



Massachusetts State Office

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA ANNOUNCES SIGN-UP FOR ORGANIC INITIATIVE Massachusetts farmers should sign-up by March 12th

AMHERST, Mass. (January 15, 2010) — Massachusetts organic farmers and those in transition to organic production may sign-up now for technical and financial assistance under the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). While sign-up is continuous throughout the year, **farmers are encouraged to apply by March 12th** in order for their applications to be reviewed and ranked for currently available funds.

Under the Organic Initiative, participants will receive help implementing a variety of conservation practices, including crop rotation, cover crops, nutrient management, pest management, prescribed grazing, forage harvest management, composting, water diversions and waterways, strip cropping, livestock watering facilities, fencing, and pollinator habitat. High tunnels - also known as hoop houses – are also included to help farmers increase the availability of locally grown produce in a conservation-friendly way.

Farmers should contact their local USDA Service Center to determine eligibility. USDA service center locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture. General program information is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

The EQIP Organic Initiative is a nationwide special initiative to provide financial assistance to National Organic Program (NOP) certified organic producers as well as producers in the process of transitioning to organic production. Those applying for this special funding will be competing only among other organic/transitioning farmers. The objective of this initiative is to make EQIP assistance more available, appropriate and accessible to organic food producers. Initiative rules limit the amount of funding a participant may receive to \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 over six years.

“The EQIP Organic Initiative is designed to meet the Administration's promise to encourage more organic agriculture production,” said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts.

EQIP is a voluntary program that helps farmers and forest landowners address water quality, water conservation, invasive species control, soil quality, erosion control, nutrient and pest management, residue management, irrigation efficiency, energy conservation, air quality and other natural resource concerns.

NRCS offices in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: If you would like to include local contact information, please use the office below that serves your area.

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