United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

2011 Ranking Period 1

Water Quality Enhancement Activity – WQL20 – Transition to organic cropping systems

Enhancement Description
Transition to Organic Cropping Systems supports the conversion of a conventional to an organic cropping system. Key to the enhancement is the inclusion of management activities that improve soil and water quality in a "Organic System Plan" that adheres to the National Organic Program (NOP) 205.201 criteria. Included in the plan are specifics on how producers will manage pests, weeds, diseases, and plant nutrients by following a crop rotation that incorporates cover crops. Additional considerations for using manure, compost, and source of seed are also addressed.

Landuse Applicability
Cropland

Benefits
Environmental benefits will be operation specific. Benefits may include, but are not limited to improving soil quality through reduced erosion, increased organic matter, and balancing plant nutrients; and reducing impact of the farming operation on water quality achieved by managing pests, weeds, and diseases using biological, mechanical, and/or physical practices that eliminate the need for synthetic pesticides.

Criteria

1. Implement a crop rotation that improves soil quality using a sod-based rotation, inclusion of high residue crops, addition of cover crops during non crop periods, reduced tillage, and/or other soil improving practices.
2. Manage plant nutrients using agronomic practices such as cover crops to provide or trap nutrients and/or a crop rotation that mixes high and low nutrient feeding crops.
3. Incorporate manure when applied within the time limit specified in the NOP 205.203c1.
4. Compost manure and plant material for plant nutrient use according to NOP 205.203c2 before land application.
5. Apply additional plant nutrient supplements to ensure they do not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by following criteria in NOP 205.203d & e.
6. Manage pests through a strategy that incorporates:
    a. prevention management practices e.g. crop rotation, sanitation measures and selection of resistant crop varieties
    b. scouting and monitoring

   c. suppression by using biological, mechanical, or physical practices (e.g. introduction of predators or parasites of the pest species, cultivation or weed flaming, mulching).
7. Apply all materials, including plant nutrients and pesticides for crop production in accordance with the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Natural Substances.
8. Apply no prohibited substances, as listed in NOP §205.105 to the land for a period of 3 years immediately preceding harvest of the crop
9. Establish distinct, defined boundaries and buffer zones between fields and adjacent lands to prevent the unintended application of a prohibited substance to the crop or contact with a prohibited substance applied to adjoining land that is not under organic management.
10. Complete organic transition within three (3) years as verified by obtaining an approved Organic System Plan from a valid certifying agency.

Documentation Requirements

1. Written narrative of practices used to:
   a. Improve soil quality including crop rotation, cover crops and other associated practices
   b. Provide plant nutrients
   c. Control pests in the cropping system
2. Map showing field boundaries and buffer zones
3. A record of the application of inputs according to the NOP rules, e.g., type, date, rate, and amount of allowed nutrients and pesticides
4. Documentation of practices applied and steps taken to receive organic certification based on consultation with an accredited organic certifier
5. Copy of the Organic System Plan when approved by certifying agent