

Lessons Learned from an NRCS Contract: Uncle Matt's Organic's Experience with EQIP

BACKGROUND

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) and Florida Organic Growers (FOG) are working to increase farmer and community awareness of available federal funding for organic and transitioning farms.

We interviewed **Ben McLean III** of **Uncle Matt's Organic** in **Clermont, Florida**, about his experience receiving support through the **Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**.

[Read more about Uncle Matt's Organic](#) and how they accessed EQIP funding to support cover cropping, nutrient sampling, and pest management.

Their contract effectively increased available nitrogen and other nutrients, helped control nematodes, and supported an increase in native pollinators.



Photo credit: Ben McLean III

WHY EQIP?

[NRCS' EQIP program](#) offers financial assistance and technical support to implement new conservation practices on your farm, with [additional support for historically underserved applicants](#), including socially disadvantaged, beginning, veteran, and [limited-resource](#) farmers and ranchers. [Read more here.](#)

"I became a better farmer because of this contract; it allowed us to steward our resources better. When money's tight, it's wonderful to have support to put a practice in AND learn how to be a better farmer." – Ben McLean III

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**TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**



Key Takeaways: A Farmer's Perspective

Conservation Strategy: cover cropping, nutrient sampling, and pest management.

When applying to the EQIP program, applicants work with NRCS to assess resource management on their farm and select a conservation enhancement that best fits their needs.

Timeline

1. Contact NRCS

Discuss conservation goals and eligibility.

2. Register with FSA

Enter your farm into the USDA's system.

3. Make a Plan

Select your conservation enhancement.

4. Complete Paperwork

Certain documentation is required before starting.

5. Implement Your Practice

NRCS will do a site visit to your farm.

6. Receive Payment

Farmers will be reimbursed in a lump sum.

Lesson: Get into the System

After a series of destructive hurricanes hit Florida, registering with the FSA became Ben's catalyst for receiving emergency relief and streamlined their application for an EQIP contract.

Lesson: Ask Questions

"Ask your NRCS agent. I asked a lot of questions, and I got a lot of help. We can't be afraid to ask the questions." Engaging with your NRCS rep will help ensure an effective contract and will support the reimbursement process.

Consideration: Leased Land

Paperwork and recordkeeping is often a challenge for farmers with leased farm land. Fortunately, the McLean's office manager and a supportive NRCS rep ensured a smooth process.

Utilize Support Networks

Ben encourages farmers to attend Extension and USDA events. "Get to know your neighbors and other farmers, join grower organizations. This is where you'll meet NRCS reps and can ask about their programs."

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