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# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Massachusetts farmers and forest land owners encouraged to apply for federal conservation assistance**

AMHERST, Mass. (March 17, 2011) — Massachusetts farmers and forest land owners who would like to address soil and water conservation concerns on their land are encouraged to apply by **April 15, 2011** for financial and technical help through the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

While EQIP sign-up is continuous throughout the year, land owners are encouraged to apply now in order for their applications to be reviewed and ranked for possible funding should additional monies become available for Massachusetts projects.

Call or visit a local USDA service center to schedule a time to complete paperwork and begin the conservation planning process. 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](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov).

EQIP is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and forest land owners who want to enhance and protect soil, water, air, plants and animal resource concerns. Common conservation practices address soil erosion, excess runoff or leaching, irrigation water efficiency, animal waste, nutrient and pest management, grassland and forest conservation, and threatened, rare and endangered species habitat.

Through the 2008 Farm Bill, EQIP now offers new and innovative conservation practices for air quality and energy, forest land, greenhouses, organic farming, invasive species control and pollinator habitat. The new Farm Bill also provides higher payment rates to beginning, socially disadvantaged and limited-resource farmers.

"USDA is committed to providing conservation tools and resources to help Massachusetts farm and forest land owners ensure that their land remains healthy and productive," said NRCS Massachusetts State Conservationist Christine S. Clarke. "NRCS conservationists are available to help landowners develop a conservation plan to address their natural resource concerns."

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In federal fiscal year 2010, some 249 EQIP projects were funded statewide for a total of nearly \$6.7 million. Conservation practices addressed animal waste management, crop management, air quality and energy efficiency, grazing, irrigation, erosion control and water management, forestry and wildlife concerns.

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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