



More Integrated Pest Management Please:

How USDA Could Deliver Greater Environmental Benefits From Farm Bill Conservation Programs

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Read the full report on the NRDC website at www.nrdc.org/health/pesticides/ipm/contents.asp.

Farmers need a way to manage the weeds and insects that threaten their crops, but chemical-intensive pest management often degrades the environment, breeds pest resistance, and creates increasing regulatory liabilities for producers. Integrated pest management, or IPM, can provide effective crop protection while these minimizing risks. But new NRDC research has found that the primary farm bill conservation program aimed at promoting on-farm stewardship practices is generally missing the opportunity to promote IPM, even in states where pesticide impacts are significant or widespread.

Missed Opportunities for Pest Management

The federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), operated by USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, currently allocates nearly \$800 million annually to reward agricultural producers who adopt on-farm stewardship practices to protect soil, water, air, plants, and animals (not including additional funding for technical assistance providers). Unfortunately, EQIP is missing critical opportunities to promote IPM.

NRDC research based on interviews, literature reviews, and data analysis, finds that:

- **Insufficient EQIP funding is allocated to support IPM, even in states with serious pesticide impacts.** From 2003 through 2005, an average of just 2.4 percent of EQIP funds nationally was granted to farmers to support safer pest management. In many states, including those in regions where pesticides are known to be degrading water quality or other resources, little or no funding is being allocated to promote IPM.

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■ **EQIP funding allocations for unspecified “pest management” practices do not ensure that funded practices will yield environmental benefits.** Only a few states offer sufficiently high and detailed incentive payments to support higher-performing, prevention-oriented IPM practices. In at least a few state EQIP programs, it appears that producers are receiving payments just to buy pesticides.

1. Implement IPM initiatives in priority regions. In regions where pesticide use results in widespread environmental impacts or regulatory liability for producers, NRCS should launch initiatives to promote IPM through new partnerships, retooling EQIP and other conservation programs, and benchmarking program performance.

2. Recognize the multiple benefits of IPM. NRCS should adequately rank IPM proposals in terms of their positive impact on multiple resources, including water, air, soil, habitat, and human safety.

3. Encourage increased environmental performance by establishing tiered payment rates for advanced IPM practices, including those for organic systems.

4. Improve the delivery of quality technical assistance by forging new partnerships to fill gaps in IPM expertise.

5. Increase reimbursement and performance expectations for technical service providers (TSPs), and provide TSPs with more training in integrated pest management.

6. Prioritize integrated stewardship practices. IPM practices will be most effective when integrated with other farming practices, including irrigation, nutrient management, crop rotation, tillage, and animal husbandry, among others.

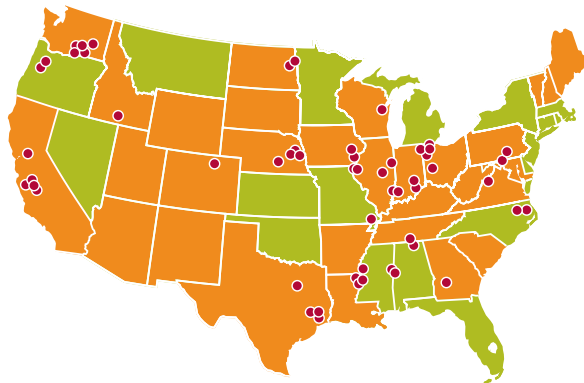
7. Elevate national leadership to promote IPM within NRCS and increase state and local staff training and expertise in NRCS offices.

8. Revise NRCS’ national IPM standard to clearly promote pest prevention, pesticide use reduction, biological approaches, and use of least hazardous pesticides.

9. Develop metrics for evaluating and monitoring IPM performance under Farm Bill conservation programs. A scoring system for pest management plans and their components along a continuum—from chemically intensive treatment methods to prevention-based, non-chemical or biologically integrated practices—would enable NRCS to more objectively rank EQIP proposals and, by aggregating scores, report on IPM performance over time and throughout regions.

States with the Lowest EQIP Allocations to Pest Management

- Less than 2% of EQIP funds allocated for pest management (2003-2005).
- Pesticide levels exceed one or more benchmarks for human health or aquatic life.



Source: U.S. Geological Survey.

Pesticides Exceed Levels of Concern in the Nation’s Waterways

In its most comprehensive survey of pesticides in the nation’s surface and groundwater released in 2006, USGS finds:

- Pesticides exceeded levels of concern for aquatic habitat in 57 percent of the streams monitored in agricultural areas.
- Nearly 10 percent had pesticides at levels exceeding benchmarks for human health.

Source: U.S. Geological Survey.

■ **Low prioritization in the EQIP ranking process, lack of clear IPM standards and guidelines, a bias favoring structural/engineered projects, and lack of technical assistance capacity at NRCS all conspire to reduce IPM allocations.**

■ **While the program as a whole is missing the opportunity to promote IPM, a few state EQIP programs have taken the initiative to launch innovative partnerships and substantially expand IPM allocations.** In a handful of states, NRCS and its partners are delivering high-quality technical assistance and training to growers in IPM and nutrient management.

Recommendations for Integrated Pest Management Success

NRDC research points to nine priority actions that could enhance growers’ pest management practices and better achieve EQIP’s goals for improved soil, water, air, and habitat.

