

## Applications for NRCS Organic Initiative Due March 30

U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Eric B. Banks reminds potential applicants to contact their local NRCS office soon to find out if they are eligible for the agency's Organic Initiative. Applications for the second ranking period of 2012 are due at NRCS offices by close of business on **March 30, 2012**. The NRCS Office Locator is available at <http://go.usa.gov/Uo8>.

“Under this Initiative,” reminded Banks, “NRCS provides assistance to eligible producers for installation of conservation practices on organic or agricultural operations transitioning to organic production,” said Banks.

“This initiative really fits with those producers who want to move into organic production, especially those with limited acreage and perhaps equipment,” said Banks. For example, one way for a producer to start growing organic food is by using the seasonal high tunnel conservation practice. After the producer signs up for the initiative, and has an approved contract, then she/he is able to install the high tunnel and grow produce such as lettuce and spinach almost year round. This locally grown food sold to schools, nursing homes, restaurants, and individuals, at farmers markets, and/or through community supported agriculture allows buyers to Know Your Farmer Know Your Food.

In 2011, Kansas NRCS approved 48 contracts on 470 acres, for \$214,871. In Kansas, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for conservation practices related to the Organic Initiative.

Nationwide, NRCS has nearly \$50 million in financial and technical assistance available to certified organic producers, those who want to make the transition to organic production, and producers who sell less than \$5,000 in organic products annually.

Part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Organic Initiative offers a wide array of conservation practices specifically designed for organic production. “Practices will help the selected applicants meet many requirements of their USDA Organic System Plans and stay in compliance with USDA's National Organic Program,” Banks said.

The top six Organic Initiative conservation practices are cover crops, nutrient management, pest management, seasonal high tunnels, crop rotation, and fencing.

Changes for the 2012 signups include three ranking periods for current and transitioning producers, a threshold ranking score for qualified applicants, required conservation practices that promote the consistent use of those practices, and an expanded list of conservation activity plans.

Learn more about the Organic Initiative at <http://go.usa.gov/Uo9> and find out about other NRCS initiatives and programs at <http://go.usa.gov/UoX>.

