



Massachusetts State Office

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA announces sign-up for conservation programs in Massachusetts

AMHERST, Mass. (December 14, 2010) – The United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service has announced application cut-off dates for several conservation programs in Massachusetts. These federal programs, authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill, provide financial and technical assistance to help local farmers protect soil, water and other natural resources.

Applications for Farm Bill conservation programs may be submitted at any time, however applications received by the dates below will be considered for the next round of ranking and funding in Massachusetts. Farmers should visit their local USDA service center to apply; 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.

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – EQIP helps farmers and forest landowners address water quality, water conservation, invasive species control, soil quality, erosion control, nutrient and pest management, prescribed grazing, irrigation efficiency, energy efficiency, forest stand improvement, and other natural resource concerns. **Cut-off date: January 14, 2011.**
- **EQIP Organic Initiative** – the EQIP 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. Applicants 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. **Cut-off date: March 4, 2011.**
- **Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)** – GRP is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on their property through easements and rental agreements. This year, farmland under a state Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) will be eligible for GRP rental agreements. **Cut-off date: February 18, 2011.**
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** – WRP offers an opportunity for landowners to voluntarily protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. WRP offers three options to landowners: permanent easements, 30-year easements or 10-year restoration cost-share agreements. **Sign-up is continuous so landowners may apply at any time.**

“The 2008 Farm Bill provides additional incentives for landowners who are beginning, have limited resources, or who are socially disadvantaged because they belong to racial or ethnic groups that have historically been subjected to prejudice,” said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. “Such landowners can receive up to 90 percent of the costs associated with planning and implementing conservation measures and up to 30 percent of expected costs may be provided in advance.”

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

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