

Initiative Name and Acronym: National Organic Initiative (NOI)

Initiative Description/Summary: Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) NOI, NRCS will assist eligible producers with installation of conservation practices on agricultural operations related to organic production. NRCS has determined that this definition includes certified organic producers and producers who are transitioning to become certified organic. Eligible applicants also include producers who fall under the exemption category in the National Organic Program (NOP) regulation.

- Certified organic producers must provide NRCS with a copy of their USDA NOP organic certificate or proof of good standing from a USDA-accredited certifying agent; certification must be maintained for the life of the contract.
- Exempt producers who are selling less than \$5,000 a year in organic agricultural products are exempt from NOP's certification. Exempt organic producers are eligible for the EQIP Organic Initiative provided that they self-certify that they agree to develop and implement an organic system plan (OSP) as required by the NOP. Applications should be ranked with transitioning producers.
- Transitioning to organic must self-certify that they agree to develop and implement an OSP as required by the NOP.

Approved or Participating States and Application Periods

- All States and Territories are required to offer the Organic Initiative.
- State Conservationists are encouraged to establish more than one application period for this initiative.
- States Conservationist will allocate the minimum level of funds to support the OI according to the allocation letter. States will determine how to divide the total amounts between certified and transitioning subaccounts. At the end of the last ranking period, any unused OI funds must be returned by allowance change to NHQ.

Program Contact Information and State Web Site

National Contact: EQIP specialist for organic, Lindsay Haines, at (202) 260-9231 or lindsay.haines@wdc.usda.gov.

State OI Contacts: States will identify a **programmatic** and **technical** contact person and update the FAPD Contacts List on the national FAPD SharePoint as needed, at https://ems-team.usda.gov/sites/NRCS_PROGRAMS/fapd/EQIP/NHQ/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx

State Web Site: National Headquarters National Organic Initiative Web site is located at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=nrcs143_008224

States must link to the national site in order to post each year's program information.

ProTracts Requirements

1. Subaccount Guidance

The following subaccounts have been created in ProTracts to support NOI for all States and Territories. No additional organic related subaccounts may be established:

- "FY16 Organic Certified" with an account type of "Organic Certified"

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Only certified organic applications may be ranked in this subaccount.

- "FY16 Organic Transition" with an account type of "Organic Transition"

Transitioning and exempt from certification producers must be evaluated in this subaccount. Transition to organic conservation activity plan (CAP) must be assigned the application type of "Plan-Organic."

Note: States may not establish a requirement that producers who are transitioning to organic develop a "Transition to Organic" conservation activity plan (CAP) as a condition of eligibility for program participation.

2. Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (AERT) Guidance

- The following land uses are approved support the NOI and should be populated in ProTracts AERT:
 - Crop
 - Forest
 - Range
 - Pasture
 - Farmstead
- All eligible conservation practices are approved to support the NOI and should be populated in ProTracts AERT.
- Refer to and use the general EQIP CPPE database and practice matrix for populating the environmental effects in AERT to ensure that all approved practices will result in a positive conservation benefit.

3. AERT – Ranking Questions

The total ranking points associated with initiative are to be distributed in AERT and approved ranking questions as follows:

AERT Level	Maximum Points	Point Percentage
National Ranking Questions	250	25%
State Ranking Questions	400	40%
Local Ranking Questions	250	25%
Efficiency Score	100	10%
Total points for this initiative:	1,000	100%

In order to meet the requirements of Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 512, Subpart C, States must adjust AERT "multipliers" in ProTracts to ensure that the above target percentages will properly distribute available ranking points for each category.

National Ranking Criteria Requirements

National ranking questions are established in ProTracts by National Headquarters.

State Ranking Criteria Requirements for EQIP National Organic Initiative

State ranking questions are established and entered in ProTracts by National Headquarters.

2016 EQIP Organic Initiative State Ranking Criteria	FY 2016 Points
1. If the application is for development of a conservation activity plan (CAP), the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering "Yes" to the following question. Answering "Yes" to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the State priority category.	
1a. Is the program application for development of a CAP for a TSP prepared transition to organic plan (138)? <u>If answer is "Yes," do not answer any other State-level questions.</u> If answer is "No," proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section.	400
2. Soil Health Degradation: Maximum 60 points. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include implementation of one soil health or enhancing practice that addresses soil tilth, crusting, water infiltration, organic matter, compaction, etc.?	60
3. Soil Erosion: Maximum 60 points. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include practices that will result in reduction of erosion?	60
4. Water Quality Degradation: Maximum of 70 points.	
4a. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include implementation of practices for the management of noxious and invasive species only on noncropland acreage?	35
4b. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include implementation of nutrient management for management of soil fertility, plant nutrients, and soil amendments?	35
5. Degraded Plant Habitat: Maximum of 90 points	
5a. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include practices that will result in creation of buffer zones that will mitigate offsite contaminants from entering the farm?	20
5b. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include practices with the intent of increasing habitat for pollinators, beneficial insects, or both?	50
5c. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include practices that will improve wildlife habitat?	20
6. Insufficient Water: Maximum of 50 points. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include practices that will improve the efficiency of an existing irrigation system, conserve soil moisture, or both?	50
7. Livestock Production Limitation: Maximum of 70 points	
7a. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include implementation of practices to improve the management of plant species, livestock, residues, feed, and other identified resource needs?	40
7b. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include implementation of practices that limit and manage domestic livestock access to streams, creeks, and other natural water bodies?	20
7c. Does the EQIP schedule of operations include implementation of practices to ensure adequate domestic livestock drinking water sources (not including streams) are available in the treatment unit?	10
Total Points:	400

Local Ranking Criteria Requirements:

Most local ranking questions are approved and entered into ProTracts at the State level.

Local-level ranking questions must account for a total of 250 points or at least 25 percent of total points available according to the requirements in 440-CPM, Part 512, Subpart C. Establish a maximum point total of 250 in ProTracts AERT. Each State **must** enter the following question #1 in the ProTracts local-level category in ProTracts:

2016 EQIP OI Local-Level Ranking Question	FY 2016 Points
<p>1. If the application is for development of a conservation activity plan (CAP), the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering "Yes" to the following question. Answering "Yes" to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the State priority category.</p>	
<p>1a. Is the program application for development of a CAP for a TSP-prepared transition to organic plan (138)? <u>If answer is "Yes," do not answer any other State-level questions.</u> If answer is "No," proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section.</p>	250

EQIP Organic Initiative Self-Certification Worksheet for Fiscal Year 2016

This self-certification form must be used by each producer applying for EQIP Organic Initiative assistance. The goal of the Organic Initiative is to ensure that conservation technical assistance and EQIP benefits are allocated to address resource concerns related to organic production. In order to qualify for the Organic Initiative, a producer must self-certify that they meet one of the following three categories.

1. Certified Organic

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that I am a certified organic producer and I will provide NRCS with a copy of my current USDA NOP organic certificate or proof of good standing from a USDA-accredited certifying agent. I understand that I am required to maintain organic certification throughout the life of the EQIP OI contract. If certification is not maintained, the contract may be subject to termination.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

2. Exempt from Certification (Organic Producers Selling Less Than \$5,000 in Organic Products Annually)

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that in order to receive technical and financial assistance through EQIP Organic Initiative as an exempt producer, I agree to develop and implement an OSP as required by the National Organic Programs (NOP) Act (7 U.S.C. Sections 6501-6522). I understand my application will be ranked with transitioning organic producers provided I meet eligibility requirements. I certify that I sell less than \$5,000 in organic products annually and I have provided the required documentation as specified in 440-CPM. I agree to notify NRCS should my exempt from certification status change during the life of this EQIP OI contract.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

D.C. Approval: _____ Date Approved _____

3. Transitioning to Organic

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that in order to receive technical and financial assistance through EQIP Organic Initiative as a transitioning to organic producer, I agree to develop and implement an organic system plan to standards as required by the National Organic Programs (NOP) Act (7 U.S.C. Sections 6501-6522).

I understand that if I do not meet this requirement during the period while transitioning to organic production, my EQIP contract may be subject to termination.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

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