
USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs of Organic Producers

News Release | Maine | May 17, 2023

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Bangor, ME May 15, 2023 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will cover up to 75% of the costs associated with organic certification, up to \$750 per category, through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP). Maine Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages organic agricultural producers and handlers to apply for OCCSP by Oct. 31, 2023, for expenses incurred from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023.

As part of USDA's broader effort to support organic producers and in response to stakeholder feedback, this year FSA increased the cost share to the maximum amount allowed by statute.

"We're taking steps to better support Maine organic producers," said, Sherry Hamel, State Executive Director for FSA in Maine cost share to the statutory limit this year. Organic certification costs have long been identified as a barrier to certification, and this assistance, at its full levels, will help Maine organic producers participate in new markets while supporting and growing our local and regional food systems."

Cost Share for 2023

The cost share provides financial assistance for organic certification, and producers and handlers are eligible to receive 75% of the costs, up to \$750, for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and state organic program fees (California only).

Maine producers have until Oct. 31, 2023, to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.

How to Apply

To apply, state producers and handlers should contact their local FSA office [USDA Service Center](#). As part of completing the OCCSP application, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses.

Organic producers and handlers may also apply for OCCSP through participating state departments of agriculture. Additional details can be found on the [OCCSP](#) webpage.

Opportunity for State Departments of Agriculture

FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA will post a synopsis of the funding opportunity on grants.gov and will electronically mail the notice of funding opportunity to all eligible state departments of agriculture.

If a state department of agriculture chooses to participate in OCCSP, both the state department of agriculture and FSA County Offices in that state will accept OCCSP applications and make payments to eligible certified operations. However, the producer or handler may only receive OCCSP assistance from either FSA or the participating state department of agriculture.

Other USDA Organic Assistance?

USDA offers other assistance for organic producers, including the new [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#), which includes direct farmer assistance for organic production and processing, conservation and crop insurance.

For conservation, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is helping producers adopt the new organic management standard, which allows flexibility for producers to get the assistance and education they need such as attending workshops or requesting help from experts or mentors. It supports conservation practices required for organic certification and may provide foregone income reimbursement for dips in production during the transition period.

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) reminds producers interested in the Transitional and Organic Grower Assistance Program, also part of OTI, to visit with their crop insurance agent for more information. Premium benefits for eligible policies will be automatically applied to the producer's billing statement later this year. ?

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USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) also administers federal crop insurance options, including [Whole Farm Revenue Protection](#) and [Micro Farm](#), which may be good options for organic producers.?

Also under OTI, is the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Organic Program's (NOP) Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). TOPP builds mentorship relationships between transitioning and existing organic farmers to provide technical assistance and wrap-around support in six U.S. regions.

On May 10 USDA AMS announced the availability of approximately \$75 million in grant funding for the Organic Market Development Grant (OMDG) program. OMDG will fund businesses transitioning to organic or initiating new organic production or processing and support new, improved and expanded markets for domestically produced organic products with a focus on processing capacity, market access, and product development.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and

producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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