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USDA Offers Conservation Funding to Organic Producers in South Carolina

Prioritized Funding Application Deadline March 4, 2011

COLUMBIA, December 29, 2010 – Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan announced USDA will provide funding to help organic producers and those transitioning to organic production implement resource conservation practices on their agricultural operations.

“Increasing consumer demand for organically grown foods is providing new opportunities for small and mid-size farmers to prosper and stay competitive in today’s economy,” Merrigan said. “The 2008 Farm Bill calls for this assistance, and we want to help these farmers protect the natural resources on their land and create conditions that help foster organic production.”

Fiscal year (FY) 2011 marks the third year of USDA’s Organic Initiative, and up to \$50 million is available this year for producers to plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns in ways that are consistent with organic production. For example, organic producers may use the funding to plant cover crops, establish integrated pest management plans, or implement nutrient management systems consistent with organic certification standards.

Eligible producers include those certified through USDA’s [National Organic Program](#), those transitioning to certified organic production, and those who meet organic standards but are exempt from certification because their gross annual organic sales are less than \$5,000. In FY 2010, NRCS obligated nearly \$24 million through the Organic Initiative to help producers implement conservation practices.

Organic Initiative funding is provided through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP), a voluntary conservation program administered by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. The 2008 Farm Bill EQIP provided for assistance specifically for organic farm operations and those converting to organic production.

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Helping People Help the Land

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Under Organic Initiative contracts, producers are paid 75 percent of the cost for the organic conservation measures they implement. Beginning, limited resource, and socially disadvantaged producers are paid 90 percent. The program provides up to \$20,000 per year per person or legal entity, with a maximum total of \$80,000 over six years.

Producers interested in applying for Organic Initiative funding must submit applications through their local NRCS Service Center, which can be located through the Web site at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>.

Detailed information about the initiative and how to apply is available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/organic/2011.html>.

Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, with the cutoff date set for March 4, 2011.

NRCS is celebrating 75 years helping people help the land. Since 1935, the NRCS conservation delivery system has advanced a unique partnership with state and local governments and private landowners delivering conservation based on specific, local conservation needs, while accommodating state and national interests. NRCS is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

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