NRCS EQIP Technical and Financial Support for Organic Farmers
Sarah Brown, Organic Conservation Specialist, Oregon Tilth
March 29, 2012
http://www.extension.org/organic_production

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Presented by Sarah Brown
Organic Conservation Specialist
Oregon Tilth
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Outline
• NRCS and EQIP
• The Organic Initiative
• Sign-up Process
• NRCS Conservation Practices
• Case Study: Pie Ranch Conservation Plan
• Additional Resources

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
United States Department of Agriculture
• NRCS Services
  – Soil Survey
  – Technical Assistance
  – Farm Bill Programs
  – Emergency Assistance
  – Conservation Partnership Efforts
  – Information & Outreach

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
Technical and financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.
EQIP Organic Initiative

- Eligibility-certified organic, transitional, and exempt producers
  - Submit OSP or Self-Certification
- Support for Transitioning producers
  - Conservation Activity Plan Supporting Transition to Organic (CAP 138)
    - Not required
  - Technical Service Providers

EQIP Organic Initiative

- $50 million annually nationwide
- Producer payment limit- $20k annually / $80k entire contract

Self-Certification Worksheet

2. Transitioning to Organic
   1. Certification Authority (OSP or Self-Certification)

   Name:
   Phone:

   I understand that I must meet this requirement during the transition period to organic production, and any CSP application may be subject to verification.

   Signed:
   Date:
   Signature:

3. Exempt from Certification (Organic Producers selling less than 5000 pounds annually)
   1. Certification Authority as an Organic Producers, Entity or Entity’s Individual is currently certified under the National Organic Programs (NOP), 7 U.S.C. Section 6502(d)(2)(B), and not applications will be submitted with certified organic producers provided they have met all NOP requirements.

   Signed:
   Date:
   Signature:

   Farm Services Agency (FSA) Farm Bill Program Assistance

- FSA will require
  - Copy of Deed
  - Entity Documents
  - HEL Determination
  - AGI Documentation
  - Proof of Identity
  - Signature Authority
  - Possibly Other

Conservation Assistance
Sign-up Process

- Contact NRCS
  - Develop Conservation Plan with NRCS
    - Identify resource concerns
    - Identify needed conservation practices
- Contact FSA
  - Establish eligibility to Participate in Farm Bill Programs
  - Establish official USDA farm records including farm/tract #
Sign-Up Process

- NRCS Responsibilities:
  - Provide/Accept Application
  - Determine Land Eligibility
  - Gather Irrigation History
  - Develop a Conservation Plan
  - Screen and Rank
  - Develop conservation plan specifications

Developing an NRCS Conservation Plan

What are NRCS resource concerns?

- Soil Erosion
- Inadequate habitat for wildlife
- Degraded Plant Condition
- Water Quality Degradation
- Soil Quality Degradation

What are NRCS ‘conservation practices’? (Available Practices vary by State)

- Irrigation Water Mgt
- Nutrient Management
- Wildlife Habitat Mgt
- Pest Management/IPM
- Prescribed Grazing
- Residue Management
- Crop Rotation
- Deep Tillage

Management Practices
Vegetative Practices

- Cover Crop
- Hedgerow
- Critical Area Planting
- Windbreak
- Grass Waterway
- Filter Strip
- Conservation Cover

Irrigation Related Practices

- Drip Irrigation
- Sprinkler Irrigation
- Irrigation Pipeline
- Water Harvesting
- Irrigation Reservoir
- Water Control Structure-Flow Meter
- Pumping Plant
- Tail Water Recovery
- Spring Development

Structural Practices

- Compost Facility
- Access Road
- Underground Outlet
- Subsurface Drain
- Sediment Basin
- Diversion
- Fence
- Roof Runoff Structure
- Stream Crossing
- Water Control Structure

Other Practices

- Mulching
- Seasonal High Tunnel
- Wetland Restoration
- Fish/Wildlife Structure
- Pond Sealing
- Invasive Weed/Plant Control
- Energy Mgt Practices
- Forestry & Range Practices

How do you implement conservation practices?

- Seed Selection
  - Purpose/Use
  - Native or Non-native
  - Grass, Legume, or Mix
- Planting
  - Drilled or Broadcast
  - Seedbed Preparation
  - Planting Time
  - Irrigation/Fertilization
  - Weed Control
  - Incorporation

Cover Crops

Planning Considerations
Pollinator Hedgerows Planning Considerations

- Purpose/Use
- Plant selection
- Beneficial Insectary
- Pollinator/Timing
- Height/Spread
- Irrigation
- Wildlife
- Screening/Aesthetics
- Monitoring & Maintenance
  - Weed & Gopher Control
  - Irrigation

Compost Facility Planning Considerations

- Purpose
- Location, Size, Shape
- Source: On-site, Imported
- Facility Type
  - Structure or Field
  - Cover Type
- Equipment
  - Stockpiling/Turning
  - Spreading/Incorporation
- Water Supply
- Building materials in organic systems

Financial Assistance Cost Lists

- EQIP payments based on typical costs for implementation
- Beginning Farmer, Limited Resource Producer, and Socially Disadvantaged are eligible for an increased payment rate of 25% - ASK!
- Many practices have multiple payment scenarios/rates - ASK!
- Some states have organic and/or small farm payment ‘rates’ - ASK!

Additional Details

- NRCS certifies installed practices before payment to producer
- See USDA FSA or ShadeFund (www.shadefund.org) for loans
- Program payments may be taxable
- May sign up for multiple Farm Bill Programs on same farm
- Can have more than one active EQIP contract at a time on the same farm

Poll Q2

Pie Ranch Conservation Plan

*Used with landowner permission*
Pie Ranch Conservation Plan

Cover Crop

A winter cover crop of small grains, grasses, or legumes or any combination of these will be grown when strawberries are not grown to reduce soil erosion during the critical period and then incorporated into the soil to improve soil health, water infiltration, and aeration. It will be planted by October 15 and seeding rates adjusted to provide a dense stand. Adequate time will be allowed for decomposition or the fertilizer rates adjusted for the next crop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Planned</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applied Amount</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3 ac</td>
<td>4/29/2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3 ac</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 ac</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Poll Q3

Pie Ranch Conservation Practices

Hedgerow Planting

A living fence of shrubs, and/or trees will be established and maintained adjacent to Pie Field. The hedgerow will provide insectary benefits for crop pest management and provide wildlife food and cover. Practice will be installed according to NRCS Standards and Specifications #422.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Planned Amount</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applied Amount</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>500 ft</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>350 ft</td>
<td>12/21/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500 ft</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>350 ft</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Additional Opportunities

- State Technical Committees & Local Working Groups
  - Provide input on:
    - Local Resource Concerns
    - Screening/Rank Criteria
    - New Practices and Costs
- Host a tour
- Attend a listening session
- NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants

For More Information:
http://tilth.org/education-research/organic-conservation-program

Farm or state specific questions?
Find your local NRCS office:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov

Sample state website:

Questions?
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Find all upcoming webinars and archived eOrganic webinars at http://www.extension.org/pages/25242

Find the slides as a pdf handout and the recording at http://www.extension.org/pages/63100

Additional questions about organic farming?
http://www.extension.org/ask

We need your feedback! Please fill out our follow-up email survey!