

Illinois

Chicago metro demand and vast corn-soy acreage position Illinois as a Midwest organic conversion leader



MIDWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

Illinois ranks 11th nationally with 843 certified organic operations and 150,154 certified acres. Illinois pairs some of the nation's most productive farmland with experienced grain farmers, strong agricultural research, and unmatched transportation and processing infrastructure. Much of the organic grain grown here already moves into national supply chains — feeding organic livestock, processors, and food manufacturers across the country rather than being consumed locally. With \$10.8M in OREI/ORG funding and 26 million acres of conventional corn and soy, Illinois is one of the highest-leverage organic grain conversion opportunities in American agriculture.

843 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	150,154 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$10.8M OREI / ORG FUNDING	+26% MORE WORKERS VS. CONVENTIONAL
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STATE PROFILE AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	843 (11th nationally)
Certified organic acres	150,154
OREI / ORG funding (cumulative)	\$10.8M
Worker employment vs. conventional	+26%
Split operations	54% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Transition Illinois corn and soybean acres — including experienced non-GMO grain operations — to organic to supply national feed and food-grade grain markets and reduce import dependence.
- Build out the aggregation, processing, and marketing infrastructure for food-grade organic grain, which hasn't kept pace with farmer interest.
- Develop specialty-crop supply near population centers, backed by professional-scale food hubs that can serve institutions such as schools, hospitals, and universities.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Soybeans:** Illinois scale addresses the national organic soy import gap.
- ▶ **Corn:** organic corn anchors Midwest organic dairy and poultry chains.
- ▶ **Vegetables:** diversified farms near Chicago supply co-ops and CSA channels.
- ▶ **Small Grains:** organic wheat, oats, and spelt for the artisan grain market.

BARRIERS

- GMO contamination risk from neighboring conventional farms is a persistent organic grain certification threat.
- High cash rent driven by corn-soy commodity prices compresses the economics of organic grain transition.
- Limited organic grain aggregation and elevator infrastructure outside of established cooperative channels.
- Limited dedicated organic technical assistance in the state leaves transitioning farmers without readily available agronomic support.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Illinois combines the Midwest's most productive corn-soy farmland with experienced farmers, deep research capacity, and national-scale transportation and processing. The organic grain conversion opportunity is enormous: transitioning even 2% of Illinois corn-soy acres would add over 500,000 certified acres to national food and feed supply chains. Building out food-grade grain processing and dedicated organic technical assistance is the essential infrastructure for making that transition happen.

Resources for Farmers

Illinois organic farmers are supported by the Illinois Department of Agriculture, the Illinois Stewardship Alliance, the Midwest TOPP region, and University of Illinois Extension. Together they deliver certification support, organic grain training and mentorship, farmer advocacy, land access, and market development statewide.

Illinois Dept of Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- Illinois Certified Organic program and state organic producer registry
- NRCS Illinois: EQIP Organic Initiative and Transition Assistance programs
- Illinois Agricultural Loan Program supporting organic transition financing

agr.illinois.gov

U of I Extension

RESEARCH & GENERAL AG PROGRAMMING

- Strong crop research and general agricultural programming statewide
- Crop Sciences research and on-farm trial networks
- Soil health, cover crop, and integrated weed management resources
- Dedicated organic-specific technical assistance is currently limited

extension.illinois.edu

Illinois Stewardship Alliance

FARMER ADVOCACY & POLICY

- Illinois's leading sustainable and organic agriculture advocacy organization
- Organic and sustainable farmer policy advocacy at the state level
- Annual Prairie Fest conference connecting organic farmers and consumers
- Beginning farmer resources and organic market development support

ilstewards.org

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, vegetable, and fruit operations
- Workshops on organic transition, grain systems, and certification in Illinois
- Market access and supply chain development for Illinois organic producers

organictransition.org/region/midwest

DID YOU KNOW? ILLINOIS

Most of the organic grain grown in Illinois never stays in Illinois — it moves into national supply chains that feed organic livestock, processors, and food manufacturers across the country. That national reach is Illinois's real organic advantage: productive farmland, experienced grain farmers, and transportation and processing infrastructure that few states can match. The gap is downstream — food-grade grain aggregation, processing, and dedicated organic technical assistance haven't kept pace with farmer interest. Organizations like The Land Connection are building that missing infrastructure through grain-focused training, mentorship, and market development.

KEY SOURCES

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

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