



Fed agency's 'historic shift' to promote organics

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service is putting special emphasis on organic agriculture

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The U.S. organic agriculture industry is set to reap unprecedented rewards from the federal government under the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and is a voluntary working lands program that rewards producers for the conservation benefits of their existing organic farming and ranching systems.

Organic practices are among the more than 70 activities CSP targets.

Some of these include organic cropping and livestock systems, establishment of pollinator habitat, conservation tillages, resource conserving crop rotations, rotational grazing, and continuous cover cropping.

Practices that sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gasses are also rewarded. In addition, the 2008 Farm Bill requires NRCS to provide technical assistance specific to organic producers.

CSP will award five-year contracts to qualifying producers for up to \$200,000.

Producers who want to be considered for the 2009 funding pool must apply by September 30.

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF), based in Santa Cruz, Calif., praised the agency for its "historic transition" by placing special emphasis on organics.

"Official recognition that organic agriculture can play a vital role in national conservation activities is a tremendous step forward for organic producers," said OFRF Executive Director Bob Scowcroft in a statement.

Special outreach efforts will be made to small-scale farms, specialty crop operations, and organic farms.

NRCS will also assist potential applicants dealing with the requirements of certification under the National Organic Program and CSP requirements.

To read the Federal Register notice about the changes in the CSP, click [here](#).