

2002 Farm Bill Provisions for Tree Farms and other Family Forests

Tree Farm Committee Action Alert

The 2002 Farm Bill represented a major step forward in Federal support for Tree Farmers and other family forest owners.

- ?? Congress made family-owned forestlands a priority for funding under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. EQIP is one of the largest single conservation funding program for family-owned farms and forests, with up to \$1.3 billion available a year.
- ?? A major new incentive program, the Forest Land Enhancement Program [FLEP], was created to replace SIP and FIP.
- ?? A new outreach initiative, the Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative, was grafted on the Renewable Resources Extension Act programs administered by Extension. The SFOI is designed to educate family forest owners about sustainable forestry, and Congress specifically directed that non-governmental organizations like Tree Farm and SAF be eligible to implement part of the program.

Getting these new programs into the Farm Bill represents a great victory for Tree Farm and the forestry community.

But now the real work begins – in the states and at the grassroots.

We urge you to mobilize your Tree Farm Committee, reach out to your allies in the forestry community, and link up with your state forester and your state forestry association to insure that these programs are implemented as Congress intended.

On the following pages we offer suggestions for action and information about:

- ?? Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- ?? Forest Land Enhancement Program
- ?? Sustainable Forestry Outreach Program

Please get in touch if you'd like more information, contact numbers or suggestions for action.

And please keep us posted on your progress, so we can brief the leadership of the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service about where things are going well, and where they're not.

Thanks!

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Environmental Quality Incentives Program [EQIP] Natural Resources Conservation Service

Objective

Make more money available through EQIP to support conservation practices by Tree Farmers and other private forest owners in your state.

Summary

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, an arm of the Department of Agriculture, is the largest source of Federal funding for conservation activities on rural land.

Funding is offered through several programs already open to non-industrial forestland owners – the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Conservation Reserve Program.

Another program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program [EQIP], was reauthorized this year by Congress as part of the new Farm Bill. Congress added new language making nonindustrial forestland a priority for funding under EQIP, and increased funding for EQIP to \$1.3 billion a year.

But simply adding language to the Farm Bill, while a great victory for Tree Farm, won't do the job. We need to get to work in the states to achieve what Congress had intended.

NRCS defers authority to State Technical Committees [STC], organized by the State Conservationist, to determine state funding priorities, administer programs, and identify what sort of activities and practices should be funded. STC membership is intended to be broad-based and inclusive; in practice they are often dominated by livestock and row crop farmers.

The Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bruce Knight, has urged us to get as many Tree Farmers [and other members of the forestry community] on these STCs as possible.

This is, Chief Knight says, the best way to focus STCs on the conservation needs of private forestland owners who aren't farmers – and the only way to assure that a reasonable share of funding is aimed at meeting those needs.

Objectives and Action

? ? Get Tree Farmers [and other members of the forestry community] involved as members of your State Technical Committee [STC] for the Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS].

? ? Let your State Forester know you are seeking to participate.

☞ ☞ Encourage their active participation, and seek the State Forester's help in identifying others who might represent the forestry community on the STC

? ? Educate the STC about the new Farm Bill which makes nonindustrial private forestland a priority target for conservation funding under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program [EQIP]

☞ ☞ Under the new legislation, EQIP funding is not limited to forestland attached to a farm. Congress clearly intended these funds to support conservation activities on free-standing woodlots and forestland not owned by farmers.

? ? Encourage the STC to allocate a specific [and hopefully, generous] portion of their state funding to addressing conservation activities on nonindustrial private forestland.

? ? Make the STC aware of conservation practices on private land that should be eligible for funding.

☞ ☞ In the new Forest Land Enhancement Program, which replaces SIP and FIP, the Congress specified certain objectives and suggested eligible practices. They can serve as a model for forestry practices eligible for EQIP.

☞ ☞ Each state STC must set its own priorities and approved practices for EQIP and other conservation programs. But Congress' intent is clear, and you should encourage your STC to consider what Congress had clearly intended.

? ? Stick with the STC over time. Changing NRCS' focus away from pure agriculture to forestry is a long-term project. It will require patience, new relationships, and plenty of allies.

☞ ☞ Try to connect with your state Farm Bureau and other farm groups. Make them your allies if you can.

☞ ☞ Encourage politically-influential Tree Farmers to get involved.

Remember

NRCS and STCs are in the habit of thinking "farm," not forest. We're seeking a big cultural change. Help them understand that to be eligible for EQIP funding, forestland does not have to be part of a farming operation.

Forest Land Enhancement Program [FLEP]
US Forest Service
State Forestry Agencies

Objective

Help guide FLEP by making sure Tree Farmers and other family forest owners serve as members on State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees.

Summary

FLEP is a cost-share program – funded at \$100 million over six years – that encourages the long-term sustainability of non-industrial private forestlands. It will be implemented by the Secretary of Agriculture through the State Foresters in coordination with State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees (and in consultation with other stakeholders).

To be eligible for cost-share assistance, an owner of non-industrial private forestlands must

?? develop and implement a management plan that meets specific criteria. We believe Tree Farm-certified management plans should meet these criteria.

?? provide for the treatment of no more than 1,000 acres of non-industrial private forestlands. This acreage limit may be increased to no more than 5,000 acres if it is determined that the treatment of additional acres will result in significant public benefit.

Cost-share assistance (up to 75%) is available for activities and practices that are listed and approved in a State plan. State foresters will lead development of state plans; the legislation requires that they consult with their State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee.

During the Farm Bill debate, we had worked hard to vest control of the program at the state level, so states could assess their own priorities and apply funds to meet them. We succeeded. Though objectives and eligible practices are suggested in the Farm Bill itself [see next page], there will be a great deal of flexibility to craft a program that works for each state.

Our challenge now will be to assure that Tree Farmers and other family forest owners can play a significant role in helping set priorities, and identify practices that should be funded.

Action

?? Contact your state forester to find out whether Tree Farmers and other family forest owners are adequately represented on the State Forest Stewardship Committee. Ask how more Tree Farmers can participate to help set priorities.

?? Offer to work with your state forester to help implement the program, especially to make Tree Farmers and other family forest owners aware of FLEP, and what it means for them.

Forest Land Enhancement Program

Objectives [Quoted from Legislation]

- 1) Investing in practices to establish, restore, protect, manage, maintain, and enhance the health and productivity of the nonindustrial private forest lands in the United States for timber, habitat for flora and fauna, soil, water, and air quality, wetlands, and riparian buffers.
- 2) Ensuring that afforestation, reforestation, improvement of poorly stocked stands, timber stand improvement, practices necessary to improve seedling growth and survival, and growth enhancement practices occur where needed to enhance and sustain the long-term productivity of timber and nontimber forest resources to help meet future public demand for all forest resources and provide environmental benefits.
- 3) Reducing the risks and helping restore, recover, and mitigate the damage to forests caused by fire, insects, invasive species, disease, and damaging weather.
- 4) Increasing and enhancing carbon sequestration opportunities.
- 5) Enhancing implementation of agroforestry practices.
- 6) Maintaining and enhancing the forest landbase and leverage State and local financial and technical assistance to owners that promote the same conservation and environmental values.
- 7) Preserving the aesthetic quality of nonindustrial private forest lands and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Approved Activities and Practices May Include [Quoted from Legislation; State Retains Final Discretion]

- 1) The establishment, management, maintenance, and restoration of forests for shelterbelts, windbreaks, aesthetic quality, and other conservation purposes.
- 2) The sustainable growth and management of forests for timber production.
- 3) The restoration, use, and enhancement of forest wetland and riparian areas.
- 4) The protection of water quality and watersheds through
 - a) the planting of trees in riparian areas; and
 - b) the enhanced management and maintenance of native vegetation on land vital to water quality.
- 5) The management, maintenance, restoration, or development of habitat for plants, fish, and wildlife.
- 6) The control, detection, monitoring, and prevention of the spread of invasive species and pests on nonindustrial private forest lands.
- 7) The restoration of nonindustrial private forest land affected by invasive species and pests.
- 8) The conduct of other management activities, such as the reduction of hazardous fuels, that reduce the risks to forests posed by, and that restore, recover, and mitigate the damage to forests caused by, fire or any other catastrophic event, as determined by the Secretary.
- 9) The development of management plans;
- 10) The conduct of energy conservation and carbon sequestration activities.
- 11) The conduct of other activities approved by the Secretary, in consultation with the State forester and the appropriate Committees.

Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative [SFOI]
Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service

Objective

Encourage state extension leaders to provide financial, and in-kind support to state Tree Farm outreach and education efforts under SFOI.

Ask state extension leaders how state Tree Farm Committees and Tree Farmers can support adequate funding of SFOI and RREA.

Summary

The Farm Bill instructs the Secretary of Agriculture to establish the Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative [SFOI] as an amendment to the Renewable Resources Extension Act [RREA].

The purpose of the program is to educate landowners on the value and benefits of practicing sustainable forestry, the importance of professional forestry advice in achieving their objectives, and the variety of public and private resources available to assist them.

Congress intended that some of the funds appropriated for SFOI be granted to groups like Tree Farm and the Society of American Foresters, to take advantage of non-governmental networks for outreach and education.

SFOI is embedded in RREA, and RREA is now authorized at \$30 million annually through 2007. But appropriations for RREA have always fallen well below authorized levels.

Action

- ?? Contact your state extension leaders to determine how they plan to implement SFOI in your state.
- ?? Encourage them to take advantage of non-profit programs like Tree Farm to help deliver outreach and education initiatives.
- ?? Offer to assist in any way possible to push for full funding of RREA and SFOI.