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December 16, 2011

## **KANSAS BULLETIN NO. KS300-12-16**

### **SUBJECT: LTP–Environmental Quality Incentives Program–Fiscal Year 2012 Organic Initiative**

**Action required by:** February 6, 2012 (Field Office [FO])  
April 2, 2012 (FO)  
June 4, 20 (FO)  
June 18, 2012 (Area Offices [AOs])  
February 8, 2012 (State Office [SO])  
April 4, 2012 (SO)  
June 6, 2012 (SO)

**Purpose.** To provide guidance for administering the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative

**Expiration Date.** September 30, 2013

#### **Background**

EQIP Organic Initiative (OI) funds can only be used to address organic-related EQIP approved applications. For the FY 2012 EQIP OI, national headquarters (NHQ) will be allocating an initial allowance to all states to be used to obligate funds for approved applications that equal or exceed the initial threshold score established by NHQ for the first application period.

- FOs will accept applications on a continuous basis.
- Eligible applications must be ranked in the Programs Contracts System (ProTracts) Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool (AERT).
- NHQ will establish a threshold ranking score for each application period. EQIP eligible applicant ranking scores that meet or exceed the threshold score may be approved for funding and an approved application obligated prior to the end of each application period.

(more)

DIST: A, F, S, C. Nelson

## **Organic Certification Requirements**

- Certified organic producers must provide the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with a copy of their Organic System Plan (OSP) and Organic Certification must be maintained for the life of the contract (see Attachment A).
- Transitioning-to-organic producers will provide the NRCS the contact information of the applicant's U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) accredited organic certifying agent and must self-certify that they agree to develop and implement an OSP before an EQIP application can be approved for funding (see Attachment A).
- Exempt organic producers are eligible for the EQIP and should be ranked with certified organic producers provided that they self-certify and they agree to develop and implement an OSP (see Attachment A). Producers that sell agricultural products as "organic" but whose gross agricultural income from organic sales totals \$5,000 or less are exempt from certification.
- Additional information about the National Organic Program (NOP) and organic certification requirements administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) can be found at [www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop).

## **Application Ranking**

A list of eligible conservation practices and Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) is attached (Attachment B).

**NOTE:** The ProTracts application type of "planning" must be associated with each CAP application. CAP applications will not be ranked. CAPs may be pre-approved, if funds are available, after all eligibility requirements are met. CAPs are completed by Technical Service Providers, not the NRCS.

Refer to Attachment C, which provides the OI state and local ranking criteria.

**NOTE:** National ranking criteria are consistent for all EQIP applications.

The eligible land uses and resource concerns are shown in Attachment D.

## **Practice Clarification**

As in previous years, the maximum eligibility extent for Conservation Practice (CP) 798, Seasonal High Tunnel, payment shall be 2,178 square feet (sq. ft.) per **agricultural operation**. This may be single or multiple structures for a maximum of 2,178 sq. ft. coverage. Title 440–Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 502, Section 502.0, defines an agricultural operation as “. . . a parcel or parcels of land whether contiguous or noncontiguous, constituting a cohesive management unit for agricultural purposes.”

**NOTE:** When participants with cropped land sign up for Irrigation System, Micro-Irrigation and do not have the required Division of Water Resources (DWR) reports or Farm Service Agency (FSA) records verifying that they have met the two out of the last five years irrigation requirement, they will need to provide the field office with adequate documentation of irrigation history. The supervisory district conservation (SDC) or district conservationist (DC) will use his/her best professional judgment and document their decision in the case file.

### **Application Ranking Periods**

Although EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis, the NRCS leadership has established the following ranking periods for the OI this FY:

- Period 1: From program announcement to February 3, 2012, only eligible applications that score equal to or greater than the established threshold score may be approved for funding within the first period but no later than February 8, 2012. **Applications received will have rankings completed immediately, but no later than close of business (COB) February 6, 2012, for ranking Period 1.** Subject to available funds, all eligible applications below the threshold score from Period 1 will be considered for funding during the second application period.
- Period 2: NHQ will establish a new threshold score for Period 2. From program announcement to March 30, 2012, all new or unfunded eligible applications that score equal to or greater than the new threshold score may be considered for funding within the second period but no later than April 4, 2012. **Applications received will have rankings completed immediately, but no later than COB April 2, 2012, for ranking Period 2.** Subject to available funds, all eligible applications below the threshold score from Period 1 and 2 will be considered for funding during the third application period.
- Period 3: NHQ will establish a new threshold for Period 3. From program announcement to June 1, 2012, all new or unfunded eligible applications that score equal to or greater than the threshold score will be considered for funding based on the new threshold score and availability of funds and but no later than June 6, 2012. **Applications received will have rankings completed immediately, but no later than COB June 4, 2012, for ranking Period 3.** Any eligible unfunded applications remaining after this period will be processed as per Title 440-CPM, Part 512, Section 512.27, Servicing Unfunded Applications.

**Obligation Deadline:**

All OI approved applications must be obligated by June 18, 2012.

**Contact:** Please forward questions through established channels, to Corey L. Nelson, Resource Conservationist, at [corey.nelson@ks.usda.gov](mailto:corey.nelson@ks.usda.gov) or call (785)823-4580

*(Signed)*

ERIC B. BANKS  
State Conservationist

Attachments