

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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USDA Announces Ranking Dates for Three Major Conservation Initiatives

ST PAUL, MN, Jan. 19, 2012 – USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Don Baloun today announced the ranking dates for the On-Farm Energy, Organic and Seasonal High Tunnel conservation initiatives. These three Initiatives offer technical and financial assistance through the NRCS’ Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

“Producers tell us they want to apply for these initiatives, but many want more time to make sure they choose the one that’s right for their operation,” Baloun said. Moving to multiple ranking dates for each initiative is going to make it easier for more producers to apply and help them get started with implementing the practices they need to benefit the natural resources on their farming operation.”

NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year. There will be three ranking periods for the Organic, On-Farm Energy and Seasonal High Tunnel initiatives, all ending on February 3, March 30 and June 1, 2012. At the end of the ranking period NRCS ranks all submitted proposals for funding consideration. NRCS will notify all applicants of the results of the rankings and begin developing contracts with selected applicants.

Initiative Overviews

On-Farm energy Initiative: NRCS and producers develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. NRCS then uses audit data to develop energy conservation recommendations. Each AgEMP has a landscape component that assesses equipment and farming processes and a farm headquarters component that assesses power usage

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and efficiencies in livestock buildings, grain handling operations, and similar facilities to support the farming operation.

Organic Initiative: NRCS helps certified organic growers and producers working to achieve organic certification production. Now for fiscal year 2012, applicants will be evaluated continuously during the ranking periods. Applications meeting or exceeding a threshold score may be approved for an EQIP contract before the end of the ranking period. Applications ranking below the threshold score will be deferred to the next period. A new threshold score will be established at the beginning of each ranking period. This new scoring process allows organic producers to implement conservation practices in a timelier manner.

Seasonal High Tunnel Pilot Initiative: NRCS helps producers plan and implement high tunnels, steel-framed, polyethylene covered structures that extend growing seasons in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment, and better air quality due to fewer vehicles being needed to transport crops.

1. Visit the [Minnesota NRCS Website](#) for more information.

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