



September 2020

Dear Pennsylvania Certified Organic Operator,

We hope this letter finds you well and managing through this unprecedented global pandemic. It is a situation that has challenged all of us, and by working together we will emerge stronger, more resilient, and better prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. Following are a few updates that may be of interest to you.

Changes to the 2020 Organic Certification Cost Share Program

The USDA Farm Services Agency recently announced changes to the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) due to financial challenges confronted by the federal government. For 2020, qualified applicants may **receive 50 percent of eligible fees paid, up to a maximum of \$500**, for each eligible scope of certification. We understand this is 25 percent less than in previous years but encourage you to participate in the program.

USDA certified organic operations that are certified or receiving continuation of certification during the period **October 1, 2019, through September 30, 2020**, by a USDA-accredited certifier, may apply for the cost share reimbursement.

A copy of your certificate or renewal certificate is no longer required for the cost share application, but please be certain to enter your certificate number on the enclosed application. You will need to provide invoices and proof of payment with your completed application or arrange for your certifier to supply that information to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. This information is necessary to verify costs and process your application for reimbursement.

All completed applications must be postmarked by **October 31, 2020**, and mailed to:

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
ATTN: Michele Brookins
2301 North Cameron Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110

Applications also are available on the [Ag Business Development Center's Financial Assistance page](#) and may be submitted by email no later than **October 31, 2020**. Please note, you will also need to submit your proof of payment, which can be done electronically as well, by emailing to RA-AgBusiness@pa.gov.

We recommend completing your application as soon as possible as reimbursements will be made on a first come, first serve basis, while funds are available. If you have any questions, please contact Michele Brookins at mbrookins@pa.gov, by phone at (717) 787-5319, or at RA-AgBusiness@pa.gov.

(More information on back of page)

PA Preferred® Organic Program

Pennsylvania farmers are leaders in organic agriculture. Not only is Pennsylvania one of the few states that boasts more than 1,000 certified organic farms, but did you also know that the state ranks third in the entire nation for total organic sales?

The PA Preferred® Organic program was created to help accelerate the growth of Pennsylvania's organic agricultural industry and assist our hardworking farmers in this endeavor. Through the program, we offer support to organic farmers and processors in a variety of ways:

- Sponsor free or low-cost technical assistance for farmers and manufacturers/processors to start and expand certified organic operations
- Support PA-specific organic research in a variety of topics, such as reduced or no-till techniques, resilience in the face of weather extremes, and reducing the threat of pesticide drift
- Identify gaps in organic processing and encourage additional capacity to improve the availability of more locally grown and made products in the marketplace
- Facilitate and support farmer education events
- Develop organic marketing materials and campaign to educate consumers about the value of locally grown and made organic products
- Create a PA Preferred® Organic product label so consumers can easily identify PA organic products

For more information about the PA Preferred® Organic program, contact Adam Dellinger at addellinge@pa.gov or (717)-787-6006.

Agricultural Business Development Center

Established as part of the 2019 PA Farm Bill, the Agricultural Business Development Center (ABDC) is a new initiative spanning the Bureau of Market Development's Economic Development Division and the Bureau of Farmland Preservation. The new Center replaces both the Center for Farm Transitions and the Preserved Farm Resource Center.

Designed to enhance the long-term vitality of Pennsylvania's farms, the ABDC is focused on providing support for sound business planning, efficient transitions of farm ownership, strategic farm expansion, diversification of agricultural production, and building a team of financial and technical expertise as a resource for Pennsylvania farmers.

For more information about the Agricultural Business Development Center, contact Phil Stober at pstober@pa.gov or (717)-836-3973.

Thank you for your continued support of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture as we work to build a sustainable agricultural industry for both farmers and consumers.