



Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program

Toolkit for Stakeholders

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is providing up to \$20 million to reimburse agricultural producers and handlers who are certified organic and crop and livestock producers who are transitioning to organic for eligible expenses incurred during fiscal years 2020, 2021, and/or 2022. The new program, [Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program \(OTECP\)](#), is part of USDA's [Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative](#).

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept OTECP applications for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 from November 8, 2021, through January 7, 2022. The application period for fiscal year 2022 applications will be announced at a later date.

We need your help. We want to ensure producers and handlers of agricultural commodities that are certified organic, and those transitioning to organic, are aware of this program and the available resources to apply, including how to contact the FSA office at their local USDA Service Center and FSA's call center. This toolkit is meant for partners and stakeholder groups to share information in their networks. It includes:

- Key messages
- Newsletter article
- Social media posts with graphics

Answers to frequently asked questions can be found at farmers.gov/otecp/faq.

Please contact us at fpac.bc.press@usda.gov with any additional questions.

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Key Messages

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, certified organic and transitional operations faced challenges due to loss of markets, increased costs, and labor shortages, in addition to costs related to obtaining or renewing their organic certification, which producers and handlers of conventionally produced commodities do not incur.
- Transitional operations also faced the financial challenge of implementing practices required to obtain organic certification without being able to obtain the premium prices associated with certified organic commodities.
- USDA's new [Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program \(OTECP\)](#) will provide up to \$20 million to reimburse agricultural producers and handlers who are certified organic and crop and livestock producers who are transitioning to organic for eligible expenses incurred during fiscal years 2020, 2021, and/or 2022.
- OTECP funding is provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).
- OTECP is open to certified operations and transitional operations located in the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.
- For each fiscal year, OTECP covers 25% of a certified operation's eligible certification expenses, up to \$250 per certification category (crop, livestock, wild crop, handling, and State Organic Program fee). This includes application fees, inspection fees, USDA organic certification costs, state organic program fees and more.
- Crop and livestock operations transitioning to organic production may be eligible for 75% of a transitional operation's eligible expenses, up to \$750, for each year. This includes fees charged by a certifying agent or consultant for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan.
- For both certified operations and transitional operations, OTECP covers 75% of the registration fees, up to \$200, per year, for educational events that include content related to organic production and handling to assist operations in increasing their knowledge of production and marketing practices that can improve their operations, increase resilience, and expand available marketing opportunities.
- Additionally, both certified and transitional operations may be eligible for 75% of the expense of soil testing required under the National Organic Program (NOP) to document micronutrient deficiency, not to exceed \$100 per year.

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- Visit farmers.gov/otecp for additional information, including more details on eligible expenses.
- OTECP builds upon USDA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) which provides cost share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the National Organic Program (NOP). OTECP expands upon this assistance by including those transitioning to organic production.
- The application period for 2020 and 2021 begins on Nov. 8, 2021 and ends on Jan. 7, 2022. The application period for 2022 will be announced at a later date.
- Applicants may apply for OTECP through the FSA office at any USDA Service Center. Producers can find contact information for their local Service Center at farmers.gov/service-locator.
- Applicants may also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to provide one-on-one assistance.
- FSA will issue OTECP payments after the end of the application period for each fiscal year. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Newsletter Article

USDA Builds Pandemic Support for Certified Organic and Transitioning Operations

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide pandemic assistance to cover certification and education expenses to agricultural producers who are certified organic or transitioning to organic. USDA will make \$20 million available through the new [Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program \(OTECP\)](#) as part of USDA's broader [Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative](#), which provides new, broader and more equitable opportunities for farmers, ranchers and producers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, certified organic and transitional operations faced challenges due to loss of markets, and increased costs and labor shortages, in addition to costs related to obtaining or renewing their organic certification, which producers and handlers of conventionally grown commodities do not incur. Transitional operations also faced the financial challenge of implementing practices required to obtain organic certification without being able to obtain the premium prices normally received for certified organic commodities.

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Eligible Expenses

OTECF funding is provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). Certified operations and transitional operations may apply for OTECF for eligible expenses paid during the 2020, 2021 and 2022 fiscal years. For each year, OTECF covers 25% of a certified operation's eligible certification expenses, up to \$250 per certification category (crop, livestock, wild crop, handling and State Organic Program fee). This includes application fees, inspection fees, USDA organic certification costs, state organic program fees and more.

Crop and livestock operations transitioning to organic production may be eligible for 75% of a transitional operation's eligible expenses, up to \$750, for each year. This includes fees charged by a certifying agent or consultant for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan.

For both certified operations and transitional operations, OTECF covers 75% of the registration fees, up to \$200, per year, for educational events that include content related to organic production and handling in order to assist operations in increasing their knowledge of production and marketing practices that can improve their operations, increase resilience and expand available marketing opportunities. Additionally, both certified and transitional operations may be eligible for 75% of the expense of soil testing required under the National Organic Program (NOP) to document micronutrient deficiency, not to exceed \$100 per year.

Applying for Assistance

Signup for 2020 and 2021 OTECF will be Nov. 8, 2021, through Jan. 7, 2022. Producers apply through their [local Farm Service Agency \(FSA\) office](#) and can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364. Visit farmers.gov/otecf to learn more.

Additional USDA Programs and Services


To learn more about USDA's assistance for organic producers, visit usda.gov/organic. Visit www.farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance for additional information on USDA's Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative.







Sample Posts for Facebook and Twitter

Below are social media posts for use on Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms. Be sure to tag us on Twitter: @FarmersGov and @usdaFSA.

- @USDA's new program provides assistance to eligible certified organic operations and those transitioning to organic for certain expenses paid during the 2020, 2021, and 2022 fiscal years. Signup opens 11/08. Learn more: [Farmers.gov/otecp](https://farmers.gov/otecp) [+ graphic option below]
- Are you a producer or handler of agricultural commodities that are certified organic? Or, are you transitioning your operation to certified organic? You may be eligible for @USDA's new Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program. [Farmers.gov/otecp](https://farmers.gov/otecp) [+ graphic option below]
- New Program Alert! @USDA's Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program can help offset your eligible expenses for organic certification, transitioning to organic, educational activities, and soil testing. [Farmers.gov/otecp](https://farmers.gov/otecp) [+ graphic option below]



ORGANIC & TRANSITIONAL EDUCATION & CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

THE PROGRAM	 CERTIFIED ORGANIC OPERATIONS	 CROP AND LIVESTOCK OPERATIONS TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC	 BOTH CERTIFIED AND TRANSITIONAL OPERATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL EVENTS	 BOTH CERTIFIED AND TRANSITIONAL OPERATIONS FOR SOIL TESTING
Provides assistance for agricultural producers who are certified organic or transitioning to organic for the following expenses paid in 2020, 2021 and 2022.				
ELIGIBLE EXPENSES	25% of certification expenses	75% of eligible expenses	75% of the expense for registration fees	75% of the expense
EXPENSES INCLUDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application fees • Inspection fees • State organic program fees • User fees or certifier sales assessments • Postage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fees for pre-certification inspections • Development of organic systems plan 	Registration fees for virtual or in-person events that provide educational content related to organic production and handling.	Soil tests to document micronutrient deficiency required under the National Organic Program
EXPENSES PER YEAR	Up to \$250 /expense category: Crop, Livestock, Wild Crop, Handling and State Organic Program fee	Up to \$750 each year	Up to \$200 each year	Up to \$100 each year

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United States
Department of
Agriculture



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Accepting Applications
Nov. 8, 2021 to Jan. 7, 2022
www.farmers.gov/OTECF or 877-508-8364



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