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USDA Offers Organic Producers Opportunity to Implement Conservation Practices

Bangor, ME – April 11, 2011 – Juan Hernandez, State Conservationist for the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Maine, announced another funding opportunity for certified organic producers and those transitioning to organic production. “This additional opportunity will allow more producers to get assistance in protecting the natural resources on their land and creating conditions that help foster organic production.” While applications are accepted on a continuous basis, the cutoff date for this application period is May 20, 2011.

Eligible producers include those certified through USDA’s National Organic Program, those transitioning to certified organic production, and those who meet organic standards but are exempt from certification because their gross annual organic sales are less than \$5,000.

Up to \$480,000 is available this year in Maine for the third year of USDA’s Organic Initiative. Funds will help producers plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns in ways that are consistent with organic production for conservation practices such as planting cover crops, establishing integrated pest management plans, constructing seasonal high tunnels, or implementing nutrient management systems consistent with organic certification standards.

Successful applicants will receive funding to implement conservation practices that have been identified as needed to improve natural resource conditions. Not only do these practices offer significant environmental benefits, but they are also important to growers. Under this Organic Initiative, the three practices: (1) cover crop, (2) herbaceous weed control, and (3) mulching three practices will receive a higher payment rate based on organic production costs and requirements.

Organic Initiative funding is provided through NRCS’ Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a voluntary conservation program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. The 2008 Farm Bill provided assistance specifically for organic farm operations and those converting to organic production.

Under EQIP Organic Initiative contracts, NRCS provides financial payments and technical assistance to help producers implement conservation measures in keeping with organic production. Beginning, limited resource, and socially disadvantaged producers may obtain additional assistance. The 2008 Farm Bill limits EQIP payments for organic operations to \$20,000 per year per person or legal entity, with a maximum total of \$80,000 over six years.

Interested producers should visit their local USDA Service Center to determine eligibility. USDA Service Centers are listed online at <http://offices.usda.gov>, or in the telephone book under United States Government, Agriculture Department. Additional information on the 2011 EQIP Organic Initiative is available at www.me.nrcs.usda.gov.

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