

ENGAGING WITH ORGANIC BUYERS - VEGETABLE

RESOURCE GUIDE: FEBRUARY 2025

This Resource Guide outlines best practices, considerations, buyer information, and further resources for navigating organic vegetable 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 vegetable markets in February 2025. To learn more and find events near you, visit: www.organictransition.org/region/national/events.



EVENT RECAP:

This organic markets webinar series consisted of three online events. The first webinar focused on farmers and economic expert perspectives on the return on investment of organic transition through the lens of markets. The second webinar of the series featured buyer perspectives on effective organic sourcing. The closing and final webinar was an open Q&A with the farmers, buyers and economic expert featured in the preceding webinars.

The first webinar was moderated by Roshell Rosales Aguilar, Farm and Agribusiness Management Regional Extension Agent at Auburn University. The panel featured Emma Jagoz from Moon Valley Farm, Reggie Ramos from Grow with the Flow and Carolyn Dimitri, Professor of Food Studies at NYU. You can watch the recording [here](#).

The second webinar was moderated by David Paysnick, Business Development Manager at Food Connects. This panel featured Kenny Meyer and Whitney Herrera from Whole Foods Market and Alex Borst from Happy Dirt. You can watch the recording [here](#).

The last part of the webinar series was not recorded to encourage the free flow of conversation. Notes from the call can be found below.

Key Takeaways/Best Practices

FINDING A BUYER:

- Use the Organic Integrity Database (OID).
- This site allows farmers to search by location, product, etc.
- It's a great tool for direct marketing specialty crops and small lots but it can take some time learning to navigate.
- Know the key words for what you are searching for – you'll be able to find emails/phone numbers of decision makers here.
- Use the Find.Organic directory.
- Attending trade shows and conferences is a great way to meet buyers.
- If you are a farmer/producer looking for deeper markets access guidance, organic crop rotation support, or to get connected with buyers, farmers can contact [Rodale Institute's Consulting Markets Team](#).

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU CALL:

- Farmers should try to learn the name of the buyer, purchaser or procurement specialist prior to making the call.
- When calling, farmers should ask whoever answers first for the buyer's first name to avoid "getting stuck at the front desk."



- Farmers should always follow up by email after making a call. If they do not know the buyer's email, they should be sure to ask for it while they have them on the phone.
- Farmers should communicate why their products are special, highlight the value of their product and discuss their practices during the call.
- During the call, remember to ask specific questions about pricing and timelines.

TIMING:

- Buyers are often very busy; farmers should do their research to ensure they are calling the right person.
- Farmers should call buyers during their workday, considering time zones. Farmers should aim to call between 8-4pm; mornings seem to be the most productive times for cold calling.
- Many decision makers also get to the office as early as 7 am, so calling early is advantageous.
- Farmers should also consider time zones and lunch breaks when making calls.
- Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays tend to be the best days for farmers to call buyers.
- Decision makers may be on the road visiting locations, and if farmers know this, farmers should call while the decision-maker is traveling, as many can talk via Bluetooth while driving.
- Winter is a great time to call and line up contracts. It's beneficial to call around 8 brokers/buyers and let them know your planting intentions.
- Farmers should know that forward contracting is an agreement made in advance of planting or harvesting and spot purchasing is a one-time purchase made on the spot, usually for immediate delivery.

SEPARATE CONTRACTS, POST HARVEST HANDLING

- Honest, consistent communication around harvest timelines and availability is extremely important since vegetables are perishable.
- Proper packaging and temperature-controlled storage is essential. Farmers should pack to avoid bruising/wilting and clearly communicate their storage methods when speaking to buyers.
- If farmers have a consistent supply of a certain vegetable they should consider negotiating long-term contracts.
- Pricing for farmers depends on location and the market channel.
- Plan out your harvest. Some buyers do production planning with suppliers.
- Understanding the harvest cycle before speaking with buyers allows farmers to accurately communicate crop availability, and avoid overcommitting, ensuring smooth transactions and stronger relationships with buyers.

What are the most important criteria when selecting farm partners to work with?



- Some buyers may require safety audits like FSMA, SQF or GAP certification
- Farmers should maintain consistent quality
- Organic certification
- Farmers who know how to package their products and communicate effectively
- Farmers who take initiative and are committed to obtaining a variety of certifications stand out
- Farmers who understand their own costs and avoid underselling or overselling their products

What certifications, other than USDA Organic certification do farmers look for?

- USDA Gap Certification, Fair Trade Certification and Non-GMO Project Verified are certifications that buyers may also look for.

Who is responsible for delivery? The Buyer or Farmer?

- It depends on the buyer/farmer, so it is important to discuss this expectation clearly with the buyer you are working with to ensure a mutual understanding.

Who sets the price?

- Price really depends on scale, history and location. The closer a farm is to the store, the higher the price may be due to its hyper local nature, with costs reflecting quality and farm inputs. Larger farms and shipping costs are closer to the national cost structure, with a slight local price premium.
- Buyers want to ensure the price is fair for farmers, as they aim to build lasting relationships and are not looking for one-time transactions.
- Many buyers will crop plan with farmers.
- Pricing can be a collaborate process – farmers need to understand their own costs to avoid underselling, as negotiations will always take place.

What should I grow?

- Farmers should grow what they love and can grow well, and they may want to consider growing something unique with great flavor.
- It's not just about what farmers grow, but also how they engage with consumers. By building authentic relationships, farmers can create trust and loyalty with consumers and stand out in the market.

How do I differentiate myself from others?



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- Farmers can differentiate themselves from others by sharing their story. Even if their product is not significantly different, they can highlight who they are and how they care for the environment.

RESOURCES:

- [Organic Integrity Database](#)
- [Find.Organic](#)
- [Tools for Transition](#)
- [Veggie Compass](#)
- [Vegetable Crop Budget Estimator](#)
- [Organic Crop Production Enterprise Budgets](#)
- [Research on the Relationships along the organic supply chain](#)
- [Transition Story](#)

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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