

Contact Information: Elaine Tremble
Public Affairs Specialist

Ranking Dates Set for Three Major Conservation Initiatives

Bangor, ME – December 7, 2011 – Agricultural producers will have more opportunities this year to be approved for funding for three conservation initiatives, announced Juan Hernandez, State Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), three ranking dates have been set for the On-Farm Energy, Organic, and Seasonal High Tunnel initiatives for Fiscal Year 2012; in the past there was one ranking period per year. All three initiatives offer technical and financial assistance.

“Moving to multiple ranking dates for each initiative is going to make it easier for more producers to apply and help them get started with implementing the practices they need to benefit the natural resources on their operations,” said Hernandez. “We hope producers will visit their local USDA Service Center for more details on how NRCS can help them conserve Maine’s natural resources.”

NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year; however, there will be three ranking periods for the three initiatives, all ending on February 3, March 30 and June 1, 2012. At the end of a ranking period, NRCS will rank all submitted proposals for funding consideration, notify all applicants of the results of the rankings, and begin developing contracts with selected applicants.

Initiatives Overview:

On-Farm Energy Initiative: NRCS and producers develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. NRCS then uses audit data to develop energy conservation recommendations. Each AgEMP has a landscape component that assesses equipment and farming processes and a farm headquarters component that assesses power usage and efficiencies in livestock buildings, grain handling operations, and similar facilities to support the farm operation.

Organic Initiative: NRCS helps certified organic growers and producers working to achieve organic certification install conservation practices for organic production. New for fiscal year 2012, applicants will be evaluated continuously during the ranking periods. Applications meeting or exceeding a threshold score may be approved for an EQIP contract before the end of the ranking period. Applications rating below the threshold score will be deferred to the next period. A new threshold score will be established at the beginning of each ranking period. This new

Helping People Help the Land

NEWS RELEASE

scoring process allows organic producers to implement conservation practices in a timelier manner.

Seasonal High Tunnel Pilot Initiative: NRCS helps producers plan and implement high tunnels, steel-framed, polyethylene-covered structures that extend growing seasons in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment, and better air quality due to fewer vehicles being needed to transport crops.

For more information go to www.me.nrcs.usda.gov or contact your nearest USDA Service Center, listed online at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the telephone book under United States Government, Agriculture Department.

Since 1935, NRCS has provided leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private land owners and managers conserve their soil, water, and other natural resources. NRCS employees provide technical assistance based on sound science and that is suited to a customer's specific needs, and provides financial assistance for many conservation activities.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.