

NEWS RELEASE

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Minnesota pioneers organic transition cost share program

MDA encourages farmers to work with certifying agencies during transition period

ST. PAUL, Minn. – The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has announced a new pilot program designed to assist farmers transitioning their land or livestock to certified organic status.

The program is the first in the nation to provide an incentive for farmers to work with a USDA-accredited organic certifying agency during the transition period, which typically lasts 36 months. Certifying agencies visit farms and verify that the farmer's practices comply with federal organic regulations. Other reimbursable costs include soil testing and registration fees to attend an organic education conference. Farmers transitioning to organic can receive a rebate of 75 percent of eligible costs, with a maximum payment of \$750 per year for three years or until achieving organic certification, whichever comes first.

Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson says the program was designed to help transitioning farmers improve their chances of success.

"Farmers choose to go organic for many reasons and there are ready markets for those products," said Frederickson. "Many would like feedback during the transition process so they know they're on the right track. The Minnesota Organic Advisory Task Force has recommended something like this for years, and I'm pleased that we now have a pilot program for 2013."

Minnesota has a history of creating innovative organic programs. In 1999, Minnesota launched the first organic certification cost share program in the nation, providing regulatory relief to farmers by helping defray the cost of organic certification with partial rebates. Minnesota's program served as a model for a national program that was then included in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills.

Application forms for the Minnesota Organic Transition Cost Share Program are available at www.mda.state.mn.us/organic or by calling 651-201-6012. The deadline to apply for the 2013 program is February 14, 2014.

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