

# ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

## In Florida



### OVERVIEW

Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments in U.S. and Florida agriculture. Organic food sales remain the fastest growing sector in the food industry, swelling by 18 percent in 2007. Organic food sales more than tripled, to \$1.7 billion in 2007 from \$393 million in 2002, according to new data released by USDA's Agriculture Census.

### CONSERVATION PLANNING

For more than 75 years, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has placed a high priority on helping agricultural producers with conservation plans to meet their environmental and economic goals, while concurrently planning for the protection of the soil, water, air, plant, livestock, and wild-life resources. Conservation goals are highly individual and may certainly include transitioning to organic agriculture.

NRCS conservationists work with farmers and ranchers to come up with scientifically-sound alternatives for accomplishing their goals and working out a timeline to implement the conservation practices in the plan.

Practice implementation may be partially funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Having a conservation plan may give applicants a higher status when applying for the competitive EQIP contracts.

All information provided to NRCS for conservation planning purposes is strictly confidential.

### LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) provides funding specifically to help organic farmers and those producers transitioning to organic farming.



### Organic Initiative

The 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.

The Organic Initiative is part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a voluntary conservation program that provides financial and technical assistance to landowners willing to implement practices to improve natural resources on privately owned agricultural land.

### APPLYING FOR EQIP

Applications for EQIP are taken continuously throughout the year; however, to be considered for the EQIP Organics Initiative for Fiscal Year 2012, producers need to have an application signed and returned to their local NRCS office by **March 30, 2012** to be eligible for this round of funding.

While EQIP has always been available for organic producers to treat resource concerns on their land, with the provisions of the 2008 Farm

Bill, specific funds are being set aside to assist organic producers.

Successful applicants will receive financial assistance to implement priority conservation practices within the state that are designed to address natural resource concerns. Contact your local NRCS office for practice incentive rates.

Applications for the EQIP Organic Initiative are competitive and are ranked based on national, state, and local resource priorities as well as their overall benefit to the environment.

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## SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Those producers with limited financial resources (defined on a county by county basis), or who qualify as a Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, or Beginning farmer/rancher, or Indian Tribe can receive a higher incentive rate for conservation practices. For more information go to: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/SLB\\_Farmer/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/SLB_Farmer/)

## OTHER PROGRAMS

NRCS administers a suite of conservation programs to improve and conserve natural resources, enhance wildlife habitat and help people help the land. Contact your local NRCS district conservationist for more information on other programs.

For more information and updates about EQIP and other Farm Bill topics visit:

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs)

National Organic Program  
[www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)



Successful applicants will receive funding to implement any approved EQIP conservation practices that are needed to address NOP quality standards.

Organic producers are required to develop and carry out an organic system plan (OSP). Applicants transitioning to organic production will be required to submit a self-certification letter at the time of application.

Farmers who want to apply for financial assistance to transition to organic agriculture may receive assistance under a provision of the EQIP program that allows producers to apply for up to \$20,000 per year, or \$80,000 over a six-year period.

The Seasonal High Tunnel Systems for Crops Initiative is also available under the Organic Initiative and EQIP. This initiative helps farmers to establish high tunnels - also known as hoop houses - to increase the availability of locally grown produce in a conservation friendly way.

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Producers must be:

- An individual, legal entity, Indian tribe, or joint operation with signature authority;
- Engaged in agricultural production, or have an interest in the agricultural operation associated with the land;
- Producing an annual minimum of \$1,000 of agricultural products;
- Have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract period (i.e., ownership or lease)

Land must be:

- Agricultural land;
- Privately owned or Indian Land, or public land which is a working component of the applicant's agricultural operation and which the applicant has control of for the term of the contract period.

### Farms Under \$5,000 in Revenue Per Year:

If producers who sell less than \$5,000 a year wish to use EQIP as part of their transition to organic certification, they may do so; however, they are required to implement conservation practices for certified organic production that are consistent with an Organic System Plan (OSP) the same as those who are already certified.

When applying for EQIP, especially for the first time, producers should be mindful that they will need to fill out forms providing USDA with information that confirms that they are eligible to participate in these public-funded programs.



To apply for the Organic Initiative contact your local USDA-NRCS Service Center  
[www.fl.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/index](http://www.fl.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/index)

or Jeffrey Woods, Assistant State Conservationist for Financial Programs, 352-338-9515