

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NRCS Conservation Programs Deadline Fast Approaching

Applicants are encouraged to submit applications for assistance through Nov. 18, 2011

PETALUMA, California, Oct. 20, 2011 – For those farmers, ranchers, dairy operators, grape growers, forestry landowners and Tribes who are interested in applying for Fiscal Year 2012 Farm Bill conservation program-financial assistance, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in California has set **Friday, Nov. 18, 2011**, as the application cutoff for ranking consideration.

This deadline includes all California Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and existing Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) project priorities. The deadline for NRCS's National Initiatives (EQIP Organic, High Tunnels, Energy and Air Quality) will be provided at a later date.

In Fiscal Year 2011, California NRCS obligated \$74 million in EQIP funds for 1,692 contracts benefitting nearly one-million acres statewide. However, the number of applications received exceeds available funds by approximately three to one. Agricultural producers are encouraged to apply now to ensure consideration for this funding cycle.

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that supports agricultural productivity and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, agricultural producers receive technical and financial assistance to implement projects that address resource concerns such as water conservation and water and air quality.

WHIP is a voluntary program for private landowners who want to develop or improve wildlife habitat on private farms and ranch lands. It provides both technical and financial assistance to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

The primary objective of the local Sonoma Wine Country AWEP is to increase the reliability of agricultural water supplies and to improve in-stream flows to benefit federal and state listed salmon and steelhead trout in the Russian River and Sonoma Creek. Projects that reduce the amount of stream diversions or improve management of frost control water will be given high priority if they are in the Russian River. The construction of off-stream water storage ponds are identified as a high priority where they reduce instantaneous drawdown of river flows during frost control and/or irrigation operations and where the necessary water rights and permits have been acquired to store water. The program encourages the development of alternative sources of water or methods for frost control as well as infrastructure improvements that allow for flexibility in water management or increased efficiency. Irrigation water management is also



targeted with this program and producers interested in installing weather stations and/or soil moisture monitoring devices are encouraged to apply. Eligible practices include but are not limited to off stream ponds that have the necessary permits and engineered design, pond liners, pumping stations, pipelines, “disconnected” wells that pump to ponds for frost protection, wind machines, sprinkler head replacements and roof gutters for rainwater collection.

Applications can be submitted throughout the year, but those received after November 18 will be held until the next funding cycle. For additional information, landowners are encouraged to contact their local NRCS Service Center by **Friday, Nov. 18, 2011**. To make an appointment to apply, please contact **Felicia Hanley** at **(707) 794-1242 x 125**

Since the 1996 Farm Bill, NRCS California has invested more than \$1 billion working hand-in-hand with California’s landowners, through conservation planning and assistance, to benefit the soil, water, air, plants, and animals that result in productive lands and healthy ecosystems.

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