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At a Glance: **Organic Farming**

Overview

Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments in U.S. agriculture. From 1992 through 2005, the acres of certified organic cropland rose from 403,000 to more than 1.7 million; organically certified pasture acres rose from 532,000 to over 4 million; and the total number of organic certified livestock rose from 11,000 in 1992 to over 196,000.

Legislative Changes

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) highlights the availability of financial and technical assistance to help producers of all commodities meet their conservation goals, including producers transitioning to organic farming and currently certified organic producers. The assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps producers plan and implement conservation practices to allow their organic operations to be environmentally sustainable.

The major 2008 Farm Bill conservation programs that may be of interest to those seeking assistance with conservation practices in their organic or transitioning operations include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP).

EQIP is primarily used to provide financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices to address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resources. A new organic provision targets organic producers and producers transitioning to organic production:

- Assistance is for conservation practices related to organic production.
- Assistance is limited to \$20,000 per year and \$80,000 during the six year period.
- Producers are required to develop and carry out an organic system plan or carry out practices consistent with an organic system plan.

Producers must be pursuing an organic certification or in compliance with their organic certification.

The following are examples of EQIP assistance that may be of interest to those engaged in organic farming:

- Assistance in implementing an Integrated Pest Management Plan.
- Assistance in installing interior fencing and watering for rotational grazing systems.
- Assistance to implement conservation practices tailored to the producer's operation.

A new CStP provides technical and financial assistance to those producers who already have applied the basic conservation practices and are willing to implement a higher level of conservation on their operations. Producers participating under CStP receive incentive payments for the specified higher levels of conservation treatment.

More Information

For more information and updates about EQIP, CStP, and other Farm Bill topics please refer to the USDA Web site: <http://www.usda.gov/farmbill> or the NRCS Web site: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008.

