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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA announces opportunity for Massachusetts organic farmers to implement conservation practices

Farmers are encouraged to apply by May 20, 2011

AMHERST, Mass. (April 12, 2011) – USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced another funding opportunity for certified organic farmers and those transitioning to organic production to implement resource conservation practices on their agricultural operations. Fiscal year 2011 marks the third year of USDA's Organic Initiative.

The financial and technical assistance available through the initiative will help Massachusetts farmers to plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns in ways that are consistent with organic production. For example, conservation practices might include planting cover crops, establishing integrated pest management plans, constructing seasonal high tunnels, or implementing nutrient management systems consistent with organic certification standards.

While applications are accepted on a continuous basis, the cutoff date for this application period is set for **May 20, 2011**. Producers interested in applying for EQIP Organic Initiative funding must submit applications through their local NRCS Service Center, which can be located through the Web site at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov>. Program information is available at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

"Massachusetts organic growers continue to express interest in program support to implement conservation practices," NRCS State Conservationist Christine Clarke said. "This additional opportunity will allow more farmers to get assistance in protecting the natural resources on their land and creating conditions that help foster organic production."

Eligible farmers include those certified through USDA's [National Organic Program](#), those transitioning to certified organic production, and those who meet organic standards but are exempt from certification because their gross annual organic sales are less than \$5,000.

Organic Initiative funding is provided through NRCS' [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP), a voluntary conservation program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. The 2008 Farm Bill provided assistance specifically for organic farm operations and those converting to organic production.

Under EQIP Organic Initiative contracts, NRCS provides financial payments and technical assistance to help producers implement conservation measures in keeping with organic production. Beginning, limited resource, and socially disadvantaged farmers may obtain additional assistance. The 2008 Farm Bill limits EQIP payments for organic operations to \$20,000 per year per person or legal entity, with a maximum total of \$80,000 over six years.

(MORE)

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that helps people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. NRCS has seven Massachusetts field offices in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham, which work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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