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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## USDA announces sign-up dates for conservation programs in Massachusetts

AMHERST, Mass. (Oct. 25, 2011) – The United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced three rounds of funding for four conservation program in Massachusetts. These federal programs, authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill, provide financial and technical help to farmers and forest land owners to protect soil, water and other natural resources.

The assistance is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA), and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), all administered by NRCS.

NRCS will offer three ranking periods with the following closing dates: **February 3, March 30, and June 1, 2012**. Farmers can submit applications for these programs anytime throughout the year; all complete applications will be batched and ranked on these closing dates for funding decisions. For an application to be considered complete for ranking, the following criteria apply:

1. All land and producer eligibility requirements must have been met.
2. A conservation plan identifying conservation practices to be included for proposed funding must be finalized for the enrolled land.

“Applications that are not complete by any one closing date will be deferred to the next ranking period,” said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. “We strongly encourage farmers to work with their local NRCS field office early to be sure that they don’t miss any opportunities.”

Farmers should visit their local USDA service center to apply; 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).

Three national initiatives also will be available in Massachusetts through EQIP, including: organic production; seasonal high tunnels for crop production; and on-farm energy conservation. Applicants compete only among other farmers in the same funding pools.

One regional initiative, the New England/New York Forestry Initiative will be offered to non-industrial, private forest landowners to implement forest management plans on their land. Funds for this will be available through EQIP and WHIP.

The 2008 Farm Bill provides additional incentives for farmers who are beginning, have limited resources, or who are socially disadvantaged because they belong to racial or ethnic groups that have historically been subjected to prejudice. Such farmers can receive up to 90 percent of the costs associated with planning and implementing conservation measures and up to 30 percent of expected costs may be provided in advance.

NRCS has 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/REPORTERS:** If you would like to include local contact information, please use the office below that serves your area.

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