

## Funds help ‘equip’ local farmers, foresters to best care for their land



Are you already doing the right thing by and for your land, like clearing buckthorn, thinning red pine, or growing organic food? You may be eligible for funds to help plan, implement, and maintain these ongoing forms of good land stewardship.

The Dept. of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service has a program designed for landowners who need advice and financial help managing their land. The program is called “Environmental Quality Incentives Program” (EQIP), and in our area, EQIP can provide help for everything from growing vegetables under hoop houses to clearing buckthorn. The South St Louis SWCD is acting as liaison to field inquiries from interested landowners.

EQIP is a voluntary, cost-share program that provides financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. Payments under these contracts can be for up to 10 years. Beginning farmers and those of limited resources are among landowners eligible for increased cost-share payment rates.

The Duluth office of the NRCS sets priority practices for our area, to help in ranking applications. NRCS staff can design an EQIP plan for activities such as:

- Installing hoop houses, the plastic/PVC greenhouses used for growing tomatoes and other local produce in our northern climate;
- Removing terrestrial invasive species like buckthorn and garlic mustard;
- Thinning trees, such as red pine, for forest stand improvement;
- Fencing land and installing water systems for rotational grazing; and
- Creating grouse habitat.

A site visit and plan is completely free, with no obligation on your part to implement the plan. If you decide to apply for EQIP funds, NRCS staff will provide you with an implementation schedule and help calculate the \$1,000 in farm income needed for eligibility. (For example, feeding your family with produce from your garden can be quantified for eligibility.)

Additional funds are available under EQIP for developing a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) for your property. Similar to the DNR’s Forest Stewardship Plans, only more flexible and readily written, a CAP makes you eligible for forestry management tax incentives programs (Rural Preserve, Class 2c and SFIA).

To learn more about your potential eligibility for the EQIP conservation cost-share, please call Kate at the SWCD (218) 723-4946. Additional information is available through the links below: