

USDA NRCS

United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

NEWS RELEASE

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USDA NRCS ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR NEW ORGANIC INITIATIVE

Jackson, MS, April 11, 2011 – USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is taking applications for a 2011 nationwide Organic Initiative to encourage more organic agriculture production. Funding for the initiative is being made available as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

“EQIP has always been available to organic producers, but with the new Farm Bill, specific funds are being set aside to assist organic producers,” stated Al Garner, Mississippi State Conservationist for NRCS. “The goal of this state-wide organic farming program is to assist producers with making beneficial, cost effective changes to production systems for cool and warm season vegetables and herbs..”

Under the Organic Initiative cover crops, crop rotation, nutrient management, pest management, prescribed grazing, forage harvest management and a number of other conservation practices are eligible. Certified organic producers or producers transitioning to organic farming who have gross farm sales of \$1,000 or more are eligible to apply.

Applications for EQIP are taken continuously throughout the year. However, to be considered for Fiscal Year 2011 EQIP Organic funding, producers need to have an application signed and on file at their local NRCS office by **May 20, 2011**.

Applicants must also complete an Organic Farm Plan with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC), and review and sign a copy of Becoming a Certified Organic Grower (a Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service booklet).

Farmers may receive up to \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 over 6 years. Producers and operations that sell more than \$5,000 a year in organic agriculture products must be certified in order to use the USDA Organic label on their product. Producers and handling (processing) operations that sell less than \$5,000 a year in organic agricultural products are exempt from certification. They may label their products organic if they abide by the standards, but they cannot display the USDA Organic seal.

Each year NRCS completes a contract review to determine if a participant has transitioned to organic farming and is following the approved conservation plan. Failure to complete the transition to organic farming may result in recovery cost and liquidated damages being assessed to the participant.

Orchard producers are eligible as long as the orchard is part of an organic farm.

Interested producers should visit their nearest USDA Service Center to determine eligibility. Additional information on the 2011 EQIP Organic Initiative is available at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/.

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