

Iowa

The nation's largest corn and soy state pivoting organic grain production to close the domestic feed gap



MIDWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

Iowa ranks 9th nationally with 907 certified organic operations and 197,192 certified acres. Iowa's organic grain sector is at the center of the national organic feed shortage: the U.S. imports 75-80% of its organic soybeans, and Iowa's conventional grain infrastructure is uniquely positioned to close that gap. With \$12.6M in OREI/ORG funding and Practical Farmers of Iowa's deep farmer network, Iowa is the single most important state for organic grain transition in the country.

907 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	197,192 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$12.6M OREI / ORG FUNDING	+27% MORE WORKERS VS. CONVENTIONAL
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STATE PROFILE

AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	907 (9th nationally)
Certified organic acres	197,192
OREI / ORG funding (cumulative)	\$12.6M
Worker employment vs. conventional	+27%
Split operations	58% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Transition conventional corn-soy acres to close the national organic feed grain shortage and reduce imports.
- Build organic grain aggregation and processing infrastructure to serve Midwest organic livestock producers.
- Expand organic dairy operations leveraging the state's strong cooperative infrastructure and feed grain base.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Soybeans:** Iowa leads growth in closing the organic soy import gap.
- ▶ **Corn:** organic corn anchors Midwest dairy and poultry supply chains.
- ▶ **Oats & Small Grains:** organic oats for cereal, food processing, and cover crop seed.
- ▶ **Dairy:** northeast Iowa organic dairy leverages cooperative infrastructure.

BARRIERS

- GMO pollen drift from Iowa's dense conventional corn and soy acres threatens organic grain certification.
- High cash rent prices driven by conventional commodity markets compress organic transition economics.
- Three-year transition period with income risk requires accessible bridge financing and cost-share support.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Iowa is ground zero for the national organic feed grain shortage. Its 58% split-operation rate and nearly 300,000 certified acres demonstrate genuine scale, but the conversion of even a fraction of Iowa's 23 million conventional corn-soy acres would transform the national organic supply chain. Practical Farmers of Iowa and Midwest TOPP are the essential catalysts.

Resources for Farmers

Iowa organic farmers are supported by Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Iowa Department of Agriculture, Iowa State University Extension, and Midwest TOPP. Together they deliver farmer-led research, transition cost-share, mentor matching, and market access for Iowa's organic grain and dairy sector.

Practical Farmers of Iowa

FARMER-LED RESEARCH & PEER LEARNING

- Iowa's leading sustainable and organic farmer research organization
- Farmer-to-farmer trials and knowledge sharing on organic grain systems
- Beginning farmer programs and organic transition peer learning networks
- Annual conference and field day program across organic grain and dairy topics

practicalfarmers.org

Iowa Dept of Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- Iowa Certified Organic program and state organic registry
- NRCS Iowa: EQIP Organic Initiative and Transition Assistance programs
- Beginning Farmer Loan Program and agricultural development resources

iowaagriculture.gov

Iowa State University Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic grain, dairy, and vegetable production specialists statewide
- Neely-Kinyon Long-Term Agroecological Research site for organic systems
- Organic Farmer Network and statewide farmer resource portal
- Cover crop, soil health, and crop rotation research for organic transition

extension.iastate.edu

Midwest TOPP (MOSA-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Serves AR, IL, IN, IA, KY, MI, MN, MO, OH, TN, WI
- Paid organic mentor matching for grain, dairy, and diversified farms
- Workshops on organic corn-soy transition and cover crop integration
- Market access support for organic grain and dairy supply chains

organictransition.org/region/midwest

DID YOU KNOW? IOWA

The United States imports 75-80% of its organic soybeans, and Iowa grows more conventional soybeans than any other state. This is the central paradox of U.S. organic agriculture: the nation's most productive soybean state exports conventional soybeans while importing organic soybeans from overseas. Transitioning a fraction of Iowa's 10 million soybean acres to organic would eliminate the import gap entirely. Practical Farmers of Iowa and ISU Extension are actively demonstrating that the agronomics and economics work; the primary barrier is the three-year transition period and access to bridge financing.

KEY SOURCES

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

Organic Trade Association. "Organic Industry Survey." OTA Market Report, 2025, ota.com.

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. "2021 Organic Survey." USDA NASS, 2022, nass.usda.gov.

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. "Iowa Organic Program." IDALS, 2025, iowaagriculture.gov.