



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Applications for Initiatives Due April 19

JACKSON, Feb. 7, 2013 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications to help producers improve water and air quality, build healthier soil, improve grazing and forest lands, conserve energy, enhance organic operations and achieve other environmental benefits.

April 19 is the deadline for the second signup period; however, applications for these initiatives are taken on a continuous basis. The initiatives include:

On-Farm Energy: Makes agricultural lands more energy efficient through conservation practices like agricultural energy management plans and farmstead energy improvements. Producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

Gulf of Mexico: Improves water quality in Gulf of Mexico, Bay St. Louis and Jourdan River through conservation practices like grade stabilization structure, tree planting, longleaf pine establishment and wildlife habitat management. Producers in the Bayou La-Terre and Rotten Bayou watersheds in Hancock and Harrison counties are eligible to apply.

Longleaf Pine: Restores and enhances longleaf pine forests through conservation practices like longleaf pine tree planting and site preparation. Producers in counties with suitable soil types are eligible to apply.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds: Improves water quality in Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi River through conservation practices like irrigation water management and drainage water management. Producers in the Coldwater River and Sunflower River watersheds in the Delta region are eligible to apply.

Working Lands for Wildlife: Creates and enhances habitat for threatened and endangered species like the gopher tortoise through conservation practices like planting longleaf pine trees and using prescribed burning. Producers in counties with suitable soil types are eligible to apply.

Organic: Supports organic operations through conservation practices like conservation crop rotation, residue management/no-till/strip till/direct seeding and cover crop. Producers in all 82 counties are eligible.

Seasonal High Tunnel: Supports local food systems and lengthens growing season through this practice. Producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

Beginning Farmer: Provides support to new farmers through practices like fencing and prescribed grazing. Producers who have operated a farm for less than 10 years are eligible.

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Limited Resource Farmer: Provides support to new farmers through practices like ponds and heavy use protection area. To be considered a limited-resource farmer or rancher, an applicant must meet both of the following criteria:

- Direct or indirect gross farm sales of not more than the current indexed value (\$172,800) in each of the previous two years;
- Total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in the previous two years.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmer: Provides support to new farmers through practices like fencing and ponds. A socially disadvantaged producer is a group whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. This includes:

- American Indians and Alaskan Natives
- Asians
- Black or African Americans
- Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders
- Hispanics

Applicants self-certify. Gender alone is not a covered group for the purposes of NRCS conservation programs.

Specialty Crop: Encourages and supports growers of specialty crops (i.e. sweet potatoes, greens, squashes) through practices like mulching and cover crops. Specialty crop producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

Livestock: Encourages and supports livestock operations through practices like stream crossings, cross fencing and ponds. Livestock producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

“Conservation programs offer farmers, ranchers and forestland managers a variety of options to conserve natural resources while boosting production on their land,” State Conservationist Homer Wilkes said. “This conservation investment helps improve environmental health and the economy of Mississippi rural communities.”

These initiatives are funded through Farm Bill conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, which provides financial assistance for a variety of conservation activities. Applicants can sign up at their local NRCS service center.

For more information about EQIP or other technical or financial assistance programs offered by NRCS, please contact your local service center: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrsc>

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USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps America’s farmers and ranchers conserve the Nation’s soil, water, air and other natural resources. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), 800-877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866-367-8642 (Relay voice users).

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