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Department of Agriculture

**FUNDING, EXPERTS AVAILABLE TO HELP FARMERS**

**TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION**

 HARRISBURG, PA – Farmers considering the transition to organic production can apply for funding to help ensure a smooth process through the Organic Transition Assistance Program, the newest offering in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's expanding suite of economic development assistance for farms and agribusinesses.

 The program is available to for-profit enterprises in non-organic agricultural production or in processing agricultural products that are not currently certified organic. A unique transition team will be specially tailored for each producer to address their particular needs. As part of the process, up to $1,500 will be reimbursed for costs associated with the transition process.

 Deputy Secretary for Market and Economic Development Hannah Smith-Brubaker announced the development of the program at this week's Growing Pennsylvania's Organic Farms Conference. Hosted by the department and Pennsylvania Farm Link, the two-day conference provided organic producers a variety of educational sessions led by regional university faculty and other experts ranging from marketing to nutrition to soil and nutrient management.

 "Organic production is an increasingly important segment of agriculture, and we're seeing a particularly strong demand for organic grain production," said Smith-Brubaker, who operates her own organic farm in Juniata County. "Since farmers in the transition process can experience bottlenecks and there may be implications for profit margins during this time, hiring a team of experts to guide producers and processors to minimize those risks can be extremely helpful. This program makes shouldering that cost a little easier."

 Applications will be available in spring 2016. Funding reimbursement periods will last for 12 months for each applicant. Teams should meet at least twice during that 12-month period.

 This program is the newest initiative stemming from the Path to Organic Program. $45,000 will be available to assist farms and agribusinesses making the transition to organic. These programs are part of PAgrows, the department's center for offering a variety of low-interest loans, grants and technical assistance to help producers and agribusinesses put together the pieces of the lending puzzle. From the Organic Cost Share Program to the Next Generation Farmer Loan Program, with more than a dozen other funding opportunities in between, there is a way to assist most agricultural operations.

 For more information on the Organic Transition Assistance Program or any of the department's other economic development programs and opportunities visit www.PAgrows.com.