

# Organics in Alabama

How Alabama farmers benefit from organic certification

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ORGANIC?

Organic agriculture is regenerative. Organic farms work in harmony with natural systems to enhance biodiversity, protect water resources, and improve soil quality. These practices not only produce food, but also contribute to environmental sustainability through reduced chemical inputs, increased carbon sequestration, and enhanced wildlife habitat. Overall, organic agriculture provides a viable model for economic growth and stability for farmers and rural communities while promoting long-term resilience.

Organic certification represents a comprehensive approach to agriculture that integrates environmental stewardship with rigorous production standards. Today, a product can only carry the “USDA Certified Organic” label if the farmer has followed specific production practices, including:



No synthetic pesticides or fertilizers or genetic engineering used in growing crops;



No antibiotics or growth hormones used in raising livestock; and



Third-party certification of farm products by an accredited certifying agent to be USDA certified.

## ORGANIC BENEFITS AND IMPACTS

The organic agriculture sector, now a \$70 billion component of the U.S. economy, demonstrates exceptional growth and economic impact. With organic sales reaching \$69.7 billion in 2023 and consistently achieving 10% annual growth compared to 2-3% for conventional agriculture, the sector presents significant opportunities for domestic agricultural expansion and rural economic development.

The 25-year Long-Term Agroecological Research (LTAR) study at Iowa State University found that organic systems achieved:

- Similar or greater yields compared to conventional crops
- Average returns approximately \$200 per acre higher than conventional
- Improved soil quality under organic management
- Greater resilience to extreme weather

Organic price premiums, averaging 20% higher than conventional products, provide crucial economic incentives for farmers while contributing to agricultural workforce stability and rural economic resilience.

### AN OVERVIEW

Alabama maintains a growing presence in organic agriculture with 18 certified organic farm operations as of 2021. The state's organic farms manage 2,959 acres of certified organic land, with organic producers having grown by nearly 500% since 2019. Alabama's organic commodity sales reached \$2.4 million in 2021, demonstrating the sector's economic impact in the state.

Alabama's organic market is projected to grow another 33% through 2025, with farmers preparing to meet increasing consumer demand. This growth trajectory represents significant potential for Alabama's agricultural economy. Alabama's organic farms are part of a broader national trend where organic food sales are growing at 10% annually compared to 2-3% for conventional agriculture. The domestic market for organic products reached \$69.7 billion in 2023, creating significant opportunities for Alabama producers.

Alabama's organic operations contribute to a resilient agricultural economy. Organic farmers report needing less off-farm employment than conventional farmers to supplement their income, even while farming fewer acres. With organic price premiums averaging 20% higher than conventional prices, Alabama's organic farms are well-positioned for economic sustainability, helping meet the demands of local consumers, as 71% of Alabamians purchase organic products regularly.

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### PRODUCTION STRENGTHS

Alabama has developed particular expertise in livestock and specialty crop production, with milk, cattle, and tomatoes being the state's top organic commodities. This positions Alabama strategically within diversified segments of the organic market. The state reported nearly 7,000 certified organic acres in 2022, showing continued expansion in organic production. With institutions like Auburn and Tuskegee Universities conducting research on organic agriculture in the region.

### WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2016, The Organic Farmers Association is a nonprofit organization that aims to provide a strong unified national voice for domestic certified organic producers. We put farmers in the driver seat to advocate and educate for more domestic organic farms, strong organic standards, and technical assistance and education to support a national growth of organic farming.

The complete report can be found under Census on the USDA NASS website at [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov).