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USDA: \$50 million in EQIP for farmers going organic

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Farmers will have three weeks to apply for \$50 million in land stewardship funding to help pay the cost of converting to organic production, said the U.S. Agriculture Department on Tuesday.

USDA said the special sign-up would run May 11-29 under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. It will be open to growers switching to organic production or expanding their organic operations and certified organic farmers who want to expand stewardship work.

Six practices will be eligible for support -- conservation crop rotation, cover crops, integrated pest management, nutrient management, rotational grazing and forage harvest management.

A small-farm and an organic-farm group said the sign-up showed USDA was making a good-faith effort to help organic agriculture. Farmers can receive a maximum of \$20,000 a year per farm in organic transition funding and up to \$80,000 per farm in six years.

"The EQIP transition contracts are geared for small- and medium-scale family farms and ranches and will speed the move toward more organic acreage," said Mark Lipson of the Organic Farming Research Foundation.

(Reporting by Charles Abbott; Editing by Christian Wiessner)

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