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Conservation funds available for organic growers

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Organic growers, and those who are transitioning acreage to meet organic standards, are eligible for federal money aimed at promoting conservation practices.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has allocated \$50 million for the national 2010 Environmental Quality Incentives Program Organic Initiative,

according to the Organic Farming Research Foundation, Santa Cruz, Calif.

"I think (the program) displays a commitment to conservation," said Ariane Lotti, a foundation policy associate.

The deadline to apply is March 12 and those who receive funding are paid 75% of the cost for the organic conservation measures they implement, according to a news release. Beginning, limited resource, and socially disadvantaged producers are paid up to 90%. The program provides up to \$20,000 per year with a maximum of \$80,000 over six years, according to the release.

Last year, NRCS received 3,000 applications, according to the agency, and approved half of them. Abigail Letzter, a conservation programs specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, said the agency is hoping for more applicants this year.

"We've been working to get the message out in all states so that all organic producers and those working to transition to organic have the necessary information to sign-up and begin to conservation on the ground," Letzter said.

Producers can learn more about the initiative and how to apply at offr.org.

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