

Tennessee

Volunteer State organic growth spans tobacco-exiting farms, Appalachian produce, and Nashville markets



MIDWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A FARMER'S TOOLKIT
State Module | August 2026

Tennessee ranks 37th nationally with 119 certified organic operations and 5,338 certified acres. Tennessee's organic sector shares characteristics with its neighbor Kentucky in benefiting from the generational tobacco exit, with small farms transitioning to organic vegetables, herbs, and livestock across middle and eastern Tennessee. The Nashville metro area's explosive growth has created one of the Southeast's fastest-expanding premium organic food markets. Appalachian mountain farms in the east supply premium specialty vegetables and herbs, while the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's PickTN program supports direct-market access statewide.

119 CERTIFIED OPERATIONS	5,338 CERTIFIED ACRES	\$52M ORGANIC SALES	Growing SECTOR TRAJECTORY
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STATE PROFILE

AT A GLANCE

Certified operations	119 (37th nationally)
Certified organic acres	5,338
Organic sales value	\$52 million
Worker employment vs. conventional	+25%
Split operations	48% of farms

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop organic farm-to-restaurant and direct-to-consumer supply chains in Nashville, one of the South's fastest-growing metro areas with a booming food and beverage scene.
- Support tobacco-exiting farmers transitioning to organic vegetables, herbs, and livestock using existing small-farm skills and infrastructure.
- Expand organic produce and specialty crop production in east Tennessee to supply Knoxville, Asheville, and regional premium food markets.

TOP ORGANIC COMMODITIES

- ▶ **Vegetables & Herbs:** organic farms supply Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga markets.
- ▶ **Beef & Livestock:** pasture-rich counties support organic and grass-fed beef and pork.
- ▶ **Dairy:** middle Tennessee certified organic dairy serves regional co-ops.
- ▶ **Fruits & Berries:** Appalachian organic orchards and berry farms for premium buyers.

BARRIERS

- Former tobacco farm infrastructure requires retooling and new market relationships for organic vegetable and herb production alternatives.
- Hot, humid summers create significant pest and disease pressure requiring intensive organic management without well-established regional protocols.
- Limited organic cold storage and distribution infrastructure constrains small organic producer access to Nashville and other metro wholesale buyers.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Tennessee's combination of tobacco-transition farm expertise, three growing metro direct markets in Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga, and Appalachian mountain growing conditions for premium specialty crops gives its organic sector strong and diverse growth potential across the state.

Resources for Farmers

Tennessee organic farmers are supported by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, University of Tennessee Extension, the Tennessee Organic Growers Association, and the Midwest TOPP region. These partners deliver certification, technical assistance, market development, and farmer network resources statewide.

Tennessee Department of Agriculture

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS

- Organic Certification Cost Share: federal pass-through, up to \$750/yr
- PickTN branding and direct-market support program for certified organic products
- NRCS Tennessee: EQIP Organic Initiative and Organic Transition Assistance programs
- Agricultural development grants supporting organic market infrastructure and value-added processing

tn.gov/agriculture

University of Tennessee Extension

RESEARCH, EXTENSION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Organic vegetable, beef, dairy, fruit, and tobacco-alternative production specialists
- UT organic systems research and on-farm demonstration programs statewide
- Soil health, cover crops, and integrated pest management for organic transition
- 95-county extension network delivering local organic technical assistance across TN

extension.tennessee.edu

Tennessee Organic Growers Association

FARMER ADVOCACY & PEER LEARNING

- Tennessee's primary organic producer advocacy and peer learning network
- Annual TOGA conference and farm tour programs connecting organic producers
- Organic certification guidance and cost-share navigation for producers
- Farmer peer learning networks and market development for organic producers statewide

tnorganic.org

Midwest TOPP (MOSA-led)

MENTORSHIP & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Serves AR, IL, IN, IA, KY, MI, MN, MO, OH, TN, WI
- Paid organic mentor matching for vegetable, beef, dairy, and fruit operations
- Workshops on organic tobacco transition, Southeast pest management, and certification
- Market access and Nashville food hub connections for Tennessee organic producers

organictransition.org/region/midwest

DID YOU KNOW? TENNESSEE

Nashville's metropolitan area has been the fastest-growing large city in the United States for several consecutive years, generating one of the South's most rapidly expanding premium organic food markets.

The Nashville metro's influx of tech workers, healthcare professionals, and tourism visitors has created extraordinary demand for farm-to-table dining, organic grocery options, and premium food experiences.

Tennessee organic producers within a two-hour drive of Nashville are positioned to supply this high-growth market. UT Extension's farmer resources and Midwest TOPP's mentorship network are the bridge connecting Tennessee's transitioning farms with Nashville's booming organic appetite.

KEY SOURCES

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

Tennessee Department of Agriculture. Organic Certification Program. TDA, 2023.

Tennessee Organic Growers Association. TOGA Programs. TOGA, 2023.

University of Tennessee Extension. Organic Agriculture Programs. UT Extension, 2023.