With harvest wrapping up across the state the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reminds farmers and ranchers that now is the time to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Those interested in EQIP are encouraged to sign up before Dec. 21.

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program available to private landowners and operators. Through EQIP, farmers and ranchers may receive financial and technical help with conservation practices on agricultural land.

According to Craig Derickson, NRCS State Conservationist, there are several options available to producers under both programs.

“EQIP is one our most versatile programs. It offers cost share and technical assistance to apply conservation measures on cropland, rangeland, as well as for animal feeding operations and establishing or enhancing wildlife habitat. There are special initiatives to help conserve water in the Ogallala Aquifer, help producers conserve energy on the farm or ranch and provide assistance to convert to organic agriculture,” Derickson said.

EQIP has become the most widely applied conservation program in Nebraska with more than 7.7 million acres under contract. The goal of EQIP is to provide a financial incentive to encourage landowners to protect their natural resources, resulting in cleaner air, water and more wildlife habitat.

Individuals interested in entering into an EQIP agreement may file an application at any time, but the ranking of applications on hand to receive funding will begin Dec. 21.

Producers are encouraged to sign up soon since all funding for EQIP in Nebraska could potentially be obligated by March 1, 2013. The first step is to visit a local NRCS field office and complete an application.

For more than 75 years, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has helped agricultural producers with conservation plans. NRCS Conservationists will work with landowners on their farm or ranch to develop a conservation plan based on resource goals. Conservation planning assistance is free and does not require participation in financial programs.

For more information about EQIP and the other available conservation programs visit a local NRCS field office or www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.