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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA announces early sign-up for conservation programs in Massachusetts

AMHERST, MA— The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing an early sign-up period for federal conservation cost-share programs to help Massachusetts farmers address natural resource concerns on their land next year. Bay State farmers must apply for 2006 NRCS conservation programs by October 31, 2005.

A conservation plan will be required as part of the application evaluation process. Farmers are encouraged to call or visit their local USDA service center to schedule a time to complete the necessary paperwork and begin the conservation planning process.

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.

With financial and technical assistance from NRCS, farmers and other landowners will promote environmental quality on farmland, address water quality and quantity challenges, and protect valuable wetland ecosystems and wildlife habitat.

“By working in partnership with the NRCS field staff to develop a conservation plan, Massachusetts landowners in communities across the commonwealth are showing that they are good environmental stewards,” said State Conservationist Cecil B. Currin. “USDA remains committed to providing conservation tools and resources to ensure that Bay State land remains healthy and productive.”

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Cost-share funding is available through several voluntary conservation programs authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill. Through these programs, landowners may receive up to 75 percent of installation costs for conservation practices, depending on producer, land and practice eligibility criteria. Following is a summary of available programs:

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – EQIP helps farmers improve production while protecting environmental quality by addressing such concerns as erosion control, prescribed grazing, irrigation efficiency and comprehensive nutrient management planning.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** – WHIP provides assistance to landowners who want to improve fish and wildlife habitat or restore natural ecosystems on their land.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** – WRP offers an opportunity for landowners to voluntarily protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property.
- **Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)** – AMA helps farmers adopt conservation practices and investment strategies that will reduce or mitigate risks to their agricultural enterprises. In Massachusetts, cost-share is available to producers for drought mitigation.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that provides leadership in a partnership effort to help 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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