

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Craig Derickson reminds potential applicants to contact their local NRCS office soon to find out if they are eligible for the agency's Organic Initiative. Applications for the second ranking period of 2012 are due at NRCS offices by close of business on March 30.

Nationwide, NRCS has nearly \$50 million in financial and technical assistance available to certified organic producers, those who want to make the transition to organic production and producers who sell less than \$5,000 in organic products annually.

As part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Organic Initiative offers a wide array of conservation practices specifically designed for organic production.

Through the Organic Initiative, NRCS will provide funding to help organic producers and those transitioning to organic production implement resource conservation practices on their agricultural operations. Organic producers may use the funding to plant cover crops, establish integrated pest management plans, or implement nutrient management systems.

"NRCS employees will work with producers to design a conservation plan that will work best for their operation. These conservation plans include practices that will help the selected applicants meet many requirements of their USDA Organic System Plans and stay in compliance with USDA's National Organic Program," Derickson said.

The top five Organic Initiative conservation practices are cover crops, nutrient and pest management, seasonal high tunnels, crop rotation, and fencing.

Changes for the 2012 signups include three ranking periods for current and transitioning producers; a threshold ranking score that can speed up approval for qualified applicants; required conservation practices that promote the consistent use of those practices; and an expanded list of conservation activity plans.

Learn more about the Organic Initiative at <http://go.usa.gov/Uo9> and find out about other NRCS initiatives and programs at <http://go.usa.gov/UoX>.