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### **KRC Commends New EQIP Organic Transition Provisions**

*Whiting, Ks.* – The Kansas Rural Center applauds the new EQIP Organic Transition Program, which will begin offering federal financial and technical assistance to Kansas farmers and ranchers interested in transitioning to organic production methods.

The 2008 Farm Bill's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) authorizes for the first time on a nationwide basis the use of funds for transition to organic production systems.

“Organic is the fastest growing sector of agriculture with benefits to the producer, the consumer, and our natural resources,” stated Mary Fund, Kansas Rural Center Communications Director. “Cover crops and long-term legume based crop rotations, the foundation of an organic system, offer conservation benefits while also offering unique market opportunities. These practices not only can reduce erosion and agricultural runoff, but they reduce purchased input use, thus lowering production costs.”

“Since this is a new program there are a lot of questions as to how it will work, and there will likely be bugs to work out of the system,” said Fund. “But we urge any interested farmers to call their local conservation district office to inquire about the program or to sign up.”

Prior to 2008, a few states had been using their EQIP programs to provide special assistance to farmers and ranchers in conversion to organic in a pilot program. Nebraska and Iowa are just two of around a dozen or more states who have offered the assistance in the past. But now, the option is available nationwide to those who want to transition to organic production systems or to existing organic farmers who are expanding their organic crop production or increasing their organically managed livestock or poultry operations. *Continued on page 2*

To participate in the organic conversion provision, farmers or ranchers must develop and implement an organic systems plan and agree to become certified at the end of a three-year transition period. Certification standards have been established by the federal government, and are carried out by any one of numerous independent certifying entities as authorized by USDA.

According to USDA, assistance is limited to \$20,000 per year and \$80,000 during the six-year period. Assistance is for conservation practices (existing practice standards) related to organic production. USDA NRCS is also required to make available an adequate and appropriate range of technical assistance for those seeking the conversion assistance.

“We are concerned at KRC that technical assistance may be a problem initially,” Fund stated. “For the EQIP program, applicants must contact NRCS field staff for planning and assistance, who are still coming up to speed on practices and issues specifically related to organic practices and certification standards.”

“KRC gets calls now from farmers with questions about crop rotations and what is allowed and what isn’t under certification,” Fund explained. “We get practical questions about how to plan that first year or shift toward organic production. We know how tough it can be, so yes, we want to be sure that the appropriate advice and help is available.”

“But only by showing strong interest in the program can it be retained and improved. So we urge farmers or ranchers interested in the EQIP Organic Conversion Program to call your local Conservation District office,” Fund stated. “And if you have questions about organic practices in general, call KRC. We are committed to working with individual farmers—and with NRCS—to make the program a success.”

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