

Conservation Programs & Practices for: Organic Farming

About NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works to protect and conserve natural resources on our nation's private lands.

A part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, NRCS administers conservation programs funded primarily through the 2008 Farm Bill.

The conservation provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill will affect farmers for years to come. New provisions continue to build on the conservation gains made by U.S. citizens over the past decade. Existing programs have been simplified and new programs created to address high priority environmental protection goals.

In addition to addressing a broad range of environmental goals, the 2008 Farm Bill includes increased financial assistance for new, limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers.



Contact your local NRCS field office for more information and assistance.

Contact NRCS:

Massachusetts USDA Service Centers

Barnstable: 508-771-6476

Greenfield: 413-772-0384

Hadley: 413-585-1000

Holden: 508-829-4477

Pittsfield: 413-443-1776

West Wareham: 508-295-5151

Westford: 978-692-1904

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers conservation practices related to organic production through two programs - the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

Agricultural producers who are certified organic and those who are transitioning to organic production are eligible to apply to EQIP.

Through a special EQIP Organic Initiative, NRCS provided \$50 million for organic producers in 2009. Massachusetts received \$300,000 of those funds. This initiative will continue through 2014 with additional funds allocated annually.

Organic farmers also are eligible to apply to the general EQIP program, which offers a greater range of conservation practices.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

CSP rewards producers who have already applied stewardship principles to their operations and who agree to undertake additional conservation activities. The new rules for CSP will be announced soon. Please go to our website for current details and announcements.

Conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through EQIP

EQIP ORGANIC INITIATIVE: The EQIP Organic Initiative highlights six core conservation practices, offering higher payment rates than the general EQIP program.

- Conservation crop rotation
- Cover crop
- Nutrient management
- Pest management
- Prescribed grazing
- Forage harvest management

Additional agronomic and vegetative practices such as composting, diversions and waterways, strip cropping, livestock watering facilities, fence and pollinator habitat are also available.

Payments through the EQIP organic initiative are limited to \$20,000 per participant annually or \$80,000 over a six year period.

GENERAL EQIP: The general EQIP program is open to all farmers and offers a wider range of conservation practices including waste storage facilities and irrigation systems. New features of EQIP in 2009 include practices for forestry, greenhouses, air quality, energy, invasive species control, and pollinator and wildlife habitat.

The total payment limitation for each farmer is \$300,000 for 2009 - 2014.

Conservation programs require installing and maintaining practices according to approved NRCS practice standards.

For a complete list of all EQIP practices, please visit our website.



NRCS Conservation Programs for Organic Farming

Why does NRCS offer programs for organic farming?

Organic farming positively impacts our environment.

Many techniques involved in organic farming result in improved soil quality. Organically farmed soils exhibit higher organic matter content, better carbon sequestration and soil aggregation/tilth, and greater biological diversity.

Water quality also improves because there is less leaching of nitrogen in organic systems, and there are no off-site losses of pesticides.

Native pollinators, beneficial insects that attack plant pests, and wildlife also benefit from organic systems.

Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments in U.S. agriculture.

From 1992 through 2005, the acres of certified organic cropland rose from 403,000 to more than 1.7 million; organically certified pasture acres rose from 532,000 to over 4 million; and the total number of organic certified livestock rose from 11,000 in 1992 to over 196,000.

Helpful resources:

- Baystate Organic Certifiers: www.baystateorganic.org
- Northeast Organic Farming Association in Massachusetts: www.nofamass.org
- USDA National Organic Program: www.ams.usda.gov
- ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service : www.attra.ncat.org

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP helps promote farm and forest production by enhancing the environmental quality of soil, water, air, plants and animals.

Who can apply?

- Farmers who produce or sell an annual minimum of \$1,000 of agricultural products may apply.
- Farmers who own or manage certified organic operations or operations that are transitioning to certified organic may apply.

Certified organic farmers need to:

- submit a copy of their current organic system plan (OSP) when they apply.
- maintain their organic certification for the entire length of their EQIP contract.

Transitioning organic farmers need to:

- begin or be in the process of transitioning to a certified organic operation. This requirement also applies to producers earning less than \$5,000 annually in agricultural sales.
- submit a self certification letter stating that they agree to develop and implement an organic system plan. A template for this letter is available online.
- be working with an organic certifying agency.
- There is no minimum acreage requirement to apply for EQIP, however, projects that address significant resource concerns are more likely to receive funding.
- Beginning, socially disadvantaged and limited-resource farmers may be eligible for higher payment rates.

How do I apply?

- Contact your local USDA Service Center to speak to one of our conservation professionals to begin the program application process.
- Information and application forms are available on our website. You will need to file several forms to ensure that you are eligible for federal programs, including:
 - CCC-1200: Conservation Program Application
 - CCC-926: Adjusted Gross Income Certification
 - AD-1026: Highly Erodible Land & Wetland Conservation Certification

When should I apply?

- Applications may be submitted anytime. All applications will be evaluated periodically in a competitive ranking process as funding becomes available. Ranking criteria for each program is available on our website.

Please call the NRCS field office at your local USDA Service Center or visit us online for more information.