

## The EQIP Improvement Act

**Lead Sponsors:** U.S. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Mike Lee (R-UT)

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Improvement Act will prioritize federal assistance for proven agricultural conservation practices, reduce federal cost-sharing for practices that provide little or no environmental benefit, reduce the overall payment cap on EQIP contracts, eliminate a requirement that 60% of EQIP funding flow to livestock operators, and implement the recent [recommendations](#) from the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Analysis of completed EQIP contracts show that between 2009 and 2016, just 14% – \$600 million – of all EQIP funding went towards conservation practices which the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has identified as producing significant environmental benefits for water quality, water quantity, soil health, air quality and fish and wildlife. By contrast, more than \$1 billion – or more than 20% percent of EQIP funds – was spent on infrastructure practices which produce relatively little environmental benefit.

### Supporting Most Effective Conservation Practices

– [According to USDA data](#), several EQIP conservation practices (Table 1) produce significantly more environmental benefits, including drinking water protection. These practices include cover crops, no-till, crop rotations, nutrient management, and streamside buffers. The EQIP Improvement Act would prioritize funding at the state and county level for these high priority practices.

Reduce Support for Least Effective Conservation Practices – [According to USDA data](#), several EQIP conservation practices (Table 2) provide relatively little benefit to taxpayers or the environment. Between 2009 and 2016, taxpayers provided more than \$1 billion to support these practices, which include cost-sharing for roads, fish ponds, stock ponds, dams, animal waste pits, pipelines, and land clearing. The bill would reduce maximum cost-sharing from 75 percent to 40 percent.

Support More Farmers and Ranchers – The EQIP Improvement Act will reduce the overall five-year EQIP payment cap from \$450,000 to \$150,000 – which will free up EQIP funds to serve more farmers – and end an arbitrary requirement that 60 percent of EQIP funds flow to livestock operators. While the average size of an EQIP contract between 1997 and 2015 was less than \$8,000, more than 4,300 contracts exceeded \$150,000. Given funding limitations, fewer than [30 percent](#) of qualifying EQIP projects were funded in 2017.

**Table 1. Practices Prioritized Under EQIP Improvement Act**

Practice Name	Score (max. 175)	Total Payments (2009-2016)
Riparian Forest Buffer	76	\$2,983,115
Conservation Cover	71	\$8,272,010
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	67	\$182,098
Tree/Shrub Establishment	59	\$59,375,527
Prescribed Grazing	51	\$103,979,351
Cover Crop	48	\$149,653,776
Conservation Crop Rotation	47	\$65,599,886
Critical Area Planting	47	\$14,137,776
Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till	46	\$111,585,406
Filter Strip	44	\$765,287
Nutrient Management	35	\$142,745,613
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$659,279,846</b>

**Table 2. Practices With Reduced Payments Under EQIP Improvement Act**

Practice Name	Score (max. 175)	Total Payments (2009-2016)
Land Clearing	-20	\$899,063
Aquaculture Ponds	-7	\$763,086
Clearing and Snagging	-6	\$1,401,733
Fish Raceway or Tank	-6	\$78,074
Dam, Diversion	-5	\$1,138,416
Livestock Pipeline	0	\$170,731,038
Obstruction Removal	0	\$8,878,659
Dike	1	\$15,966,555
Vertical Drain	1	\$112,689
Spoil Spreading	2	\$1,222,586
Waste Transfer	6	\$57,462,092
Surface Drain, Main or Lateral	7	\$446,283
Irrigation Reservoir	8	\$33,101,601
Surface Drain, Field Ditch	8	\$511,354
Dam	9	\$832,118
Access Road	10	\$28,831,566
Land Smoothing	10	\$4,046,788
Animal Mortality Facility	11	\$28,709,538
Waste Storage Facility	12	\$386,172,869
Waste Facility Closure	13	\$16,902,145
Irrigation Pipeline	14	\$97,082,379
Waste Treatment Lagoon	15	\$2,545,287
Pond	16	\$43,538,295
Pumping Plant	18	\$99,268,098
Diversion	18	\$7,784,305
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$1,008,426,616</b>