

Helping to Institutionalize Organics as a Conservation Practice in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Western SARE PDP Project Title: Field Course for Agricultural Professionals on the Common Goals and Strategies of USDA's National Organic Standards and Resource Conservation Programs **Project Number:** EW03-004

The purpose of this project was to help NRCS and RCD staff in California better understand organic practices and the common ground that exists between NRCS and RCD missions and organic agriculture.



Four NRCS workshops, 10 workshops for Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs).

1. TOOLS DEVELOPED FOR THE PROJECT

- Organic Jeopardy game (effective & fun review tool)
- Fieldwork on soils at organic farms
- PowerPoint presentations about organics and natural resource conservation of the Big Five (plant, animal, air, water, and soil)
- Soil quality demonstrations (organic vs. conventional soils—seeing is believing)
- NRCS-Organics Conservation Practices Cross-Compliance Chart (a.k.a. The Rosetta Stone)

Organic Rules and Regulations	Organic Soil Management	Organic Cropping Practices	Organic Pest Management	Organic Miscellaneous
100 pt	100 pt	100 pt	100 pt	100 pt
200 pt	200 pt	200pt	200 pt	200 pt
300 pt	300 pt	300 pt	300 pt	300 pt
400 pt	400 pt	400 pt	400 pt	400 pt
500 pt	500 pt	500 pt	500 pt	500 pt

3. OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

- Trained 396 NRCS and RCD personnel in California about organic certification and practices.
- Development of a NRCS/California Organics Cost Share under the IPM Practice Standard (EQIP), which pays organic growers \$100/acre (up to \$10,000) to underwrite transition costs.
- NCAT invited to become a member of the NRCS Soil Quality Cadre
- Ongoing relationships with NRCS at federal, state, and county levels.
- Additional NRCS training (post project) in 2007 for 30 CA staff

Effects of organic and conventional farming on beneficial invertebrates (review 41 studies)

Animal group	Abundance – number of individuals			Species diversity: species number		
	ORG > CON	ORG = CON	ORG < CON	ORG > CON	ORG = CON	ORG < CON
Earthworms	17	1	0	4	3	0
Carabids	13	2	0	6	2	0
Spider	6	1	0	0	0	0
Diplopods	4	0	0	1	1	0
Bugs	2	1	0	1	1	0
Mites	2	0	1	1	1	0
Total	44	5	1	13	8	0

ORG > CON: better performance in organic farming

ORG = CON: No significant difference

ORG < CON: better in conventional



2. APPROACHES OF THE PROJECT

- Build relationships at all NRCS levels
- This happens before and after project is completed
- Understand NRCS priorities & relate them to Organic Production Systems
- Educate NRCS staff with scientific documentation about organics
- Provide hands-on demos & fieldwork on organic farms whenever possible
- Understand other states' approaches to cost-sharing organics
- Make NRCS the "good guys"

EQIP Forms



Environmental & Cost Effectiveness Score Summary

Factor	Resource Concern - Environmental Benefit	Maximum Points	Earned Points
1 National Resource Concerns (Pages 3-4)		120	
3 Local Resource Concerns (If Applicable)		90	
2a Irrigated Cropland SWAPA Resource Concerns		90	
2b Irrigated Pasture-Rangeland SWAPA Resource Concerns		90	
2c Dryland Cropland SWAPA Resource Concerns		90	
2d Grazed Land SWAPA Resource Concerns		90	
2e Non-Industrial Forest SWAPA		90	
2f Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations SWAPA		90	
Total Maximum Environmental Points: 900			
Total Environmental Score			
Cost Effectiveness Calculation:	Environmental Score X	Primary Practice Category	Multiplier
	+ \$	X	100 =
			Factor

(Either in Electronic Application or)

Final Ranking Score

SWAPA Concern	2a-Irrigated Cropland	2b-Irrigated Pasture-Rangeland	2c-Dryland Cropland	2d-Grazed Land	2e-Non-Industrial Forest	2f-Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations
1. EQIP Critical address significant identified SWAPA concern in National and State SWAPA Concerns	10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points
2. EQIP Critical address all SWAPA concerns in National and State SWAPA Concerns	10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points
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