USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs of Organic, Transitioning Producers

News Release | | May 16, 2022

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WASHINGTON, May 16, 2022 - Agricultural producers and handlers who are certified organic, along with producers and handlers who are transitioning to organic production, can now apply for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP) and Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP), which help producers and handlers cover the cost of organic certification, along with other related expenses. Applications for OTECP and OCCSP are both due October 31, 2022.

"By helping with organic certification costs - long identified as a barrier to certification - USDA has helped producers participate in new markets while investing in the long-term health of their operations," said Farm Service Agency Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. "We launched the Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program to build on the support offered through the Organic Certification Cost Share Program and provide additional assistance to organic and transitioning producers weathering the continued market impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, in response to stakeholder feedback, we have aligned the signup dates for these two organic programs and encourage producers to work with the local USDA Service Centers and State agencies to complete the applications. The FSA, and the USDA broadly, are committed to making sure our Nation's organic producers and handlers have the tools they need to continue positively shaping our local and regional food systems."

Cost Share for 2022

OTECP covers:

- Certification costs for organic producers and handlers (25% up to $250 per category).
- Eligible expenses for transitional producers, including fees for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan (75% up to $750).
- Registration fees for educational events (75% up to $200).
- Soil testing (75% up to $100).

Meanwhile, OCCSP covers 50% or up to $500 per category of certification costs in 2022.

This cost share for certification is available for each of these categories: crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and State organic program fees.

Producers can receive cost share through both OTECP and OCCSP. Both OTECP and OCCSP cover costs incurred from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. Producers have until October 31, 2022 to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.

How to Apply

To apply, producers and handlers should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) at their local USDA Service Center. As part of completing the OCCSP applications, 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 agencies.

Additional details can be found on the OTECP and OCCSP webpages.

Opportunity for State Agencies

FSA is accepting applications for State agencies to administer OCCSP through July 18, 2022. 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 by either FSA or the participating State department of agriculture.

More Information

OTECP builds upon OCCSP, providing additional relief to help producers during the pandemic. OTECP uses funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act; OCCSP is funded through the Farm Bill.

USDA has made other strides to assist organic producers. In 2022, USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) increased expansion limits for organic producers with coverage through Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP). RMA also updated the insurance option to allow producers to report acreage as certified organic or transitioning, as long as organic certification was requested by the acreage reporting date. Also, this year, RMA introduced a new option - Micro Farm - through WFRP designed for producers with small-scale operations that sell locally, which includes organic producers.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under 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 usda.gov.

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