

# EQIP Organic Initiative

April 2011



ABOUT NRCS	ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)
<p>The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works to protect and conserve natural resources on our nation's private lands.</p> <p>A part of the United States Department of Agriculture, NRCS administers conservation programs funded primarily through the 2008 Farm Bill.</p>	<p>Agricultural producers who are certified organic and those who are transitioning to organic production are eligible to apply to EQIP. This includes producers who fall under the exception category in the National Organic Program (NOP) regulation: those producers whose gross agricultural income from organic sales totals \$5,000 or less annually, but who still comply with the applicable organic production handling and labeling requirements mandated for certified organic producers.</p> <p>Through this special EQIP Organic Initiative, NRCS provided \$50 million for organic producers in 2011. Participants are limited to \$20,000 in payments per year and \$80,000 in six years. This is why practices such as manure storage are not offered through this initiative. If a transitioning or certified organic producer needs a manure storage practice, they should apply under the VT EQIP structural pool.</p>
CONTACT NRCS	WHY DOES NRCS OFFER THE EQIP ORGANIC INITIATIVE?
<p><b>Vermont USDA Service Centers:</b></p> <p>Berlin: 802-828-4493                  Brattleboro: 802-254-9766                  Middlebury: 802-388-6748                  Morrisville: 802-888-4935                  Newport: 802-334-6090                  Rutland: 802-775-8034                  St. Albans: 802-527-1296                  St. Johnsbury: 802-748-2641                  White River Jct.: 802-295-7942                  Williston: 802-865-7895</p>	<p>The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) to provide a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.</p> <p>In addition, the 2008 Farm Bill included provisions for use of EQIP to provide opportunities for organic growers as well as requirements related to adherence to National Organic Program (NOP) requirements and new program payment limitations.</p>
	<p><i>Helping People Help the Land</i></p>
<p><a href="http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP/OI">www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP/OI</a></p>	

## ELIGIBLE PRACTICES OFFERED THROUGH THE ORGANIC INITIATIVE

- Irrigation Practices
- Grazing Practices
- Buffers
- Forest Trails & Landings
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Cropland Practices

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Northeast Organic Farming Association Vermont: <http://nofavt.org/>
- USDA National Organic Program: [www.ams.usda.gov](http://www.ams.usda.gov)
- ATTRA—National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP helps promote farm and forest production by enhancing the environmental quality of soil, water, air, plants and animals.

## WHO CAN APPLY?

- Farmers (including sugarcorn operators) who produce or sell an annual minimum of \$1,000 of agricultural products may apply.
- Farmers who own or manage certified organic operations or operations that are transitioning to certified organic may apply.

### **Certified organic farmers need to:**

- ⇒ Submit a copy of their current organic system plan (OSP) when they apply.
- ⇒ Maintain their organic certification for the entire length of their EQIP contract.
- ⇒ Exempt producers also need to provide documentation that they sell less than \$5,000 in organic products annually.

### **Transitioning organic farmers need to:**

- ⇒ Begin or be in the process of transitioning to a certified organic operation. This requirement also applies to producers earning less than \$5,000 annually in agricultural sales.
- ⇒ Provide contact information of the producer's accredited certifying agent.
- There is no minimum acreage requirement to apply for EQIP, however, projects that address significant resource concerns are more likely to receive funding.
- Beginning, socially disadvantaged and limited-resource farmers may be eligible for higher payment rates.

## HOW DO I APPLY?

- Contact your local USDA Service Center to speak to one of our conservation professionals to begin the program application process
- Information and application forms are available on our website. You will need to file several forms to ensure that you are eligible for federal programs, including but not limited to:
  - CCC-1200: Conservation Program Application
  - CCC-926: Adjusted Gross Income Certification
  - AD-1026: Highly Erodible Land & Wetland Conservation Certification

## WHEN SHOULD I APPLY?

- Applications may be submitted anytime. All applications will be evaluated periodically in a competitive ranking process as funding becomes available. Ranking Criteria for each program is available on our website.

[www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP/OI](http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP/OI)

**Helping People Help the Land**