

New Organic Transition Management EQIP Practice 823

The National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has many programs to help farmers convert to organic farming operations. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is “NRCS’ flagship conservation program that helps farmers, ranchers and forest landowners integrate conservation into working lands.” Under EQIP, Organic Transition Initiative 823 (OTI) is specifically meant to help those transitioning to organic operations.

HELP THE NRCS HELP YOU

- This new practice provides cost share payments for organic and transitioning producers.
- The 823 practice is different for NRCS: it offers a suite of practices that enhance the organic production system on the farm, instead of just one practice.
- The more practices you apply for, the higher your payment. The contract is typically three years long, but you don’t have to initiate all practices each year.
 - Payments range from \$250 to \$2,000+ per acre per year depending on how many practices are done and your cropping system.
 - You pay up front for the practice in the spring and get paid in the fall of that year after NRCS has visited your farm to verify your contract activities have been completed.

GETTING STARTED

Since this practice is so new, many NRCS county offices aren’t sure how to handle it. Here are a few pointers to help them, help you!

Prepare:

[Look over practice standard 823](#), and see which practices you may want to implement. Most NRCS practices can be rolled into 823, even if they’re not specifically listed. You can have an 823 contract with multiple practices in addition to separate contracts.

Brainstorm:

- What resource concerns you have
- What specific practices you want to include
- What and how much land is involved
- Add these ideas to a map or an aerial photo of your farm

Not sure where to start? Call [OFA’s Farmer Services Team](#) (833-724-3834) to talk through your ideas!

Think about why you are doing the practice:

- Improving soil health?
- Reducing erosion?
- Improvement of plant productivity and health?
- Reduction of plant pest or disease pressure?
- Enhancement of wildlife and beneficial insect habitat, especially with native plantings?
- Improve quality of forages for grazing or harvest?

Remember, one practice can provide numerous benefits. For example, cover crops improve soil health, lessen erosion, and if flowering, can provide beneficial insect habitat. These overlapping benefits can earn your application more points!

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

For 823, it would be useful to visit your NRCS office and apply at least 6 weeks before the ranking date, to give the NRCS agent time to visit your farm and discuss your goals and ideas. NRCS staff are very knowledgeable and might think of things that you might have missed!

You can visit your NRCS office any time to apply for EQIP, but there are “ranking dates” where all applications are ranked to decide which farmers are offered contracts. Contracts are usually written 4-6 months after you apply. [Find more ranking date info on OFA’s website.](#)