



**To: Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lehigh, Northampton, and Montgomery County
Specialty Crop and Livestock Producers**

From: Ian Phelps, Conservation Outreach Specialist, Southeastern PA Resource Conservation & Development Council, ianphelps@enter.net 610.346.9037

Sign-up Now for EQIP Organic Initiative Conservation Technical and Financial Assistance

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative**. USDA has allocated money for the Organic Initiative Program in 2012, which is available for producers with a certified organic operation and those transitioning to certified organic farming systems. Farmers with operations that are exempt from formal certification (whose gross agricultural income from organic sales total \$5,000 or less annually but who still comply with the applicable organic production, handling, and labeling requirements mandated for certified organic producers) may apply as a Certified Organic operation.

The Organic Initiative offers financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to implement new conservation practices, like cover cropping, pest management, crop rotation, stream buffers, hedgerow planting and various other practices.

Applications for the EQIP Organic Farming Initiative are accepted continuously throughout the year to be evaluated, ranked, and prioritized. To apply, you will need to complete an application form and contact your local NRCS office. For 2012 funding, three application evaluation cycles will be used: All applications received by **February 3, 2012** will be evaluated and ranked as a group. Then, all additional applications received by **March 30**, plus remaining unfunded applications from the February 3 cycle, will be evaluated and ranked. If funds remain after the March 30 cycle, a final cycle ending **June 1** will be used to assign remaining funds to remaining eligible unfunded applications.

To sign up, visit your USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) local service center. Bucks & Montgomery: 215.453.9527 (ext. 3); Berks: 610.372.4655 (ext. 3); Chester & Delaware: 610.696.0398 (ext. 3); Lehigh & Northampton: 610.625.8392 (ext. 3), or contact Gwendolyn Crews, PA-NRCS 717.237.2218
<http://www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/Organic/index.html>

Eligible Applicants - The Organic Initiative is available to agriculture producers who:

- Own or have control of the land (by lease or rental agreement) for the length of contract
- Are an individual, entity, or joint operation;
- Are registered in the USDA Service Center Information Database (SCIMS);
- Are certified as organic according to the National Organic Program (NOP) **OR** be in the process of transitioning to organic production; this includes producers whose operations are exempt from certification according to the NOP.

The Organic Initiative is specifically targeted at agricultural producers who have environmental concerns on their operation and are:

- Just beginning or already in the process of transitioning to certified organic production;
- Existing certified organic farmers (or exempt) who are transitioning additional acres or herds;
- Existing certified organic farmers (or exempt) who need to adopt additional conservation measures to fully address particular natural resource and environmental concerns and;
- Existing certified organic farmers (or exempt) who want to both transition additional production AND adopt additional conservation measures on existing certified organic operations.

Payments

Farmers and ranchers who receive EQIP Organic Initiative contracts with NRCS receive a conservation incentive for the conservation measures they implement. Beginning, limited resource, and socially disadvantaged producers (those considered “historically underserved” by the USDA) qualify for higher payment rates. The program provides up to \$20,000 per year with a maximum total of \$80,000 over six years.

Thank you for your interest. For more information, please contact your local NRCS office at the number listed above, or call 610.346.9037

Sincerely,

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