



Fact Sheet

May 2009

Helping Louisiana farmers who are certified organic producers or are transitioning to organic

Overview

Organic food sales remain the fastest growing sector in the food industry, swelling by 18 percent in 2007.

Organic food sales more than tripled, to \$1.7 billion in 2007 from \$393 million in 2002, according to new data released by USDA's Agriculture Census.

All 50 states now have certified organic acreage for a total of 4 million acres of farmland. California remains the leading state in certified organic cropland, with over 220,000 acres, mostly for fruit and vegetable production.

Louisiana has experienced gradual growth with a total of more than 1,100 acres. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry reports that there are 16 certified organic producers of crops ranging from fruits and vegetables to dairy.



Conservation planning - technical assistance offered by the NRCS

Organic Initiative - EQIP

The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) provides specific opportunities for organic producers and those transitioning to organic farming. Louisiana farmers who are transitioning to organic or who are currently certified organic can now apply to receive assistance under the Organic Initiative through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers EQIP and is applications for the Organic Initiative.

A number of "core" organic conservation practices may be funded through the Organic Initiative, including cover crops, conservation crop rotation, prescribed grazing, pest management, nutrient management, and forage harvest management. All conservation practices offered under "general" EQIP are also available through the Organic Initiative, including but not limited to fence and watering facilities for rotational grazing, erosion control practices, irrigation management, field borders, etc. EQIP is a voluntary conservation program reauthorized in the 2008 Farm Bill. It supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, eligible producers may receive financial and technical help with structural, vegetative, and management conservation practices on agricultural land and private non-industrial forestland. Applications for EQIP are taken continuously throughout the year. Applicants who are currently certified organic will need to include their organic system plan (OSP) reviewed by a USDA accredited organic certifier when applying for financial assistance in the Organic Initiative under EQIP.

Assistance Available

In Louisiana, more than \$900,000 is available in 2009 through a special allotment for organic farmers via the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Successful applicants will receive 75% of the cost to implement priority conservation practices designed to improve natural resource conditions. Not only do these practices offer significant environmental benefits, but they are also important to growers. Under the Organic Initiative, approved applicants can receive up to \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 over six years.

Conservation Planning Assistance

For more than 70 years, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has placed a high priority on helping agricultural producers with conservation plans to meet their environmental and economic goals, while at the same time planning for the protection of the soil, water, air and wildlife resources. Conservation goals are highly individual and may include transitioning to organic agriculture (or boosting pollinator populations, increasing biodiversity including soil-borne organisms, enhancing water quality, controlling invasive species or dozens of other

resource-enhancing possibilities). NRCS conservationists will come to your farm and work with you to develop a conservation plan based on your farm goals. The plan will specify a timeline to implement the conservation practices. Conservation planning assistance is free and does not require participation in costshare programs.

Confidentiality

All information provided to NRCS for conservation planning purposes is strictly confidential.

How Do I Get Started?

Visit your local USDA Service Center to:

- a) Register in the Service Center Information Database (SCIMS) database through the Farm Service Agency.
- b) Apply for assistance under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) at the NRCS office prior to May 29, 2009 for current year funds. (Applications received after May 29, 2009 will be considered in the future funding years.)
- c) Have or be willing to develop an Organic System Plan on your land
 - 1) If already certified as organic, bring a copy of your Organic System Plan for review
 - 2) If transitioning to organic, submit a self-certification letter to NRCS district conservationist stating your intent to do so. The NRCS can provide a template for selfcertification if needed.

Eligibility Requirements

- a) Be an agricultural operation that produces at least \$1,000 in agricultural products in 2 of the last 5 years or has IRS Schedule F form showing profit or loss from a farm operation
- b) Must own, or have control of the land (by lease or rental agreement) for length of contract
- c) Must be actively engaged in farm operation
- d) May be an individual, entity or joint operation

- e) Be registered in the USDA Service Center Information Database (SCIMS)
- f) Be certified as organic according to the National Organic Program OR be in the process of transitioning to organic production

What is an Organic System Plan?

An Organic System Plan is a required written management plan that covers all components of an organic production and handling system. Such a plan must be developed annually and must include:

1. A description of practices and procedures to be performed and maintained;
2. A list of each substance to be used in production or handling, indicating its composition, source, location(s) where it will be used, and documentation of commercial availability;
3. A description of the monitoring practices and procedures to be performed and maintained, including their frequency;
4. A description of the record keeping system implemented to comply with established requirements;
5. A description of the management practices and physical barriers established to prevent co-mingling of organic and non-organic products on a split operation and to prevent contact of organic production and handling operations and products with prohibited substances; and
6. Additional information deemed necessary by the certifying agent (CA) to evaluate compliance with the regulations. The OSP is administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Payments are not authorized for activities or practice components which are solely production related and are not linked to an identified resource concern. Payments may not be used for any costs related to organic certification.

USDA Accredited Certifying Agents in Louisiana

Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, 5825 Florida Boulevard, Suite 1023 Baton Rouge, LA 70806
Contact: Harry Schexnayder
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Information and Contacts

Louisiana specific information can be found at www.la.nrcs.usda.gov .

Agency information can be found at:
www.nrcs.usda.gov
www.ams.usda.gov
www.fsa.usda.gov

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