

Organic Initiative At A Glance



Organic farming positively impacts our environment and is one of the fastest growing segments of U.S. agriculture. Many organic farming techniques help to improve soil and water quality. Native pollinators, beneficial insects that attack plant pests, and wildlife also benefit from organic systems.

Virginia has received more than \$700,000.00 in 2011 to assist USDA Certified Organic producers and those wishing to transition to organic production in addressing their soil, water, and plant resource concerns.

Assistance Available

The Organic Initiative is part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS is offering more than 40 conservation practices in 2010 to protect water quality, improve soil quality, and enhance plant health. This year, we are emphasizing:

- Establishing Perennials in Your Rotation
- Increasing the Use of Cover Crops
- Implementing No-Till and Strip-Till Methods
- Installing Field Borders and Wildflower Planting
- Establishing Trees and Shrubs

Farmer applications will be ranked in two separate categories or pools, one for transitioning farmers and one for certified organic farmers. (Organic producers may also apply for assistance under general EQIP.) Ranking criteria has been established based on resource concerns that link to National Organic Program (NOP) objectives.



Barley and crimson clover in Rockingham County

Who can apply?



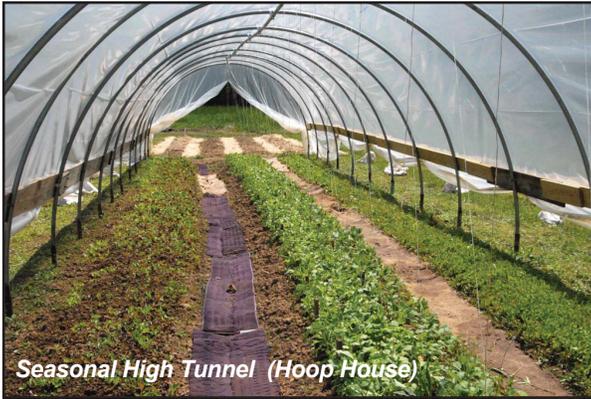
Organic vegetable crop

- Farmers who produce or sell an annual minimum of \$1,000 of agricultural products
- Farmers who own or manage certified organic operations or operations transitioning to certified organic

Certified organic farmers need to submit a copy of their current organic system plan (OSP) and maintain their organic certification for their entire EQIP contract.

Transitioning organic farmers need to:

- begin or be in the process of transitioning to a certified organic operation.
- submit a self-certification letter stating they agree to develop and implement an organic system plan. (A template is available online.)
- be working with an organic certifying agency.



There is no minimum acreage requirement to apply for EQIP. However, projects addressing significant resource concerns are more likely to receive funding. Beginning, socially disadvantaged and limited-resource farmers may be eligible for higher payment rates.

Eligibility and Sign Up

Contact your local USDA Service Center to speak to one of our conservation professionals. Information and application forms to begin the program application process are available at your local NRCS office.

You will need to file several eligibility forms at the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to ensure that you are eligible for federal programs. These offices are usually co-located with NRCS.

When you visit your local NRCS Service Center, you will need lease agreements or proof you control the land you wish to enroll. If you are already USDA Certified Organic, bring copies of your certification and Organic System Plan.

Application Deadlines

Program sign-up is continuous, so applications may be submitted any time. They will be evaluated periodically in a competitive ranking process as funding becomes available. The second evaluation cutoff is May 20, 2011.

Call the NRCS field office at your local USDA Service Center or visit us online at www.va.nrcs.usda.gov for more information.

To find your local office, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/.

Helpful Resources

- **Baystate Organic Certifiers**
www.baystateorganic.org
- **USDA National Organic Program**
www.ams.usda.gov
- **National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service**
www.attra.ncat.org
- **Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**
www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/organic.shtml
- **Southern Sustainable Agricultural Working Group**
www.ssawg.org



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