

South Dakota

Mount Rushmore State builds organic grain, sunflower, and rangeland beef on the northern plains



A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

South Dakota ranks 39th nationally with 104 certified organic operations and 148,228 certified acres. South Dakota's organic sector is anchored by large-scale grain and sunflower production on the eastern plains and rangeland beef operations in the vast grasslands of the western region. The state's position at the junction of the Corn Belt and the Great Plains rangeland creates a dual-commodity organic opportunity with grain and livestock producers increasingly finding organic certification economically attractive. The South Dakota Organic Alliance and South Dakota State University Extension support organic development across the state.

104 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	148,228 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$38M ORGANIC SALES	Top 10 ORGANIC ACREAGE RANK
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STATE PROFILE

AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	104 (39th nationally)
Certified organic acres	148,228
Organic sales value	\$38 million
Worker employment vs. conventional	+17%
Split operations	37% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop organic grain aggregation and value-added processing infrastructure to capture more value from South Dakota's substantial certified grain and sunflower acreage.
- Expand organic rangeland beef supply chains leveraging western South Dakota's vast native grasslands and historically low chemical input use.
- Support beginning farmer organic transition on eastern South Dakota grain acres as the farm population ages and land transfer opportunities increase.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Wheat & Corn:** eastern plains organic wheat and corn supply regional processors.
- ▶ **Sunflowers:** organic sunflowers supply oil, snack seed, and bird feed markets.
- ▶ **Beef Cattle:** western SD's vast rangeland supports certified organic beef.
- ▶ **Soybeans:** southeastern SD organic soybeans supply regional feed mills.

BARRIERS

- Remote geography and limited organic processing infrastructure mean most of South Dakota's organic grain leaves the state as raw commodity.
- Extreme weather including drought, hail, and late spring freezes creates production risk, particularly during the organic transition period.
- Conventional grain infrastructure and cash rental markets create economic inertia against organic grain transition for large-scale eastern SD producers.

KEY TAKEAWAY

South Dakota's 290,000+ certified organic acres in grain, sunflowers, and rangeland make it an important supply state for the U.S. organic food system. On-state organic processing and value-added investment would dramatically increase the economic return of this production base to South Dakota farm families.

Resources for Farmers

South Dakota organic farmers are supported by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, South Dakota State University Extension, the South Dakota Organic Alliance, and the Central Plains TOPP region. These partners deliver certification, research, and technical assistance resources statewide.

SD Dept of Agriculture and Natural Resources

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- South Dakota Proud branding and marketing support for certified organic products
- NRCS South Dakota: EQIP Organic Initiative and Organic Transition Assistance
- Agricultural development grants for organic market and infrastructure projects

danr.sd.gov

South Dakota State University Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic grain, sunflower, beef, and soybean research and extension specialists
- SDSU organic systems research and northern plains dryland farming programs
- Soil health, cover cropping, and integrated weed management for organic producers
- Statewide extension network delivering local organic technical assistance in all counties

extension.sdstate.edu

South Dakota Organic Alliance

FARMER ADVOCACY & PEER LEARNING

- South Dakota's primary organic farmer advocacy and education network
- Annual SD Organic Alliance conference and farm tour programs
- Organic certification guidance and cost-share navigation for new and transitioning producers
- Farmer peer learning and mentorship for organic grain and livestock producers

sdorganicalliance.org

Central Plains TOPP (OCIA-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Serves CO, KS, ND, NE, OK, SD
- Paid organic mentor matching for grain, sunflower, beef, and soybean operations
- Workshops on organic grain transition, northern plains management, and certification
- Market access and organic buyer connection resources for South Dakota producers

organictransition.org/region/plains

DID YOU KNOW? SOUTH DAKOTA

Western South Dakota's Badlands and Black Hills region contains some of the most intact native rangeland in North America, creating ideal conditions for certified organic grass-fed beef production. The region's historically low chemical input use, native grass diversity, and vast open rangeland meet organic certification requirements with relatively lower transition barriers than crop ground. With premium organic and grass-fed beef markets growing steadily, South Dakota ranchers in the western grasslands are positioned to access significant price premiums over conventional cattle markets.

KEY SOURCES

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

South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Organic Program. SDANR, 2023.

South Dakota Organic Alliance. Programs and Resources. SDOA, 2023.

South Dakota State University Extension. Organic Agriculture Programs. SDSU Extension, 2023.