

# Conservation SHOWCASE



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## NRCS

Natural Resources  
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## NRCS Assists Small Farmer Transition to Organic Production

KINGS VALLEY, Ore. – Back in 2008, with a little assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Goodfoot Farm, a 10-acre organic farm nestled along the banks of the Luckiamute River in Kings Valley, Ore., was about to experience improvements not seen in years.

“It was about the same time we were pursuing certification to use the organic label that I first heard about the NRCS Organic Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP),” said farm owner Beth Hoinacki during a summer 2011 interview on her farm located northwest of

Corvallis. “I initially had some concern about signing-on with ‘big government,’ but after I met my NRCS District Conservationist, Tom Snyder – it was a no-brainer and I signed-up.”

Tom is one of about 34 NRCS district conservationists (DCs) that live and work in communities across Oregon. Every county in the state has an assigned DC who works closely with private landowners and managers and other partner organizations to conserve soil, water, and other natural resources. Through financial and technical assistance programs, DCs can help agricultural producers implement a wide variety of conservation practices to improve the environment and agricultural production. Tom is based out of the Tangent USDA Service Center and responsible for Benton County.

“Organic EQIP is more than just a financial incentive to implement conservation practices – it is definitely an ‘incentive,’ as the program is so aptly named; but with it comes a valuable

**ABOVE:** Beth Hoinacki looks over her orchard, chickens and geese.



**Two curly-feathered Seastopol and two American Lavender geese help control grass and weeds**



informational resource,” said Beth. “It is much more than a contract with the government for financial assistance. It is a personal relationship with a person who can provide a lot of assistance and enough flexibility in the contract to help us meet our personal conservation goals on our land.”



**Livestock flourish on Goodfoot Farm thanks to the biodynamic agricultural method of farming . Four geese and over two dozen chickens help clean up any remaining fruit after harvest which may harbor pests and pathogens harmful to livestock.**

Beth and her husband Adam Ryan purchased their farm in 1999. Though initially centered on blueberries, Beth and Adam envisioned a diversified farm growing perennial and annual crops while also providing areas for wildlife stewardship. Since 2005, Goodfoot Farm marketed blueberries under an exempt category of organic products. This meant their annual sales were below \$5,000 and their operation didn’t have to be certified by a USDA accredited certifying agent; however, they still had to adhere to organic production and handling requirements. Fortunately, about the time their sales approached the exempt-sales threshold, NRCS announced the new EQIP Organic Initiative.

“The reason we applied is EQIP fit with our farm objectives as we were expanding and starting our

certified organic operation,” said Beth. “EQIP addresses both production and stewardship aspects of farming. It helped us start projects critical to soil and water quality that we probably would have not otherwise been able to get to. There are so many things to do on the farm; the financial incentive helped get them started and the contract helps keep them a priority to get them done.”

“EQIP addresses both production and stewardship aspects of farming.”

—Beth Hoinacki

Through EQIP, NRCS can assist landowners in meeting their conservation goals on an accelerated schedule. Something that a farmer may be hoping to accomplish in the next 10 years may suddenly be achievable within two.

conservation practices on their farm. These include establishing a grass waterway and grade stabilization structure for erosion control; planting a hedgerow for pollinator habitat; implementing a nutrient management plan to protect water quality; and developing a crop rotation and cover crop regimen to improve soil quality (see side bar).

By doing the work themselves and with the financial and technical assistance provided through the EQIP Organic Initiative, Beth and Adam have implemented a number of

“Going organic has never been a question for us,” said Beth. “But recently we’ve gotten very

**A nearly-completed culvert in Beth Hoinacki’s NRCS -engineered grass waterway**



interested in biodynamic agriculture. It's a more holistic approach to agricultural production that looks at the farm as a system as a whole. Organic looks at a crop or a field and is more focused on allowed off-farm inputs whereas the biodynamic approach is more about a plan and purpose for a farm or piece of land to realize its potential as a natural, self-sustaining system.”

One example Beth gave was the fact that organic farming does allow certain organically-approved pesticides to be applied. Even though these pesticides are allowed within organic regulations, they may still be harmful to fish and beneficial insects. In addition, these products must be imported from off the farm.

“The biodynamic method has really influenced my thinking in designing the farm,” said Beth.

“And EQIP allows me the flexibility to pursue this goal by supporting planting beneficial habitats and developing a natural ecosystem within the production system. The goal is for this natural system to reduce the need for pest and fertility products to be imported from off the farm.”

“I really encourage any organic grower to go meet their DC,” said Beth. “Talk with him or her about what you want to do. If you have a good feel for it – go for it. It’s a win-win for sure.”

To learn more about Beth and Adam’s Goodfoot Farm, go to their web site at

<http://www.goodfootfarm.com/>.

To learn more about program opportunities with NRCS, go to [www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/](http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/).

**Rows of certified organic potatoes in flower on Goodfoot Farm**

