

## Sugar Maker Assistance Available from Vermont USDA NRCS

- The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service can assist agricultural producers, including sugar makers, with addressing energy conservation.
- This is through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - a voluntary program that offers financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers.
- Assistance is available to producers in two ways: 1) it enables the producer to identify ways to conserve energy through an Agricultural Energy Management Plan (AgEMP) conservation activity plan (CAP), also known as an on-farm energy audit, and 2) provides financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices recommended in the energy audit.
- Eligible producers interested in entering into a financial assistance agreement with NRCS for EQIP may file an application at their local USDA Service Center at any time. A list of Vermont locations is on the AgEMP fact sheet or at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=vt>
- A Technical Service Provider (TSP) will develop your Energy Management Plan (energy audit). A sugar maker must sign up with NRCS before this plan is written in order to receive an EQIP payment for the cost of the plan. See the AgEMP fact sheet for details on this process. Up to \$1900 is available from NRCS for the AgEMP, so the cost of the energy audit is often fully paid for. Payment for the audit is not dependant on the recommendations in it.
- The audit essentially looks at BTU's used for producing syrup in the previous year, regardless of fuel type, and determines the amount of BTU's to be saved by a new evaporator, a new or expanded RO, or steam recovery device (Steamaway, Piggy Back or Steam Pan).
- After the audit is complete, sugar makers can apply for financial assistance to implement recommended equipment upgrades. Assistance is not available for equipment that is not identified in the audit as a cost effective way to increase the energy efficiency of a maple sugaring operation. There is no obligation to implement what is identified in an audit.
- For FY2012 there are two pieces of equipment being offered for maple sugaring:
  - Reverse osmosis machine, at \$16 - \$23 per gal/hr rate from NRCS (e.g. for a 2000 gal/hr RO, NRCS payment would be \$32,000+)
  - Enhanced pre-heaters (Steamaway, Piggy Back or Steam Pan), at \$21-\$31 gal/hr rate from NRCS
- There may be payments available for additional items next year. Program funding, payment rates, and practices for which payments are available can vary from year. NRCS fully expects adequate funds will be available next year but nothing is guaranteed.

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- This program does not pay sugar makers who are starting an operation or expanding an existing one. It is designed to upgrade inefficient equipment to reduce the amount of BTU's needed to produce syrup from approximately the same number of taps as the previous year (on which the audit was based).
- If the audit is done this year the sugar maker can sign up for funding of equipment anytime after that audit, provided nothing major changes with their operation (i.e. they haven't done a major expansion, etc. that would make the audit results irrelevant).
- EQIP AgEMPs are available on a first come first serve basis while funds last.
- EQIP Energy Initiative practices have signup periods over the first six months of this year. The applications will be competitively ranked and successful applicants will receive financial assistance for their equipment upgrade.
- Equipment may not be purchased before notification that funding for implementation of recommendations in the AgEMP has been approved.
- There are 3 different signup deadlines for this initiative: February 3, March 30, and June 1, 2012. It may be possible to sign up by one deadline and get the AgEMP done in time to sign up for equipment upgrades by a future deadline. A producer can also sign up for funding in future years – it is not required that installation be done in 2012.
- This is not the same program as the USDA Rural Development (RD) Rural Energy for America Program which has a different requirements, application process and funding rates. You will need to contact RD directly about this opportunity.
- Vermont NRCS EQIP: <http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP/Index.html>
- EQIP Application: [ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/VT/Programs/EQIP/Blank\\_EQIP\\_CCC1200.pdf](ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/VT/Programs/EQIP/Blank_EQIP_CCC1200.pdf)

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