Engineering Support for USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for Feedyard Dust Control

Brent W. Auvermann, Texas AgriLife Research-Amarillo

BACKGROUND

Historically, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds have been reserved for use strictly by farmers, ranchers and small animal-feeding operations. In 2003, for the first time in the program’s history, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Texas designated a portion of EQIP funds for use by larger, concentrated animal-feeding operations (CAFOs) to deal with the unique environmental challenges that these large-scale operations face. The first area of emphasis for Texas’ CAFO program under EQIP was “atmospheric resource quality management,” or ARQM, focusing exclusively on dust control from open-lot feedyards.

In the program’s first year, 2003, the ARQM program provided up to 50 percent cost sharing for the design and installation of solid-set sprinkler systems. In 2004, NRCS added an incentive program that helped feedyards underwrite the cost of one or two additional manure-harvesting operations per year once the feedyard had conducted the first manure-harvesting operation of the year.

RESULTS / BENEFITS

• Agricultural engineers at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Amarillo played a key role in developing the technical standards, the selection criteria and the scoring system to implement the ARQM program in Texas.

• As of October 2005, 34 feedyards have successfully competed for EQIP-ARQM contracts totaling $5,053,897. Of those contracts, 21 were manure-harvesting incentive payments and 13 were solid-set sprinkler systems.

• The EQIP-ARQM program in Texas is slated to continue through 2007.