



April 15, 2004

OKLAHOMA BULLETIN NO. OK300-4-4

SUBJECT: LTP – Field Office Implementation of Program Contracts System (ProTracts)

Purpose: To provide guidance in the implementation of ProTracts for administration of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) applications/contracts.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2004

Background - ProTracts is a web-enabled software application that NRCS will use beginning in fiscal year 2004 to manage conservation program applications and cost-share contracts for Farm Bill programs administered by NRCS. ProTracts currently provides functionality for EQIP and WHIP. Additional programs will be added later. Conservation practice planning and application that is entered into the ProTracts system will eventually have the capability to be harvested by the Performance Results System (PRS).

Major features of ProTracts include application tracking, production of filled application and contract forms (CCC-1200), automatic generation of applicant letters, practice certification, payment approval, and filled payment application forms (CCC-1245). The system provides for the distribution of allocations to counties/districts and local emphasis areas (LEA) that will be managed and maintained locally. ProTracts prevents over-obligation of program funds when applications are selected for funding, contracts are signed and obligated, payments are approved, and contracts are modified. The system accesses applicant/participant information from the Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS) and provides several methods to generate reports or lists that can be printed or exported for local manipulation. ProTracts supports the administrative agreements with the Farm Services Agency (FSA) for Farm Bill programs.

The ProTracts on-line system includes a Training Site that will be available during and after the initial training sessions to help develop experience and confidence as well as the Production Site for actual record entry. All Oklahoma NRCS employees with contract administration responsibilities are currently enrolled and have access to both sites. Field users should follow instructions in the ProTracts Help Menus and in the Help Topics available at the following link:

<http://www.itc.nrcs.usda.gov/Protracts/TrainingDocs/ProtractsAllHelp.zip>

Field users are to use the ProTracts Training Site to practice system processes and become proficient before accessing the Production Site and entering actual application/contract data. The Zone Program Liaisons are responsible for ProTracts support and training of field users. All questions concerning ProTracts should be forwarded through the program liaisons.

ProTracts Data Entry Requirements for EQIP

EQIP Applications - Immediately after obtaining the required training and establishing proficiency on the ProTracts Training Site, field office users will enter all active EQIP applications (approved

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and deferred) on the ProTracts Production Site for the appropriate funding year. For guidance in entering and managing applications, refer to *ProTracts Help Topics, Book 3, Applications*, for guidance on the following steps. All current and previous year's deferred evaluated applications will be entered into ProTracts before obligating FY 2004 contracts.

FY 2003 EQIP Applications – All applications that were developed into contracts in FY 2003 will be entered, approved, and marked as signed by the applicant in ProTracts to facilitate the administration of these contracts in ProTracts. All active, deferred FY 2003 applications will also be entered into ProTracts as a FY 2004 application maintaining the original application date. Field offices will be required to maintain the NRCS-LTP-3 for all FY 2003 and prior years' applications in the appropriate file.

FY 2004 EQIP Applications - All applications received beginning October 1, 2003, will be entered into ProTracts maintaining the original application date. Separate applications will be entered for each ranking pool/funding code. FSA will be provided a copy of all applications that were not referred by them for producer eligibility determination **no more than five (5) working days** after receipt of the application and **before** approving applications and obligating funds in ProTracts.

EQIP Contract Administration - Contract support documents will be developed in Customer Service Toolkit (CST) and the data will be uploaded into ProTracts to obligate the appropriate funding allocation. Refer to *Book 3, Applications, sub-topic – Upload a Toolkit Contract* for guidance in uploading contracts from Toolkit. All modifications/revisions and payments for contracts approved in FY2003 and FY2004 will be processed within ProTracts. For guidance in making payments and contract modifications, refer to *Book 4, Contracts*.

FY 2003 EQIP Contracts - Contracts funded in FY2003 will be uploaded from CST into ProTracts before completing any future status reviews or practice payments but no later than the end of the fiscal year. After uploading the contracts, administering DCs will provide the appropriate adjoining DC a list of contracts with starting and ending dates for contract obligation. Adjoining DCs will access these applications in ProTracts, obligate the contracts (refer to *Book 3, Applications, sub-topic – Sign and Obligate a Contract*), and notify the administering DC. In accordance with EQIP policy, the person obligating the contract will be unable to approve payments in ProTracts. Since these are already active contracts, no forms will need to be produced, nor signatures obtained.

FY 2004 EQIP Contracts - Contracts funded in FY2004 will be uploaded into ProTracts prior to the funding being obligated for the contract. The funding approval will be tracked in ProTracts. The current MOU designates FSA to develop the official copy of forms CCC-1200 (contract and appendix) and all CCC-1245s (payment applications). Application signatures obtained on any form other than the official FSA copy of the CCC-1200 must be attached and noted on the official copy. Forms AD-1155, AD-1156, and appropriate letters for notification will be developed and printed within the ProTracts system. When contracts are ready for obligation, the Designated Conservationist will notify an adjacent DC, with appropriate delegated authority. DC's with delegated authority will access the approved applications on-line and will obligate the funds for those contracts within ProTracts for the adjacent county. After obligating electronically, the official CCC-1200 produced by FSA including the applicant's signature(s), will be physically signed by a DC with appropriate delegated authority and a copy provided to FSA. Exception: For those offices that have already acquired producers' signatures in Item 10 on the ProTracts generated CCC-1200 as of this date, NRCS will sign and forward the CCC-1200 to FSA for entry into the System 36. The ProTracts generated CCC-1200 will be stapled to the System 36 generated 1200. The FSA System 36 will remain as the financial accounting and payment software for EQIP through fiscal year 2004.

EQIP Allocations – ProTracts provides the capability to allocate program funding for local obligation and management. *ProTracts Help Topics, Book 5, Fund Management*, provides guidance for local fund allocation and management.

To simplify data entry, FY 2003 ProTracts allocations in most locations are limited to one fund code, "EQIP General FA". With the exception of the following counties, all FY 2003 applications and contracts will be obligated to this fund code. Beaver, Cimarron, Harper, and Texas Counties will also have the fund code "Ground and Surface Water FA" in addition to the "EQIP General FA" fund code for appropriate applications.

Beginning in FY 2004, local funding allocations will be distributed and managed through ProTracts using the following funding accounts as appropriate:

- Base Allocation
- Local Emphasis Area(s)
- Statewide AFO/CAFO
- Statewide GSWC
- High Plains GSWC
- Tribal/Outreach
- Statewide Manure Transfer

Designated Conservationists will be able to establish local sub-accounts within the Base Allocation account (Example: Soil Resources, Grazinglands Resources, Water Resources, etc.) and Local Emphasis Area(s) account (Example: Cottonwood Canyon LEA, Eagle Chief Creek LEA, etc.) as needed to support locally defined resource concern ranking criteria and local emphasis areas.

Information and reports available through ProTracts will eliminate the need for maintaining the NRCS-LTP-3, ranking lists, and the funding spreadsheet for FY2004 and future years. However, field offices are required to maintain all previous years' NRCS-LTP-3s for EQIP in the appropriate file location. DCs (and only DCs) will need to continue to contact Kevin Norton, Assistant State Conservationist (Programs), in writing (email acceptable) for approval of local EQIP allocation adjustments before obligating these funds locally. The current forms for requesting corrections or adjustments to an approved application and contract modification funding request due to errors, omissions, appeals, or practice failures will be used and are available on-line at the following links:

<http://intranet.ok.nrcs.usda.gov/PGM/Forms%20For%20Download/EQIP%20Funding%20Form.pdf>

<http://intranet.ok.nrcs.usda.gov/PGM/Forms%20For%20Download/Error%20and%20Omission%20Form.pdf>

Offices requesting adjustments will be notified by return email when the appropriate re-allocation has been made. Additional guidance regarding EQIP allocations and program administration may be found in bulletin OK300-4-5.

ProTracts Data Entry Requirements for WHIP

WHIP Applications – A new form CCC-1200 has been developed for accepting FY 2004 WHIP program applications. Previously signed application forms (AD-1153s) are acceptable. Any applications accepted after the date of this bulletin will require the new form. After entry of the required application information in ProTracts, a completed CCC-1200 will be produced (refer to *Book 3, Application, sub-topic – Printing the Application*) and signed by the applicant. A blank CCC-1200 (WHIP) is also accessible on the ProTracts main menu under Forms. All current, unfunded, and otherwise viable applications, including those evaluated by ODWC, will be entered in both ProTracts and the on-line WHIP ranking tool at the following link:

<http://intranet.ok.nrcs.usda.gov/EQIP/Entry.htm>

This process will apply for all WHIP applications evaluated in FY 2004. Future selections will be made exclusively from applications entered in ProTracts.

WHIP Contract Administration – ProTracts Help Topic references for the various WHIP contract administration processes are the same as for EQIP.

Contracts Developed Prior to FY 2004 - No prior year WHIP contracts will be entered into ProTracts at this time. Continue to use form AD-1161 (Payment Application) for practice payment for all contracts developed prior to FY 2004 and forward all payments to the appropriate OA for processing. Contract modifications/revisions will be developed in CST until further notice. Contract administration review and processing procedures (by Zone OA) will continue as in prior years. No additional monies may be obligated until obtaining prior approval from the State Office.

FY 2004 Contracts - After notification of application approval (more specific instruction to be provided in a later bulletin) and receipt of an appropriate Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP) from ODWC, all FY 2004 WHIP contracts may be entered directly into ProTracts or developed in CST and uploaded into ProTracts to obligate the appropriate funding allocation. All modifications/revisions and payments for FY 2004 and later contracts will be processed within ProTracts. Forms CCC-1200 (contract), CCC-1245 (payment application, new for WHIP FY 2004), and AD-1156 (modification/revision), will be developed and printed within ProTracts. Prior approval is required from the ASTC (Programs) before obligating a contract for more than the original requested amount or for any modification of an existing contract requiring an increase from the original contracted amount. A written request from the DC only (email acceptable) outlining the reason for the modification and the actual amount needed will be required. The requesting field office will be notified by email when the re-allocation has been made and is available in ProTracts for obligation.

WHIP Allocations – For FY 2004, contracts will be funded from a statewide application ranking list and allocations for successful applicants will be issued accordingly to the appropriate field office in ProTracts. Like EQIP, information and reports available through ProTracts will also eliminate the need for maintaining the NRCS-LTP-3 for FY 2004 WHIP applications. However, field offices are required to maintain all previous years' NRCS-LTP-3s for WHIP in the appropriate file location. Additional guidance regarding WHIP program administration may be obtained from bulletins OK300-4-1 and OK300-4-6.

Letters to EQIP and WHIP Applicants

Letter templates are available in ProTracts (refer to *Book 3, Applications, sub-topic – Manage Letters*) to notify deferred, cancelled, approved, or disapproved applicants of their application status. Letters to all applicants will be sent after funding decisions have been made for both programs and when no other funding re-allocations are expected.

The transition to ProTracts will require significant effort and understanding on the part of all users. Questions concerning the use of ProTracts and this instruction may be forwarded to the appropriate Zone Program Liaison or Lanny Miller, Resource Conservationist, Programs Staff.

/s/

M. DARREL DOMINICK
State Conservationist