

Fact Sheet:

Organic Specialty Crop Production



Why grow organic specialty crops?

The demand for organic fruits, vegetables, and herbs is steadily increasing, driven by consumer preference for chemical-free and locally grown food. Specialty crops like organic berries, heirloom tomatoes, and culinary herbs offer high-value market opportunities for farmers.

Organic crop production best practices



Soil health and fertility

Build soil organic matter through composting, crop rotation, and reduced tillage. Maintaining soil health is fundamental to organic production, as it enhances nutrient availability and supports beneficial soil organisms.



Weed management

Implement mechanical weeding, flame weeding, and mulching. Avoid synthetic herbicides. Effective weed management is crucial in organic systems to reduce competition for nutrients and light.



Pest and disease control

Use integrated pest management techniques, such as beneficial insects, neem oil, and disease-resistant crop varieties. Regular monitoring and preventive measures are key components of a successful strategy.



Water conservation

Employ drip irrigation and soil moisture monitoring to maximize efficiency and reduce water waste. Efficient water use is essential for sustainable specialty crop production, especially in regions with limited water resources.



Supply chain and input availability

- **Organic seed sourcing.** Locate suppliers early to prevent shortages. Using organic seeds ensures compliance with organic standards and supports the integrity of the organic label.
- **Equipment considerations.** Organic production often requires different equipment for weed control and soil health management. Investing in appropriate tools can enhance efficiency and effectiveness in organic farming practices.
- **Fertilizers and soil amendments.** Ensure compliance with organic regulations for soil amendments and fertilizers. Utilizing approved organic inputs maintains soil fertility while adhering to certification standards.



Financial support and resources

- **Natural Resources Conservation Services Environmental Quality Incentives Program Grants.** Financial assistance for high tunnels and conservation practices. These grants can support infrastructure improvements that enhance production efficiency and environmental stewardship.
- **Specialty Crop Block Grants.** Funding for research, marketing, and producer education. These grants aim to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by supporting various initiatives.
- **Organic Farming Research Foundation.** Support for scientific studies on organic farming. Research funding can lead to innovation and improved practices in organic specialty crop production.



Additional considerations

- **Market access.** Developing direct-to-consumer sales channels, such as farmers markets or community-supported agriculture, can enhance profitability and consumer engagement.
- **Certification process.** Understanding the organic certification process is crucial for compliance and market recognition. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program provides guidelines and resources for producers.
- **Risk management.** Implementing crop insurance and diversification strategies can mitigate financial risks associated with organic specialty crop production.



For comprehensive guidelines, refer to the USDA's "Guide for Organic Crop Producers."

