

Organic Initiative (Environmental Quality Incentives Program)



Virginia Overview

Organic farming positively impacts our environment and is one of the fastest growing segments of U.S. agriculture. Native pollinators, beneficial insects that attack plant pests, and wildlife also benefit from organic systems.

NRCS in Virginia offers financial and technical assistance for certified organic farmers and those interested in transitioning to organic production to address their soil, water, and plant health resource concerns.

Management activities in these key areas can help you meet National Organic Program requirements: soil health (erosion control, organic matter), nutrient management, crop rotations, biodiversity (buffers, pollinator habitat, etc.), and livestock practices (fencing, watering, etc.).

What's Available

The Organic Initiative is part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS in Virginia is offering more than 40 conservation practices to protect water quality and improve soil health. Practices receiving special emphasis this year include:

- Increasing the Use of Cover Crops
- Implementing No-Till and Reduced Till Methods
- Installing Field Borders and Wildflower Planting
- Establishing Trees and Shrubs

Eligibility

Certified organic farmers must submit a copy of their current Organic System Plan (OSP) and maintain their organic certification for their entire EQIP contract. Transitioning organic farmers need to:

- begin or be in the process of transitioning to a certified organic operation.
- submit a self-certification letter agreeing to develop and implement an organic system plan (template available online).
- work with an organic certifying agency.

You will also need lease agreements or proof you control the land you wish to enroll. If you're already USDA Certified Organic, bring copies of your certification and OSP to the local NRCS Office.

How to Apply

Program sign-up is continuous with periodic evaluation and preapprovals throughout the year. You will need to file several eligibility forms at the local Farm

Service Agency (FSA) office to ensure that you qualify for federal programs. These offices are usually co-located with NRCS.

NRCS will help eligible producers develop a conservation plan, which will become the basis of the EQIP contract. EQIP applications will be ranked based on a number of factors, including the environmental benefits and cost effectiveness of the proposal.

Transitioning and certified organic farmer applications are ranked in one fund pool. (Organic producers may also apply for assistance under general EQIP.)

More Information

Stop by your local USDA Service Center or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted. (Find your local USDA Service Center at <http://offices.usda.gov>.)

To learn more about organics and determine whether it is the right choice for you, visit these websites:

- USDA National Organic Program (www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/programs-offices/national-organic-program)
- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (www.attra.ncat.org)
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/sales-certified-organic.shtml>) .

Virginia

Natural Resources Conservation Service

nrcs.va.usda.gov/

