



Conservation Programs & Practices for: **Organic Farming**

About NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with agricultural and forest producers to protect and conserve natural resources on our nation's private lands.

NRCS administers conservation programs funded primarily through the current Farm Bill (Agricultural Act of 2014), and offers financial and technical assistance to landowners to address high priority resource concerns through the implementation of conservation practices. Contact your local NRCS field office for assistance.

The 2014 Farm Bill

The 2014 Farm Bill, enacted on February 7, 2014, offers voluntary conservation programs that benefit both agricultural and forest producers and the environment.

The conservation provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill continue to build on the conservation gains made by U.S. citizens over the past decades and previous farm bills.

Contact NRCS:

Massachusetts USDA Service Centers

- Greenfield: 413-772-0384 ext.3
- Hadley: 413-585-1000 ext. 3
- Holden: 508-829-4477 ext. 3
- Pittsfield: 413-443-1776 ext. 3
- Westford: 978-692-1904 ext. 3
- West Wareham: 508-295-5151 ext. 2
- West Yarmouth: 508-771-6476

NRCS offers conservation practices related to organic production through two programs - the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

Agricultural producers who are certified organic, transitioning to organic production, or who fall under the exemption category in the National Organic Program (NOP) regulation are eligible to apply to EQIP. NRCS provides funds through a special EQIP Organic Initiative. Organic farmers also are eligible to apply to the general EQIP program, which offers a greater range of conservation practices.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

CSP rewards producers who have already applied stewardship to their operations and who agree to undertake additional conservation activities.

Conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through EQIP:

EQIP ORGANIC INITIATIVE: The Organic Initiative provides financial assistance to implement a broad set of conservation practices to help organic producers in addressing resource concerns including:

- Developing a conservation plan
- Establishing buffer zones
- Planning and installing pollinator habitat
- Improving soil quality and organic matter while minimizing erosion
- Developing a grazing plan and supportive livestock practices
- Improving irrigation efficiency
- Enhancing cropping rotations and nutrient management

Payments through the EQIP organic initiative are limited to \$20,000 per participant annually or \$80,000 over a six year period.

GENERAL EQIP: The general EQIP program offers a wider range of conservation practices including waste storage facilities, forestry, greenhouses, air quality, energy, invasive species control, and pollinator and wildlife habitat. The total payment limitation per farmer is \$450,000.

Conservation Plans & Conservation Activity Plans

Your program application must be supported by an NRCS approved conservation plan, which provides documentation of the practices that could be used to address your natural resource concerns. We will work with you to develop an approved conservation plan.

You may also apply for financial assistance to hire Technical Service Providers (TSP) to develop a specialty plans called Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) to address certain land use activities or specific resource needs on your land.



NRCS Conservation Programs & Practices for Organic Farming

Why do we offer help for organic farming?

Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments in U.S. agriculture. Certified organic cropland, pasture and livestock have steadily increased over the past decade.

Organic farming positively impacts our environment in many ways. Native pollinators, beneficial insects that attack plant pests, and wildlife also benefit from organic systems. However, some techniques involved in organic farming can result in decreased soil and water quality.

Although organic farmers use few, if any, herbicides, the frequent cultivation required to control weeds reduces soil organic matter and can lead to soil erosion, poor soil aggregation/tilth, and overall decreased soil health. Adding fall and summer cover crops and mulches can offset some of the negative effects of tillage.

Organic farmers often rely on animal manures or manure-based fertilizers to provide all of the nutrients that their plants require; however, the continual use of animal manures to provide enough nitrogen for growing plants also drastically over-supplies phosphorus to the soil which can lead to water quality problems.

Strategies such as nutrient management and the use of crop rotations and legume cover crops can alleviate some of the detrimental aspects of organic farming.

Helpful resources:

- USDA National Organic Program: www.ams.usda.gov
- ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: www.attra.ncat.org
- Cornell Organic Guides for Fruit, Vegetables & Dairy: nysipm.cornell.edu/organic_guide
- Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES): mosesorganic.org

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP helps promote farm and forest production by enhancing the environmental quality of soil, water, air, plants and animals.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP helps farm and forest land owners maintain and improve existing conservation systems and adopt new conservation activities.

Who can apply?

- Owners of land in agricultural production, or persons who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production on eligible land, that has a natural resource concern.
- Farmers who own or manage certified organic operations or operations that are transitioning to certified organic may apply.
- There is no minimum acreage requirement to apply for EQIP or CSP, however, projects that address more significant resource concerns are more likely to receive funding.
- Beginning, socially disadvantaged and limited-resource farmers, Indian tribes and veterans may be eligible for higher payment rates and advance payments.

How and when do I apply?

- Applications may be submitted anytime. All applications will be evaluated periodically in a competitive ranking process as funding becomes available. Ranking criteria is available on our website.
- To apply, you will need to file the following forms (also on our website):
 - Conservation Program Application (CCC-1200)
 - Adjusted Gross Income Certification (CCC-926)
 - Highly Erodible Land & Wetland Conservation Certification (AD-1026)
- A DUNS number, and registration and yearly renewal in the System for Award Management (SAM) will be required before contracts can be obligated and for payment eligibility determination.

Certified organic farmers must:

- provide a copy of their USDA NOP Organic Certificate or proof of good standing from a USDA accredited certifying agent
- certification must be maintained for the life of the EQIP contract.

Transitioning organic and exempt farmers must:

- written self-certification that they agree to develop and implement an OSP.

- Note: NRCS is not authorized to enforce the provisions of NOP.
- If your application is funded, you will be required to install and maintain your conservation practices according to NRCS standards.

Please call the NRCS field office at your local USDA Service Center or visit us online for more information.