

# Assistance for Transitioning to Organic Farming

## How We Can Help

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to producers transitioning from conventional farming to organic. Assistance begins with the NRCS Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) 138 practice offered through our Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The plan is written for the purpose of identifying existing benchmark conditions on your farm and advises on how to address resource concerns identified to meet requirements within National Organic Program (NOP) guidance standards.

CAP 138's help plan conservation practices on your farm and also help meet resource inventory requirements of the NOP Organic System Plan. Primary planning to identify needed improvements promote creating and maintaining an environmentally sustainable organic operation and also helps reduce producer paperwork throughout the process. CAP 138's also provide background and establish need for further financial assistance to address all identified resource concerns on the farm. Once the CAP is in place, producers are eligible to apply for future funding to implement many conservation practices to improve farm conditions. CAP 138's must be written by a NRCS-certified Technical Service Provider (TSP) for a producer to receive financial assistance through EQIP. Items inventoried on the farm and included in the CAP 138 are

- soil health and organic matter;
- erosion control;
- nutrient management;
- crop rotations and biodiversity;
- hedgerows and buffers;
- habitat for wildlife, pollinators, and beneficial insects;
- livestock practices such as pasture and grazing management and diverse pasture plantings;
- fencing and walkways; and
- watering facilities.

Several conservation practices are available to provide solutions for the resource concerns listed above. In addition, irrigation improvements and hoop house installation are also available through EQIP.



## Steps to Get Started

1. Explore conservation planning and programs online: <http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov>. Find your nearest service center: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.
2. Assess your farm and define conservation objectives. Be prepared to explore your objectives and discuss conservation practices with local NRCS Service Center staff.
3. Establish or update your farm records and program eligibility with the USDA Farm Service Agency.
4. EQIP is a voluntary program to address resource issues you may want to improve. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a program that rewards good stewardship. Apply for cost sharing assistance to install practices or complete conservation activities. Collaboration with your local field office is essential to develop a conservation plan before competing for funding. Cost sharing is based on environmental benefits and ranking applicants based on those benefits.
5. Producer should keep their organic certifying organization informed.

Wisconsin