

# Advancing Regional Organic Markets

## A FARMER'S TOOLKIT

# Today's Organic Market Opportunities

Organic demand in the U.S. keeps climbing, and it's outpacing the rest of the food market by a wide margin. Shoppers are spending more than \$71 billion annually on organic products, and they're seeking far more than fruits and vegetables. Top selling organic products at retail include produce, dairy, beverages, packaged goods, and value-added foods. Grains, livestock products, and value-added goods are all in demand, and often imported.

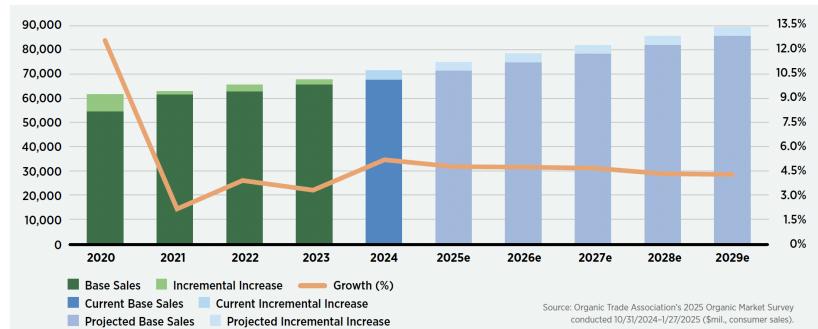
That gap between what buyers want and what U.S. farms produce is creating opportunity for transitioning operations to step in, diversify, and earn stronger margins in markets that are actively seeking new suppliers.

To help you assess opportunities as you plan for long-term, resilient organic growth, here's a peek at the national and regional demand trends, supply gaps, and tips to work effectively with buyers.

## WHAT'S DRIVING GROWTH

- Clean Ingredients** Demand for simple, recognizable ingredients
- Shrinking Price Gap** Organic pricing is more competitive with conventional
- Health Trends** GLP-1-driven eating habits are increasing demand for cleaner foods
- Generational Shift** Millennials and Gen Z prioritize sustainability, local foods, and global flavors

FIGURE 1.2. Total U.S. Organic Sales and Growth, 2020-2029e



## Organic Market Snapshot

- \$71.6 billion in U.S. organic sales (2024), growing at 5.2% year-over-year
- Organic sales outpace the total food market by nearly 2x
- Organic sales are projected to exceed \$85 billion by 2029

SEGMENT	GROWTH	KEY TRENDS	IMPLICATIONS FOR GROWERS
Meat, Poultry, Seafood	16.10%	Organic beef up +36.7%	High-opportunity segment for U.S. livestock producers. Demand for certified organic meat is outpacing domestic supply, opening doors for ranchers to transition and certify. This growth is also opening doors for grain producers and feed processors to support the growing organic beef sector.
Dairy and Eggs	7.70%	Organic eggs up +16.1%	Strong upside for diversified farms. Requires certified feed supply — a call to expand U.S. organic grain production.
Textiles (fibers, apparel)	7.40%	Lifestyle and sustainability-driven	Opportunity for fiber crop growers. Cotton and hemp may see expanded demand if currently limited domestic supply chains and processing capacity can be rebuilt.
Beverages	5.20%	Functional drinks, clean labels	Growth in value-added processing. Organic fruit and botanical growers can tap into beverage markets with the right processing partners.

## Fast-Growing Organic Categories

Animal products, textiles and beverages offer potential for organic growers, particularly those willing to supply feed, diversify or add value.

Demand for organic products continues to grow, and every region has a different mix of strengths and gaps that matter for farms moving into organic.



## The Northeast Organic Advantage

### A Practical Guide for Farmers & Producers

The Northeast is one of the most mature, dynamic, and resilient organic markets in the United States. With high consumer awareness, dense population centers, and a long history of diversified farming, the region is uniquely positioned to drive the next wave of regionally rooted organic growth. Spanning seven states across New England and the broader Northeast, this compact but high-performing region combines strong market demand, engaged institutions, and climate-adapted cropping systems — offering fertile ground for producers looking to expand, diversify, or transition into organic.

### A Region Defined by Diversity, Proximity, and Deep Consumer Engagement

Organic production in the Northeast is strengthened by its tight connection between farms and consumers. States such as Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts boast some of the highest per-capita organic adoption in the country, while New York remains a top-five state in organic acreage and sales. The region is home to more than **2,000 organic businesses**, serving consumer markets that consistently report **87–89% household organic participation**.

#### Producers benefit from:

- **High-value markets** within close reach — New York City, Boston, Hartford, Providence, and Portland
- **A legacy of small- and mid-scale diversified farms**, supported by CSAs, farmers markets, co-ops, and institutional buyers
- **Strong organic acreage density**, with several states ranking among the top in percentage of farmland that is certified organic
- **Robust policy and technical support**, led by institutions such as MOFGA, NOFA chapters, and the Rodale Institute
- **Growing producer momentum**, with notable shares of farms in Maine and Rhode Island planning organic expansion

Collectively, these strengths create one of the nation's most engaged and resilient organic ecosystems.

STATE	CERTIFIED OPERATIONS (2025)	CERTIFIED ACRES (2025)	TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES	NOTABLE HIGHLIGHTS
Connecticut	162	34,790	Tomatoes, squash, lettuce	87% of households buy organic
Maine	496	70,772	Milk, maple syrup, blueberries	4th nationally in share of organic farmland (11%); \$8.5M OREI/ORG funding
Massachusetts	309	4,082	Milk, lettuce, cranberries	85% of households buy organic; 50% of counties are "organic hotspots"
New Hampshire	121	11,091	Milk, maple syrup, tomatoes	89% of households buy organic
New York	2,003	985,648	Milk, eggs, cattle	2nd nationally in operations and acres; \$31M in OREI/ORG funding
Rhode Island	51	174	Tomatoes, onions, lettuce	88% of households buy organic
Vermont	825	200,989	Milk, maple syrup, cattle	88% of households buy organic; \$9M in OREI/ORG funding

# What the Region Produces — and Where It's Headed

## Diversified Specialty Crops & Value-Added Products

The Northeast's climate and market proximity support a thriving specialty crop sector including berries, leafy greens, tomatoes, herbs, and high-value vegetables. Protected and controlled-environment agriculture — from high tunnels to greenhouses — plays a major role in extending seasons and meeting year-round demand. Small fruits, storage crops, and specialty value-added foods (maple, jams, fermented products, syrups) contribute to stable margins and strong regional identity.

## Grains & Dairy: Cornerstones of the Northeast Organic Economy

Dairy remains one of the region's defining organic sectors, especially in Vermont, New York, and Maine. Organic grains, particularly feed grains, continue to play a critical role in supporting dairy and livestock systems across the region. Strengthening grain and feed production offers major strategic value: reducing dependence on national imports while stabilizing regional dairy supply chains.

## Creative, High-Margin Niches & Protected Agriculture

Producers across the Northeast are increasingly expanding into mushrooms, greenhouse greens, berries, herbs, and winter storage crops — all supported by nearby consumer markets that prioritize freshness, transparency, and sustainably grown products. Investments in protected agriculture can turn climate limitations into competitive advantages by enabling more consistent, year-round supply.

## Looking Ahead: A Region Positioned to Lead the Next Phase of Organic

Consumer demand for organic in the Northeast continues to grow at twice the rate of the overall food market. With strong regional identity, deep-rooted local food cultures, and high trust in organic integrity, the Northeast is ideally positioned to strengthen regional supply chains and reduce dependence on imported organic foods. States such as Vermont, Maine, and Connecticut lead the nation in organic acreage share, while New York ranks #2 in number of organic businesses — showing both depth and breadth of opportunity.

Whether expanding berries and leafy greens, growing local grain and feed systems, or investing in year-round protected agriculture, Northeast producers are shaping a future where organic supply is more local, resilient, and aligned with strong regional values. By combining market proximity, policy support, and the region's longstanding commitment to sustainable agriculture, the Northeast is poised to remain a national leader in organic innovation and growth.



## Regional Challenges — and Producer-Led Solutions

**The Northeast's opportunities are closely tied to addressing several structural challenges:**

- **Limited storage and processing capacity**, particularly for grains, vegetables, and dairy
- **Dependency on imported feed grains**, creating cost and supply vulnerability
- **Labor shortages**, especially for diversified vegetable and specialty crop operations
- **Short growing seasons**, requiring season extension to meet demand consistently

**Producers and regional partners are advancing solutions that include:**

- **Expanding protected agriculture** (hoop houses, greenhouses) to lengthen seasons and boost profitability
- **Building out regional processing**, from grain milling to value-added specialty foods
- **Strengthening feed grain programs** to support dairy and livestock systems
- **Developing workforce and training pipelines** for year-round organic farm employment
- **Scaling up storage and aggregation**, improving access to institutional and wholesale markets

These collective strategies help transform limitations into opportunities for resilient growth.

# WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH BUYERS

*“Do your homework. Go to the store and do research. Come in with your eyes wide open.”*  
– Kenny, Natural Foods Retail Buyer

## What Do Buyers Want?

Buyers value clear communication, dependable follow-through, and partners who understand their pricing, timing, and operational constraints.

They care about the farms behind their products and appreciate growers who are transparent, collaborative, and invested in long-term relationships.



## Finding and Connecting with Prospective Buyers

### Attend Conferences, Trade Shows & Field Days

Events bring together retailers, distributors, chefs, and foodservice buyers looking for new suppliers.

### Ask Neighbors & Fellow Producers

Farmers often know who pays well, communicates clearly, and buys consistently.

### Use Directories & Market Databases

Directories help you find buyers by category, product type, or region.

### Review Buyer Websites for Vendor Requirements

Many buyers provide clear instructions for new suppliers.

Typical information includes:

- Category review schedules
- Packaging, labeling, and certification requirements
- Insurance and transportation expectations
- Instructions for submitting new products or samples

### Reach Out Directly

A short, targeted email or call is expected—and welcomed

### Work With Your Local Food Hub or Distributor

Food hubs and regional aggregators often buy from small and mid-sized farms and already have strong relationships with retailers and institutions.

You can find additional resources and support at the links below.

[markets@rodaleinstitute.org](mailto:markets@rodaleinstitute.org)  
[organictransition.org/region/national](http://organictransition.org/region/national)

### Understanding Market Nuances Grocery Buyers

It can take as long as a full year to get into the larger, national retail chains while independent retailers may be able to bring in new vendors/farmers within a matter of days.

### Distributor/Wholesale Buyers

These buyers need transportation solutions that keep their trucks full. If you know of other certified organic farmers in your region, let the buyers know there is more than one reason to send a truck your way.

### Institutional Buyers - School Districts and Foodservice

School districts we interviewed want organic root vegetables and correctly sized fruit, especially apples, oranges, and berries for the entire school year. Schools also often buy B grade fruit and vegetables.

### Grain Buyers - Feed & Food

Ask the buyer for crop specifics before buying seed or planting. Some require particular varieties and some even offer seed programs/bulk buying opportunities for growers.

### Fiber and Seed Buyers

If you grow cotton, participating in a Cotton Cooperative will greatly enhance your ability to sell your crop. If you grow seed, know all legal requirements in advance and save yourself from future headaches.