

NRCS & the NOP

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NOP ACA Training

San Diego, CA

February 19, 2014



Outline

- Overview of NRCS & Programs
- Relation to NOP Regulations
- The role of ACAs
- NRCS support of the OSP



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

United States Department of Agriculture



- NRCS Services
 - Soil Survey
 - Technical Assistance
 - Conservation Planning
 - Practice Implementation
 - Farm Bill Programs
 - Financial Assistance
 - Emergency Assistance
 - Conservation Partnership Efforts
 - Information & Outreach



Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

Technical and financial assistance to help plan and implement **conservation practices that address natural resource concerns** and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.



EQIP Organic Initiative

- Eligible producers-certified organic, transitional, and exempt producers
 - Certified producers: Submit Certification\Proof of Good Standing
 - Transitional and Exempt – Submit Self-Certification



Self-Certification Worksheet

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 \$5000 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 that meets standards established in the National Organic Programs (NOP) Act (7 U.S.C. Sections 6501-6522) for the life of this contract. I understand my application will be ranked with certified 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 CPM-440. 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 established in 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 program contract may be subject to termination.

Signed: _____ Date: _____



EQIP Organic Initiative

- Competitively ranked
 - (but not against conventional producers!)
- Year-round sign-up period
- Remaining 2014 ranking deadlines:
 - February 21, March 21, April 18, and May 16
- Statutory Payment limits: \$20 million annually and \$80 million/contract



Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)



CSP encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by:

- Undertaking additional conservation activities; and
- Improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities.

Under CSP, participants are paid for conservation performance: the higher the operational performance, the higher their payment.



CSP Enhancements

"Enhancement" means a type of conservation activity used to treat natural resources and improve conservation performance. Enhancements are installed at a level of management intensity that **exceeds the sustainable level.**



Soil Quality Enhancement Activity – SQL08 – Intercropping to improve soil quality and increase biodiversity

This enhancement involves the use of intercropping principles (i.e., growing two or more crops in close proximity to each other during part or all of their life cycles) to promote interactions that improve soil and water quality via increased biodiversity and contribute to pest management.



NRCS Support for Organic Producers

- Technical assistance
- Financial assistance
- Only supports conservation
 - NOT production, marketing, finances, business planning, etc.
- Buffers
- Building soil organic matter
- Crop rotation
 - Including cover crops
- Nutrient management
- Minimizing erosion
- Increasing biodiversity
- Natural resource management*
- Structural Practices (High tunnels, manure storage, watering facilities etc.)

* There are varying definitions of natural resources



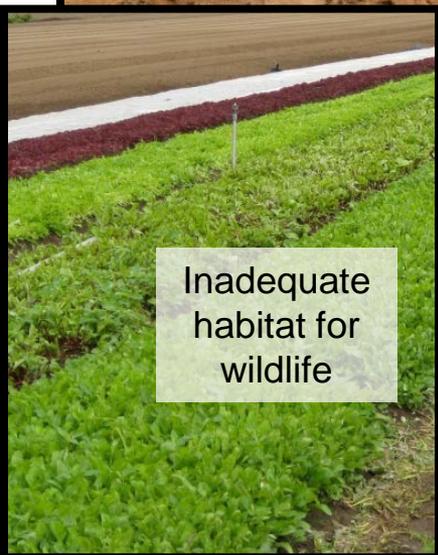
What are NRCS resource concerns?



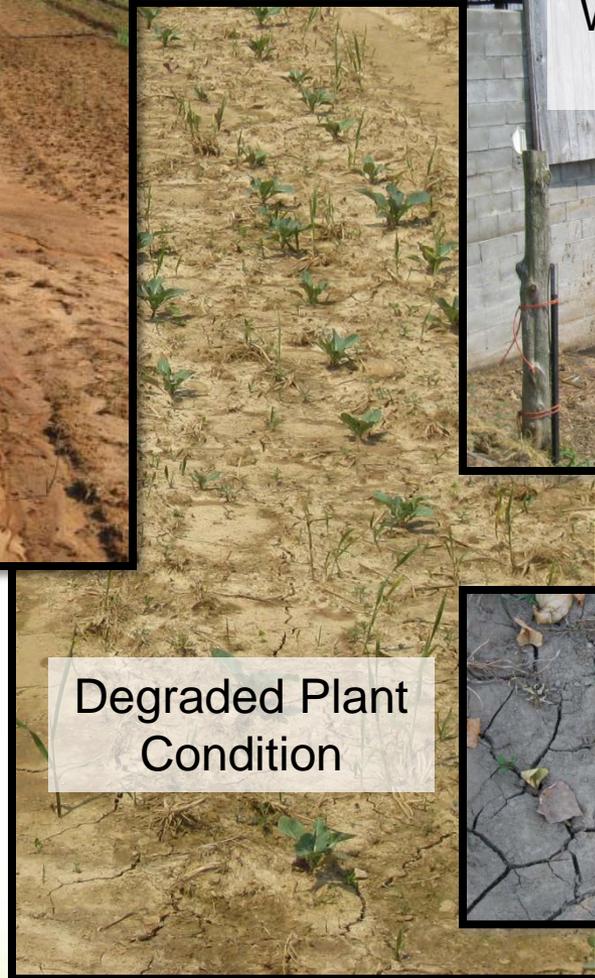
Soil Erosion



Water Quality Degradation



Inadequate habitat for wildlife



Degraded Plant Condition



Soil Quality Degradation



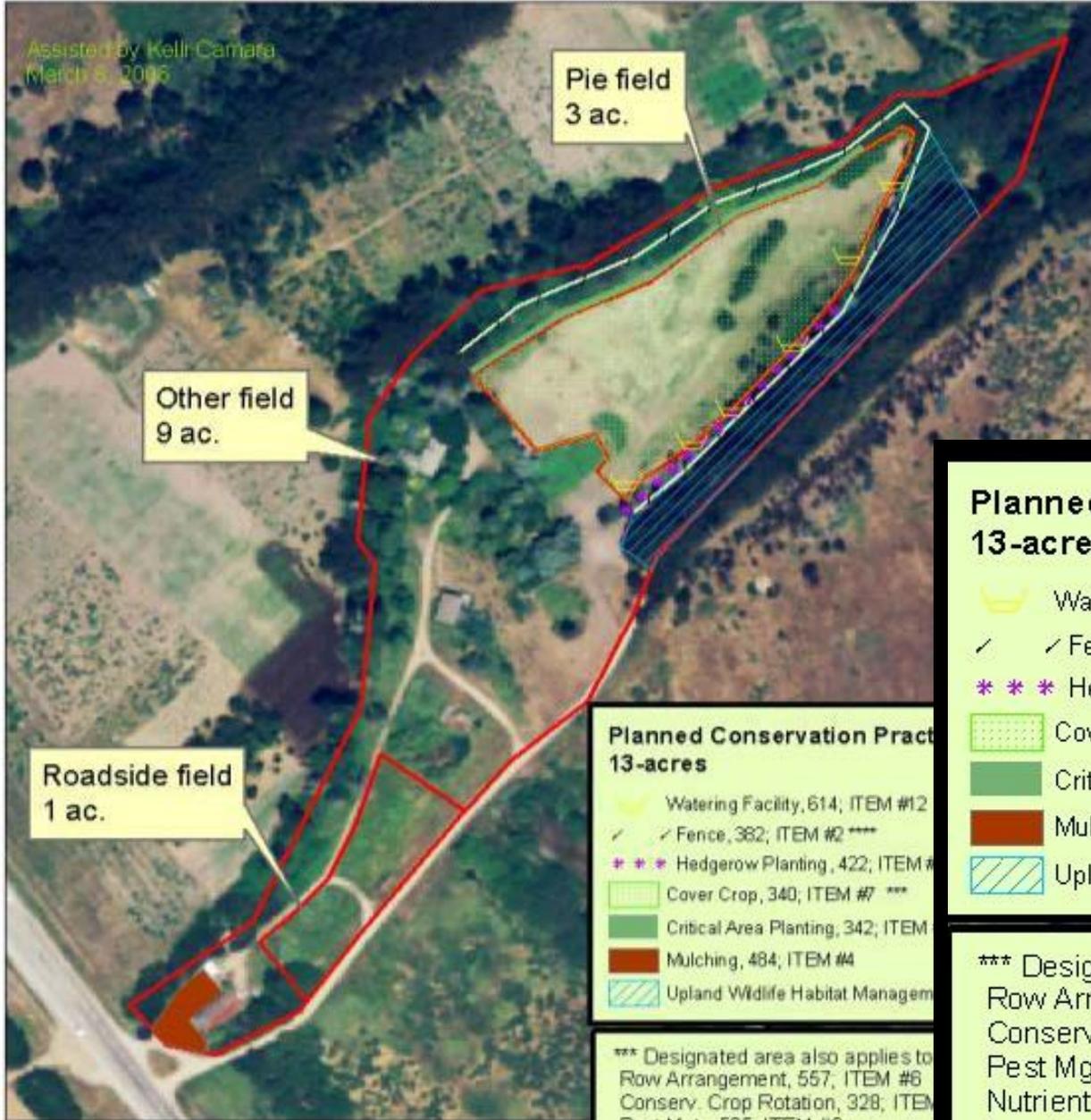
NRCS Resource Assessments

- Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation - RUSLE2
- Wind Erosion Prediction System – WEPS
- Rangeland Health Assessment Protocol
- Pasture Condition Scoring
- Energy Estimators
- Windows Pesticide Screening Tool -WIN-PST
- Environmental Evaluation
- And many more!



What are NRCS 'conservation practices'?





Pie field
 3 ac.

Other field
 9 ac.

Roadside field
 1 ac.

**Planned Conservation Practices
 13-acres**

-  Watering Facility, 614; ITEM #12
-  Fence, 382; ITEM #2 ****
-  Hedgerow Planting, 422; ITEM #3
-  Cover Crop, 340; ITEM #7 ***
-  Critical Area Planting, 342; ITEM #1
-  Mulching, 484; ITEM #4
-  Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, 645; ITEM #5

*** Designated area also applies to:
 Row Arrangement, 557; ITEM #6
 Conserv. Crop Rotation, 328; ITEM #8
 Pest Mgt., 595; ITEM #9
 Nutrient Mgt., 590; ITEM 10
 Land Smoothing, 466; ITEM #13

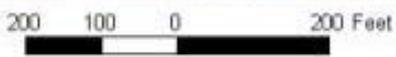
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CAP 138: Conservation Activity Plan Supporting Transition to Organic

- Evaluates resource concerns such as erosion, soil quality/organic matter, water quality, plant health, soil fertility, pest management, biodiversity status and others.
- Completed by Technical Service Providers (TSPs)
- Not an OSP



CAP 138

Resource Concern	Description of Concern	NOP Regulation Practice Standard(s)	Minimum Treatment Level	Measurement & Assessment Tool
WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION - Excess nutrients in surface and ground waters	Nutrients - organic and inorganic - are transported to receiving waters through surface runoff and/or leaching into shallow ground waters in quantities that degrade water quality and limit use for intended purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 205.203 Soil fertility and crop nutrient management practice standard • 205.205 Crop rotation practice standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrient applications are based on soil and/or tissue tests and nutrient budget for realistic crop yields • Nitrogen & Phosphorus loss risk assessments are acceptable 	Describe and attach N & P assessments
Do existing conditions or proposed alternatives meet the minimum treatment criteria? (Describe or attach evaluation)				
Fields that DO NOT Meet Minimum Criteria				



Organic System Plan (OSP)



Organic System Plan Template for Crop and/or Livestock Production

Farm / Ranch / Business Name

Date

As you describe your natural resource management practices, please note that some of your answers to questions about natural resource management may be relevant to other sections of this OSP as they relate to crop rotation, nutrient and manure management. The following questions are intended to address general, whole-farm goals and approaches to organic natural resource management.

1. Please describe how your farming or ranching practices—crop and/or livestock production practices—maintain or improve natural resources, foster cycling of nutrients, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Please list the specific strategies or practices you use that contribute to each general goal listed below, as applicable.

a. Conserve soil; Improve soil condition; Prevent soil erosion.



b. Prevent water contamination by plant nutrients; Protect water quality.

Organic System Plan (OSP)



Organic System Plan Template for Crop and/or Livestock Production

Farm / Ranch / Business Name

Date

d. Conserve biodiversity (soil organisms, pollinators, natural enemies of pests, predators, native habitat, vegetation and wildlife).

e. Other practices that maintain or improve natural resources (soil, water, wetlands, woodlands and wildlife), foster cycling of nutrients, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.



OSP

DRAFT

**NOP OSP
Template**

Land Use
History
Affirmations
Production
related info
Recordkeeping
Commingling/co
ntamination

NRCS-OSP Plug-in

Maps
Natural resource assessment
Erosion
Pesticides
Planned practices
Crop rotation
Grazing plan
Nutrient management
Biodiversity status
Others

**NRCS
Conservation
Plan**

All resource concerns assessed and
addressed SWAPA +EH
Inventory
Evaluation
Record of Decisions
Implementation requirements

Implementation requirements

CAP 138



Common Qs for ACAs

- What do you think about the plug-in idea? Would you support it's use by new clients?
 - *Please contact Sarah Brown, Betsy Rakola, and Melissa Bailey to give us your feedback.*



Common Qs from ACAs

- How does a transitional producer prove they are working with us?
 - *They self-certify. They are no longer required to identify which ACA they've contacted or plan to work with.*



Common Qs from ACAs

- What is a 'letter of good standing'?
 - *A letter indicating they are currently certified.*
- Can ACAs be TSPs?
 - *ACAs need to follow COI guidance by NOP. There may be opportunities for ACAs to provide this service.*



Common Qs for ACAs

- What if NRCS finds erosion on a certified operation? What if they are farming on NRCS-identified Highly Erodible Land (HEL)?
 - *There have been numerous cases where NRCS has identified this. NRCS does not regulate or report to NOP. A larger roundtable discussion between NOP and NRCS is planned to address this inconsistency.*



NRCS Organic Initiative

bit.ly/2013EqipOI

The screenshot shows the NRCS website interface. At the top left is the USDA logo and the text "Natural Resources Conservation Service". Below this is "United States Department of Agriculture". Navigation tabs include "Topics", "Programs", "Newsroom", and "Contact Us". On the right, there are links for "About NRCS", "Careers", "National Centers", and "State Offices", along with a search bar and "Browse By Audience", "A-Z Index", "Advanced Search", and "Help". A breadcrumb trail reads: "You are Here: Home / Programs / Financial Assistance / Environmental Quality Incentives Program / 2013 EQIP Organic Initiative". Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr are present under the heading "Stay Connected". The main content area is titled "2013 EQIP Organic Initiative" and features a large photograph of a green field under a blue sky with clouds. A sidebar on the left lists "Programs" with expandable sections: "Farm Bill", "Landscape Initiatives", and "Financial Assistance". Under "Financial Assistance", several programs are listed, including "Agricultural Management Assistance", "Agricultural Water Enhancement Program", "Air Quality Initiative", "Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative", "Conservation Innovation Grants", "Conservation Stewardship Program", and "Environmental Quality Incentives Program".



USDA.gov Organic Pages

www.usda.gov/organic

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

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Topics Programs and Services Newsroom Blog

You are here: Home / Organic Agriculture

Overview

- Organic Agriculture
- Benefits of Organic Certification
- Is Organic an Option for Me?
- Organic Fact Sheets
- Organic 101 Blogs

Programs and Services

- View Organic Standards
- Become Certified Organic
- Find Financial Resources for Farmers
- Learn About Research and Education
- Get Production and Conservation Assistance
- Buy Improved Crop Insurance
- Access Economic and Market Information
- Import or Export Organic Products
- Contact Your Local Field Office

Is Organic an Option for Me?

Are you thinking about transitioning to organic? Learn how the USDA supports organic agriculture through standards, enforcement, certification, market information, funding, extension, and research.

1/4 ◀ ▶

Organic Agriculture

USDA is committed to helping organic agriculture grow and thrive. To help meet Secretary Vilsack's goal of increasing the number of certified organic operations, USDA is [delivering results](#) through its many programs which serve the growing organic sector. October 2012 marked the 10th anniversary of the USDA Organic Seal, and we are proud that it has become a leading global standard.

What is Organic Agriculture?

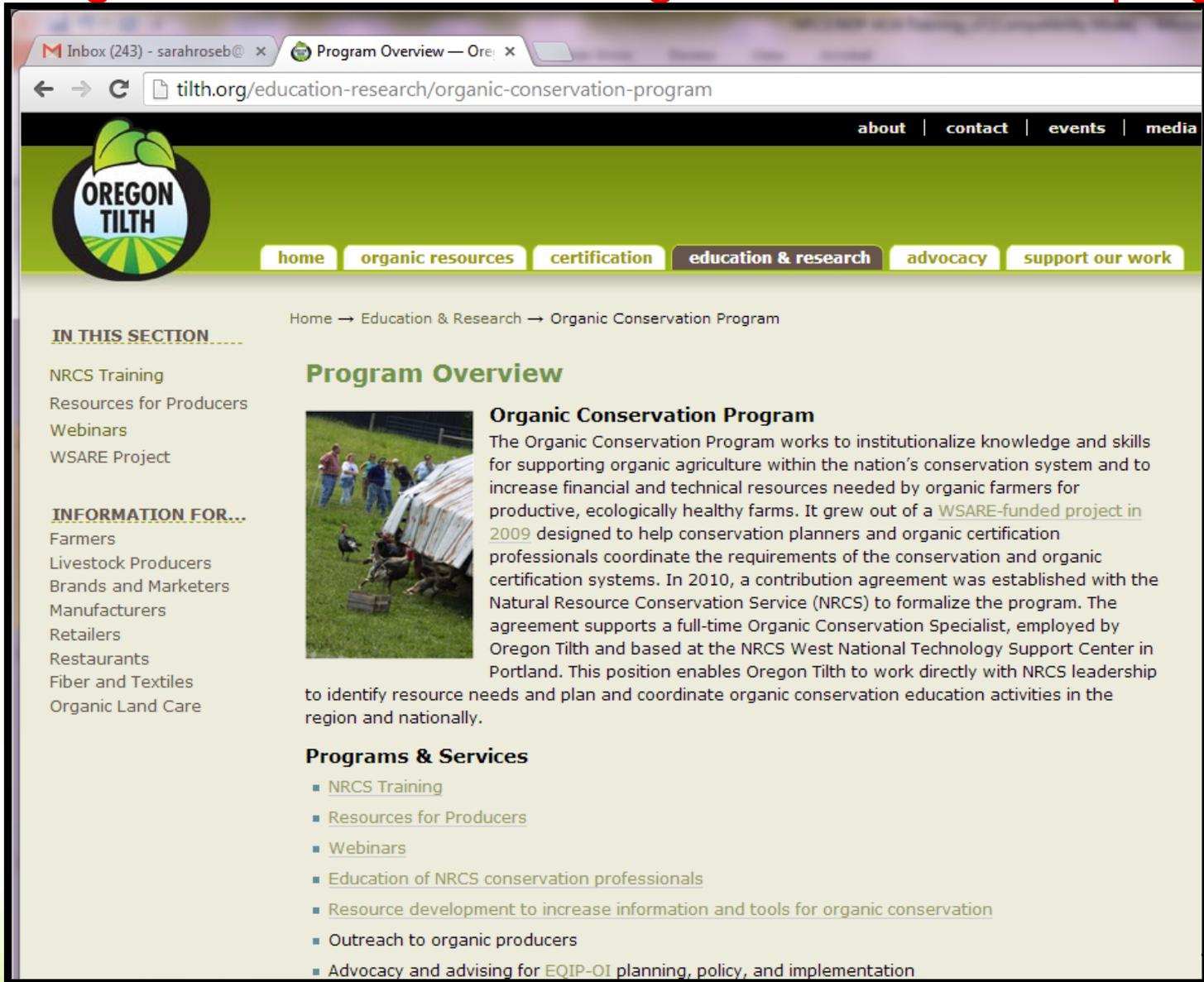
Organic agriculture produces products using methods that preserve the environment and avoid most synthetic materials, such as pesticides and antibiotics. USDA [organic standards](#) describe how farmers grow crops and raise livestock and which materials they may use.

Organic farmers, ranchers, and food processors follow a defined set of standards to produce organic food and fiber. Congress described general organic principles in the Organic Foods Production Act, and the USDA defines specific organic standards. These standards cover the product from farm to table, including soil and water quality, pest control, livestock practices, and rules for food additives.



For More Information:

<http://tilth.org/education-research/organic-conservation-program>



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL tilth.org/education-research/organic-conservation-program. The page features the Oregon Tilth logo in the top left and a navigation menu with links for [home](#), [organic resources](#), [certification](#), [education & research](#) (highlighted), [advocacy](#), and [support our work](#). A secondary navigation bar includes [about](#), [contact](#), [events](#), and [media](#). The main content area is titled "Program Overview" and includes a photograph of a group of people in a field. The text describes the program's mission to support organic agriculture within the conservation system and its history, including a WSARE-funded project in 2009 and a contribution agreement with the NRCS in 2010. A list of "Programs & Services" is provided at the bottom.

OREGON TILTH

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Home → Education & Research → Organic Conservation Program

IN THIS SECTION

- [NRCS Training](#)
- [Resources for Producers](#)
- [Webinars](#)
- [WSARE Project](#)

INFORMATION FOR...

- [Farmers](#)
- [Livestock Producers](#)
- [Brands and Marketers](#)
- [Manufacturers](#)
- [Retailers](#)
- [Restaurants](#)
- [Fiber and Textiles](#)
- [Organic Land Care](#)

Program Overview



Organic Conservation Program

The Organic Conservation Program works to institutionalize knowledge and skills for supporting organic agriculture within the nation's conservation system and to increase financial and technical resources needed by organic farmers for productive, ecologically healthy farms. It grew out of a [WSARE-funded project in 2009](#) designed to help conservation planners and organic certification professionals coordinate the requirements of the conservation and organic certification systems. In 2010, a contribution agreement was established with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to formalize the program. The agreement supports a full-time Organic Conservation Specialist, employed by Oregon Tilth and based at the NRCS West National Technology Support Center in Portland. This position enables Oregon Tilth to work directly with NRCS leadership

to identify resource needs and plan and coordinate organic conservation education activities in the region and nationally.

Programs & Services

- [NRCS Training](#)
- [Resources for Producers](#)
- [Webinars](#)
- [Education of NRCS conservation professionals](#)
- [Resource development to increase information and tools for organic conservation](#)
- [Outreach to organic producers](#)
- [Advocacy and advising for EQIP-OI planning, policy, and implementation](#)



Farm or state specific questions?

Find your local NRCS office:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Partners Help Black Bears Bounce Back in Mississippi



Committed partners, good conservation planning, and our Wetlands Reserve Program have changed the fate of the black bear in Mississippi. Numbering barely a dozen in the 1990's, today there are as many as 120 of the reclusive creatures. Find out how people are coming together to help **black bears** flourish again in Mississippi's wetlands.

in the News





Questions?

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