

What is Technical Note 12 - Conservation Activities in Organic Agriculture and General Funding Availability Notice

In this kit:

Background info	1
Resource Highlight: Technical Note 12	2
Key Features	2
How this helps farmers	3
How this helps NRCS Field Agents and other TSPs	4
Suggested questions for your NRCS office	5
How can you apply for NRCS Assistance?	5
Media Kit for TOPP Partners:	8
Social Media & Outreach sample text	8
Short blurb for Texting	9
Printable PDF	9
Downloadable Graphics for Social Media	9
Other Funding Availability Notices:	9

Background info

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers funding and technical assistance programs to help producers enhance their farming operations and, increasingly, transition to organic production. These programs are generally accessible through NRCS field agents and Technical Service Providers (TSPs). However, these agents and TSPs may not always be familiar with the specific conservation benefits and practices associated with organic farming. To address this, the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) collaborated with NRCS to develop Technical Note 12: Conservation Activities in Organic Farming Systems. This document equips field agents and TSPs with the knowledge needed to effectively support the unique requirements of organic producers. This resource is designed to help raise awareness about Technical Note 12 among farmers and highlights the opportunities it presents to working collaboratively with NRCS field agents and TSPs.

This work is funded through the TOPP network, which covers six regions: the Mid-Atlantic/Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Northwest, and West/Southwest. Organizations in these regions are actively forming partnerships to serve transitioning and existing organic farmers. In the West and Southwest, CCOF coordinates the work carried out by dozens of community-based public, private, and nonprofit partners in seven states: California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Hawaii. OFRF is working in this region to develop communications materials highlighting important financial and technical assistance programs and resources that are applicable to organic and transitioning-to-organic operations at all scales and positions in the food system.

Resource Highlight: [Technical Note 12](#)

[Technical Note 12 - Conservation Activities in Organic Farming Systems \(190 TN AG-12, TN-12, Tech Note 12\)](#) was developed through a collaboration between the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) and the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Tech Note 12 provides comprehensive guidance to NRCS field staff, Technical Service Providers (TSPs), as well as farmers and ranchers, on addressing resource concerns while complying with organic requirements. It details how various organic practices address resource concerns that were not previously fully covered by Conservation Practice Standards (CPS). Tech Note 12 clarifies that these practices are now covered, either partially by existing CPSs or if not by CPS-823, Organic Management.

By understanding and utilizing this resource, and highlighting it to your field agents and TSPs, organic producers can gain better insight into the rationale behind NRCS decision-making and operations. Your local NRCS office and TSPs are available to assist you in adopting the practices listed in Tech Note 12 and CPS-823 to meet the specific needs of your operation.

Obtain translated materials, or schedule interpretation services for phone calls or in-person visits here: <https://www.farmers.gov/translations>

- This document is currently not available in Spanish, if you need assistance please request personalized Spanish language support for any USDA resource here: <https://www.farmers.gov/translations#spanish-request>

Key Features

- *Alignment with NOP Standards:* Tech Note 12 aligns NRCS resource concerns with applicable National Organic Program (NOP) requirements and standards. This ensures that Field Staff and TSPs recommend practices that not only

address resource concerns, but are also compliant with organic certification requirements. Tech note 12 is another step in bridging the gap between NRCS conservation practices and those that are required by organic farming, providing coherent and explicit connections between the two for field staff and TSPs. As a result, organic producers' conservation efforts are recognized and can confidently implement conservation practices on their operations.

- *Documentation and Procedures:* Tech Note 12 highlights the importance of utilizing existing Organic Systems Plans (OSPs) to streamline NRCS Conservation System Planning. OSPs, which organic farmers are already required to maintain for certification, contain detailed information about the farm's management practices, including soil fertility, pest control, and biodiversity strategies. By leveraging these existing documents, NRCS field agents and TSPs can more efficiently develop conservation plans that align with organic standards. This approach reduces redundancy, saving time and resources for both the farmer and the NRCS staff.
- *Real-World Examples:* Tech Note 12 provides real-world examples that demonstrate the conservation benefits of organic farming systems. These illustrate to NRCS field agents and TSPs how organic systems can address a variety of resource concerns, such as soil health, water quality, and biodiversity. By telling the story of successful organic conservation, Tech Note 12 contributes to the growing institutional knowledge of organic agriculture within NRCS. It equips field staff and TSPs with tangible examples to understand the potential impact of organic systems, fostering a deeper appreciation for their benefits. We encourage you to contribute to this growing resource by sharing your own conservation success stories and examples with OFRF [using this link](#).

How This Helps Farmers

- Tech Note 12 helps farmers describe the conservation benefits of their operations in the specific language of resource concern management that NRCS Field Agents and TSPs are used to.
- There are dozens of different programs and initiatives that NRCS operates, like the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), to provide financial and technical assistance to farmers to help improve their operations and address resource concerns in their area. Tech Note 12 makes the case that organic-certified and transitioning-to-organic producers should be able to access these programs.
- **As an important reminder for all NRCS programs! Applicants must not start any financially assisted conservation activity or engage the reimbursable services of a certified TSP before an obligating document is executed by NRCS. If applicants start a conservation practice or activity prior to NRCS executing an obligation, the applicant will be ineligible to receive payment.**

How This Helps NRCS Field Agents and Other TSPs

- Assessment:

Field agents and TSPs will use Tech Note 12 to conduct thorough assessments of organic farming operations. This involves identifying how the area's resource concerns interact with the unique traits of organic farming, such as soil fertility, water management, pest control, and habitat conservation. By referencing Tech Note 12, agents can identify which conservation practices are most appropriate for addressing these concerns, ensuring that the solutions proposed are both effective and compliant with organic standards.

- Planning:

Using the insights gained from the assessment, field agents and TSPs develop tailored conservation plans that incorporate the recommended practices from Tech Note 12. These plans are customized to meet the unique needs of each operation, taking into account the specific challenges and goals of the farmer. The plans outline a step-by-step approach to implementing the conservation practices, ensuring that they align with both NRCS guidelines and organic certification requirements.

- Implementation:

Once the conservation plan is in place, NRCS field agents and TSPs assist farmers in applying for NRCS program assistance, such as EQIP and CSP. They provide hands-on support to ensure that the practices outlined in the plan are effectively implemented. This includes helping with the design and installation of infrastructure, providing technical advice, and facilitating access to necessary resources and equipment. Their support ensures that farmers can successfully integrate these practices into their operations.

- Monitoring:

After implementation, field agents and TSPs continue to support farmers by monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation practices. They track key performance indicators, such as improvements in soil health, water quality, and pest management, to evaluate the success of the practices. If necessary, they make adjustments to the conservation plan to optimize results. This ongoing monitoring helps ensure that the practices remain effective and that the farm continues to meet both NRCS and organic certification standards.

Suggested Questions for Your NRCS Office

- "I'm interested in applying for NRCS Conservation Program Assistance for my farm business to help finance conservation project/resource concern of interest. What do you need from me to get started on my application?"

- “What additional funding opportunities are available to my farm?”
- “How soon can a conservationist visit my farm to set up a conservation plan?”
- “When is the deadline for the next ranking period?”
- “I am interested in seeing if I am eligible for the increased and advanced payment option for Historically Underserved farmers. How will this change my application process?”
- “I ___(own/rent)___ my land. What documents will you need for completion of my EQIP application by the deadline?”
- “My farm is ___certified/transitioning___ to organic. What additional information will you need for completion of my conservation plan and application by the deadline?”
- “Are you familiar with Technical Note 12 - Conservation Activities in Organic Farming Systems? If not, can we discuss how this may affect my application?”

How Can You Apply for NRCS Assistance?

- 1. First, it's always a good idea to review some materials.**
 - [List of resource concerns](#)
 - Your state's NRCS or your Conservation District's website:
 - [AZ](#); [CA](#); [HI/PIA](#); [NM](#); [NV](#); [TX](#); and [UT](#)
- 2. Find the right application.** Apply through your [regional Natural Resource Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) office following.
 - Applications for assistance are accepted on a continuous basis, but they are considered for funding in different ranking periods. Deadlines and available EQIP and CSP initiatives may vary by state:
 - [State-specific application ranking dates](#)
 - [Arizona](#)
 - *EQIP and CSP: Expected Winter 2024/2025*
 - [California](#)
 - *EQIP: Expected Fall 2024*
 - *CSP: Expected Winter 2025*
 - [Nevada](#)
 - *EQIP: Expected Fall 2024 and Spring 2025*
 - *CSP: Expected Spring 2025*
 - [New Mexico](#)
 - *EQIP and CSP: Expected Fall 2024*
 - [Pacific Islands](#) (March 8, 2024)
 - *EQIP and CSP: Expected Spring 2025*
 - [Utah](#)
 - *EQIP and CSP: Expected Fall 2024, Spring and Summer 2025*

- [Texas](#)
 - *EQIP: Expected Fall 2024*
 - *CSP: Expected Winter 2025*
- **But don't wait!** You can work with your NRCS district office well before these dates to fill out all the paperwork and ensure you meet all eligibility requirements and complete a Conservation Plan through their Conservation Desktop platform.
- 3. Required financial information to gain access to government payments.**
 - Applicants must be registered with [Farmers.gov](#). Members' farm records must be up to date.
 - Applicants must [provide adjusted gross income certification](#) (Form [CCC-941](#)), which requires applicants' Taxpayer ID Number (SSN or EIN) and their AGI from the previous three tax years.
- 4. Required documents.**
 - All applicants must provide control of land documentation (deed, proof of land ownership, lease, or other legal agreement).
 - Applicants must provide written authorization from the landowner to install structural or vegetative practices on leased land included in the application.
 - For certified organic applicants only, NRCS requires proof of certification for the CPA 1200.
 - If a conservation project involves irrigation, documentation of the land's irrigation history is required.
- 5. Submit!** Sending all of this information to the correct state or federal agency office.
 - NRCS Info:
 - [Find Your Local Service Center](#)
 - [Ask.USDA.gov](#)
 - Phone: 1-833-ONE-USDA
 - Email: askusda@usda.gov
 - [EQIP: How do I Apply?](#)
 - [CSP: How do I Apply?](#)
 - Donna Hopwood, EQIP Organic Program Specialist, National Headquarters
 - donna.hopwood@wdc.usda.gov
 - Lindsay Haines, National Organic & Pest Management Specialist, National Headquarters
 - Lindsay.Haines@wdc.usda.gov
 - In Arizona:
 - [Arizona Service Center Locator](#)

- For Program Information, contact your local NRCS office.
- AZ State Office: 230 N 1st Avenue, Suite 509, Phoenix, AZ 85003
 - Phone: 602-280-8801
 - Email: AZinfo.nrcs@usda.gov
- Acting Programs Manager: Jason Kepler
 - Phone: 602-616-0560
- In California:
 - [California Service Center Locator](#)
 - CA Program Contacts:
 - Jenna Ganoung, State EQIP Program Manager Davis State Office
 - Phone: (530) 792-5671
 - Email: jenna.ganoung@usda.gov
 - Robert Boettcher, State CSP Program Manager
 - Phone: (615) 277-2544
 - Email: robert.boettcher@usda.gov
- In Hawaii:
 - [Hawaii Service Center Locator](#)
 - Pacific Islands Area Program Contacts:
 - Amanda Stanford, Acting Program Manager for EQIP/AMA
 - Email: amanda.stanford@usda.gov
 - Zephyr Usinger, Program Manager for CSP/ACEP
 - Phone: (808) 861-0695
 - Email: zephyr.usinger@usda.gov
 - Scott Turgeon, Program Manager of Initiatives
 - Phone: (808) 339-9055
 - Email: scott.turgeon@usda.gov
- In Nevada:
 - [Nevada Service Center Locator](#)
 - [Nevada State Office](#): C. Clinton Young Federal Building, 300 Booth St, Room 2070, Reno, NV, 89509
 - Phone: 775-857-8500
 - Email: SM.NRCS.NV.INFO@usda.gov
- In New Mexico:
 - [New Mexico Service Center Locator](#)
 - Direct all questions about applying for EQIP to your local office.
 - NM Program Contact: Kenneth J. Branch, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs
 - Phone: (505) 761-4454

- E-mail: kenneth.branch@usda.gov
- In Texas:
 - [West TX Service Center Locator](#)
 - [East TX Service Center Locator](#)
 - [Texas State Office](#): 101 Main St, Temple, TX 76501-7602
 - Phone: 245-742-9800
 - Assistant State Conservationist for Programs: Stacy Riley
 - Phone: 254-742-9825
 - Email: stacy.riley@usda.gov
- In Utah:
 - [Utah Service Center Locator](#)
 - UT Program Contact:
 - Davie Stokes, EQIP Program Manager
 - Phone: (435) 609-9187
 - Email: davie.stokes@usda.gov
 - James Huggard, CSP Program Manager
 - Phone: (435) 381-2300 ext.109
 - Email: james.huggard@usda.gov

Media Kit for TOPP Partners:

Social Media & Outreach sample text

Following are examples of text to include in a social media post, an email to your network, or in your organization's newsletter:

Email or newsletter:

New NRCS Resource for Organic Producers!!

@USDA-NRCS offers funding and technical assistance to enhance your farming operations and support your transition to organic production. To help with this, the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) and NRCS developed Technical Note 12: Conservation Activities in Organic Farming Systems. This valuable resource equips NRCS field agents and Technical Service Providers (TSPs) with the knowledge needed to effectively support organic producers. 🥕🌱

Learn how Tech Note 12 can help you meet organic standards while addressing resource concerns like soil health, water quality, and biodiversity. Visit OFRF's website to learn more [here!](#) Or contact your local NRCS office or TSP to get started today!

Find your local NRCS service provider here:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center?state=&county=>

#OrganicFarming #SustainableAgriculture #NRCS #TechNote12 #FarmFunding
#SoilHealth #WaterQuality #Biodiversity #OrganicTransition

Facebook or LinkedIn:

Did you know @USDA-NRCS offers funding and technical assistance to enhance your farming operations and support your transition to organic production? 🥕

To assist with this, the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) and NRCS developed Technical Note 12: Conservation Activities in Organic Farming Systems. This valuable resource equips NRCS field agents and Technical Service Providers (TSPs) with the knowledge needed to effectively support organic producers.

Tech Note 12 can help you:

- 🌱 Meet organic standards.
- 🌱 Address resource concerns like soil health, water quality, and biodiversity.
- 🌱 Gain funding and technical support for projects on your farm.

[Learn more here](#)

Or contact your local NRCS office or TSP to get started today! You can find your local NRCS service provider here:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center?state=&county=>

#OrganicFarming #SustainableAgriculture #NRCS #TechNote12 #FarmFunding
#SoilHealth #WaterQuality #Biodiversity #OrganicTransition

IG:


Hey farmers! Are you interested in, or in the process of, transitioning to organic farming? 🌱 Did you know that funding and technical assistance are available to enhance your farming operations and support your transition to organic production through @USDA_NRCS?

To make this easier, @OFRF and NRCS developed Tech Note 12: Conservation Activities in Organic Farming Systems. This resource equips NRCS field agents and Technical Service Providers (TSPs) with the tools to effectively support organic producers. 🥕 🌱

Tech Note 12 can help you meet organic standards while addressing soil health, water quality, and biodiversity. Reach out to your local NRCS office or TSP to get started today, or visit OFRF.org and go to > Resources > Transition to Organic!

#OrganicFarming #SustainableAgriculture #NRCS #TechNote12 #FarmFunding
#SoilHealth #WaterQuality #Biodiversity #OrganicTransition

Short form for X:

 Did you know @USDA_NRCS offers funding & support for transitioning to organic farming? And now Tech Note 12 is here to help NRCS agents better support organic producers!

Learn more: <https://ofrf.org/news/why-technical-note-12-is-such-a-big-deal/>
#OrganicFarming

State by State handles on X:

[AZ](#): @NRCS_AZ

[CA](#): @NRCSCalifornia

[HI/PIA](#): @NRCS_PIA

[NM](#): @NRCS_NM

[NV](#): @NRCS_NV

[TX](#): @NRCSTexas

[UT](#): @NRCS_UT

Short blurb for Texting

The USDA NRCS offers funding and support to help farmers transition to organic production. And now, OFRF and NRCS have created Tech Note 12, a resource that helps NRCS agents and service providers better support organic farmers in meeting standards and improving soil health, water quality, and biodiversity. To learn more, contact your local NRCS office or TSP and ask about how Tech Note 12 can support you and your farm operation today! Or visit OFRF.org > Resources > Transition to Organic.

[**Printable PDF**](#)

[**PDF para imprimir**](#)

[Downloadable Graphics for Social Media Text:](#)

[Gráficos descargables para textos en redes sociales:](#)

Other Funding Availability Notices:

- [Organic Certification Cost Share Program \(OCCSP\)](#)
 - The OCCSP provides cost-share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products for obtaining or renewing their certification under the National Organic Program (NOP). Certified operations can receive up to 75% of their certification costs paid during the program year, up to \$750 per certification scope.
 - **Who is eligible:** Currently certified organic producers
 - **How to apply:** Certified organic operations can apply for OCCSP assistance through their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office or, in some cases, through a participating State Agency. Here's how to proceed:
 - *Through FSA:* If you choose to apply through the FSA, you'll need to use [their specific OCCSP application form](#) and follow the [instructions provided](#). This ensures that your application is processed smoothly and efficiently.
 - *Through a State Agency:* If your state participates in the OCCSP, you likely have the option to apply through your state agency. In this case, use the application form provided by your state's program. States like [Arizona](#) and [California](#) have their own forms, while Texas offers an [online application platform](#) along with a [Request for Assistance \(RFA\)](#) providing information.
 - **2024 Deadline:** October 31, 2024
- [Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program \(Western SARE\)](#)
 - The Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Research & Education Grant Program focuses on promoting on-farm sustainability through innovative, producer-driven research and outreach. This program funds projects led by agricultural producers, who work with technical advisors to address specific needs in sustainable agriculture. Projects can receive up to \$25,000 for 1-2 producers, and up to \$29,900 for 3 or more producers. The goal is to integrate research and education to benefit the environmental quality, profitability, and quality of life for producers and their communities. Outreach activities include demonstrations, educational events, and more (SARE Western).

- **Who is eligible:** Only current farmers and ranchers are eligible to receive these grants. SARE defines a farmer/rancher as:
 - Primary occupation is farming/ranching and have a Taxpayer ID Number for their operation; or
 - They are a part-time producer with at least \$1,000 in income from farming/ranching
- **How to apply:** Here is the [Call for Proposals](#) that will have instructions to apply
- **2024 Deadline:** October 24, 2024
- **[Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#)**
 - The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and improve environmental quality. EQIP provides funds to help implement conservation practices such as soil health management, water quality improvement, and habitat enhancement. The program supports practices including efficient irrigation systems, nutrient management, and high tunnel installations. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, with state-specific ranking periods for funding consideration.
 - **Who is eligible:** Individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian Tribes that own or rent and currently manage land for agricultural or forest production. Applicants must have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS and must maintain control of the land for the entire span of the EQIP contract.
 - **How to apply:** [Contact your local NRCS office.](#)
 - **2024 Deadline:** Applications accepted on a continuous basis
- **[Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#)**
 - CSP is designed to compensate agricultural and forest producers who agree to increase their level of conservation by adopting additional conservation activities and maintaining their baseline level of conservation. NRCS will help applicants identify natural resource issues in their operations and provide financial & technical assistance to solve or improve these problems in a cost-effective manner.
 - **Who is eligible:** Individuals, legal entities, joint operations, or Indian Tribes that own or rent and currently manage land for agricultural or forest production. Applicants must have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS and must maintain control of the land for the entire span of the 5-year CSP contract. The applicant must have an adjusted gross income of less than \$900,000 (Indian Tribes exempt).

- **How to apply:** [Contact your local NRCS office.](#)
- **2024 Deadline:** Applications accepted on a continuous basis
- **[Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans & Grants](#)**
 - The USDA Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) provides financial assistance through grants and guaranteed loans to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements. This program aims to help reduce energy costs, generate new income streams, and improve the overall energy resilience of operations. Eligible projects include biomass, geothermal, hydropower, hydrogen, wind, solar, and ocean energy systems.
 - **Who is eligible:** Agricultural producers who receive at least 50% of their income from farming.
 - **2024 Ranking dates:** June 30, September 30
 - **How to apply:** Contact your [state office](#) for loan application assistance, or your [Rural Development Energy Coordinator](#) to apply for a grant.