

North Carolina

Research Triangle demand and Blue Ridge mountain farms drive NC organic expansion

A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
 State Module | August 2026

North Carolina ranks 18th nationally with 554 certified organic operations and 51,063 certified acres. North Carolina's organic sector spans three distinct geographies: coastal plain vegetable and grain farms, Piedmont diversified operations, and Blue Ridge mountain specialty vegetable and small fruit producers. The Research Triangle metro area generates exceptional organic demand from one of the Southeast's most educated and food-conscious consumer bases. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association is a regional powerhouse anchoring certification, advocacy, and farmer community across both Carolinas.

554 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	51,063 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$112M ORGANIC SALES	Top 15 U.S. ORGANIC STATE
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STATE PROFILE AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	554 (18th nationally)
Certified organic acres	51,063
Organic sales value	\$112 million
Worker employment vs. conventional	+27%
Split operations	50% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Expand organic food hub capacity in the Research Triangle to connect Piedmont and mountain organic producers with the region's high-demand urban consumer base.
- Develop organic poultry processing infrastructure to enable North Carolina producers to capture more value from growing organic poultry demand.
- Grow the mountain organic vegetable sector by supporting season extension investments that lengthen the Blue Ridge production window.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Vegetables:** Blue Ridge and Piedmont farms supply major NC urban markets.
- ▶ **Poultry:** Piedmont organic pastured poultry serves regional grocery buyers.
- ▶ **Grains:** coastal plain organic grains supply Southeast feed markets.
- ▶ **Small Fruits:** organic blueberries, strawberries, and brambles at premium prices.

BARRIERS

- Organic poultry processing capacity is limited in the state, constraining the ability of organic poultry producers to scale and access premium markets.
- Coastal plain summer heat, humidity, and tropical storm risk create production challenges that require intensive organic pest and disease management.
- High competition for farmland near Research Triangle and Charlotte metro areas drives up land prices and limits organic producer access to prime market-adjacent land.

KEY TAKEAWAY

North Carolina's combination of mountain specialty crop excellence, one of the Southeast's most food-forward metro markets in the Research Triangle, and a nationally recognized organic farmer organization in CFSA makes it a model for organic sector development across the entire South.

Resources for Farmers

North Carolina organic farmers are supported by the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, NC State University Extension, the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, and the Southeast TOPP region. Together they deliver certification, research, technical assistance, and market access programs across the state's diverse farming regions.

NC Dept of Agriculture and Consumer Services

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- Got to Be NC Agriculture branding program for certified organic product promotion
- NRCS North Carolina: EQIP Organic Initiative and Organic Transition Assistance
- Specialty crop block grants supporting organic vegetable, fruit, and grain market development

ncagr.gov

NC State University Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic vegetable, grain, poultry, and small fruit production specialists statewide
- NC State organic systems research and on-farm demonstration programs
- Soil health, cover crops, and integrated pest management for organic producers
- 100-county extension network with dedicated sustainable agriculture agents

ces.ncsu.edu

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

FARMER ADVOCACY & PEER LEARNING

- Premier organic and sustainable agriculture organization in the Carolinas
- Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference serving 1,000+ farmers and stakeholders
- Organic certification cost-share navigation and producer support programs
- Farmer peer networks, farm tours, and organic market development across NC and SC

carolinafarmstewards.org

Southeast TOPP (FOG-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Serves AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, PR, VI
- Paid organic mentor matching for vegetable, grain, poultry, and small fruit operations
- Workshops on organic transition, Southeast pest management, and market access
- Supply chain and food hub development resources for North Carolina organic producers

organictransition.org/region/southeast

DID YOU KNOW? NORTH CAROLINA

The Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Research Triangle is consistently ranked among the top U.S. metro areas for organic food spending per capita, with a highly educated tech and university workforce driving exceptional organic demand. This concentration of organic purchasing power within a two-hour drive of North Carolina's mountain and Piedmont farming regions creates one of the Southeast's most favorable farm-to-market dynamics for organic producers. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference and NC State's organic research programs have built the farmer knowledge base and market connections needed to capture this opportunity.

KEY SOURCES

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

NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. NC Organic Program. NCDA&CS, 2023.

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. CFSA Programs and Resources. CFSA, 2023.

NC State University Extension. Organic Agriculture Resources. NC State Extension, 2023.