

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

ORGANIC INITIATIVE

2010 South Carolina Fact Sheet



The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program for individuals engaged in livestock, forestry or agricultural production, including **organic production**. EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices on eligible agricultural land.

2010 Organic Initiative

SC Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices will accept applications for financial assistance under a special Organic Initiative sign-up that ends **March 12, 2010**. National Organic Program (NOP) certified organic producers, as well as producers in the process of transitioning to organic production, are eligible to apply.

Under this initiative, a producer's conservation goals may include transitioning to organic agriculture, aiding pollinator populations, increasing biodiversity including soil-borne organisms, controlling invasive species, enhancing water quality or other resource-enhancing goal. Practices that are linked to one of these resource concerns may be eligible for a conservation payment.



Farmers who want to apply for financial assistance may receive up to \$20,000/year and are limited to \$80,000

over a six-year period. Payments are not authorized for activities or practice components which are solely production related and are not linked to an identified resource concern. Payments may not be used for any costs related to organic certification.

Producers must meet basic [program eligibility guidelines](#) to be eligible to apply.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for EQIP and this special funding, the applicant must:

- a) Have an interest in an agricultural operation that produced at least \$1,000 in agricultural products in 2 of the last 5 years or has IRS Schedule F form showing profit or loss from a farm operation
- b) Own or have control of the land (by lease or rental agreement) for the length of contract
- c) Be an individual, entity or joint operation
- d) Be registered in the USDA Service Center Information Database (SCIMS)
- e) Be certified as organic according to the National Organic Program OR be in the process of transitioning to organic production

Farms under \$5,000 in revenue per year

Current USDA organic certification rules do not require producers who sell less than \$5,000 a year to have an annual Organic System Plan (OSP). However, if they elect to pursue organic certification and use this Organic Initiative to assist in their transition to organic certification, they will be required to implement conservation practices that are consistent with an OSP the same as those who are already certified.



What is an Organic System Plan?

An Organic System Plan is a written management plan that covers all components of an organic production and handling system. Such a plan must be developed annually and must include:

1. A description of practices and procedures to be performed and maintained;
2. A list of each substance to be used in production or handling, indicating its composition, source, location(s) where it will be used, and documentation of commercial availability;

3. A description of the monitoring practices and procedures to be performed and maintained, including their frequency;
4. A description of the record keeping system implemented to comply with established requirements;
5. A description of the management practices and physical barriers established to prevent co-mingling of organic and non-organic products on a split operation and to prevent contact of organic production and handling operations and products with prohibited substances; and
6. Additional information deemed necessary by the certifying agent (CA) to evaluate compliance with the regulations.
7. Clemson University Department of Plant Industry is a USDA approved Accredited Certifying Agent. This accreditation allows DPI (Department of Plant Industry) to certify organic operations.
8. In order to obtain an OSP, South Carolina growers should contact Kyle Stephens, Clemson University DPI, at (864) 646-2140, or email rstphns@clemson.edu.
9. Additional information on organic farming, certification, and products intended for use in certified organic production, handling, and processing are available at www.clemson.edu/public/regulatory/plant_industry/organic_certification/index.html and the Organic Materials Review Institute at www.omri.org.

The OSP is administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>).

What is the Contract Period?



EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practice and a maximum term of ten years. Contracts provide pre-determined program payments to the producer for the

implementation of the planned practices according to a schedule developed with the producer.

The schedule lists the conservation practice extent (amount), date to be installed, and payment. Practices are subject to NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions. Deviation from the contract schedule is considered a contract violation unless approved in advance.

Applications for the Organic Initiative

Producers can apply for assistance in 2010 under the EQIP Organic Initiative program at any time until the **March 12, 2010, deadline**. Applications received after this deadline will be held for 2011 funding consideration.

Applicants must have or be willing to develop an OSP on their land.

- If already certified as organic, bring a copy of your Organic System Plan for review.
- If transitioning to organic, submit a self-certification letter to NRCS stating your intent to develop an OSP. The NRCS can provide a template for self-certification if needed.

NRCS conservationists will work with you to develop a conservation plan based on your organic system plan and farm goals. The plan will specify a timeline to implement the conservation practices identified in the OSP. Conservation planning assistance is *free* and does not require participation in cost-share programs.



What are the Payment Rates and Terms?

Program payment rates in South Carolina are calculated at between 45 and 75% of the typical cost of implementing the practice, as determined by the resource concern being addressed. If the applicant is a beginning farmer, socially disadvantaged or limited resource producer, the rates are 25% higher, up to a maximum of 90%. Payments are made after conservation practices are implemented to the standards agreed to in advance.

Grazing and animal waste control practices will be planned only for the livestock that have been housed or grazed on land under the operator's control for at least 12 of the previous 36 months, with an allowance for normal variations in animal numbers. The contract holder may increase the size or extent of a contracted practice at their own expense. Waivers can be requested in writing to the State Conservationist.

For more detailed information about organic production and conservation practices eligible for cost-share, contact your local [SC USDA Service Center](#) or [SC NRCS Agronomist Tibor Horvath](#) at (803) 253-3893, or email tibor.horvath@sc.usda.gov.