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USDA ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR SEVERAL NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION INITIATIVES.

Initiatives target organic agriculture, energy conservation and water quality.

LINCOLN, January 27, 2012 – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is currently accepting applications for several special initiatives promoting organic agriculture, energy conservation, and water quality and quantity measures.

Applications are accepted anytime at local NRCS offices but interested participants are encouraged to apply soon. The first cutoff date for ranking applications is Feb. 3, 2012, but additional ranking periods will be available throughout winter and spring. Interested applicants will have until June 1, 2012, to apply for financial and technical assistance through these special initiatives, but are encouraged to apply well in advance of the final cut off date to ensure funding availability.

These special initiatives are available through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.

Funding is currently available for the following special initiatives:

On-Farm Energy Initiative:

The On-Farm Energy Initiative offers assistance to producers in two ways: 1) it enables the producer to identify ways to conserve energy on the farm through an on-farm energy audit, and 2) provides financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices recommended in the energy audit, such as residue and tillage management, and Farmstead Energy Improvement.

Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative:

The Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative helps producers plan and implement high tunnels, which are steel-framed, polyethylene-covered structures that extend growing seasons. High Tunnels can help producers improve plant and soil quality, reduce nutrient and pesticide transportation, and reduce energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce.

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Organic Initiative:

The Organic Initiative provides financial and technical assistance to help organic growers implement approved conservation practices that address significant natural resource concerns, and assists growers transitioning to organic production with developing and implementing conservation plans.

Ogallala Aquifer Initiative:

Funding through this initiative will provide technical and financial assistance to producers to install conservation practices that help conserve water and protect water quality within priority areas located in the Ogallala Aquifer. A map of the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative priority areas is located at www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program Initiative (AWEP)

AWEP is a voluntary conservation initiative that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land to conserve surface and ground water and improve water quality within AWEP project areas. A map of the AWEP project areas is available at www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

For more information about these special initiatives please visit your local NRCS field office or www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

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