<u>FINAL DRAFT</u> EQIP 328 PRACTICE GUIDELINES: Organic Soil Quality Cropping System

EQIP FY 2009 Cost list item: 328—Conservation Crop Rotation—Organic Soil Quality Cropping System ($300 per acre one-time payment, applicant capped at $15,000—50 acres)

Name/EQIP Contract Number: _____

Purposes of Incentive Practice:

- To implement weed control and cropping management strategies that will maintain positive soil organic matter trends in cropland
- To eliminate the potential off-site impacts of synthetic chemical pesticides
- To encourage the use of cover crops and limited tillage in organic cropping systems
- To reduce sheet and rill erosion from organic crop fields through use of cover crops and limiting tillage
- To manage organic crop pests by breaking pest cycles through alternating production crops on organic cropping area

Conditions for Practice Eligibility: To be eligible for this practice, producers must offer cropland not already certified organic by the USDA National Organic Program, and are either proposing organic transition to begin within 12 months or are within the standard 3-year transitional period. Idle land, or land that will remain idle during the contract period, is not eligible for enrollment.

Practice Requirements (eligibility for the incentive payment requires that all practice criteria be met):

- Development and implementation of a weed control strategy that meets applicable NRCS pest management policies (recommend use of NC 595 Pest Management Job Sheet for FY 2009)

- Pest management plan must include weed control strategy that maintains positive Soil Conditioning Index (SCI) as developed in RUSLE 2 for a minimum of three cropping years

- Conservation plan must include cropping rotation that maintains positive SCI (as developed in RUSLE 2) for a minimum of three cropping years (plan narratives that describe the proposed conservation cropping rotation are strongly encouraged)

- Continued compliance with USDA National Organic Program and applicable NC organic standards

- If perennials are to be established as part of designed organic cropping rotation, an annual production crop must be planted at least once during the three cropping years of this system

Considerations for implementation of Organic Soil Quality Cropping system:

- Consider pairing the organic cropping system with a nutrient management plan that meets NC NRCS 590/633 standards—utilize NC 590/633 Job Sheet. If animal waste is utilized as crop nutrient source, soil tests should be conducted annually to monitor soil phosphorus levels.

- Consider utilizing pest management and weed control methods that encourage habitat for beneficial insects (mixtures of native warm season grasses and native flowering plants, as well as bunch-type grasses) that may reduce reliance on organic-approved chemicals and enhance farm wildlife habitat.

- Consider using perennials, such as alfalfa and white clover, for multiple years within the organic cropping rotation in order to build soil organic matter, provide plant available nitrogen, and help break weed cycles and diminish soil weed seed bank.

- Producers participating in the Organic soil quality practice remain eligible for other incentives that may be applicable to organic agriculture—such as cover crop crimping, establishment of cover crop grain/legume mixtures, and sod-based rotations (17 or 29 mo only)

- Cover crops or cover crop mixtures that produce high density biomass, when combined with a full maturity 'crimper' termination method, may be effective in organic crop field weed suppression.

- Managed legume cover crops also provide residual nitrogen to production crop. Low availability of nitrogen has been shown to be a determining factor in low organic crop yields.

- Consider implementation of a conservation cropping system of no-till with cover crop mixes or sod-based rotations with perennials to reduce field erosion, surface runoff and enhance soil quality.

Certification of Organic Soil Quality cropping system practice:

Year 1 Year 2 Year 3
☐ ☐ ☐ RUSLE 2 computations showing positive SCI for selected cropping rotation and weed control methods for the next 3 years on the contract area are required (keep in case file)

Year 1 Year 2 Year 3
☐ ☐ ☐ Weed control strategy that meets applicable NRCS pest management policies and will allow for positive SCI (keep in case file)

Year 1 Year2 Year 3
☐ ☐ ☐ Producer must provide annual documentation that the contract area meets USDA and any applicable NC organic standards (keep in case file)

Year 1 Year 2 Year 3
☐ ☐ ☐ Status reviews should be conducted at a time during the crop growing season where tillage and/or weed control operations can be monitored to evaluate compliance with plan cropping rotations and SCI requirements. Status review documentation should include crop being grown, observed weed control status, crop residue estimates, etc. *Practice payment should be made when evaluation of annual organic production crop tillage frequencies and weed control operations can be made (during crop growing season July—Sept.)*

Year 1 Year 2 Year 3
☐ ☐ ☐ Producer is eligible for payment upon completion of practice requirements in the first year, but requirements must be implemented for a minimum of 3 years.

I certify that the Organic Soil Quality Cropping System practice has been completed per EQIP practice guidelines and the NC 328 Conservation Crop Rotation standard.

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