

## Fact Sheet:

# Transitioning to Organic Farming and Certification

## What is organic farming?

Organic farming is a production system that sustains soil health, ecosystems, and biodiversity without the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or genetically modified organisms. It prioritizes natural inputs, ecological balance, and long-term soil fertility. Farmers who transition to organic production often see benefits such as improved soil structure, reduced input costs, and access to premium organic markets.

## The transition process: what to expect

- **Transition period.** A 36-month transition period is required before land can be certified organic. During this time, all prohibited synthetic chemicals must be eliminated.
- **Develop an organic system plan.** This document outlines your farming practices, soil health strategies, pest and weed management, and recordkeeping processes.
- **Certification process.** Work with a U.S. Department of Agriculture-accredited certifying agent to complete an application, undergo an on-farm inspection, and receive compliance approval.
- **Recordkeeping.** Maintain detailed records of inputs, crop rotations, and management practices to ensure compliance.
- **Market development.** Research organic markets and sales channels early in the transition to ensure financial sustainability.



## Financial feasibility and risk management

- **Cost of transition.** Estimated costs vary, but transitioning an acre of land can include expenses for organic seed, soil amendments, and certification fees.
- **Yield expectations.** Expect a temporary reduction in yields as soil health rebuilds. Organic yields often stabilize or improve after transition.
- **Risk mitigation strategies.** Crop insurance options for organic growers, financial safety nets, and diversification strategies can reduce risks.
- **Organic price premiums.** Organic crops often fetch higher prices; securing buyers and contracts before transitioning is key to profitability.

## Market and infrastructure considerations



### **Finding organic buyers:**

Research potential buyers and secure contracts early in the transition process.



### **Storage and handling:**

Organic grains and products must be stored separately to prevent contamination.



### **Processing barriers:**

Locate organic-certified grain elevators, mills, and processors to ensure supply chain compatibility.

## Transition strategies for commodity crops

- **Side-by-side transitioning.** Keeping part of the farm conventional while transitioning other areas can help manage financial risk.
- **Cover crops and rotations.** Using nitrogen-fixing cover crops and diversified rotations helps improve soil health.
- **Intercropping and diversification.** Integrating specialty crops or organic livestock can provide additional income streams.



### Resources for transitioning and certification

- USDA Organic Certification Cost Share Program
- Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- USDA National Organic Program
- Organic Materials Review Institute for approved inputs