



Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

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Accessing NRCS Programs for Organic Farmers

by Katy Green
MOFGA's Organics Transition Coordinator

Overview

The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary cost-share program that promotes environmental stewardship and good farming practices. In the 2008 Farm Bill, EQIP was expanded to include a special emphasis on organic farms, called the Organic Initiative (OI). The Organic Initiative operates in the same way as EQIP, but is funding that is specifically set-aside for organic growers. To qualify for the Organic Initiative, farmers must be either certified organic, transitioning to organic production or exempt under the NOP rule. Organic producers can still participate in the standard EQIP ranking if they choose.



Benefits

There are numerous benefits to organic producers that choose to participate in the Organic Initiative. First, is cost share assistance to implement practices that address farm resource concerns, while fulfilling many requirements of the organic standards.

Assistance can be provided to:

- Develop a conservation plan
- Develop a transition to organic plan
- Establish boundaries and buffer zones
- Improve soil quality and organic matter and implement crop rotations

- Develop a pest management strategy that is consistent with organic standards
- Develop a grazing plan that meets OSP and pasture rule requirements
- Enhance nutrient management on the farm through increased waste management and on farm composting
- Improve irrigation efficiency

Other benefits include higher payment rates for some practices over the existing EQIP rates and more competitive ranking opportunities.



Accessing the Programs

The first step in accessing these programs is to visit your county FSA office and make sure your farm is on file there. Once that's done you should schedule an appointment to meet with an NRCS staff member in your county. This can happen at your farm or at the NRCS office.

During this meeting you should paint a picture of the overall goals of your farm and current barriers to meeting those goals. If you have an idea of the kinds of NRCS practices that you'd like to implement it's also important to highlight for the NRCS staff member the resource concern the practice will address. Building a good rapport with your NRCS representative can be helpful in making sure you get the most out of these programs.

For further questions about how to get involved in these programs, how they work, or specific practices contact Katy Green, Organic Transitions Coordinator at MOFGA, 568-4142 or kgreen@mofga.org

NRCS offices by county

Androscoggin/Sagadahoc Counties 254 Goddard Road Lewiston, ME 04241-1938
Tel: 207-753-9400

Aroostook County:
Central Aroostook 735 Main Street, Suite #3
Presque Isle, ME 04769
Tel: 207-764-4153

Southern Aroostook 304 North Street Houlton, ME 04730-9527
Tel: 207-532-2087

St. John Valley 139 Market Street, Suite 106 Fort Kent, ME 04743-1425
Tel: 207-834-3311

Cumberland/York Counties
306 U.S. Route 1, Suite A1
Scarborough, ME 04074-9774
Tel: 207-883-0159

Franklin County
107 Park Street Farmington, ME 04938-1915
Tel: 207-778-4767

Kennebec/ Lincoln County
Central Maine Commerce Center
21 Enterprise Drive, Suite #1 Augusta, ME 04330
Tel: 207-622-7847

Oxford County
1570 Main Street, Suite #10
Oxford, ME 04270-3390
Tel: 207-743-5789

Penobscot/Hancock County
1423 Broadway, Suite #2 Bangor, ME 04401
Tel: 207-947-6622

Piscataquis County
42 Engdahl Drive Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426-3717
Tel: 207-564-2321

Somerset County
12 High Street, Suite #3 Skowhegan, ME 04976-1998
Tel: 207-474-8324

Waldo/Knox County
266 Waterville Road Belfast, ME 04915-1224
Tel: 207-338-1964

Washington County
Federal Building and Post Office
89 Court Street Machias, ME 04654-0121
Tel: 207-255-3995

Sources:

NRCS Organic Initiative Website
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/?&cid=nrcs143_008224

Maine NRCS Website
<http://www.me.nrcs.usda.gov/>

