

MISSISSIPPI STATEWIDE CONCERN SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

EQIP ORGANIC

PURPOSE: This concern addresses cropland and grazing land in the State of Mississippi. The goal of this state-wide organic farming program is to assist producers with making beneficial, cost effective changes to production systems (including conservation practices related to organic production) for cool and warm season vegetables and herbs or for the production of hay. Additionally the purpose of the program is to assist producers with the transition to organic farming in order to be certified as well as those already certified as organic farmers according to the National Organic Program (NOP) administered by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

ELIGIBLE LAND: Cropland, grazing land, and orchards.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION AND PROCEDURE

- ü Must complete Organic Farm Plan. Consult the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) for additional information. NRCS will provide maps and other general documentation to the applicant necessary for developing the organic plan. The participant will work directly with MDAC to actually complete the Organic Farm Plan form.
- ü Must review and sign copy of Becoming A Certified Organic Grower. Consult Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service for additional information. (<http://www.msstate.edu/dept/cmrec/organic>)
- ü Must complete National Screening Criteria Worksheet - FY2011 – This tool will be used for organic and transitioning to organic participants.
- ü Must sign Self-Certification Letter if producer is applying for EQIP assistance to transition to organic production. Letter states that producer “agrees to develop and implement conservation practices for certified organic production that are consistent with an organic system plan.”

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Progress in reaching the project objectives will be obtained from data documented in the CPO and reported using the PRS reporting system.

- Producer must have gross farm sales of \$1,000 or more to qualify for EQIP Organic.
- The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 requires the Secretary to use the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to provide financial assistance to producers to implement conservation practices related to organic production.
- In order to be eligible for EQIP organic financial assistance, producers are required to develop and carry out an Organic System Plan (OSP) while in the process of transitioning to organic production or to carry out conservation practices which are consistent with an OSP and the purposes of EQIP for certified organic operations.
- The maximum allowable annual EQIP payment to a person or legal entity may not exceed \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 during any 6-year period.
- EQIP payments may not be used for costs related to organic certification.
- EQIP contracts funded for producers who are not pursuing organic certification or are not in compliance with the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 will be subject to cancellation.
- Only producers who grow or sell more than \$5,000 in agricultural products will be required to become certified as an organic production operation. However, producers growing less than \$5,000 in agricultural products must still meet the requirements of a certified organic grower to be eligible for this program.

Producers and handling (processing) operations that sell less than \$5,000 a year and are not certified may label their products organic if they abide by the standards, but they cannot display the USDA Organic seal.

ELIGIBLE CONSERVATION PRACTICE INFORMATION:

The following table lists conservation practices that directly relate to production of organic crops and are eligible for payment for the EQIP Organic resource concern:

CONSERVATION PRACTICES ELIGIBLE FOR PAYMENT

Practice Code	Name	Units
138	Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition	Ac/Job
317	Composting Facility	SqFt/Each
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	Ac
329	Residue Management	Ac
340	Cover Crop	Ac
342	Critical Area Stabilization	Ac
382	Fence	Ft
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	Ac
393	Filter Strip	Ac
412	Grassed Waterway	Ac
484	Mulching (Plastic)	Ac
511*	Forage Harvest Management	Ac
512*	Pasture and Hayland Planting	Ac
528*	Prescribed Grazing	Ac
590*	Nutrient Management	Ac
595*	Pest Management	Ac
614	Watering Facility	No
645*	Wildlife Upland Habitat Management	Ac
647*	Early Successional Habitat Development and Management	Ac
798*	Seasonal Tunnel System For Crops	SqFt

*382 – Only a special wildlife fence design is available only for organic farmers. See specification sheet for wildlife protective fence. \$7500 state limit for fence under EQIP Organic.

*391 and 393 – Buffers will be utilized to support pollinator habitat. (No chemical spraying will be allowed.)

*511 – This practice is for mixed grasses that will be managed as stored forageland (hay, silage, and/or greenchop). Associated Practices are: 528-Prescribed Grazing, 512-Pasture and Hayland Planting, and 595-Pest Management.

*528 – Pasture Condition Score Sheet is required, lime and fertilizer limited to 200 acres (\$30,160 BASE cost cap / \$36,180 HU cost cap) per tract. Acres that receive lime and fertilizer will not be eligible for this practice for five years; **not a stand alone practice**; must be planned in conjunction with at least one of these practices: 382 and/or 614.

*590 – Only organic fertilizers are eligible for cost-share assistance. See payment schedule for eligible payment items (with manure application and without manure application).

*595 – Must follow organic certified growers' guidelines released by Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce. Additional information will be provided by the Ecological Staff. (See payment schedule.)

Organic A – Row crops, vegetables, and fruits produced using organic farming practices.

Organic B – Okra, squash, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins using organic farming practices.

Organic C – Tomatoes produced using organic farming practices.

*645 - Manage Transition Zone/Corridor must be used in conjunction with 645 Establish Transition Zone/Corridor.

*647 - Manage Wildlife Habitat Buffer must be used in conjunction with 647 Establish Wildlife Habitat Buffer.

*798 - Structures cannot exceed 5% of one acre per operation roughly 2178 sq. ft (\$5,880 BASE cost cap / \$7,187 HU cost cap). **Participant must construct a "kit" type structure and other required components.** (Only Metal framed structures are eligible for financial assistance.)

Site selection is critical to prevent soil erosion from occurring. Crops must be planted into natural soil bed (not raised bed or pots). This includes field-grown ornamentals. This practice does not include greenhouses or low tunnel systems that may cover single crop rows. Note: These structures should not be referred to as greenhouses.

The following is the rate of compensation for practices associated with 798. For practices less than ½ acre, use ½ acre payment rate. If area is 1/2 to 1.0 acre, use 1 acre payment rate. For example- A critical area stabilization of 2/3 acre the planner would use 1 acre in the contract and plan. In most cases, light grading and shaping and vegetation only should be planned.

Note: Since Seasonal High Tunnels are a pilot project, we are required to provide an annual report. Maintain receipts on these projects to determine the total costs and the manufacturer's instructions for installing the high tunnels.