

Montana

Big Sky organic grain giant: top-five nationally in certified acres of wheat, barley, and pulses



A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

Montana ranks 27th nationally with 305 certified organic operations and 451,476 certified acres. Montana's scale in organic grain and pulse production is unmatched in the northern Rockies. Winter wheat, spring wheat, barley, lentils, and chickpeas grown on the northern plains and Hi-Line have made Montana a cornerstone of the U.S. organic food supply chain. The Alternative Energy Resources Organization and Northern Plains Resource Council have championed sustainable and organic agriculture across the state's remote communities for decades.

305 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	451,476 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$62M ORGANIC SALES	Top 5 U.S. ORGANIC ACREAGE RANK
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STATE PROFILE AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	305 (27th nationally)
Certified organic acres	451,476
Organic sales value	\$62 million
Worker employment vs. conventional	+18%
Split operations	38% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS OPPORTUNITIES

- Capture more organic grain value through on-state processing investment: organic flour mills, pulse processors, and malt facilities.
- Develop organic rangeland beef supply chains to connect Montana's vast certified pastures with national premium and direct-to-consumer markets.
- Support beginning farmer organic transition on dryland grain acres as the state's farming population ages and land transfers accelerate.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Wheat:** Hi-Line organic wheat supplies national flour millers at scale.
- ▶ **Lentils & Pulses:** top U.S. organic lentils, chickpeas, and dry peas for export.
- ▶ **Barley:** established organic barley for malt and food applications.
- ▶ **Beef Cattle:** vast rangeland supports certified organic and grass-fed beef.

BARRIERS

- Remote geography and long distances to processors and markets increase transportation costs and reduce organic premium capture for Montana producers.
- Dryland farming systems face high weather variability and drought risk that can destabilize organic grain yields and revenue during transition years.
- Limited organic processing and aggregation infrastructure means much of Montana's organic grain leaves the state as raw commodity rather than value-added product.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Montana's more than 1.1 million certified organic acres make it one of the foundational supply states for the U.S. organic grain and pulse industry. Investment in on-state organic processing and value-added infrastructure would dramatically increase the economic return of this production base to Montana farm families.

Resources for Farmers

Montana organic farmers are supported by the Montana Department of Agriculture, Montana State University Extension, the Alternative Energy Resources Organization, and the Northwest TOPP region. These partners provide certification, research, technical assistance, and market development resources across Montana's vast agricultural landscape.

Montana Department of Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- Montana Grown branding program for certified organic product promotion
- NRCS Montana: EQIP Organic Initiative, Transition Assistance, and RCPP programs
- Agricultural marketing programs supporting organic grain and pulse export development

agr.mt.gov

Montana State University Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic dryland grain, pulse, and livestock production research and extension specialists
- MSU Northern Agricultural Research Center trials on organic wheat, barley, and pulse systems
- Soil health, cover cropping, and no-till transition support for organic grain producers
- Statewide extension network delivering local organic technical assistance in all counties

msuextension.org

Alternative Energy Resources Org. (AERO)

FARMER ADVOCACY & PEER LEARNING

- Montana's primary sustainable and organic agriculture advocacy and education organization
- Annual Montana Organic Conference and farm tour program
- Organic certification guidance and cost-share navigation support for producers
- Farmer networking, peer learning, and rural community development programs

aeromt.org

Northwest TOPP (OTCO-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Serves AK, ID, MT, OR, WA, WY
- Paid organic mentor matching for dryland grain, pulse, and beef operations
- Workshops on organic grain transition, certification, and dryland systems management
- Market access support for Montana organic grain and beef producers

organictransition.org/region/northwest

DID YOU KNOW? MONTANA

Montana's northern plains grow more certified organic lentils and pulse crops than virtually any other state in the U.S., supplying national and international markets with organic protein ingredients. Organic lentils, chickpeas, and dry peas thrive in Montana's dryland conditions and fix nitrogen naturally, reducing input costs during organic transition. With global demand for plant-based organic protein ingredients growing rapidly, Montana pulse farmers are positioned at the supply end of one of the fastest-growing segments of the organic food market.

KEY SOURCES

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2022 Census of Agriculture. USDA NASS, 2024.
Montana Department of Agriculture. Montana Organic Program. MDA, 2023.
Alternative Energy Resources Organization. AERO Programs and Services. AERO, 2023.
Montana State University Extension. Organic Agriculture Research. MSU Extension, 2023.