

Organic Initiative through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program



Overview

Organic food sales remain the fastest growing sector in the food industry, swelling by 18 percent in 2007, according to new data released by USDA's Agriculture Census. Organic food sales more than tripled from \$393 million in 2002 to \$1.7 billion in 2007.

All 50 states now have certified organic acreage for a total of 4 million acres of farmland. The total organic acreage in South Dakota (SD) almost tripled from 2005-2008.

What is the Organic Initiative?

The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) reauthorized the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals.

With the reauthorization of EQIP came the introduction of specific opportunities for organic producers and those transitioning to organic farming. Producers who are transitioning to organic production or who are currently certified organic can now apply to receive assistance under the Organic Initiative through EQIP. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers EQIP and its applications for the Organic Initiative.

A number of primary "core" organic conservation practices may be funded through the Organic Initiative, including cover crops, conservation crop rotation, prescribed grazing, pest management, nutrient management, and forage harvest management. Supporting conservation practices offered under "general" EQIP are also available through the Organic Initiative, including but not limited to fence, watering facilities, grassed waterway, windbreak/shelterbelt establishment, irrigation management, field borders, etc.

The EQIP is a voluntary conservation program reauthorized in the 2018 Farm Bill. It supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals.

The initiative allows producers to receive up to \$140,000 over the life of the 2018 Farm Bill. The EQIP payments are established through a contract that can last up to 10 years.

What Assistance is Available?

Conservation Planning

For more than 75 years, the NRCS has placed a high priority on helping agricultural producers with conservation plans to meet their environmental and economic goals, while at the same time planning for the protection of the soil, water, air, and wildlife resources. Conservation goals are highly individual and may include transitioning to organic agriculture (or boosting pollinator populations, increasing biodiversity including soil-borne organisms, enhancing water quality, controlling invasive species, or dozens of other resource-enhancing possibilities). The NRCS' conservationists will come to your farm and work with you to develop a conservation plan based on your farm goals. The plan will specify a timeline to implement the conservation practices. Conservation planning assistance is free and does not require participation in financial programs.

Financial Assistance

Through EQIP, land operators may receive financial assistance to voluntarily implement conservation practices that address soil, water, plants, wildlife, and energy concerns on private lands. The EQIP rules specify that payments for structural, vegetative, and management conservation practices are limited to the implementation of newly applied conservation practices not previously established. Conservation practices eligible to receive financial assistance are listed in the EQIP Payment Schedule and are limited to those practices contained in the NRCS SD Field Office Technical Guide.

Confidentiality

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

How Do I Get Started

Applications are continuously accepted; however, application batching dates are established annually for evaluation and ranking of eligible applications. Funding is not a guarantee, as EQIP is a competitive program where like applications are ranked against like applications.

Visit your local USDA Service Center to:

- Register in the Service Center Information Management

System (SCIMS) through the Farm Service Agency;

- apply for assistance under EQIP at the NRCS;
- have or be willing to develop an Organic System Plan (OSP) on your land.

What to bring with you:

- certified organic or exempt producers will need to provide their OSP reviewed by a USDA accredited organic certifier;
- if transitioning to organic production, you will be required to submit a self-certification letter to the district conservationist stating that you “agree to develop and implement conservation practices for certified organic production that are consistent with an OSP and the contact information of the USDA accredited organic certifying agent.”

What are the Eligibility Requirements

An applicant is eligible if all of the following are met:

- Engaged in agricultural production or forestry management;
- certify that the average adjusted gross off-farm income is less than \$1,000,000;
- own or have control of the land (by lease or rental agreement) for length of contract;
- an individual, entity, or joint operation;
- registered in SCIMS;
- certified as organic according to the National Organic Program or be in the process of transitioning to organic production;
- in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act.

For More Information

Please contact your local USDA Service Center or visit the South Dakota Web site for the Organic Initiative at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/sd/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=nrcs141p2_036522.

