Assisting California with Organic Agriculture

Getting started in organic? Want to build healthy soil with cover crops and crop rotations and support biodiversity and pollinator habitat?

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service can help!

Organic Agriculture in California
California remains the state with the most organic farms and greatest value of organic production in the country. Organic farmers in California produce hundreds of different crops with a diversity of farming approaches, ranging from beginning and urban farmers who sell directly to consumers all the way to large-scale farms producing for national distributors.

Certified Organic Assistance
NRCS technical and financial programs are an excellent fit with organic farmers who need assistance to address natural resource concerns or to bring their farming system to an even higher level of sustainability.

Organic Transition Assistance
Farmers transitioning to organic certification often need assistance to change their farming approach and develop an Organic System Plan (OSP), required under National Organic Program rules. NRCS can provide funding to inventory resource conditions on the applicant’s farm, recommend practices to support the transition, and complete resource-related sections of an OSP. Also, farmers can apply for assistance to implement new practices needed for organic management, such as nutrient management, cover cropping or crop rotation.

GETTING STARTED...
Go to the Office
We have 54 offices across the state. NRCS will work with you to develop a conservation plan tailored to help you improve conditions on your property. This voluntary plan will be based on your priorities and solid science. The plan may also be the basis to apply for financial assistance.

Financial Assistance
The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that has been widely used by landowners in California. EQIP shares with landowners the cost of conservation practices (see sidebar on back). The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers additional opportunities for those already meeting a baseline of stewardship.

Apply
You may apply any time during the year. Eligible projects will be evaluated, prioritized and selected for funding as budget allocations permit.

High tunnel hoop houses can extend the growing season and nurture tropical trees, such as papaya, and other high value crops.
NRCS offers technical and financial assistance on conservation practices for organic agriculture. Here are the top conservation practices implemented on organic farms in California.

**NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT**
Managing the amount, source, placement, form, and timing of application of plant nutrients and soil amendments.

**COVER CROP**
Growing grasses, legumes, and forbs for seasonal cover, erosion control, soil quality, nutrient cycling, biodiversity, and weed suppression.

**MULCHING**
Using ground cover to manage soil moisture, soil temperature, erosion, and weeds. Provides vegetative cover, and improves soil condition.

**IRRIGATION WATER MANAGEMENT**
Determining and controlling the rate, amount, and timing of irrigation water in a planned and efficient manner.

**FENCING**
Constructing a fence to serve as a barrier to livestock, wildlife, or people. Regulates animal movement for improved pasture productivity.

**HEDGEROW PLANTING**
Establishing a line of dense vegetation to provide wildlife habitat, increase carbon storage, and provide dust barrier. May act as a habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators.

**HIGH TUNNEL**
Using an enclosed plastic or fabric covered structure to protect crops from sun, wind, excessive rainfall, or cold, to extend the growing season in an environmentally safe manner.

**CONSERVATION CROP ROTATION**
Growing crops in recurring sequence on the same field to control soil erosion, aid soil quality, manage plant nutrients, and improve water efficiency.

**EQIP Organic Initiative**
The National Organic Initiative (NOI) is a program within EQIP that offers additional financial assistance opportunities exclusively for farmers who are certified organic or actively transitioning to organic.

Although EQIP supports a wide variety of conservation practices, your local NRCS field office staff will work with you to develop an organic plan that includes practices that fit your resource needs as part of the Organic Initiative.

Organic and transitioning farmers and ranchers may also apply for assistance through general EQIP or other conservation initiatives.

**What’s New in the 2018 Farm Bill?**
The limit of financial assistance through the EQIP Organic Initiative has been increased from $80,000 to $140,000 total over the 2018 Farm Bill years, 2019 through 2023.

CSP provides specific support for organic and transitioning to organic production activities. CSP also has increased payments for adoption of cover crop rotations.

**About NRCS, FSA and RMA**
In more than 80 years of assisting farmers, ranchers, and private forestland owners, NRCS has assembled a body of technical standards (for practices such as those in the sidebar at right) to address natural resource concerns. The USDA’s Farm Services Agency (FSA) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) provide other critical resources such as farm loans, crop insurance and disaster assistance.

For more information on NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ca/programs/