

Watersheds To Receive Funds To Clean Up Natural Resource Problems

(Continued from Page D4) watersheds in Pennsylvania that received EQIP funding.

The objectives of the program are to apply conservation practices on Berks County farmland that will reduce sheet, rill, and gully erosion on cropland; reduce over fertilization or nutrients on cropland; and protect surface and ground water from animal waste. This voluntary program will solve LOCAL natural resource problems as identified by the local work group.

The process to select the watersheds, or geographic priority areas, began with local work groups, whose members include representatives from agencies, or-

ganizations, and community groups within the watershed, such as the Berks and Lebanon Conservation Districts, Berks and Lebanon Natural Resources Conservation Service, Berks and Lebanon Farm Service Agency, Berks and Lebanon Cooperative Extension Service, Berks County Conservancy, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Tulpehocken Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Berks County Planning Commission, and local farmers.

Each local work group conducted a natural resource needs assessment and developed proposals for watersheds based on these assessments McCormack said. The State Technical Committee

— consisting of representatives from agencies, agribusiness and community organizations — reviewed the proposals from across the state and selected watersheds using a rating system based on 26 environmental factors. These factors addressed a wide range of natural resource conditions, including soil erosion and depositing, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, wetlands, and grazing lands.

The sign-up period for this project will be held from June 30, 1997 to July 18, 1997. Sign-ups and further information may be obtained at the local Berks County Natural Resources Office (NRCS) or Farm Service Agency (FSA).

A conservation plan is needed for all EQIP contracts, which are five to 10 years in length. NRCS and county conservation district staffs will provide the technical and educational assistance producers need to apply or install conservation practices based on their conservation plan, McCormack. The plan will describe conservation management practices to protect soil, water, air, and related natural resources.

Producers who agree to address the primary conservation concerns within the watershed will be given preference for an EQIP contract. Eligible land includes cropland, forestland and pastureland.

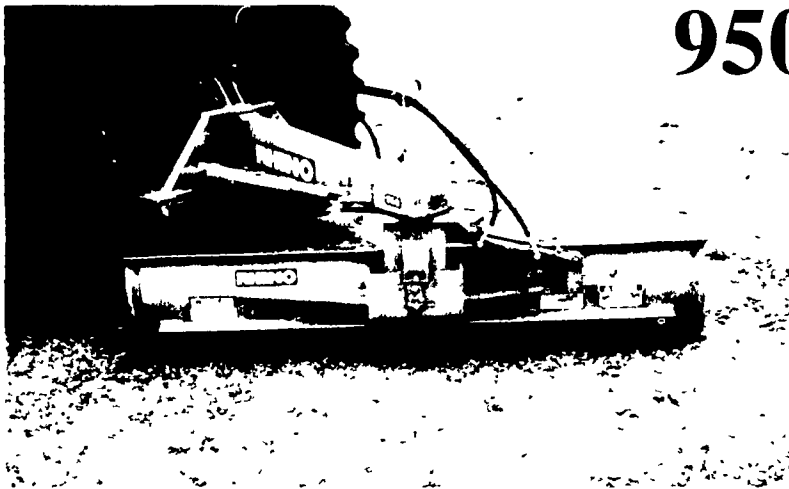
This is how the process works. An agricultural or livestock producer visits his or her NRCS, Conservation District, or FSA office

and files an application to be considered for the program. The producer meets with the NRCS representatives to discuss his/her natural resource concerns. The NRCS representatives offer alternative solutions based on the producer's willingness and ability to carry out the conservation plan. All applications will be rated and ranked by the local work group to ensure USDA will receive maximum environmental benefits for each dollar spent.

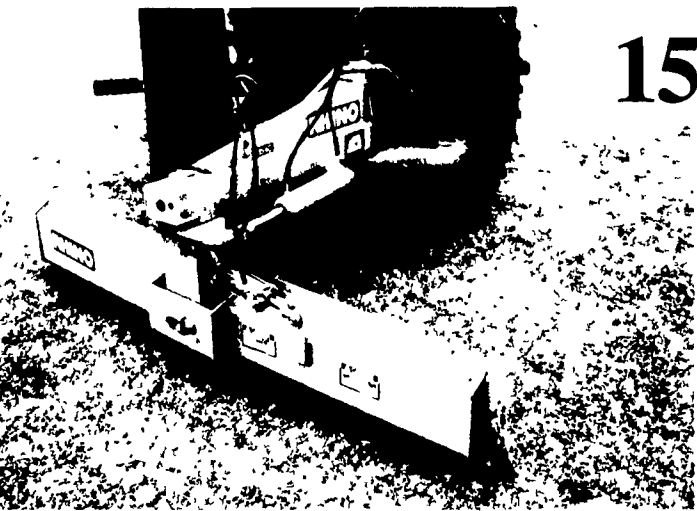
"USDA is using this process to ensure local people identify their own resource concerns," McCormack said. "However, at the same time, the department wants to ensure its financial and human resources are used to provide the maximum environmental benefits to the local residents."

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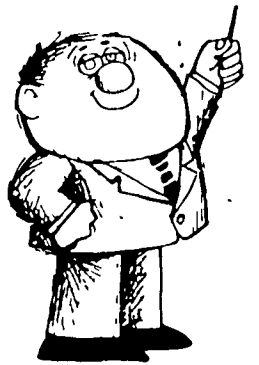


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