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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **NRCS announces cut-off date for conservation programs in Massachusetts**

AMHERST, Mass. (Oct. 10, 2012) – The United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that applications for four federal conservation programs will be ranked for possible funding on **December 21, 2012**. Massachusetts farmers and forest land owners can apply for these programs anytime throughout the year; but NRCS will review and rank all complete applications for the current round of funding on that date.

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), all federal programs authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill, farmers and forest land owners can get financial and technical help to protect soil, water and other natural resources.

To apply, visit your local 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](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov).

For an application to be considered complete for ranking, the following criteria apply:

1. All land and producer eligibility requirements must have been met.
2. A conservation plan identifying conservation practices to be included for proposed funding must be finalized for the enrolled land.

“We strongly encourage farmers to work with their local NRCS field office early to begin the conservation planning process and to be sure that they don’t miss this opportunity for conservation assistance,” said Christine Clarke, NRCS Massachusetts State Conservationist.

Five national EQIP initiatives also will be available in Massachusetts; in these initiatives, applicants compete only among others in the same funding pools.

Three of the national initiatives are offered statewide: organic production; seasonal high tunnels for crop production, on-farm energy conservation. Two initiatives are available in specific watersheds: the National Water Quality Initiative in the Palmer River watershed in Southeastern Mass. and the Long Island Sound Partnership in the greater Connecticut River watershed in four Western Mass. counties.

Due to limited WHIP funding, only applications that will benefit the New England Cottontail or the bog turtle will be considered through the Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative, another national initiative. Details will be available when you visit your NRCS office,

One regional initiative, the New England/New York Forestry Initiative, will be offered to non-industrial, private forest landowners to implement forest management plans on their land. Funds for this will be available through EQIP.

(MORE)

The 2008 Farm Bill provides additional incentives for farmers 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. Such farmers 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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