

South Carolina

Palmetto State organic growth driven by Lowcountry produce, tea, and Charleston food culture



SOUTHEAST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

South Carolina ranks 38th nationally with 117 certified organic operations and 6,387 certified acres. South Carolina's organic sector is emerging strongly, anchored by the state's warm climate enabling year-round vegetable production, the explosive growth of Charleston's farm-to-table restaurant and tourism scene, and the unique Lowcountry agricultural heritage that includes heritage grain crops, organic tea, and diversified coastal plain farms. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and Clemson University Extension provide strong technical and organizational support for the state's organic producers.

117 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	6,387 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$41M ORGANIC SALES	Growing SECTOR TRAJECTORY
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STATE PROFILE AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	117 (38th nationally)
Certified organic acres	6,387
Organic sales value	\$41 million
Worker employment vs. conventional	+26%
Split operations	49% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop farm-to-restaurant organic supply chains in Charleston, one of the South's most celebrated food and tourism destinations, creating premium market access for SC organic producers.
- Revive and certify Lowcountry heritage grain crops as organic specialty products with distinctive culinary identity and national premium food market appeal.
- Expand organic vegetable production capacity to supply growing demand from Greenville and Columbia metro areas and the state's rapidly expanding tourism economy.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Vegetables:** organic farms supply Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville markets.
- ▶ **Tea:** the Charleston Tea Garden is America's only commercial tea farm.
- ▶ **Heritage Grains:** Carolina Gold and heritage grains are being revived organically.
- ▶ **Fruits & Peaches:** SC peach heritage includes transitioning organic orchards.

BARRIERS

- Summer heat, humidity, and hurricane risk create significant production challenges and weather-related losses for organic producers, particularly during the three-year transition period.
- Limited organic cold storage and distribution infrastructure constrains market access for perishable organic crops in rural South Carolina.
- High conventional agricultural land prices in coastal and Upstate regions near growing cities limit organic farmland access for beginning producers.

KEY TAKEAWAY

South Carolina's organic sector is positioned for strong growth driven by Charleston's booming food tourism economy, the Lowcountry's unique agricultural heritage crops, and year-round growing conditions that enable high vegetable production volumes unavailable in colder states.

Resources for Farmers

South Carolina organic farmers are supported by the SC Department of Agriculture, Clemson University Extension, the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, and the Southeast TOPP region. These organizations deliver certification, technical assistance, market connection, and farmer advocacy resources across the state.

South Carolina Department of Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- SC Certified Grown branding and marketing program for certified organic products
- NRCS South Carolina: EQIP Organic Initiative and Organic Transition Assistance
- Specialty crop block grants supporting organic vegetable, fruit, and grain market development

agriculture.sc.gov

Clemson University Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic vegetable, peach, grain, and specialty crop research and extension specialists
- Clemson organic systems research and Lowcountry heritage crop restoration programs
- Soil health, cover crops, and integrated pest management for organic transition
- 46-county extension network delivering local organic technical assistance statewide

clemson.edu/extension

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, fruit, grain, and specialty operations
- Workshops on organic transition, Lowcountry production, and certification
- Market access and Charleston food hub connections for South Carolina organic producers

organictransition.org/region/southeast

DID YOU KNOW? SOUTH CAROLINA

Charleston, South Carolina is consistently ranked among the top U.S. cities for culinary tourism, with its farm-to-table restaurant culture and celebrated food festivals attracting millions of food-focused visitors annually. This concentration of premium restaurant, hotel, and culinary tourism spending in Charleston creates exceptional organic market demand within reach of South Carolina's organic farms. Clemson Extension's specialty crop research and CFSA's farmer network are helping SC organic producers build the supply chain relationships with Charleston chefs and buyers that generate the premium revenues needed to make organic certification economically compelling.

KEY SOURCES

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

South Carolina Department of Agriculture. Organic Program. SCDA, 2023.

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

Clemson University Extension. Organic Agriculture Resources. Clemson Extension, 2023.