Organic, Energy and High Tunnels Offered through USDA Special Initiative

Special sign-up opportunities are also now open for On-Farm Energy, Organic, and Seasonal High Tunnel conservation practices. All three initiatives offer technical and financial assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The first signup deadline is February 3rd, 2012. There are also two additional signup dates of March 30 and June 1, 2012. Applications must be received by these dates to be considered for funding in each round of ranking.

- **On-Farm Energy Initiative:** NRCS and producers develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption of an operation. NRCS then uses audit data to develop energy conservation recommendations. Each energy audit has a landscape component (equipment and farming processes) and a headquarters component (power usage, buildings, grain handling operations, etc.) Examples of energy conserving practices available include Conservation Crop Rotation, Legume Cover Crop, and no-till planting.

- **Organic Initiative:** NRCS helps certified organic growers and those transitioning to organic certification to install conservation practices for organic production. A wide range of practices are available in this initiative.
- Seasonal High Tunnel Pilot Initiative: NRCS helps producers plan and implement high tunnels, or “hoop houses” that extend growing seasons in an environmentally safe manner. Hoop house benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment, and better air quality due to fewer vehicles being needed to transport crops. More than 4,000 hoop houses have been planned and implemented nationwide through this initiative over the past two years.

Visit the [www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov) website for more information on how to apply for these initiatives. Landowners in Outagamie County can sign up at the Appleton Service Center, 3369 W Brewster St., Appleton; phone 920-733-1575 Ext. 3.