well as several landscape-based initiatives and historically underserved initiatives. All offer technical and financial assistance through EQIP.

Organic: NRCS helps certified organic growers and producers working to achieve organic certification install conservation practices to address resource concerns on organic operations.

Seasonal High Tunnel (Hoop House): NRCS helps producers plan and implement high tunnels - steel-framed, polyethylene-covered structures that extend growing seasons in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment and better air quality due to fewer vehicles being needed to transport crops. Supporting conservation practices, such as grassed waterways and diversions, are available to address resource concerns on operations with Seasonal High Tunnel structures.

Source Water Protection: The 2018 Farm Bill provides for increased incentives for practices that relate to water quality and quantity and protect drinking water sources while also benefitting producers. Two Source Water Protection Areas in northeast Maryland, the Liberty Reservoir and North East Creek, have been identified as priority areas in Maryland and may be eligible for increased payment rates for selected source water protection practices through EQIP.

National Water Quality Initiative: The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) is designed to help individual agricultural producers take actions to reduce the runoff of sediment, nutrients and pathogens into waterways where water quality is a critical concern. The goal is to implement conservation practices in focused watersheds in a concentrated area so that agriculture no longer contributes to the impairment of water bodies within these priority watersheds. Eligible watersheds include the Upper, Middle, and Lower Catoctin and Prettyboy watersheds.

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Soil Health Initiative: Soil is a living and life-giving natural resource. By farming using soil health principles and systems that include no-till, cover cropping and diverse rotations, more and more farmers are increasing their soil’s organic matter and improving microbial activity.

Landowners interested in applying for program funding should contact their local NRCS office at the USDA service center for their county. Visit farmers.gov for USDA service center locations. State-specific program information is available on the NRCS Maryland website at www.md.nrcs.usda.gov.

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