

## Applications for the Organic Initiative

Producers can apply for assistance under the EQIP Organic Initiative program at any time; however, periodic cut-offs will be announced for application ranking and contracting.



Applicants must have or be willing to develop an OSP on their land:

- If already certified as organic, bring a copy of your Organic System Plan for review.
- If transitioning to organic, apply for a Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition (CPSOT) under the EQIP Conservation Activity Plan initiative. Applications for both the CPSOT and the conservation practices can be made at the same time; however, payments for some practices cannot be made until the CPSOT is approved.

## What is a Conservation Plan to Support Organic Transition (CPSOT)?



A CPSOT is a specialized Conservation Plan written to guide the transition from conventional to organic agriculture.

The CPSOT will address resource concerns such as improvement of soil quality, control of erosion, runoff issues, buffering from other farms, and carrying capacity of grazed land. NRCS can use the CPSOT to help develop a contract to implement the planned practices.

Updated May 2011

## Environmental Quality Incentives Program Organic Agriculture initiative

## What is the Contract Period?

EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practice and a maximum term of ten years. Contracts provide predetermined program payments to the producer for the implementation of the planned practices according to a schedule developed with the producer.

The schedule lists the conservation practice extent (amount), date to be installed, and payment. Practices must adhere to NRCS technical standards. Deviation from the contract schedule is considered a contract violation unless approved in advance.

Visit the NRCS New Jersey website for the current list of eligible practices and payment rates:  
<http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/organic.html>

### **For More Information or to Sign-Up, Contact Your Local USDA Service Center:**

*Burlington, Camden and Ocean counties*  
**Columbus Service Center (1971 Jacksonville-Jobstown Rd)**  
Telephone: (609) 267 - 1639

*Mercer, Middlesex and Monmouth counties*  
**Freehold Service Center (4000 Kozloski Rd)**  
Telephone: (732) 462 - 0075

*Hunterdon, Somerset and Union counties*  
**Frenchtown Service Center (687 Pittstown Rd, Suite 2)**  
Telephone: (908) 782 - 4614

*Bergen, Morris, Passaic, Sussex and Warren counties*  
**Hackettstown Service Center (Bldg #1, 101 Bilby Rd)**  
Telephone: (908) 852 - 2576

*Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties*  
**Vineland Service Center (1318 South Main Rd, Bldg 5A)**  
Telephone: (856) 205 - 1225

*Gloucester and Salem counties*  
**Woodstown Service Center (51 Cheney Rd, Suite 2)**  
Telephone: (856) 769 - 1126

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**The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is a voluntary conservation program for persons who are engaged in livestock, forestry or agricultural production, including organic production. EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices on eligible agricultural land.

NRCS conservationists will work with the applicant to develop a contract plan. The plan will specify a timeline to implement the conservation practices. Conservation planning assistance is free and does not require participation in cost-share programs.



## Organic Initiative

Organic operations may enroll in EQIP at any time of the year, and should sign-up to implement needed conservation practices not related to organic certification, such as irrigation improvements, erosion control mitigation, and management of animal wastes.

However, NRCS also offers financial assistance under a special annual Organic Initiative for conservation practices needed to obtain or maintain organic certification. National Organic Program (NOP) certified organic producers, as well as producers in the process of transitioning to organic production, are eligible to apply under this special initiative each year.

Under this initiative, a producer may choose to aide pollinator populations, increase biodiversity, protect land from chemical drift or invasive species, enhance water quality or address another resource-enhancing goal. Practices that are linked to one of these resource concerns may be eligible for a conservation payment.

Farmers who want to apply for financial assistance may receive up to \$20,000/year and are limited to \$80,000 over a six-year period. Payments are not authorized for activities or practice components which are solely production related and are not linked to an identified resource concern.

Payments may not be used for any costs related to organic certification.



## What is an Organic System Plan?

An Organic System Plan is a used to certify an organic operation. It covers all components of an organic production and handling system. The OSP must be updated annually to include:



1. A description of practices and procedures to be performed and maintained;
2. A list of each substance to be used in production or handling, indicating its composition, source, location(s) where it will be used, and documentation of commercial availability;
3. A description of the monitoring practices and procedures to be performed and maintained, including their frequency;
4. A description of the record keeping system implemented to comply with established requirements;
5. A description of the management practices and physical barriers established to prevent commingling of organic and non-organic products on a split operation and to prevent contact of organic production and handling operations and products with prohibited substances; and
6. Additional information deemed necessary by the certifying agent to evaluate compliance with the regulations.

The OSP is administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>)

*Note: Current USDA organic certification rules do not require producers who sell less than \$5,000 a year to have an OSP. However, if they elect to use this organic Initiative to assist in their transition, they will be required to implement conservation practices that are consistent with an OSP the same as those who are already certified.*

## Payment Rates and Terms

Program payment rates for the organic initiative are 75% of the typical cost of implementing the practice. If the applicant is a beginning farmer, socially disadvantaged or limited resource producer, the rates are 90%. Payments are made after conservation practices are implemented to the standards agreed to in advance. Practices eligible under the initiative include:

- Cover Crop
- Conservation Cover (pollinator habitat or permanent cover between rows)
- Deer Control Fence (up to \$20,000)
- Field Borders or Filter Strips
- Irrigation Water management
- Nutrient or Pest Management
- No-Till Crop Production
- Prescribed Grazing
- Watering Facilities for Livestock
- Windbreak or Shelterbelt Establishment

## Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for EQIP, the applicant must:

- a.) Have an interest in an agricultural operation and have records established with the Farm Services Agency
- b.) Own or have control of the land (by lease or rental agreement) for the length of contract
- c.) Be an individual, entity or joint operation
- d.) Be registered in the USDA Service Center Information Database (SCIMS)
- e.) Be certified as organic according to the National Organic Program OR be in the process of transitioning to organic production

In addition, to be eligible for the organic initiative, producers must have an approved Organic System Plan (OSP); transition applicants must apply to develop an NRCS **Conservation Plan to Support Organic Transition (CPSOT)** under the EQIP Conservation Activity Plan Initiative. Applications for CPSOTs are approved without competition for funds.