

National Initiative

Organic

Questions & Answers

Background. During fiscal year (FY) 2012, the program provides assistance for the installation of conservation practices on agricultural operations related to organic agriculture.

Question (Q) – Who is eligible?

Answer (A) – There are three categories of eligible producers for this initiative:

1. Producers who are Certified Organic and have an Organic System Plan
2. Producers who are Exempt from Certification or those producers who's sales total \$5,000 or less for products sold and labeled as "Organic" AND agree to obtain and follow an OSP
3. Producers who are Transitioning to Organic production and agree to obtain and follow an OSP. They must also provide the information of the certifying agent they will be working with.

Plus participants must meet the EQIP eligibility guidelines.

http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/news/publications/USDA_Eligibility.pdf

Q – What land is eligible?

A – This initiative is applicable to cropland, pastureland and headquarters land use types.

Q – What is an Organic System Plan or OSP?

A – An OSP can be written by the producer or certifier, but must be certified by an USDA-Ag Marketing Service Accredited Certifying Agent. The OSP outlines how the producer will manage the farm, what materials and seed they will be using and what actions they will be taking to prevent the comingling of organic and non-organic materials. It also must detail how the farmer will keep records to document these actions and requires annual updates. The OSP ensures that the producer meets the USDA-AMS requirements to label their product as "Organic."

Q – Does the producer need to provide a copy of the OSP to NRCS?

A – Only if they are participating in EQIP as Certified Organic

Q – There are only two funding pools for the Organic Initiative: Certified and Transitioning. Which category do Exempt from Certification producers fall under?

A – Exempt producers are ranked in the "Certified" fund pool.

Q – How is the OSP relevant to the Conservation Plan?

A – The OSP is not necessary in order to develop a conservation plan for land under this initiative. The OSP may be useful so that NRCS can take it into consideration when providing standards and specs for installing a conservation practice (i.e, making a seeding recommendation that allows the producer to select organic cover crop seed that still meets our 340 standard). Ultimately, it is the producer's responsibility to ensure that they are following the OSP.

Q – What is a Transitioning to Organic Conservation Activity Plan or CAP?

A – The Organic Transitioning CAP is a conservation plan that identifies resource concerns and the need for conservation practices on a farm operation that is transitioning to organic and is written by a Technical Service Provider.

If the conservation planner has the technical skills and time to complete the CAP requirements, there may be no need for a producer to get a Organic Transitioning CAP contract.

Q – Is a Transitioning to Organic CAP required to participate in this initiative?

A – No.

Q – What conservation practices are included with this initiative?

A – All of the General EQIP practices are available if they will address an existing resource concern. In addition, certain practices have specific payment rates consistent with organic production such as (328) Conservation Crop Rotation, (329) Residue Management-No-Till, and (340) Cover Crops, (512) Forage and Biomass Planting and (595) Integrated Pest Management.

Q – Is NRCS required to annually check that the producer is still pursuing or maintaining organic certification?

A – No. Producers self-certify at the time of application that they meet one of the three categories. It is the responsibility of the producer to notify NRCS that they are still pursuing or maintaining certification.

Q – Are Transitioning producers required to become certified before the end of the EQIP contract?

A – No. Organic Certification may take much longer than the length of the EQIP contract.

Q – Who developed the State ranking questions in the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool in ProTracts?

A – NHQ established the state ranking questions for this Initiative.

Q – What are the local ranking questions in the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool in ProTracts?

A – The local ranking questions for this Initiative are the same as those used for General EQIP as developed by the Local Working Groups.