



Get the Support You Need to Grow Organically

About These Resources

This resource bundle provides step-by-step guides and farmer success stories designed to help you navigate USDA programs and funding. As part of the \$300 million USDA Organic Transition Initiative, significant federal funding and technical assistance are now available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help producers transition to organic systems and pursue certification.

Use these materials to explore available support and take the next step in your organic journey. We will continue to add new resources on the topic on our website at www.ofrf.org/resources/TOPP or by scanning the QR code on this page.



**TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

All of these resources were created by OFRF, supported through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). TOPP is a program of the USDA Organic Transition Initiative and is administered by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Organic Program (NOP)

Funding Available for Organic Farmers

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Background Information:

Federal funding is available to help agricultural producers transition to an organic system of production! As part of the larger \$300 million USDA Organic Transition Initiative, the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) aims to help producers adopt organic management systems in pursuit of certification.

Program Highlight: Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The CSP program from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offers technical and financial assistance to help agricultural and forest producers take their conservation efforts to the next level, through practices like cover cropping, integrated grazing, supporting wildlife habitats, and more.

Who is eligible?



Eligible Applicants: Agricultural producers with ownership or control of their land, owners of non-industrial private forestland, or those interested in establishing agricultural/forestry operations, with less than \$900,000 adjusted gross income per year. Federally Recognized Tribes.



Eligible Lands: Private agricultural lands, agricultural Indian lands, nonindustrial private forest land, farmstead, associated agricultural lands and public land that is under the control of the applicant and part of their operation. There is no minimum acreage requirement, though CSP requires you enroll your entire operation into the program. All land must be in compliance with USDA highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions to be eligible.

What are you eligible to receive?



Consultation and technical assistance from a local NRCS conservation planner to develop your conservation plan.



Financial assistance for the labor, materials, and implementation of conservation practices in your plan, issued through annual payments (minimum \$4,000 per year).

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How can you apply for this program?

First, it's always a good idea to review some materials.

1



Check out this helpful guide to learn about how USDA works with farmers & ranchers: [Get Started! A Guide to USDA Programs for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers](#).



[The CSP USDA website](#) has some general information, as does [this USDA CSP Fact Sheet](#).



Find the right application.

2

Apply through [your regional NRCS office](#) following the [provided instructions](#). Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, but deadlines and available CSP initiatives vary by state and county. **The first 2026 batching deadline for CSP is January 15, 2026, for all states.**



Provide the financial information required to gain access to government payments.

3



Applicants must be registered with [Farmers.gov](#). Members' farm records must be up to date.



Applicants must provide [adjusted gross income certification](#) (Form [CCC- 941](#)), which requires applicants' Taxpayer ID Number (SSN or EIN) and their Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) from the previous 3 tax years.



Provide the required documents.

4



All applicants must provide control of land documentation (deed, proof of land ownership, lease, or other legal agreement).



Applicants must provide written authorization from the landowner to install structural or vegetative practices on leased land included in the application.



For certified organic applicants only, NRCS requires proof of certification for the CPA 1200.



If a conservation project involves irrigation, documentation of the land's irrigation history is required.



A map showing all land uses and acres on your farm, as well as a map or other documentation of ineligible land in your operation.



5

Submit! Send all of this information to the correct state or federal agency office.



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Funding Available for Organic Farmers

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

Background Information:

Federal funding is available to help agricultural producers transition to an organic system of production! As part of the larger \$300 million USDA Organic Transition Initiative, the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) aims to help producers adopt organic management systems in pursuit of certification.

Program Highlight: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The EQIP program from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offers a variety of technical and financial assistance opportunities for farmers and ranchers including the High Tunnel Initiative, an On Farm Energy Initiative, and the Organic Initiative.

Who is eligible?



Eligible Applicants: Agricultural producers with ownership or control of their land; Owners of non-industrial private forestland; Federally Recognized Tribes; Those interested in establishing agricultural/forestry operations; Water management entities.



Eligible Lands: Cropland and hayland; Rangeland; Pastureland; Non-industrial private forestland; Other farm or ranch lands; Environmentally sensitive areas.

Historically Underserved (HU) participants are eligible for increased payment rates and advanced payments to offset the costs of purchasing goods or services. HU participants include socially disadvantaged, beginning, veteran and limited resource farmers and ranchers.

What are you eligible to receive?



Consultation from a local NRCS conservation planner to develop your conservation plan.



Technical and financial assistance for developing conservation plans and for the labor, materials, and implementation of management practices in your plan.

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Check out this helpful guide to learn about how USDA works with farmers & ranchers: [Get Started! A Guide to USDA Programs for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers](#)



[The EQIP USDA website](#) has some general information, as does [this USDA EQIP Fact Sheet](#).

Find the right application.

2

Apply through [your regional NRCS office](#) following the [provided instructions](#). Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, but deadlines and available EQIP initiatives vary by state and county. **The 2026 batching deadline for EQIP is January 15, 2026, for all states.**

Provide the financial information required to gain access to government payments.

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Applicants must be registered with [Farmers.gov](#). Members' farm records must be up to date



Applicants must provide [adjusted gross income certification](#) (Form [CCC- 941](#)), which requires applicants' Taxpayer ID Number (SSN or EIN) and their Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) from the previous 3 tax years.

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Lessons Learned from an NRCS Contract: Three Feathers Farm's Experience with EQIP

Background Information:

OFRF is currently working to increase farmer and community awareness of available federal funding for organic and transitioning farms. We interviewed Héktor Calderón-Victoria of Three Feathers Farm in California about his farm's experience receiving support for a hedgerow planting and high tunnel construction through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

You can [read more about Three Feathers Farm and their experience utilizing EQIP](#) funding to implement sustainability measures on the farm.

While these programs have ultimately been very beneficial for his farm, Héktor shared some of the challenges he experienced, including navigating the federal agencies, communication, and project timelines. We pulled out the **key takeaways** so that other farmers who are interested in utilizing these federal funding programs can learn from his experience.



Héktor Calderón-Victoria farms at Three Feathers Farm in California and utilizes NRCS EQIP.

Key Takeaways:

Navigating Federal Agencies

Challenges:

- It's hard to know which USDA agency does what.
- Figuring out who to talk to can be confusing.

Lessons Learned:

- Familiarize yourself with the USDA's different agencies.
- **Get a Farm Identification Number** from FSA before applying for NRCS programs.
- Use farmer-support groups like **OFRF for resources** about accessing USDA programs.

Language Matters

Challenges:

- NRCS agents use technical terms that farmers may not know, especially for conservation standards.

Lessons Learned:

- Ask questions if you don't understand something.
- Ask your NRCS agent to explain acronyms or terms in plain language.
- Take notes and look things up later.

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Communication Gaps and Outdated Systems

Challenges:

- USDA programs require a lot of paperwork.
- Some of their systems are outdated and not very user-friendly.
- Many forms require printing, signing, and scanning, or potentially signing in person.

Lessons Learned:

- Keep good records of contracts and communications with your agents.
- Create folders in your email, computer, and/or on paper.
- Use reminders and calendars to track due dates, follow-up tasks, and reimbursement deadlines.
- Don't expect agents to remind you—stay proactive and organized.



Long Delays and Understaffing

Challenges:

- NRCS offices may be understaffed, especially with recent federal firings and funding freezes.
- Even the most well-intentioned staff may be overwhelmed by the amount of farmer requests.

Lessons Learned:

- Be patient, proactive, and persistent.
- Advocate for yourself and keep checking in..
- Reach out again if you don't hear back—try email, phone, or visiting the office.



Project Implementation and Reimbursement Timelines

Challenges:

- The USDA contract timelines may not match your farm's needs perfectly.
- It may not be clear how long the process takes—from application to project completion to reimbursement.
- Advance Payment options aren't always volunteered by staff.

Lessons Learned:

- Plan ahead—don't wait until you're ready to build to apply.
- Ask if you're eligible for the **Advance Payment option**.
- Ask your field agent detailed questions about the project timeline:
 - When is your application due?
 - When will you hear back?
 - When can you start the project?
 - How long do you have to finish it?
 - When and how do you submit for reimbursement?



Awareness of Practices that Apply to Organic Farms

Challenges:

- Not all NRCS agents know which programs work well for organic farms.
- Knowledge varies by office, region, and individual staff.

Lessons Learned:

- Learn what practices are available in your area.
- Ask other farmers what federal programs have worked for them.
- Read OFRF's farmer stories featuring **farms that have implemented NRCS practices** and refer to the **TOPP W Toolkits** for specific program details.

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Utilizing NRCS Support on Organic Farms

Tech Note 12 provides details and updates for farmers, field agents, and technical service providers

Background Information:

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers funding and technical assistance to help farmers enhance their farming operations, including increasing support for transitioning to organic practices. However, farmers, field agents, and Technical Service Providers (TSPs) may not always be familiar with how NRCS programs can support organic practices. To address this, the [Organic Farming Research Foundation](#) (OFRF) collaborated with NRCS to develop a document that equips farmers and field agents with the knowledge needed to effectively support the unique requirements of organic producers.

Document Highlight: [Technical Note 12 - Conservation Activities in Organic Farming Systems \(190 TN AG-12, TN-12, Tech Note 12\)](#)

TN-12 is a comprehensive, up-to-date guide that details how various organic practices address NRCS's resource concerns. It details how some organic practices that were not previously fully covered by NRCS [Conservation Practice Standards](#) (CPSs) are now currently covered with updates like the new [CPS-823, Organic Management](#).

WHAT ARE THE KEY FEATURES OF TN-12?

- Aligns current and updated NRCS resource concerns with the National Organic Program (NOP) standards.
- Details how Organic System Plans (OSPs) can streamline NRCS planning.
- Provides real-world examples of the conservation benefits of organic farming systems.

How can it help Organic Farmers?

- *Provides an understanding of how various organic practices can meet requirements of specific NRCS practice standards.*
- *Presents a framework for articulating the conservation benefits of organic practices in the language used by NRCS field agents and TSPs.*
- *Showcases real-world examples of organic farmers utilizing NRCS programs like EQIP and CSP.*
- *Details how NRCS programs can support farmers wishing to transition land to organic production.*

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How can it help NRCS agents and TSPs?

-  *In conducting thorough assessments of organic farming operations and identifying how the area's resource concerns interact with organic farming standards for soil fertility, habitat conservation, water quality, etc.*
-  *In developing conservation plans with conservation practices that align with both NRCS guidelines and organic certification requirements.*
-  *In learning how to monitor the effectiveness of conservation practices while helping to ensure farms meet both NRCS and organic certification standards.*

Need help finding NRCS assistance?

Start by finding your [regional Natural Resource Conservation Service \(NRCS\) office](#).

Suggested questions for your NRCS office:

1. "I'm interested in applying for NRCS Conservation Program Assistance for my farm business to help finance _conservation project/resource concern of interest. What do you need from me to get started on my application?"
2. "What additional funding opportunities are available to my farm?"
3. "How soon can a conservationist visit my farm to help set up a conservation plan?"
4. "I am interested in seeing if I am eligible for the increased and [advanced payment option for Historically Underserved farmers](#). How will this change my application process?"

Important reminder: Although deadlines for NRCS programs vary by program and state, **you can work with your NRCS district office anytime** to complete a Conservation Plan through their Conservation Desktop platform.

Learn more about federal support for organic farmers at OFRF's [Transition to Organic Production Partnership \(TOPP\) West/Southwest page](#), including [organic certification cost-share](#) and [support for transitioning land/operations to organic](#).



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Funding Available for Organic Farmers

How to apply for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Farmer/Rancher Grant Program (SARE)

Background Information:

The **SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant Program** supports producers who want to test new ideas, improve sustainability, and share what they learn. Whether you're certified organic or in transition towards certification, this grant can help you solve real challenges on your farm.

Program Highlight: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Farmer/Rancher Grant Program

The **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)** Farmer/Rancher Grant Program is a competitive grant program that empowers U.S. farmers and ranchers to conduct on-farm research and outreach on sustainable agriculture solutions. This grant provides funding for organic and transitioning-to-organic operations to test innovative ideas and share the results with their communities. The goal of this program is to address real-world farm challenges and identify solutions related to SARE's three pillars of sustainability: 1) environmental stewardship; 2) farm profitability; or 3) farmer quality of life.

What are you eligible to receive?

-  Trial organic pest or weed management strategies.
-  Compare cover crop mixes or rotations.
-  Test compost or organic fertilizer effects.
-  Study market development opportunities.
-  Host field days and create guides for other farmers.

Who is eligible?

-  Applicants must be farmers or ranchers with a commercially oriented farm business (at least \$1,000 in annual farm income). [Find your SARE region.](#)
-  In the Western region, applicants must include a Technical Advisor (TA) whose role is to help design and validate the research, and sometimes help with the outreach component. Applicants will need a letter confirming their TA's interest in working with you on the project.

What are you eligible to receive?

-  Up to \$15,000-35,000 dependent on region. These are maximum funding amounts; projects should only judge for what is needed to accomplish the work.
-  The grant covers all approved project costs up to the total award amount.
-  These grants generally operate as a reimbursement-based award, so there will be up-front costs, but there is no cost-sharing requirement for these grants.

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United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



How can you apply for this program?

- 1 Review SARE Materials.**
 - ☀ Check out **your regional SARE's** materials on how to apply.
 - ☀ Read SARE's Call for Proposal.

- 2 Define Your Project Idea.**
 - ☀ What problem do you want to solve? What does success look like?

- 3 Build Your Team.**
 - ☀ Find a Technical Advisor or team members to work with to support your project.

- 4 Design the Research and Outreach.**
 - ☀ Set clear research goals and outline the steps to achieve them, including how you'll share results through a field day, guide development, or other methods. Ensure you create a budget that covers labor, supplies, and any needed support.

- 5 Submit.**
 - ☀ Complete all required forms and upload them through the SARE portal.

General Timeline for SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant Program

Summer: Call for Proposals (CFP) Released SARE usually releases the CFP, associated materials, and the online portal in the mid- to late-summer.	Fall: 2025 Application Deadlines • Western – November 20, 2025, at 12:00 pm MT • North Central – December 4, 2025, at 4:00 pm CT • Southern – December 5, 2025, at 12:00 pm ET
Winter: Proposal Review A Technical Review Panel evaluates the proposals. The panel is made up of a diverse group of farmers, agricultural researchers, extension specialists, and other relevant agricultural professionals from the your SARE region. Applicants typically don't hear anything other than a confirmation of submission, but your proposal is being considered behind the scenes!	Spring: Funding Decisions and Project Starts The SARE Administrative Council then makes the final funding decisions. • Western – Funding decisions are expected in April 2026, with funded projects able to start in May 2026. • Southern and North Central – Funding decisions are expected in February 2026, with funded projects able to start in April 2026.

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United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



Funding Available for Organic Farmers

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Loans

Background Information:

Federal funding is available to help agricultural producers transition to an organic system of production! As part of the larger \$300 million USDA Organic Transition Initiative, the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) aims to help producers adopt organic management systems in pursuit of certification.

Program Highlight: Farm Service Agency (FSA) Loans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is a crucial financing resource for farmers. It can help guarantee loans made by commercial lenders or issue direct loans to farmers when they cannot access credit or favorable terms and rates from a bank. The FSA can also be the “Lender of First Opportunity” for beginning farmers.

Loan Types

-  **Operating Loans.** Short-term financing for the everyday costs of starting, maintaining, and strengthening a farm or ranch.
-  **Farm Ownership Loans.** Long-term financing to buy, expand, or improve a farm or ranch.
-  **Climate-Smart Agriculture Farm Loans.** Financing specifically for organic-aligned practices and equipment that reduce environmental impact. Site under review as of 5/20/2025.
-  **Emergency Loans.** Loans to aid farmers who have been impacted by a federally declared natural disaster or national emergency.
-  **Youth Loans** .Small loans for young people (14–20 years old) for projects in connection with 4-H clubs, FFA, Tribal youth groups, or similar agricultural youth organizations.
-  **Operating and Farm Ownership Loans for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers** .Loans with more favorable terms specifically for farmers new to the industry.
-  **Indian Land Acquisition Program.** For federally recognized Indigenous farmers and tribal members looking to purchase land within their reservation boundaries for agricultural use.
-  **Highly Fractionated Indian Land Loan Program (HFIL).** For tribal members and entities looking to purchase or consolidate reservation land for agricultural use.
-  **Microloans.** Microloans are for small, beginning farmers, niche, and non-traditional farm operations that may not qualify for or need a full FSA loan.



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What FSA loan is right for me?

Need financing for your farm? FSA offers low-interest loans directly to farmers, and can also help you secure better rates through a commercial lender. Whether you're just starting out or looking to grow your farm, there's likely an FSA loan designed for your situation. Use their free [Loan Assistance Tool](#) to get a head start on finding the right loan for you.

How can you apply for FSA loans?

1

Find your local FSA office.

All FSA loans, whether direct or guaranteed, are processed through your local FSA county office. [Find your local office here: https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices)

2

Schedule a meeting.

Call or visit your local office to discuss which loan type fits your situation. Bring any records you have about your farm operation, finances, and land.

3

Gather your documents.

Your loan officer will tell you exactly what's needed, but commonly required documents include:

- ☀ Government-issued ID
- ☀ Tax returns (typically 3 years)
- ☀ Farm financial statements or records
- ☀ Proof of land ownership or lease agreement
- ☀ Business plan (see above)
- ☀ Organic certification or transition plan, if applicable

4

Submit your application.

Applications can be submitted directly through FSA or, for guaranteed loans, through a commercial lender. Your loan officer will guide you through this.

- ☀ [Apply directly with FSA.](#)
- ☀ [Apply with a commercial lender guaranteed by FSA.](#)

5

Follow up.

Processing times vary by loan type. Stay in contact with your loan officer and respond quickly to any requests for additional information.

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Whole-Farm Revenue Protection Program: What can the WFRP do for your operation and how can you apply?

What is the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) Program?

The [Whole-Farm Revenue Protection](#) policy (WFRP) is a crop insurance policy developed by the [Risk Management Agency](#) (RMA) and insured by the [Federal Crop Insurance Corporation](#) (FCIC). This policy, offered in all counties, covers the majority of the full cost of operations, excluding post-production costs, such as value-added processing.

WFRP is one of the first policies to cover revenue instead of yield, allowing for multiple commodities to be covered by the same plan—ideal for organic and transitioning producers.

How does this help your operation?

WFRP protects against revenue loss due to natural disasters or market shifts. Some benefits of protecting revenue are:

- ☀ Organic crops are valued at organic market price.
- ☀ Replanting cost coverage (up to 20%).
- ☀ Revenue protection for up to 85%.
- ☀ Limited coverage for resale items like jams or honey (if <50% of total revenue).
- ☀ Covers up to \$17 million of expected farm revenue.
- ☀ The more diverse your operation, the higher the premium discount.



How are commodities counted?

The number of commodities you grow affects your coverage level. To count, each product must meet a minimum revenue threshold. Products can be combined and counted as one to help meet that threshold. Use this [free calculator](#) to find your commodity count.

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How can you apply for this program?

First, it's always a good idea to review some materials.

1



Review information materials about [Whole Farm Revenue Protection](#). If the previous year's revenue does not exceed \$350,000, [Micro Farm Policy](#) may be a better insurance option for you.

2

Collect the four main documents needed to apply (insurance agents may ask for additional supporting documents):



IRS 1040 [Schedule F Tax Forms](#).



Farm Operation Report.



Whole Farm History.



Organic certification.

3

Contact your local insurance agent. Consider asking questions like:



"Does my farm business structure affect my ability to qualify for this program?"



"Are there any tools I can use to help calculate my lower end of revenue?"



"Would Micro Farm Policy work better for my farm?"

4



Maintain and update your farming operation report during the year.

Dates to watch out for:

These dates are estimates based on previous years. The USDA announces specific filing dates at the beginning of the calendar year.

Sales Closing, Cancellation, & Termination Dates

Calendar Year and Early Fiscal Year Filers:

January through April
(dates announced late winter; varies by county)

Late Fiscal Year Filers

Late Fall

Revised Farm Operation Report Dates

All Filers:

Mid Summer

Contract Change Date

Late Summer



United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



How to talk to your NRCS office about the Organic Transition Initiative (OTI) resources available for you

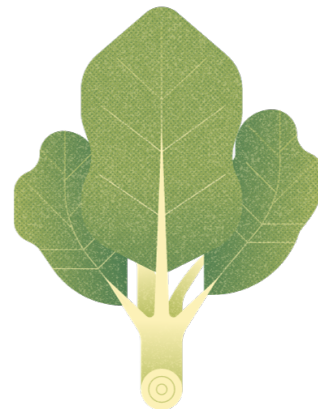
Who should I speak with?

Contact your [local NRCS office](#), or contact your state office for additional assistance.

You can also visit this [TOPP West Resources](#) page and find NRCS contacts for each of the western states under OTI Resources.

Information to gather before your conversation:

- ☀ Up-to-date records on Farmers.gov
- ☀ Previous three years of Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)
- ☀ How you have access and control over the land
- ☀ Proof of organic certification, or organic transition records
- ☀ Previous improvements and projects made to the property



Questions to ask:

Eligibility:

- 1) I own/rent my land. What documents will you need for [completion of my EQIP application](#) by the deadline?
- 2) I am eligible for the increased and advanced payment option for [Historically Underserved](#) farmers. How will this change my application process?
- 3) My farm is certified/transitioning to organic. What additional information will you need for completing my conservation plan and application by the deadline?
- 4) Does eligibility for assistance under [CPS-823](#) differ from traditional eligibility?

Assistance Available:

- 1) What financial and technical assistance is available to my farm through CPS-823?
- 2) Are there any state initiatives that I qualify for as an organic or transitioning-to-organic producer?
- 3) Can I get financial assistance for conservation work I have already started or completed?
- 4) Can NRCS help me develop and implement a comprehensive conservation plan that is tailored to my organic operation?

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Questions to ask (cont'd):

Application Process/Logistics:

- 1) I'm interested in EQIP programs to address conservation issues/projects of interest for my farm. What do you need from me to get started on my application?
- 2) How soon can a conservationist visit my farm to set up a conservation plan ([AD 1026](#))? Is that the same as a [Comprehensive Conservation Plan](#)?
- 3) When is the deadline for the next [EQIP ranking period](#)?
- 4) What are the [state and national resource concerns](#) that are the highest priority? Will my project address them?

After an award:

- 1) Are there things that I will need to do after I get the financial assistance to monitor or evaluate the project?
- 2) What are the reporting requirements and when do they need to be submitted?
- 3) How will NRCS communicate updates, changes or new opportunities related to my project or future projects?
- 4) Can NRCS provide guidance on maintaining records that satisfy both organic certification and NRCS program requirements?

What if the Field Agent is unaware of CPS-823 or the conservation benefits of organic agriculture?

NRCS employees may not be familiar with the specifics of organic certification and management; patience and persistence will be crucial to getting access to the assistance you need and deserve.

See these [NRCS-sponsored webinars and training modules](#) for additional resources that you can share with your NRCS service providers to help educate them about organic transition support.

Contact the state office if you continue to experience a lack of understanding or support.



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