

Environmental Quality Incentive Program Project Home Article for June 2008

SAN JUAN ISLANDS



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Agriculture is one of the most popular prospects in San Juan County, from school gardens, farm-to-school efforts, market gardens and our three great summer weekend farmers markets. Our growing season and weather allow for successful small scale or large scale food production. This type of land use also helps conserve our natural resources such as soil and water.

If you are a landowner of a few acres or many acres you may qualify to receive federal grant money to continue with your ongoing agricultural and forestry endeavors or to expand. Some of the innovative gardens, backyard forests and small scale agricultural projects may be eligible. For example, in 1982, a work called "*Wheatfield*" by Agnes Denes was a public sculpture/installation that did qualify as subsidized farmland as she prepared the brownfield site by removing debris from the construction of the World Trade Center. She removed weeds and garbage bags and then she managed Manhattan's traffic to have trucks bring in a layer of topsoil. The following year, New York City had its own amber waves of grain to be harvested in the fall. Agnes Denes qualified for, applied for and was subsequently awarded monetary subsidies from the US Department of Agriculture to put a wheatfield in a landfill area in Lower Manhattan and where Battery Park now sits.

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EQIP Funds for you! What ? You don't know what EQIP is?



EQIP is Washington's most popular agricultural conservation program, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). The program now has a new application cut-off date - July 15, 2008 - the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced recently.

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is a voluntary, cost-share assistance program that helps property owners of farm and forest lands install conservation practices including those aimed at helping land owners improve irrigation efficiency; manage nutrient run-off and/or animal waste; improve the health of native plant communities; and reduce soil loss. In most instances, producers who participate in the program pay for roughly half of the costs of the conservation measures or practices.

San Juan County is lucky too! We have access to dedicated funds for our area. If you have some needs for helping your land out and would like some financial help consider applying. We can assist you with the pre-planning phase which in this case is a farm or forest plan (at no cost!) and help in identifying your needs for land conservation practices help.

Locally, farmers, ranchers and forestland owners have come to rely on EQIP for assistance with conservation measures including stock watering tanks, interior fencing, re-planting trees, thinning and construction of covered composting bunks to name a few. State wide, in 2006 and 2007, Washington farm and forest owners qualified for more than \$30 million in cost-share assistance through the program, according to the NRCS.

The new application ranking cut-off date represents an on-going agency effort to provide landowners and planners additional time to develop more comprehensive conservation plans for implementing the various practices and activities funded through the program.

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Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact the San Juan Islands Conservation District Farm & Forest Planner as soon as possible to ensure eligibility and to begin the application process. “To be considered for fiscal year 2009 funding, they need to have their applications complete by July 15,” said NRCS District Conservationist Steve Nissley.

Farm and forest owners may still apply for the program throughout the year, but the new deadline represents the earliest application ranking cut-off date since the inception of the program, according to the NRCS.

The mid-July deadline will likely be in place for years to come, according to Nissley. “Unless something comes up beyond our programmatic control,” he said, “the July 15th cut-off date will be consistent throughout the life of the new Farm Bill - and perhaps even beyond.” For instance, it seems appropriate that the folks who are raising corn and creating a new living sculpture cultivated on a brownfield site (known as “*Not A Cornfield*”) in Los Angeles should look into such assistance.

Contact your local San Juan Islands Conservation District Farm & Forest Planner, Bruce Gregory for more information. Call 360.378.6621 or email us at info2007@sanjuanislandscd.org or visit our website at www.sanjuanislandscd.org.

Co-Written by D. N. Kinsey, ASLA and Bruce Gregory, San Juan Islands Conservation District, June 2008