

Natural Resource News in South Carolina

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA Announces Sign up for Small Farmer Initiative

Sign up Ends February 10, 2006

COLUMBIA, January 10, 2006—USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Walter W. Douglas announced that applications are being accepted for the Small Farmer Initiative in South Carolina. Eligible applicants may receive cost-share assistance not to exceed \$25,000. The purpose is to increase participation by small scale and limited resource farmers in USDA programs. The target audience is defined as small farmers who have historically not participated or not ranked high enough to be funded in previous program sign ups. Douglas said, “This initiative will help us to better serve small farmers who may be economically challenged and cannot produce the quantities of a large farmer in today’s competitive agricultural market.” The sign up period is underway and ends February 10, 2006.

To apply, small farmers must:

- 1) complete an application form;
- 2) provide a social security number;
- 3) provide proof of farm ownership (or a written form of lease agreement);
- 4) be registered in the USDA Service Center information management system (available by visiting your local USDA Service Center);
- 5) certify that household annual adjusted gross family income is \$63,000 or less based on the last 2 years income tax returns (a 5% variance is allowed); and
- 6) sign a self-certification form

The funds will help farmers whose entire farming operation consists of 197 acres or less (a 5% variance is allowed). To be eligible, at least 10 percent of the cropland acres must be planted to alternative crops. Alternative crops are not traditional crops such as cotton, soybeans, rice, grain sorghum, field corn, wheat, or similar crops grown on large acreage and produced for off-farm sales. A list of alternative crops can be found at www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC_pubs/altlist.htm. For applicants with pastureland *only*, participants must be willing to follow a prescribed grazing plan. Cost-share rates will be up to 90 percent for all practices.

Priority will be given to applicants addressing the following resource concerns: surface water quality, water quantity, and soil quality. Contracts will be for a length of five years, and participants will be required to keep financial, nutrient, and pest management records for the length of the contract period.

Additional information for small farmers is on the Web at www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/Small_farmer_initiative2006.html. Contact your local NRCS office, located at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the telephone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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