

Colorado

Front Range produce, Eastern Plains grain, and Rocky Mountain organic ranching



A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

Colorado ranks 19th nationally with 522 certified organic operations and 261,563 certified acres. The Front Range corridor anchors consumer demand from Denver and Boulder while Eastern Plains grain farms represent a vast transition opportunity. With \$8.2M in OREI/ORG funding and Colorado State University's statewide extension network, Colorado bridges high-altitude specialty crops with large-scale dryland grain and organic beef production.

522 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	261,563 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$8.2M OREI / ORG FUNDING	+22% MORE WORKERS VS. CONVENTIONAL
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STATE PROFILE

AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	522 (19th nationally)
Certified organic acres	261,563
OREI / ORG funding (cumulative)	\$8.2M
Worker employment vs. conventional	+22%
Split operations	44% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Leverage Denver and Boulder's high per-capita organic spending to build short local supply chains.
- Transition Eastern Plains conventional grain acres with Central Plains TOPP mentorship and EQIP cost-share.
- Expand organic beef supply chains to meet growing national demand for grass-fed, certified organic meat.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Vegetables:** Front Range CSAs supply Denver and Boulder metro year-round.
- ▶ **Cattle & Beef:** organic ranching spans mountain counties and Eastern Plains.
- ▶ **Grains:** organic wheat, corn, and sorghum on Eastern Plains dryland farms.
- ▶ **Herbs & Specialty Crops:** mountain valley farms supply regional specialty markets.

BARRIERS

- Water scarcity and drought limit organic vegetable yield consistency across the Front Range.
- High land values near Denver compress margins for new entrant farms and expansion-stage operations.
- Short growing seasons at altitude restrict production windows for mountain specialty crop farms.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Colorado's Front Range consumer demand, Eastern Plains grain acreage, and organic beef ranching create three simultaneous growth pathways. With CSU Extension's statewide reach and \$8.2M in OREI/ORG investment, Colorado is positioned to expand certified organic production across all three sectors.

Resources for Farmers

Colorado organic farmers are supported by Colorado State University Extension, the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, and Central Plains TOPP. Together they span the full pipeline from transition and certification through technical assistance, funding, and market access.

Colorado State University Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic grain, vegetable, and livestock production specialists statewide
- Soil health and water conservation research for semi-arid organic systems
- High-altitude and dryland organic farming guides and field days
- Annual Colorado Organic Producers Association conference support

extension.colostate.edu

Colorado Dept of Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- Colorado Proud branding program for state-produced organic products
- NRCS Colorado: EQIP Organic Initiative and Transition Assistance
- Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program resources

ag.colorado.gov

Rocky Mountain Farmers Union

FARMER ADVOCACY & COOPERATIVE SERVICES

- Farmer advocacy for organic and sustainable agriculture policy
- Cooperative grain marketing and shared purchasing programs
- Farmer-to-farmer peer learning networks across Colorado
- Young farmer and beginning rancher support and mentorship

rmfu.org

Central Plains TOPP (OCIA-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Serves CO, KS, NE, ND, OK, SD, and WY
- Paid organic mentor matching for transitioning grain and livestock farms
- Workshops on dryland organic production and cover crop integration
- Market access support for organic beef, grain, and specialty crop transition

organictransition.org/region/plains

DID YOU KNOW? COLORADO

Colorado's Denver-Boulder corridor has one of the highest concentrations of organic food consumers per capita in the country. Yet less than 5% of Colorado farmland is certified organic, creating a significant supply gap that local producers and new entrants can fill. Central Plains TOPP mentorship and CSU Extension production guides make organic transition economically viable for both Front Range market gardeners and Eastern Plains grain operations. The combination of strong local demand and underutilized transition potential makes Colorado one of the highest-opportunity markets in the Central Plains region.

KEY SOURCES

Organic Trade Association. "Colorado Organic Profile." OTA State Advocacy, 2025, ota.com.

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