**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

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**Assistance Available to Orchardists through the**

**Air Quality Initiative**

February 15th, 2018 – Orchardists who are interested in chipping their tree prunings and slash piles are encouraged to apply for the Air Quality Initiative of the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/wa/programs/financial/eqip/) (EQIP).

Through this program, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps producers on private land to implement conservation practices that help ensure the sustainability of their entire operation.

Through the EQIP Air Quality Initiative, orchardists and other agricultural producers may earn payments for chipping tree limbs or entire blocks of trees that have been cut and piled and would otherwise be burned. This special initiative is designed to assist producers in compliance with air quality regulations, and reduce the impacts of particulate matters that burning creates to both rural and urban areas. In eligible counties, this initiative will provide eligible producers with program support to address serious air quality concerns from agricultural operations. The per acre payment awarded to successful applicants is designed to offset the costs of chipping materials and is paid out once the practice is successfully completed. Program participants must have an obligated contract in place and written approval prior to starting any practice if they wish to receive reimbursement.

While applications for EQIP are accepted year round, applications must be received by March 16, 2018 to be considered for the current funding period.

In order to be eligible, each applicant must establish themselves as a USDA customer in the Farm Service Agency (FSA) records system and complete all certifications required for eligibility prior to the application cut-off date.

Applicants who apply as entities must provide a DUNS number, be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) at [www.sam.gov,](http://www.sam.gov/) and maintain an active registration with current information prior to applying for funding and to remain eligible for payments under a funded contract.

Producers interested in EQIP are recommended to contact their [local USDA service center](https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs) or visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted.](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/features/?cid=stelprdb1193811)