



**Supporting Organic and Transitioning
Farmers through Organic Certification Cost-
Share Programs and Conservation Efforts**

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Today's Discussion

- Background on Organics
- Organics at FSA
 - OCCSP
 - OTECP
 - Organic Buffers
- USDA Resources
- Outreach Tips/Strategies



Key Organic Farming Practices

Environmental stewardship: Organic farmers must use practices that support the use of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.

Fertility and nutrient management: Organic farmers work to develop soil health by relying on natural materials, such as cover crops, manure and compost.

Pest management: Organic farmers must use preventative measures and physical controls before using approved pesticides.

Synthetic substances: Organic farmers limit their use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to the few that are approved in organic regulations and do not use sewage sludge, irradiation, or genetic engineering.



Organic Agriculture: Facts from the NASS Survey

- In 2019, the United States had 16,585 certified organic farms producing and selling \$6.2 billion in organic commodities
- The number of operations producing certified organic commodities was up 17%, and land used for certified organic production was up 9%
- Sales of organic commodities overall rose 31%, from 2016 to 2019
- 58% of organic sales came from crops, led by vegetables and fruits (including berries and tree nuts)
- The most common practices that organic farmers implement are maintaining buffer strips or border rows to isolate organic from non-organic crops



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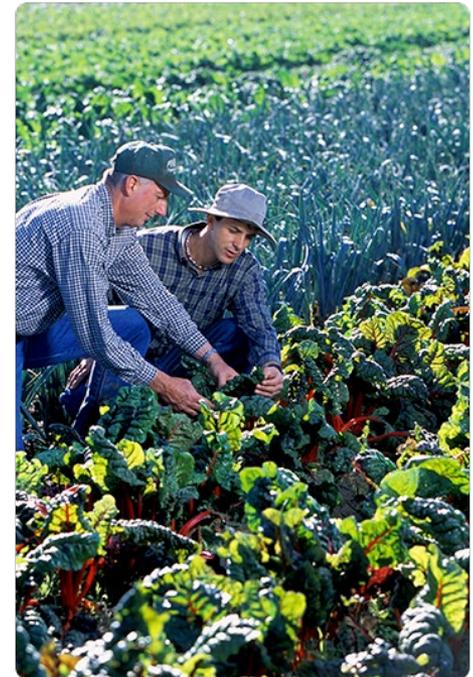
How Do Organic Farmers Get Started?

- ✓ **Get Certified!**
- ✓ **If transitioning to organic practices, ending the use of all prohibited substances**
- ✓ **Some farmers choose to transition their land to organic management gradually. Options include:**
 - ✓ Transitioning small parcels of a farm to organic, then adding more parcels each year
 - ✓ Leasing or buying land that was not in production (fallow land) for immediate organic certification



USDA Organic Certification

- The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulates all organic crops, livestock and agricultural products certified to the USDA organic standards
- The USDA does not certify organic operations directly but instead, accredits third-party certifying agents, or certifiers, to inspect and approve organic producers and handlers
- Certifiers grant organic certificates to compliant producers and handlers so that they can market and sell their products as organic



AMS "Find a certifier":

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/resources/organic-certifying-agents>

AMS "Becoming a Certified Operation":

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/becoming-certified>

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What Can Be Certified?

- **The USDA organic regulations recognize four categories of organic products:**

- **Crops:** A plant that is grown to be harvested as food, livestock feed, fiber, or used to add nutrients to the field.
- **Livestock:** Animals that can be used for food or in the production of food, fiber, or feed.
- **Processed products:** Items that have been handled and packaged (i.e. chopped carrots) or combined, processed, and packaged (i.e. soup).
- **Wild crops:** Plants from a growing site that is not cultivated.



Common Barriers to Certification

Certification myths:

1. “I can’t afford organic certification.”
2. “I can’t handle the paperwork.”

Certification truths

1. Fees are often on a sliding scale
2. Recordkeeping is good farm management
3. FSA has programs to help producers cover the costs associated with organic certification
4. USDA Service Centers can help producers with their applications



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Organic Incentives at FSA

**In response to the needs of Organic Producers,
FSA's programs:**

- **Pay for a portion of costs associated with organic certification to support producers interested in farming organically**
- **Support organic and Transitioning farmers who have been impacted by supply chain issues associated with COVID-19**
- **Provide Incentives to convert sensitive land into organic buffers and implement climate-resilient farming practices**

Programs at FSA for Organic Producers

- **Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP)**
- **Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP)**
- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): Organic Buffers**
- **Other:**
 - Loans, Microloans, & Disaster Assistance as well!



Organic Certification Cost Share Program

Ongoing, annual, appropriated funds to reimburse producers for the costs associated with organic certification

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OCCSP Implementation

- Congress authorizes USDA to provide organic certification cost share assistance to producers who are obtaining certification under the National Organic Program
- FSA provides cost share assistance in the following two ways:
 - Producers and handlers may apply directly to an FSA County Office for cost share payments or
 - State agencies may provide cost share payments to producers and handlers through grant agreements with FSA

Overview of OCCSP

What: Provides Organic producers and handlers financial assistance to reduce the cost of organic certification.

Who: Reimburses producers and handlers for a portion of their paid certification costs.

How: Once eligible, cost share reimbursements for up to 50% of certification costs each year, not to exceed \$500 per certification scopes or categories:

- Crops
- Wild Crops
- Livestock
- Handling (defined as selling, processing, or packaging)

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Eligible Scopes

USDA organic certification scopes include:

- crops
- wild crops
- livestock
- processing/handling
- State organic program fees



Certified organic operations can receive cost share assistance for the scopes above only if they are listed on the organic certificate

Eligible Applicants

National OCCSP funding is available for:

- all 50 states
- District of Columbia
- Commonwealth of Puerto Rico
- Guam
- American Samoa
- U.S. Virgin Islands
- Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands



Application Process

Certified organic operations can apply for OCCSP at any FSA county office or USDA Service Center

State Agencies can apply to administer OCCSP:

- Participating State agencies will be posted on OCCSP's webpage (<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index>) once grant agreements are in place
- State agencies may have a different application process than FSA; applicants should refer to their State agency's requirements and ensure they are using the correct application form.
- Both FSA and the State agency will accept applications and make payments in these states
- Applicants cannot receive duplicate benefits from both FSA and a State agency

5. Scope (Check all that apply) (From CCC-884, Item 11)		6. Total Associated Costs	7. Ineligible Costs	8. Total Allowable Costs (Item 6 - Item 7)	9. Allowable Costs x 50% (Item 8 x 50%)	10. Maximum Payment Amount	11. Calculated OCCSP Payment: Lesser of 50% of Allowable Costs or Maximum Payment Amount (Item 9 or Item 10)	12. Program Code
<input type="checkbox"/> Crops						\$500.00		
<input type="checkbox"/> Wild Crops						\$500.00		
<input type="checkbox"/> Livestock						\$500.00		
<input type="checkbox"/> Processing/Handling						\$500.00		
<input type="checkbox"/> State Organic Program Fees (CA only)						\$500.00		
13A. Signature of Preparer			13B. Title of Preparer		13C. Date Signed (MM-DD-YYYY)			
14A. Signature of 2 nd Party Reviewer			14B. Title of 2 nd Party Reviewer		14C. Date Signed (MM-DD-YYYY)			

Items to have Before Applying...

- Must have received their first certification or have incurred expenses related to the renewal of certification.
- Provide an application, using instructions from the State Department of Agriculture or Farm Service Agency
 - Application is simple and easy to fill out and involves sharing total costs and allowable costs for each scope



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GET UP TO 50% OF ORGANIC CERTIFICATION COSTS

Apply by November 1 , 2021

- ✓ **State applications may differ: Contact your local state department of Agriculture for more details about state deadlines**

More info and the FSA OCCSP application form is available at the [FSA Organic Program webpage](#).

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Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP)

The economic challenges that arose due to the pandemic made obtaining and renewing organic certification financially challenging for many operations

Available Funding/Legislation

- **Funding available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)**
- **Farm Service Agency will make available \$20 million through the Organic and Transitioning Education and Certification Program**
- **OTECP is open to certified operations and transitioning operations located in the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands**

Why OTECP?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, certified organic and transitioning operations faced challenges including:

- Loss of markets
- Increased costs
- Labor shortages
- Costs related to obtaining or renewing their organic certification
- Inability to obtain the premium prices associated with organic commodities despite financial costs of transitioning to organic production



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How is OTECP Different from OCCSP?

- **OTECP builds upon USDA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP)**
 - Provides pandemic-related cost share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the National Organic Program (NOP)
 - Covers an additional 25% reimbursement (up to \$250) for those who were reimbursed through OCCSP
 - Education Expenses and soil testing
- **OTECP expands upon this assistance by including those transitioning to organic production**
 - Pays for education expenses
 - Covers additional scopes

Transitional Operation

Transitional operation means a crop or livestock production operation that is transitioning to organic production in anticipation of obtaining USDA organic certification, and that has an organic system plan or written documentation from a certifying agent accredited by the National Organic Program.



Eligible Applicants

To be eligible for OTECP, an applicant must have paid eligible costs during program years 2020, 2021, or 2022 and, at the time of application, be either a certified operation or a transitional operation.

Expenses that have been incurred during the program year but not paid by the applicant are not eligible for cost share assistance.

Program Details

Covers costs associated with:

- **Obtaining USDA organic certification**
- **Expenses related to the certification process (transitional operation)**
- **Educational events related or organic production and handling**



CERTIFIED
ORGANIC
OPERATIONS



CROP AND
LIVESTOCK
OPERATIONS
TRANSITIONING
TO ORGANIC



BOTH CERTIFIED
AND TRANSITIONAL
OPERATIONS FOR
EDUCATIONAL
EVENTS



BOTH CERTIFIED
AND TRANSITIONAL
OPERATIONS FOR
SOIL TESTING

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Covered Costs for Certified Operations

Certified operations may receive assistance for the following expenses for obtaining or renewing their organic certification for the crop, livestock, wild crop, processing, and State organic program categories:

- Application fees;
- Inspection fees, including travel costs and per diem for organic inspectors;
- USDA organic certification costs, including fees necessary to access international markets with which AMS has equivalency agreements or arrangements;
- State organic program fees;
- Soil testing as required under USDA's National Organic Program (NOP)
- Educational event registration fees
- User fees or certifier sales assessments; and
- Postage.

Transitional Operations: Eligible Categories

Transitional Organic Operations may have expenses for any combination of the following categories:

- **Transitional operation fees**
- **Soil Testing**
- **Educational event**

Education Expenses

Covers registration fees for educational events that include content related to organic production and handling in order to assist operations in increasing

- **Production knowledge**
- **Knowledge of marketing practices that can improve their operations**
- **Increase resilience; and**
- **Expand available marketing opportunities**



Eligible Expenses

THE PROGRAM

Provides assistance for agricultural producers who are certified organic or transitioning to organic for the following expenses paid in 2020, 2021 and 2022.



**CERTIFIED
ORGANIC
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**CROP AND
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**BOTH CERTIFIED
AND TRANSITIONAL
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EVENTS**



**BOTH CERTIFIED
AND TRANSITIONAL
OPERATIONS FOR
SOIL TESTING**

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

25%
of certification expenses

75%
of eligible expenses

75%
of the expense for
registration fees

75%
of the expense

EXPENSES INCLUDING

- Application fees
- Inspection fees
- State organic program fees
- User fees or certifier sales assessments
- Postage

- Fees for pre-certification inspections
- Development of organic systems plan

Registration fees for virtual or in-person events that provide educational content related to organic production and handling.

Soil tests to document micronutrient deficiency required under the National Organic Program

EXPENSES PER YEAR

Up to
\$250
/expense category:

Crop, Livestock, Wild Crop,
Handling and State Organic
Program fee

Up to
\$750
each year

Up to
\$200
each year

Up to
\$100
each year



Application Process

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USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Application Period

Program years 2020 & 2021 will begin on November 8, 2021, with signup open for 60 days concluding on January 7, 2022.

Program year 2022 will be announced at a later date.

Additional Details

- OTECP provides assistance for eligible expenses paid by the applicant during:
 - FY 2020 (October 1, 2019, through September 30, 2020),
 - FY 2021 (October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2021), and
 - FY 2022 (October 2, 2021 through September 30, 2022).

Application Package

A complete application includes the following:

- **FSA-883, OTECP Application**
- **AD-2047, if not previously filed**
- **SF-3881, if not previously filed**
- **CCC-901, Part A, if not previously filed and the Applicant is an entity (this is to verify signature authority)**

Required Documentation

In addition to breaking out expenses paid by category, applicants will self-certify to either having:

- **a valid organic certificate, or**
- **documentation to show a transition to organic.**
- **Applicants are required to retain documentation in support of their application for 3 years after the date of approval.**

Submitting FSA-883

Applicants may submit OTECP application packages to any County Office:

- in person when available
- by mail
- electronically by:
 - FAX
 - Email with scanned or photocopy of signed FSA-883 attached
- other authorized method (provided by supplemental notice or other guidance) online at www.farmers.gov/otecp online application.

How to Apply



Applicants may apply for OTECP at any USDA Service Center

The application period for 2020 and 2021 begins on Nov. 8, 2021 and ends on Jan. 7, 2022. The application period for 2022 will be announced at a later date.

Producers can find their local Service Center at
farmers.gov/service-locator

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Conservation Reserve Program: Organic Buffers

FSA's Land Conservation Assistance on Organic and
Transitioning Farms

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)



2018
**FARM
BILL**

Overview of CRP

Conservation Reserve Program

- Land conservation program
- Goal of the program is to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.
- Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length.



Benefits of CRP

Enroll partial or entire fields/farms at a time.

There are three areas in which we see CRP as beneficial.

- Financial – annual rental and Cost-share payments, less productive land becomes valuable.
- Wildlife – improves habitats, attracts wildlife species, and increases pollinator habitat
- Resources – Reduce soil erosion, increase soil health, and protects air and water quality



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About CRP: Organic Buffers

- **USDA is assisting organic farmers with the cost of establishing conservation buffers and other practices through CRP on and near farms that produce organic crops**
- **Organic Buffers Initiative's goal is to create more opportunities for organic farmers to participate in FSA's programs**

How Does CRP Help Organic Farmers?

- **Financial assistance available from CRP allows conservation practices to meet the needs of organic farmers and farmers transitioning to organic agriculture**
- **CRP helps farmers improve the soil and water quality on their land while also providing more wildlife habitat**

Types of CRP Practices

Of the available CRP practices, a few of the most likely to be considered beneficial by organic producers and their operations may include:

- CP5A, Field Windbreaks
- CP16A, Shelterbelts
- CP21, Filter Strips
- CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds
- CP42, Pollinator Habitat

Benefits of Organic Buffers

- **By creating conservation buffers, CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species to:**
 - Control soil erosion
 - Improve water quality
 - Develop wildlife habitat
- **Organic producers interested in establishing buffers of shrubs and trees, or supporting pollinating species, can offer eligible land for enrollment in this initiative at any time during Continuous CRP Signup.**

What is Continuous CRP sign-up?

- No competitive offer process
- Available throughout the year
- Offers are automatically accepted if land and practice eligibility is met
- Other financial incentives including:
 - Signup Incentive Payment
 - Practice Incentive Payment
 - Climate-Smart Incentive
 - Water quality Incentive for certain practices

Additional USDA and FSA Resources

USDA offers many programs and services for organic farmers across the agency!

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Disaster Assistance:

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)

- **Administered by FSA**
- **Provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops to protect against natural disasters that result in lower yields or crop losses, or prevents crop planting**
- **Eligible causes of loss include the following natural disasters:**
 - Damaging weather, such as drought, freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes;
 - Adverse natural occurrences, such as earthquake or flood; and
 - Conditions related to damaging weather or adverse natural occurrences, such as excessive heat, plant disease

HOW DOES USDA SUPPORT ORGANIC FARMS & BUSINESSES?

USDA helps farmers with organic certification guidance, biodiversity and natural resources conservation, financial and production assistance and marketing. Whether you're already certified organic, considering transition, or working with organic producers, we have resources for you.

Visit: www.usda.gov/organic



CERTIFICATION + OVERSIGHT

Transitioning to Organic: [NOP](#)

Get Certified: [NOP](#)

Organic Certification Cost Share Assistance: [FSA](#)

Find an Organic Operation/Ingredient: [NOP](#)

Learn About USDA Organic: [NOP](#)



CONSERVATION RESOURCES

Conservation for Soil Health, Pest and Weed Management, and Pollinators: [NRCS](#)

Conservation Management and Practice Assistance: [NRCS](#)

Conservation Reserve Program: [FSA](#)

Climate Resources: [USDA](#)



DATA + RESEARCH

Statistical Surveys and Data: [NASS](#)

Commodity-Specific Production and Price Data: [AMS Market News](#)

Research to Advance Organic Farming: [USDA](#)

Trade and Export Data Analysis: [FAS](#)



FARMING RESOURCES

Farm Loans: [FSA](#)

Crop Insurance: [RMA](#)

Business Loans and Grants for Rural Communities: [RD](#)

High Tunnels: [NRCS](#)

Farmers.gov Online Community: [USDA](#)



MARKET PROMOTION

Local Food, Farmers Market, and Market Access Programs: [AMS](#)

Local and Regional Food Sector: [AMS](#)

Urban, Indoor, and Emerging Ag Grant Programs: [NIFA](#)

Helpful Links

- **National Organic Program | Agricultural Marketing Service:** <https://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/programs-offices/national-organic-program>
- **Farm Service Agency:**
 - **Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP):** <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index>
 - **Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP):** www.farmers.gov/otecp
 - **Conservation Reserve Program:** <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-program/index>
- **USDA Organic | USDA:** <https://www.usda.gov/topics/organic>

Please Share Widely!

- **Certified organic producers and those transitioning to organic operations**
- **Organizations serving socially disadvantaged producers**
- **Public higher education institutions, including Extension**
- **Agricultural and Business Media**
- **State Agriculture Departments**



Other questions or request
for collaboration can be
sent to:
FSAOutreach@usda.gov

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