

Maryland

Mid-Atlantic organic gateway serving DC and Baltimore with vegetables, grain, and Chesapeake Bay-friendly farms



NORTHEAST/ MID-ATLANTIC TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

Maryland ranks 30th nationally with 198 certified organic operations and 16,203 certified acres. Maryland sits at the crossroads of two of the East Coast's largest organic consumer markets: Washington DC and Baltimore. With \$5.9M in OREI/ORG funding and University of Maryland Extension's Chesapeake-focused research, Maryland is building organic supply chains that serve urban consumers while protecting the Bay through reduced-input farming.

198 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	16,203 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$5.9M OREI / ORG FUNDING	+23% MORE WORKERS VS. CONVENTIONAL
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STATE PROFILE

AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	198 (30th nationally)
Certified organic acres	16,203
OREI / ORG funding (cumulative)	\$5.9M
Worker employment vs. conventional	+23%
Split operations	42% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Supply DC and Baltimore's combined 10 million metro consumers through local organic food hubs and direct channels.
- Transition Eastern Shore grain acres to organic, leveraging the Chesapeake Bay conservation co-benefits narrative.
- Expand organic dairy in Western Maryland to serve the Mid-Atlantic cooperative and premium fluid milk market.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Vegetables:** organic farms supply DC, Baltimore, and the I-95 corridor.
- ▶ **Grains:** organic corn and soybeans on the Eastern Shore supply processors.
- ▶ **Dairy:** western MD and Frederick County organic dairy serves Mid-Atlantic.
- ▶ **Nursery & Horticulture:** organic nursery and greenhouse serve DC-Baltimore metro market.

BARRIERS

- Poultry industry dominance on the Eastern Shore creates land competition and nutrient management challenges.
- High suburban land values near DC and Baltimore limit new entrant farm viability and expansion.
- Chesapeake Bay regulations add management complexity for organic farms near sensitive watershed areas.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Maryland's organic farms sit within an hour of 10 million combined DC-Baltimore consumers, creating premium market access that few states can match. Transitioning Eastern Shore grain acres and building regional food hub infrastructure are the highest-return near-term opportunities, with the Chesapeake Bay narrative as a powerful consumer story.

Resources for Farmers

Maryland organic farmers are supported by the Maryland Department of Agriculture, University of Maryland Extension, Future Harvest CASA, and Northeast TOPP. Together they deliver certification support, Chesapeake-focused research, farmer advocacy, and mentor matching for Maryland's organic sector.

Maryland Dept of Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- Maryland's Best branding program for state-produced organic products
- NRCS Maryland: EQIP Organic Initiative and Chesapeake Bay conservation programs
- Beginning Farmer programs and Maryland Agricultural Finance Corporation loans

mda.maryland.gov

University of Maryland Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic vegetable, grain, and dairy production specialists statewide
- Chesapeake Bay watershed organic systems and nutrient management research
- Soil health, cover crop, and IPM research for Mid-Atlantic organic farms
- 24-county extension network delivering statewide organic outreach

extension.umd.edu

Future Harvest CASA

FARMER ADVOCACY & SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

- Chesapeake region's leading sustainable and organic agriculture organization
- Annual Future Harvest Conference: Mid-Atlantic's premiere organic farming event
- Farmer-to-farmer peer learning and organic transition mentorship programs
- Market development and farm-to-institution supply chain support

futureharvestcasa.org

Northeast TOPP (PCO-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Serves CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, WV, MD, DE
- Paid organic mentor matching for vegetable, grain, and dairy farms
- Workshops on organic Mid-Atlantic production and Chesapeake conservation systems
- Beginning farmer certification navigation and transition planning support

organictransition.org/region/northeast-mid-atlantic

DID YOU KNOW? MARYLAND

Organic farming practices directly reduce the nitrogen and phosphorus runoff that is the primary driver of Chesapeake Bay dead zones. Maryland farmers face increasing regulatory pressure to reduce nutrient runoff under the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load framework. Organic certification requirements align closely with Bay-friendly nutrient management: cover crops, reduced synthetic fertilizers, and buffer strip requirements are standard organic practices. This regulatory and environmental alignment makes organic transition both economically and ecologically compelling for Maryland farmers, a narrative that Future Harvest CASA and University of Maryland Extension are actively leveraging.

KEY SOURCES

Organic Trade Association. "Maryland 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.

Maryland Department of Agriculture. "Maryland Organic Certification Program." MDA, 2025, mda.maryland.gov.