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**ORGANIC INITIATIVE FUNDS AVAILABLE!  
NEW SIGN UP PERIOD: MAY 11 - MAY 29**

Whiting, Ks. - The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) has created a special \$50 million pool of funding for a new Organic Initiative under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Kansas share of the nationwide \$50 million is \$1.5 million. The Initiative will provide payments and technical assistance to transitioning and existing organic farmers who adopt NRCS conservation practices used in organic production systems. Kansas saw an earlier sign -up but this is a new sign-up with clearer national guidelines, which will allow more farmers to participate. Any Kansas farmer who already signed up for the program should check in with their local conservation district office.

The Kansas Rural Center, Whiting, Ks. , will help refer producers to resources, including existing Kansas organic farmers with experience in transition practices, as well as answer questions about the new program as that information becomes available.

A directive from USDA NRCS indicates that eligible farmers are:

- Farmers just beginning or in the process of transitioning to organic production;
- Existing certified organic farmers who want to transition additional acres or animals;
- Existing certified organic farmers who need to adopt additional conservation measures;
- Producers who sell less than \$5,000 in agricultural products and are thus exempt from formal certification are still eligible for Organic Initiative payments.

The program will be available in every state and county. Sign up begins for this special pool of funds on Monday, May 11th and continues through May 29th. Organic or transitioning farmers who have already applied for EQIP funding may choose to move their application into the special organic pool which will have higher payment rates for some practices than the regular EQIP program and a \$20,000 per year (\$80,000 over 6 years) payment limit. Costs of technical assistance provided by NRCS will not count against the payment limitation.

Transitioning farmers are also being offered an opportunity to develop a “conservation activity plan” as part of their EQIP Organic Initiative contract. A conservation activity plan will be needed to meet National Organic Program certification requirements and is an important step toward certification.

All applications received during this sign up period will be ranked using national and in some cases state level criteria related to how well the proposed contract contributes to conserving soil, water quality and other resource concerns. Farmers who are awarded a contract will then be eligible for technical assistance to assist with implementation of the practices. NRCS has set aside an additional \$5 million for technical assistance for this initiative.

More information is available at the website of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). <http://sustainableagriculture.net/take-action/> Look for the NSAC Memo and the NRCS directive on the EQIP Organic Initiative Program.

These organizations are also available to answer producer questions about the Organic Initiative. Visit their websites for more information: Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, Organic Farming Research Foundation, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, ATTRA (National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service), Center for Rural Affairs, Agriculture and Land Based Training Association, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Florida Organic Growers.