



NATIONAL
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM



**ORGANIC
TRADE
ASSOCIATION**



RODALE
INSTITUTE

ENGAGING WITH ORGANIC BUYERS - GRAIN

RESOURCE GUIDE: MAY 2025

This Resource Guide outlines best practices, considerations, buyer information, and further resources for navigating organic grain markets. As demand for organic products continues to rise, understanding the unique dynamics of these markets is essential for growers looking to maximize their opportunities and profitability. Whether you're new to organic farming or looking to refine your approach, this resource serves as a companion on your journey towards successful market navigation.

The National Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) supports transitioning and organic farmers with Market resources including Buyer/Seller discovery events to facilitate meaningful connections between organic sellers and buyers and Market Development Workshops. The key takeaways and resources in this guide emerged from a webinar series on organic grain markets in May 2025. To learn more and find events near you, visit: www.organictransition.org/region/national/events



WEBINAR SERIES RECAP:

This organic markets webinar series consisted of three online events.

The first webinar focused on farmer perspectives regarding the **return on investment of organic transition** through the lens of markets. It featured an overview of the organic grain market landscape and its growth potential from Alexander Shultz with Argus Media. Matt Fitzgerald of Fitzgerald Organics and Farm Flow in Minnesota and Will Glazik of Cow Creek Farm and Silver Tree Spirits in Illinois shared their insight.

You can watch the recording of the ["Markets ROI of Organic Transition for Grain Farmers" Webinar here.](#)

The second webinar of the series featured **buyer perspectives on effective organic grain sourcing** including Connor Bollum of Baystate Milling, Paul Glowaski of Cairnspring Mill, and Emily Griffith of Lil Bucks.

You can watch the recording of the ["Buyer Perspectives on Organic Grain Sourcing" Webinar here.](#)

The final event of the series was an **open Q&A about organic grain marketing** with farmers and buyers who contributed to the preceding webinars. Alison Grantham of Growell Consulting moderated. Alex Heilman of MAD! Markets, Derek Dykstra of Gracon LLC and Sunrise Organic Flour also joined the discussion. This session was not recorded to encourage the free flow of conversation, but notes from the call are incorporated in "**Key Takeaways and Best Practices**" found below.



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Key Takeaways and Best Practices

PROFITABILITY & MARKET TRENDS

- **Organic grains remain more profitable than conventional grains.**
Long-term data shows organic oats, wheat, and corn average \$74 more net income per acre than conventional equivalents, due to both market premiums and reduced input costs over time (See “Profitability & Marketing for Organic Field Crops (Organic Agronomy Training Services” Resource below).
- **Organic market share is rebounding.**
After a dip between 2021–2023, organic food sales outpaced conventional in 2024. This trend reflects growing consumer demand, especially in premium segments and urban markets.
- **Organic corn and soy are key growth sectors.**
Organic grain imports continue to put pressure on domestic markets-although there are good efforts underway to reduce fraudulent imports-and organic grain prices have been at historic lows. Both crops are seeing increased demand, influenced by domestic production gains and shifts in import patterns. These trends support strong prices and supply chain investment.

DECISION-MAKING WITH RECENT TRADE & IMPORT DYNAMICS

The past six months have highlighted the volatility of both climate and markets:

- **Climate Uncertainty:** Weather instability is a universal concern, affecting planting, yield predictability, and long-term planning. Producers are increasingly adopting adaptive practices to build climate resilience, such as varietal selection and soil health strategies.
- **Domestic Preference:** The updated Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rules are reshaping sourcing strategies. Due to increased scrutiny and uneven international compliance, some buyers are limiting or pausing purchases from overseas and focusing on domestic supply chains.
- **Shifts in global trade are reshaping U.S. organic soy markets.**
Historically reliant on imports, the U.S. organic soy market is experiencing supply tightening due to mislabeling issues abroad and regulatory crackdowns. Tariffs and stricter standards have raised domestic prices and created different opportunities for U.S. growers.



- **Domestic organic corn production covers 80% of demand.**
With imports declining, domestic supply is tightening. Expanding organic livestock and dairy sectors are expected to further increase demand for organic corn and soy.
- **Economic Disruption:** Global trade shifts, policy uncertainty, and changing consumer behavior have made business planning difficult. Many operators describe the current market as chaotic, requiring flexibility and frequent pivots in strategy.
- **Organic markets are not recession-proof—but can be resilient.**
Systems with lower input costs are less vulnerable to price fluctuations and offer more financial stability, even when yields are moderate.
- **Farmers are cautious about volatility.** Consistency in production and maintaining trusted relationships with buyers are key risk management strategies. Some buyers are shifting to more transactional contracts, making long-term relationship building even more important.

RESILIENT FARM STRATEGIES

- **Successful farms are process-oriented and systems-driven.**
Long-term success hinges on tight management, strategic crop rotations, and consistent investment in soil health and weed control. Frequent field monitoring—every 3–5 days—has proven to improve yields.
- **Prioritize Agronomy:** Markets fluctuate but maintaining strong rotation and growing high-quality crops remain the most reliable strategies.
- **Diversification unlocks hidden profitability.**
Farms that repurpose grain byproducts (e.g., soybean splits, screened-out oats) into fertilizer, feed, or cover crop seed often capture additional value while reducing waste. This does require additional effort for marketing and offtake. Some companies are exploring secondary markets for byproducts like organic buckwheat flour, which can be sold to other brands or through distributors.
- **On-farm flexibility is key.**
Farmers are repurposing older equipment, sharing resources with neighbors, and adapting field operations to changing weather patterns and labor availability. Visual management systems—such as field maps or color-coded boards—help with planning and accountability.
- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and open-source tools support organic transition.**
The transition period is a key time to document tasks, train crews, and improve field records. SOPs help maintain consistency, ease certification, and support the next generation of workers. Farmers are increasingly adopting apps, open-source recordkeeping platforms, and weather-integrated trackers to support field documentation, and time-sensitive task management. Valuing time is essential in assessing and optimizing return on investment of organic transition.



BUILDING STRONG FARMER-BUYER RELATIONSHIPS

- **Trial Relationships:** Buyers often begin new relationships with trials of smaller bushel quantities compared to an eventual market volume goal, assessing both grain quality and alignment on production practices like regenerative or organic stewardship. While some buyers source primarily from long-standing supplier networks, others are actively expanding and willing to trial buying from new growers. A good question for a new buyer is, "Are you looking to work with new growers?"
- **Plan Early:** Effective market alignment begins early in the growing cycle. For farmers interested in organic or regenerative contracting, the ideal window to engage buyers is between October and February, before planting decisions are finalized.
- **Stay Proactive:** In most cases, entering organic markets without a committed buyer is risky. Relationship building and information sharing are essential. Producers should seek transparency, ask questions, and look for alignment with buyers' long-term goals. Farmers seeking new markets need to be proactive and persistent. It's wise to also have a plan and schedule time for follow up with buyers, maintain a list of buyers who you are contacting, and find 2-3 buyers for each crop, if possible.
- **Successful buyer relationships require frequent communication.**
Establishing regular check-ins, building trust, and visiting buyers on-farm help strengthen long-term partnerships. Direct conversations, even informal ones, often lay the groundwork for long-term partnerships.
- **Distributors and Aggregators:** While direct-to-farmer relationships are preferred by many buyers, distributors can play a role in securing volume for contracts, especially in underdeveloped organic markets.
- **Trust and Transparency:** Successful relationships are built on shared values, open communication, and mutual respect. Even with stronger regulation, most sourcing decisions still rely heavily on buyer relationships, reputation, and long-term performance.
- **Problem-Solving Approach:** Mistakes happen, particularly when farmers trial new crops. A willingness to acknowledge issues and work through them together strengthens trust.
- **Co-Creation and Learning:** Buyers often work with farmers to trial new cultivars and understand regional performance. Sharing knowledge and being open to experimentation is critical. Both sides benefit from treating each other as collaborators.
- **Values Alignment:** Shared commitment to organic principles, soil health, and regional resilience strengthens long-term relationships. Remind the buyer that you



are a U.S. farmer and talk about the influence you have had on the land and community.

- **Post-Harvest Outreach:** For new suppliers, the best time to initiate contact is post-harvest with available samples and clear information on quality and variety. Proactivity and straightforward paperwork is important.

CONSUMER DEMAND TRENDS AND TIERED MARKETS

- Organic and regenerative products exist within a **tiered demand structure**.
- **Premium Markets:** Some consumers and wholesale buyers continue to value and pay premiums for sustainability, nutrition, and traceability. Markets for regenerative claims are young and limited.
- **Cost-Conscious Buyers:** At the same time, many buyers—particularly in feed, food service, and emerging brands—are facing tight budgets and margin pressure. As a result, premium demand is narrowing to specific niches, while broader markets seek affordability.
- **Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) Pressure:** DTC brands are seeing changes in consumer behavior, including smaller average order sizes and reduced discretionary spending. Seasonality also plays a large role, with sales peaking around the holidays.

SUSTAINABILITY METRICS AND BUYER EXPECTATIONS

Buyers are increasingly requesting data that goes beyond organic certification, particularly climate-related metrics.

- **Emissions Reporting:** Some supply chains are incorporating greenhouse gas (GHG) data and carbon intensity metrics into their contracts. Tools like the Cool Farm Tool and Soil Health Initiative calculators are being used to support transparency and verification.
- **Premium Disconnect:** While sustainability metrics are gaining attention, actual premiums tied to these practices are still rare. Farmers may be asked for data without a corresponding increase in compensation.
- **Farmer Resilience:** Farm-level economic viability remains a priority. Crop insurance tools that reflect organic premiums and flexible risk management strategies are crucial to navigating this transition.



CROP QUALITY EXPECTATIONS AND CONTRACT RISK MITIGATION

- Growers are advised to **secure offtake agreements**.
- **Cleanliness expectations vary** by crop and buyer: some mills accept field-run grain, while others require partial or full cleaning, especially for crops like buckwheat and sorghum.
- Buyers emphasized the importance of hitting **milling-grade specifications**, particularly for wheat and food-grade grains. Buyers will often work with a grower who is struggling to make these specs, either to work with their product or to help them find a market if they do not meet specs.
- In cases where a crop doesn't meet spec, farmers and buyers can work together to attempt to find **alternative markets** (e.g., livestock feed), helping farmers retain value.
- Pre-shipment **grading** (e.g., for moisture, protein, etc.) is encouraged and can be arranged through state labs or the buyers themselves.
- **Food Safety Testing:** Buyers typically test for basic food safety markers such as aflatoxin and vomitoxin to ensure compliance with FDA standards.
- **Pilot Scale First:** Farmers are encouraged to test new crops at smaller acreage (e.g., 40–60 acres) before engaging in forward contracts.
- **Forward Contracts:** Best practices include clear terms related to quality specs, delivery, payment schedule, packaging, and acreage.
- **Documentation:** Written agreements are essential, especially for farmers new to organic markets. Clarity in contract terms reduces risk for both parties. Written contracts with Act of God clauses offer security for both parties.

PRICING STRATEGIES

- **Watch the Market:** Conditions are volatile, but staying informed on prices, policies, and demand trends can improve decision-making and positioning. If you have the capacity to store grain into the winter and spring, that will usually mean better pricing and some leverage in buyer conversations. Even with tighter import controls, international supply affects domestic market dynamics.
- Organic grain pricing **lacks standardized benchmarks**; there is no equivalent to a commodities board for organic grains.
- Buyers and sellers often **set prices collaboratively**, based on cost of production, input costs, and regional market dynamics.

- Farmers are encouraged to **track conventional markets** (e.g., corn/wheat futures) to understand price pressures.
- Some buyers use tools like **USDA Organic Market Reports, Argus Media Pricing,** and informal benchmarking through aggregator and peer networks.



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RESOURCES:

- [Organic Integrity Database](#)
- [Find.Organic](#)
- [OATS - Organic Grain Market Outlook and Strategies 2025](#)
- [Profitability & Marketing for Organic Field Crops \(Organic Agronomy Training Services\)](#)
- [Comparison of Conventional Crop Rotation with an Organic Forage-Based Crop Rotation \(Perdue University Spreadsheet Tool\)](#)
- [The Dirt on Organic Farming Podcast Season 1, Episode 5](#)
- [Organic Transition – A Business Planner for Farmers, Ranchers, and Food Entrepreneurs](#)

RESOURCES REFERENCED:

- [Farm Flow](#)
- [2025 Organic Market Report](#)
- [CA Wheat Commission](#)
- [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program](#)
- [Naturally MN](#)
- [USDA Grain Standards](#)

CONNECT WITH US

If you're a producer looking for deeper markets access guidance, organic crop rotation support, or to get connected with buyers, contact [Rodale Institute's Consulting Markets Team](#).

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