

Northern California

Organic pioneer region: wine country, Sacramento Valley grains, and North Coast specialty crops



WEST/SOUTHWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

Northern California is home to the largest concentration of certified organic operations in the nation, with approximately 2,750 certified operations and 1,181,000 certified acres — representing about half of California's 5,465 total certified operations ranking 1st nationally. Northern California's organic sector runs from the Sacramento Valley's vast organic rice, wheat, and almond production through Napa and Sonoma's organic wine grape operations to the Mendocino and Humboldt coast's legacy organic vegetable and specialty crop farms. The Bay Area's extraordinary organic consumer market and California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), headquartered in Santa Cruz, anchor a world-class organic system. California leads the nation in certified organic operations with 5,465 certified operations statewide, of which approximately 2,750 are located across Northern California's counties.

~2,750	~1,181,000	\$900M+	#1
CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	CERTIFIED ACRES	ORGANIC SALES (CA)	U.S. ORGANIC STATE

STATE PROFILE

AT A GLANCE

Certified operations (N. CA region)	~2,750 (part of CA's #1 national rank)
Certified organic acres (N. CA)	~1,181,000
Organic wine grape acres	Growing rapidly
Worker employment vs. conventional	+29%
Split operations	55% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Expand organic wine grape acreage in Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake Counties to meet rapidly growing global demand for certified organic California wines.
- Develop organic Sacramento Valley rice and grain value-added processing capacity to supply Bay Area and national organic natural food manufacturers with California-origin certified grain.
- Leverage the Bay Area's world-leading organic consumer market to support new organic farm enterprises and premium direct-to-consumer and restaurant channel development.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Wine Grapes:** Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino supply the organic wine market.
- ▶ **Rice & Grains:** Sacramento Valley organic rice and wheat for national food makers.
- ▶ **Tree Nuts:** organic almonds, walnuts, and pistachios supply global buyers.
- ▶ **Vegetables & Specialty:** Bay Area farms supply the premier organic consumer market.

BARRIERS

- Extreme land values across the Bay Area, Wine Country, and Sacramento Valley create significant farmland access barriers for beginning organic producers.
- Drought and water scarcity in the Sacramento Valley create ongoing production risk and regulatory uncertainty for irrigated organic crop operations.
- Labor cost and availability for specialty crop harvest operations in Wine Country and North Coast regions are ongoing organic production constraints.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Northern California is the birthplace and ongoing global epicenter of organic agriculture, from CCOF's founding in 1973 to today's world-leading organic wine, rice, tree nut, and specialty crop sectors. The Bay Area's organic consumer market is unmatched anywhere on Earth.

Resources for Farmers

Northern California organic farmers are supported by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, UC Cooperative Extension, California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), and the Southwest TOPP region. These organizations deliver certification, research, technical assistance, and market development resources across the Northern California agricultural landscape.

California Department of Food and Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- CDFA Organic Program: one of the nation's largest state organic regulatory programs
- NRCS California: EQIP Organic Initiative, RCPP, and Organic Transition Assistance
- California Specialty Crop Block Grants for organic market infrastructure development

cdfa.ca.gov/organic

UC Cooperative Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic wine grape, rice, almond, vegetable, and specialty crop research statewide
- UC Davis organic agriculture research and Cooperative Extension farm advisor network
- Soil health, water use efficiency, and integrated pest management for organic systems
- 58-county extension network delivering local organic technical assistance across CA

ucanr.edu

CCOF (California Certified Organic Farmers)

FARMER ADVOCACY & PEER LEARNING

- Founded 1973: one of the nation's oldest and largest organic certification organizations
- CCOF certifies 3,000+ operations in California and across the U.S.
- Organic policy advocacy, farmer education, and market development programs
- Annual CCOF Spring Conference and organic farmer peer network statewide

ccof.org

Southwest TOPP (CCOF-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- CCOF leads the Southwest TOPP region serving AZ, CA, HI, NM, NV, TX, and UT
- Paid organic mentor matching for wine grape, grain, nut, and vegetable operations
- Workshops on organic transition, California pest management, and certification
- Market access and Bay Area food hub connections for Northern CA organic producers

organictransition.org/region/west-southwest

DID YOU KNOW? NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) was founded in 1973 in Santa Cruz County, making Northern California the birthplace of the U.S. organic certification movement that eventually led to the USDA National Organic Program. CCOF's founding in 1973 by a group of Monterey Bay area farmers and advocates established the first U.S. voluntary organic certification standards, creating the model that all 50 states and ultimately the federal government would follow. Northern California's organic legacy is not just economic but foundational to the entire U.S. and global organic agriculture movement.

KEY SOURCES

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2022 Census of Agriculture. USDA NASS, 2024.

California Department of Food and Agriculture. Organic Program. CDFA, 2023.

California Certified Organic Farmers. CCOF Annual Report. CCOF, 2023.

UC Cooperative Extension. Organic Agriculture Research and Extension. UCANR, 2023.