

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **NRCS Financial Assistance Supports Organic Growers**

Jackson, Mississippi, February 8, 2010 – The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has over \$900 thousand dollars to help Mississippi farmers produce organic products and to introduce growers to high tunnel structures that extend the growing season for crops. The high tunnels are part of a three-year study of USDA's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative.

NRCS State Conservationist Homer Wilkes says landowners may apply until March 12 for cost-share funding for the organic initiatives through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The \$1.1 million dollars available in Mississippi is part of a \$50 million nationwide initiative to provide financial assistance to National Organic Program (NOP) Certified Organic producers as well as those transitioning to organic production.

EQIP promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. Through EQIP, farmers and ranchers receive financial and technical assistance to help install structural conservation practices and to implement management systems that promote conservation.

EQIP may pay for up to 75 percent of the costs associated with installing eligible practices, including high tunnels. For those qualifying as beginning farmers, limited-resource farmers, or socially disadvantaged farmers, EQIP funds are available for up to 90 percent of installation costs. Payments for organic operations may not exceed \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 during any six-year period.

The Organic Initiative will provide EQIP conservation payments to:

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



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## Special Funding Pools

Farmer applications to this special Initiative will be treated as two separate ranking pools, one for transitioning farmers without any current certified organic production and one for existing certified organic farmers who are either adding new transitional production or adopting new conservation measures on existing organic production. In both cases, those in these special funding pools will be competing only against others in the special pool rather than in the much larger general EQIP pool.

As provided by law, there is a \$20,000 per year (\$80,000 over 6 years) payment limit for applications within this special pool.

## New Seasonal High Tunnel Practice Added This Year

Wilkes says seasonal high tunnels, also known as hoop houses, increase the availability of locally grown produce and other specialty crops in a conservation-friendly way. “High tunnels can help producers extend their growing seasons and also expand the availability of healthy, locally grown crops,” Wilkes says, “so their use can benefit producers and consumers.”

High tunnels are made of ribs of plastic or metal pipe covered with a layer of plastic sheeting. NRCS will provide financial assistance to fund one high tunnel per farm where there is existing cultivated cropland. NRCS will offer financial assistance for a high tunnel that covers up to five percent of an acre (2,178 square feet). Producers may build larger tunnels and pay 100 percent of the extra costs themselves. To receive assistance, eligible producers must use commercially manufactured high tunnel kits and no electrical, heating, or mechanical ventilation system can be added.



EQIP funds are also available to help fund supporting practices associated with the use of high tunnels. Examples of supporting practices include but are not limited to: diversions, critical area plantings, nutrient and pest management.

To apply for EQIP or to get more information about EQIP and other NRCS programs, contact the NRCS office serving your county. Look in the phone book under “U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture,” or access this website: <http://offices.usda.gov>. You can also get information about NRCS programs online at <http://www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>.

For more information about USDA's conservation programs, [click here](#) or visit the nearest USDA Service Center.

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