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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NRCS offers help for local organic farmers

Next application cut-off date is March 30

AMHERST, Mass. (March 9, 2012) – USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Massachusetts State Conservationist Christine Clarke reminds local organic farmers and those transitioning to organic production practices to contact their local NRCS office soon to find out if they are eligible for the agency's Organic Initiative.

March 30, 2012 is the cut-off date for applications to be considered in the second ranking period of 2012, although applications are always accepted on a continuous basis.

Farmers interested in applying for EQIP Organic Initiative funding must submit applications through their local NRCS Service Center, which can be found at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov>. Learn more about the Organic Initiative at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/organic and find out about other NRCS initiatives and programs at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

"We hear from many Massachusetts organic growers who are looking for help implementing conservation practices," Clarke said. "The Organic Initiative allows local farmers to get help protecting the natural resources on their land and creating conditions that foster organic production."

Statewide, NRCS currently has \$132,000 in financial assistance available to Massachusetts certified organic producers, those who want to make the transition to organic production and producers who sell less than \$5,000 in organic products annually.

Part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Organic Initiative offers a wide array of conservation practices specifically designed for organic production. The top six Organic Initiative conservation practices are cover crops, nutrient management, integrated pest management, seasonal high tunnels, crop rotation, and fencing.

"These practices will help the selected applicants meet many requirements of their USDA Organic System Plans and stay in compliance with USDA's National Organic Program," Clarke said.

Changes for 2012 include three ranking periods for current and transitioning producers; a threshold ranking score that can speed up approval for qualified applicants; required conservation practices that promote the consistent use of those practices; and an expanded list of conservation activity plans.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that helps people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. NRCS has seven Massachusetts field offices in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham, which work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS:

If you would like to include local contact information for your readers, please cite the office below that serves your area. If you have any questions, please call the public affairs contact above or your local office below.

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