



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

\$50 Million Available for Organic Farming

DARREL J. AUBERTINE May 14, 2009

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Aubertine: Interested New York farmers must apply by May 29 for funding and assistance

WATERTOWN (May 14, 2009)—As Chair of the New York State Senate's Agriculture Committee, Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine announced today that New York farmers are eligible for funding and assistance through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) to help tap into the growing market for organic agriculture products.

"Organic agriculture is a growing and profitable industry," said Sen. Aubertine, who is also Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. "Certainly, there are quite a few farmers throughout the state already involved in organic produce and many more are considering it. This fund will give farmers the funding they need and technical assistance for farmers looking to make the switch and those who have already entered the organic foods market. I want our farmers to know the funding is available if they are interested."

According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, the NRCS has created a special \$50 million pool of funding for a new Organic Initiative under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Initiative will provide payments and technical assistance to

transitioning and existing organic farmers who adopt NRCS conservation practices used in organic production systems.

Eligible Farmers:

- Farmers just beginning or in the process of transitioning to organic production;
- Existing certified organic farmers who want to transition additional acres or animals;
- Existing certified organic farmers who need to adopt additional conservation measures;
- Producers who sell less than \$5,000 in agricultural products and are thus exempt from formal certification are still eligible for Organic Initiative payments.

The program is open to farmers in every county in New York and sign up for this special pool of funds continues through May 29th. Organic or transitioning farmers who have already applied for EQIP funding may choose to move their application into the special organic pool which will have higher payment rates for some practices than the regular EQIP program and a \$20,000 per year (\$80,000 over 6 years) payment limit. Costs of technical assistance provided by NRCS will not count against the payment limitation.

“This is a substantial pool of money and any farmer in New York who is interested should get in line for funding as soon as possible,” Sen. Aubertine said. “Organic farming may not be for every farmer, but it has proven to be a profitable opportunity for many of our farmers as more and more consumers look for organic products.”

Transitioning farmers are also being offered an opportunity to develop a “conservation activity plan” as part of their EQIP Organic Initiative contract. A conservation activity plan will be needed to meet National Organic Program certification requirements and is an important step toward certification.

All applications received during this sign up period will be ranked using national and in some cases state level criteria related to how well the proposed contract contributes to conserving soil, water quality and other resource concerns. Farmers who are awarded a contract will then be eligible for technical assistance to assist with implementation of the practices. NRCS has set aside an additional \$5 million for technical assistance for this initiative.

A number of NSAC Member organizations are available to answer producer questions about the Organic Initiative. Visit their websites for more information: Organic Farming Research Foundation, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Center for Rural Affairs, Agriculture and Land Based Training Association.