



Massachusetts State Office

451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350, fax 413-253-4375
www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit, Public Affairs Officer
413-253-4371, cell 413-835-1276
diane.petit@ma.usda.gov

USDA EXTENDS SIGN-UP FOR NEW ORGANIC INITIATIVE \$308,000 in funding available to Massachusetts farmers

AMHERST, Mass. (May 21, 2009) — The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has extended the sign-up period for Massachusetts organic farmers and those in transition to organic production to apply for technical and financial assistance under a new federal initiative. Farmers may now apply **through June 12th**.

More than \$308,000 in funding is available in Massachusetts for the Organic Initiative through NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Participants will receive help implementing conservation practices; six core practices are being emphasized with higher payment rates, including: conservation crop rotation, cover crop, nutrient management, pest management, prescribed grazing, and forage harvest management.

NRCS will also assist with other conservation practices that address site-specific natural resource concerns. Initiative rules limit the amount of funding a participant may receive to \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 over six years.

Farmers should contact their local USDA Service Center to determine eligibility. USDA service center locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture. General program information is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

"This is an extremely busy time of year for farmers," said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "We've extended the sign-up period to allow organic growers more time to take advantage of this new opportunity for conservation assistance."

The 2009 Organic Initiative is a nationwide special initiative to provide financial assistance to National Organic Program (NOP) certified organic producers as well as producers in the process of transitioning to organic production. Those applying for this special funding will be competing only among other organic/transitioning farmers. The objective of this initiative is to make EQIP assistance more available, appropriate and accessible to organic food producers. Organic producers may also apply and compete for funding under the general EQIP program where the payment limitation is \$350,000 over six years.

EQIP is a voluntary program that helps farmers and forest landowners address water quality, water conservation, invasive species control, soil quality, erosion control, nutrient and pest management, residue management, irrigation efficiency, energy conservation, air quality and other natural resource concerns.

NRCS offices in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: If you would like to include local contact information, please use the office below that serves your area.

BARNSTABLE FIELD OFFICE

270 Communications Way, Unit 1G
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