Breaking New Ground: Farmer Perspectives on Organic Transition

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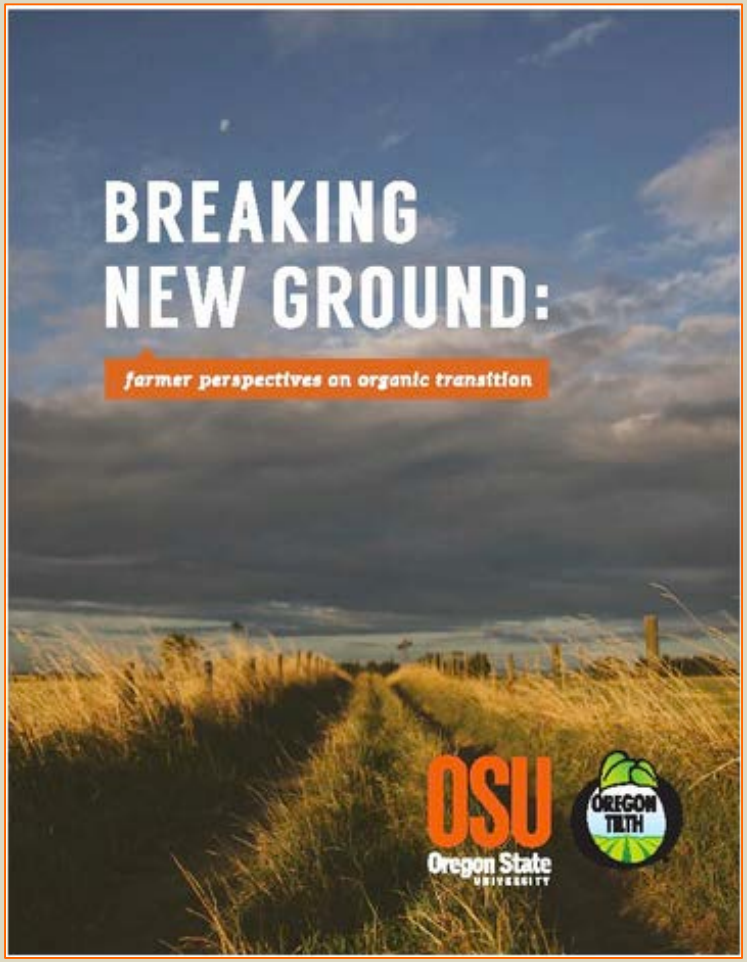

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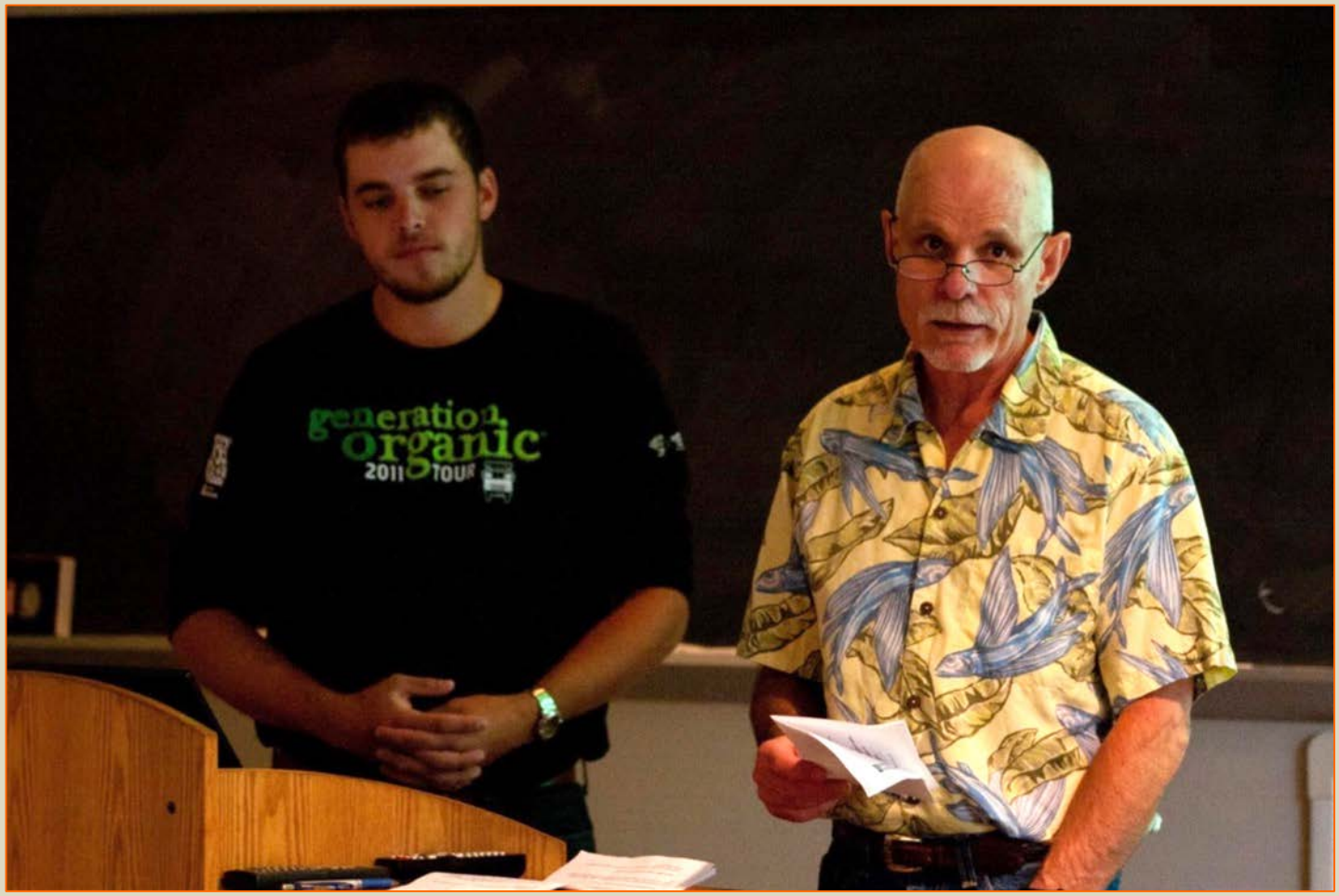

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What we do:

- Extension—programs for small farmers
- Research—sustainable farming and food systems
- Teach—college courses
- Collaborate—with food system and farm organizations
- Change—the world

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This Research

- Part of formal partnership between Oregon Tilth, Inc. and Oregon State University Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems.
- Oregon Tilth also has a partnership with USDA NRCS.
- Oregon Tilth is a leading nonprofit certifier, educator and advocate for organic agriculture. Their work focuses on certification, conservation, social equity, policy and the marketplace.

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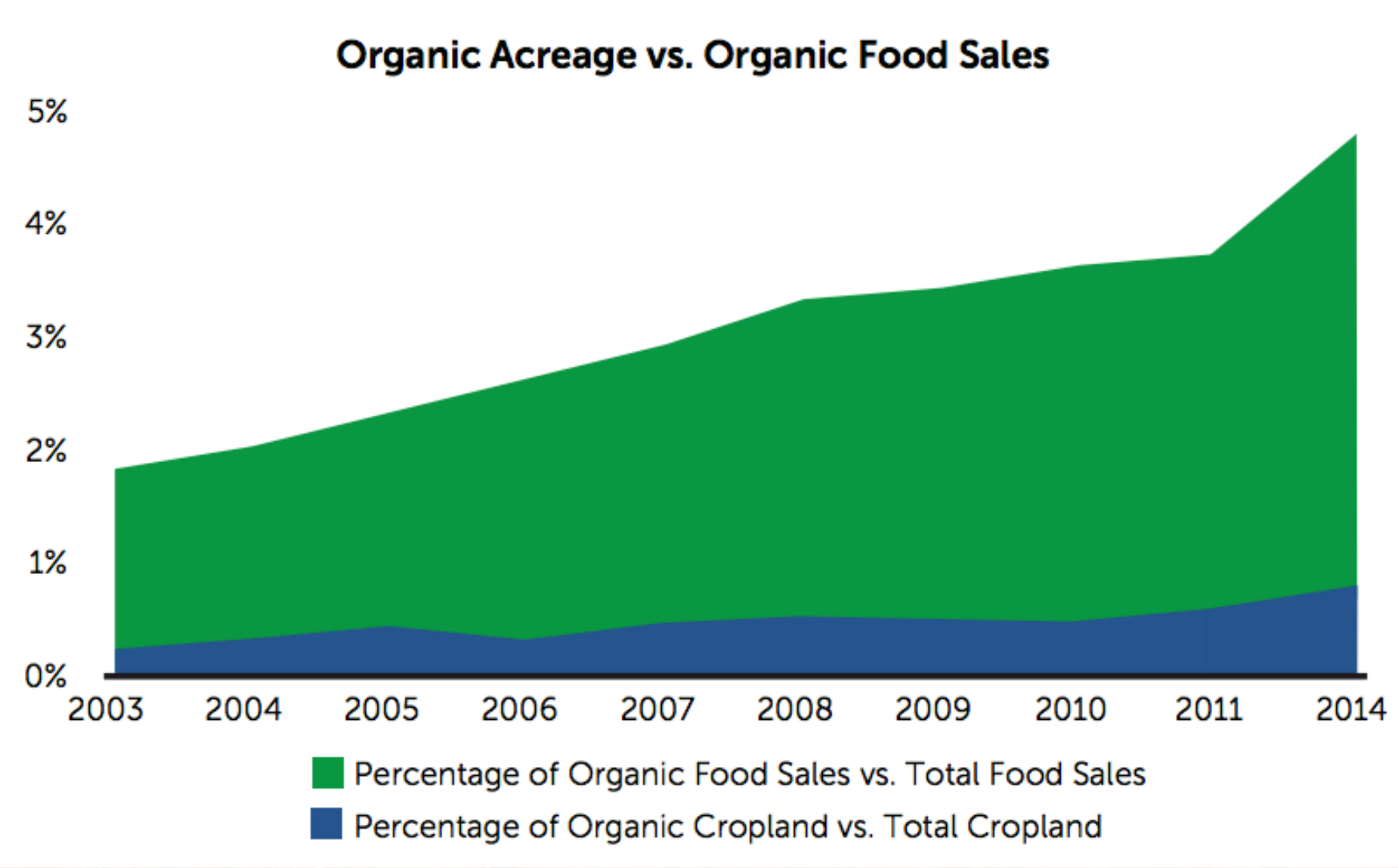
The Good News

- Market demand in the United States for certified-organic products has had double-digit growth almost every year since the implementation of the National Organic Program in 2002.
- In 2015, growth in the organic sector increased by nearly 11% to its largest dollar gain ever, for a market total of $43.4 billion (food and non-food).
- Nearly 5% of US food sales are certified organic.

(Organic Trade Association, 2015)

But…

- There is a lag in the growth of U.S. certified organic production. Less than 1% of total US cropland was certified organic in 2011 (USDA, 2013).
- This study offers one piece to the puzzle.


Organic Acreage vs. Organic Food Sales
5%
4%
3%
2%
1%
0%
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2014
Percentage of Organic Food Sales vs. Total Food Sales
Percentage of Organic Cropland vs. Total Cropland

(OTA, 2016)

- We surveyed farmers and ranchers who
  - Had an EQIP- OI contract with USDA-NRCS between 2010 and 2015, and
  - Self-identified as “transitional” participants in that program.
- The list included 1,829 farms. 615 farmers completed the questionnaire for an adjusted response rate of 34.2%.

We Asked

Demographic questions:

- Years farming
- Number of acres
- Cropping system
- Farming system relative to organic certification.

(Questions were based on previous surveys of organic farmers in U.S. and Canada)

Then, We Asked

Questions regarding:

- What **Motivated** them to transition to organic certification
- What **Obstacles** were encountered
- What **Resources** helped them
- What additional **Support** is needed

For this presentation

- I’m going to emphasize findings and recommendations related to technical assistance:
  - Segmenting farmers into categories
  - Highlighting motivations and obstacles for farmer categories
  - Resources and support for transition to organic certification

Characteristics of the Aggregate

- **Mostly smaller farms but larger also**
  - 60.5% farm fewer than 25 acres
  - 20% farm more than 100 acres
- **Mostly vegetables but a wide array of other crops**
  - 54.7% produce vegetables
  - 13.3% produce fruits or nuts
  - 32.0% produce extensive crops including: grains and legumes (12.6%), livestock (16.0%) and dairy (3.4%)

Characteristics of the Aggregate

- **Wide range of farming experience**
  - 55.5% have been farming fewer than 10 years (BFRs)
  - 27% have more than 20 years of experience
- **Wide range of ages**
  - Most farmers are middle-aged with nearly 60% between 46 and 65.
  - More than 25% are under 45 years old

Aggregate results are useful but do not tell the whole story

- We examined specific categories to see
  - How they are different in terms of their demographics
  - Whether & how those differences influence their responses regarding motivations, obstacles, resources, and support
  - This approach allows “market segmentation” that meets the needs and attitudes of specific groups

We found most compelling differences based on status of organic certification:

- 100% Certified Organic
- Transitioning to Certified Organic
- Split Certified Organic/Non-Organic
- Not Pursuing Organic Farming

We found most compelling differences based on status of organic certification:

- 100% Certified Organic
- **Transitioning to Certified Organic**
- Split Certified Organic/Conventional
- **Not Pursuing Organic Farming**

Thumbnails of Farmer Categories:

100% Certified Organic

- 27% of the sample.
- Half have less than ten years of experience, but 25% have 20 or more years' experience.
- Majority farm 25 or fewer acres but 25% are over 100 acres.
- 65% intensive crops and 35% extensive crops.

Thumbnails of Farmer Categories:

Transitioning farmers are

- 30% of sample.
- Do not have many years of farm experience (65% < 10 years)
- Are youthful (31% < 45) but still include middle-aged farmers,
- Operate mostly smaller farms (66% <25 acres)
- Produce vegetables (53%) but 32% extensive crops.

Thumbnails of Farmer Categories:

Split farms are

- 11% of sample.
- Most experienced (> 68% having 10 to 20 or more years of farming experience).
- Older (76% > 45)
- Larger farms (52% > 100 A)
- More extensive crops (37% grain and livestock).

Thumbnails of Farmer Categories:

Not Pursuing farmers are

- 16% of sample.
- Largely experienced (51% > 10 years).
- Oldest (86% > 45).
- They are smaller farms (61% < 25 A).
- Grow vegetables (52%) but high proportion of livestock (26%).

Motivations to Transition

Motivations

Values-based

- Fits my and/or my family's values
- Concerns about environment
- Potential enhancement of farm sustainability
- Concerns about human health

Market/Profit

- Access the expanding market for organics
- Potential increase in profit
- Specific market opportunity or contract from a buyer

Motivations

- All farmers ranked values over market/profit
- Significant differences in magnitude for some.

Motivations

Motivation (Percent)
Values-based
Fits my and/or my family's values
Concerns about environment
Potential enhancement of farm sustainability
Concerns about human health
Market/Profit
Access the expanding market for organics
Potential increase in profit
Specific market opportunity or contract from a buyer

Motivations

Motivation (Percent)	100% Certified Organic
Values-based	
Fits my and/or my family's values	95.0
Concerns about environment	90.1
Potential enhancement of farm sustainability	91.0
Concerns about human health	89.5
Market/Profit	
Access the expanding market for organics	59.7
Potential increase in profit	67.9
Specific market opportunity or contract from a buyer	34.2

Motivations

Motivation (Percent)	100% Certified Organic	Transitioning
Values-based		
Fits my and/or my family's values	95.0	92.9
Concerns about environment	90.1	92.3
Potential enhancement of farm sustainability	91.0	91.0
Concerns about human health	89.5	90.2
Market/Profit		
Access the expanding market for organics	59.7	**70.8***
Potential increase in profit	67.9	61.2
Specific market opportunity or contract from a buyer	34.2	34.9

Motivations

Motivation (Percent)	100% Certified Organic	Transitioning	Split
Values-based			
Fits my and/or my family's values	95.0	92.9	**75.4***
Concerns about environment	90.1	92.3	**75.0***
Potential enhancement of farm sustainability	91.0	91.0	**74.6***
Concerns about human health	89.5	90.2	**66.2***
Market/Profit			
Access the expanding market for organics	59.7	**70.8***	65.7
Potential increase in profit	67.9	61.2	60.6
Specific market opportunity or contract from a buyer	34.2	34.9	41.9

Motivations

Motivation (Percent)	100% Certified Organic	Transitioning	Split	Not Pursuing
Values-based				
Fits my and/or my family's values	95.0	92.9	**75.4***	**87.5***
Concerns about environment	90.1	92.3	**75.0***	**78.4***
Potential enhancement of farm sustainability	91.0	91.0	**74.6***	**78.4***
Concerns about human health	89.5	90.2	**66.2***	**72.6***
Market/Profit				
Access the expanding market for organics	59.7	**70.8***	65.7	52.0
Potential increase in profit	67.9	61.2	60.6	**51.6***
Specific market opportunity or contract from a buyer	34.2	34.9	41.9	27.5

Motivation Summary

- 100% Certified vs Transitioning
  - No difference in values
  - Transitioning significantly more motivated by “access to expanding market for Organics
- 100% Certified vs Split
  - Split farmers are significantly less motivated by all values
  - No difference on market/profit
- 100% Certified vs Not Pursuing
  - Not pursuing significantly less motivated by all values
  - 100% significantly more motivated by potential increase in profit.

Obstacles to Transition

Obstacles to Transition

Major, Minor, or Not

- Weed management
- Managing soil fertility
- Planning crop rotations
- Reduced yields
- Pest or disease control
- Cost of labor
- Cost of organic inputs
- Cost of organic certification
- Record keeping requirements of certification

- Availability of labor
- Availability of organic inputs
- Learning process
- Access to technical expertise
- Availability of organic processing facilities
- Obtaining adequate prices during transition
- Finding buyers/market for my organic products

A question like this is a little challenging to sort out meaningfully

Obstacle	Percent		
	Major	Minor	Not
Weed management	54.3	28.4	17.3
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification	30.6	48.1	21.3
Cost of organic inputs	29.4	46.6	23.9
Availability of organic inputs	18.1	45.6	36.3
Managing soil fertility	25.0	43.8	31.3
Cost of organic certification	19.5	43.3	37.2
Learning process	18.9	42.8	38.4
Pest or disease control	28.9	41.5	29.6
Availability of organic processing facilities	38.9	25.7	35.4
Obtaining organic price premiums	28.3	35.8	35.8
Availability of labor	26.5	38.1	35.4
Obtaining organic price information	24.2	37.3	38.5
Finding buyers/market for my organic products	16.0	29.0	54.9
Planning crop rotations	11.0	34.4	54.5
Reduced yields	17.6	31.0	51.4
Access to knowledgeable technical expertise on organic production	19.3	37.9	42.9
Obtaining adequate prices during transition	24.6	32.6	42.8
Cost of labor	32.0	27.5	40.5

Obstacle	Percent		
	Major	Minor	Not
Major Obstacle			
Weed management	**54.3**	28.4	17.3
Minor Obstacle			
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification	30.6	**48.1**	21.3
Cost of organic inputs	29.4	**46.6**	23.9
Availability of organic inputs	18.1	**45.6**	36.3
Managing soil fertility	25.0	**43.8**	31.3
Cost of organic certification	19.5	**43.3**	37.2
Learning process	18.9	**42.8**	38.4
Pest or disease control	28.9	**41.5**	29.6
No Clear Trend			
Availability of organic processing facilities	38.9	25.7	35.4
Obtaining organic price premiums	28.3	35.8	35.8
Availability of labor	26.5	38.1	35.4
Obtaining organic price information	24.2	37.3	38.5
Not an Obstacle			
Finding buyers/market for my organic products	16.0	29.0	**54.9**
Planning crop rotations	11.0	34.4	**54.5**
Reduced yields	17.6	31.0	**51.4**
Access to knowledgeable technical expertise on organic production	19.3	37.9	**42.9**
Obtaining adequate prices during transition	24.6	32.6	**42.8**
Cost of labor	32.0	27.5	**40.5**
Orange = Major; Yellow = Minor; Grey = No Clear Trend; Green = Not an Obstacle.			

Farm Level
Weed management
Pest or disease control
Learning process
Managing soil fertility
Reduced yields
Planning crop rotations
Local & Regional Infrastructure
Cost of organic inputs
Availability of organic inputs
Availability of labor
Cost of labor
Access to technical expertise
Availability of organic processing facilities
Marketplace
Obtaining organic price premiums
Obtaining adequate prices during transition
Obtaining organic price information
Finding buyers for organic products
Administrative/Policy
Cost of organic certification
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification
Totals

Arrange into domains

	Full Sample	100% Certified	Transi-tioning	Split	Not Pursuing
Farm Level					
Weed management					
Pest or disease control					
Learning process					
Managing soil fertility					
Reduced yields					
Planning crop rotations					
Local & Regional Infrastructure					
Cost of organic inputs					
Availability of organic inputs					
Availability of labor					
Cost of labor					
Access to technical expertise					
Availability of organic processing facilities					
Marketplace					
Obtaining organic price premiums					
Obtaining adequate prices during transition					
Obtaining organic price information					
Finding buyers for organic products					
Administrative/Policy					
Cost of organic certification					
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification					
Totals					

	Full Sample	100% Certified	Transi-tioning	Split	Not Pursuing
Farm Level					
Weed management					
Pest or disease control					
Learning process					
Managing soil fertility					
Reduced yields					
Planning crop rotations					
Local & Regional Infrastructure					
Cost of organic inputs					
Availability of organic inputs					
Availability of labor					
Cost of labor					
Access to technical expertise					
Availability of organic processing facilities					
Marketplace					
Obtaining organic price premiums					
Obtaining adequate prices during transition					
Obtaining organic price information					
Finding buyers for organic products					
Administrative/Policy					
Cost of organic certification					
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification					
Totals					
Orange = Major;					

	Full Sample	100% Certified	Transi-tioning	Split	Not Pursuing
Farm Level					
Weed management					
Pest or disease control					
Learning process					
Managing soil fertility					
Reduced yields					
Planning crop rotations					
Local & Regional Infrastructure					
Cost of organic inputs					
Availability of organic inputs					
Availability of labor					
Cost of labor					
Access to technical expertise					
Availability of organic processing facilities					
Marketplace					
Obtaining organic price premiums					
Obtaining adequate prices during transition					
Obtaining organic price information					
Finding buyers for organic products					
Administrative/Policy					
Cost of organic certification					
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification					
Totals					
Orange = Major; Yellow = Minor;					

	Full Sample	100% Certified	Transi-tioning	Split	Not Pursuing
Farm Level					
Weed management					
Pest or disease control					
Learning process					
Managing soil fertility					
Reduced yields					
Planning crop rotations					
Local & Regional Infrastructure					
Cost of organic inputs					
Availability of organic inputs					
Availability of labor					
Cost of labor					
Access to technical expertise					
Availability of organic processing facilities					
Marketplace					
Obtaining organic price premiums					
Obtaining adequate prices during transition					
Obtaining organic price information					
Finding buyers for organic products					
Administrative/Policy					
Cost of organic certification					
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification					
Totals					

Orange = Major; Yellow = Minor; Green = Not an Obstacle.

	Full Sample	100% Certified	Transi-tioning	Split	Not Pursuing
Farm Level					
Weed management					
Pest or disease control					
Learning process					
Managing soil fertility					
Reduced yields					
Planning crop rotations					
Local & Regional Infrastructure					
Cost of organic inputs					
Availability of organic inputs					
Availability of labor					
Cost of labor					
Access to technical expertise					
Availability of organic processing facilities					
Marketplace					
Obtaining organic price premiums					
Obtaining adequate prices during transition					
Obtaining organic price information					
Finding buyers for organic products					
Administrative/Policy					
Cost of organic certification					
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification					
Totals					
Orange = Major; Yellow = Minor; Grey = No Clear Trend; Green = Not an Obstacle.					

	Full Sample	100% Certified	Transi-tioning	Split	Not Pursuing
Farm Level					
Weed management	X	X	X	X	X
Pest or disease control		X		X	X
Learning process	X	X	X	X	X
Managing soil fertility	X	X	X	X	X
Reduced yields				X	
Planning crop rotations					
Local & Regional Infrastructure					
Cost of organic inputs	X	X	X	X	X
Availability of organic inputs	X	X		X	X
Availability of labor		X			
Cost of labor				X	X
Access to technical expertise				X	
Availability of organic processing facilities					X
Marketplace					
Obtaining organic price premiums	X		X	X	X
Obtaining adequate prices during transition			X		
Obtaining organic price information	X		X	X	
Finding buyers for organic products					
Administrative/Policy					
Cost of organic certification	X	X	X	X	X
Recordkeeping requirements of organic certification	X	X	X	X	X
Totals	**9**	**9**	**9**	**13**	**11**
Orange = Major; Yellow = Minor; Grey = No Clear Trend; Green = Not an Obstacle.					

Resources for Transition

Resources

- Information on organic pest, disease, and weed management
- Information on soil health management for organic farms
- Information on effective organic crop rotations
- Information on organic crop varieties
- Information on organic markets
- Market development for organic products
- Organic and/or transition crop enterprise budget templates
- Financial planning tools for transitioning to organic
- Advance contracts from buyers during transition
- Certified transition label

Resource	100% Certified
Information on organic pest, disease, and weed management	**1**
Information on soil health management for organic farms	**2**
Information on effective organic crop rotations	**3**
Information on organic markets	**4**
Information on organic crop varieties	**5**
Market development for organic products	6
Organic and/or transition crop enterprise budget templates	7
Financial planning tools for transitioning to organic	8
Advance contracts from buyers during transition	9
Certified transition label	10

Resource	100% Certified	Trans.
Information on organic pest, disease, and weed management	**1**	**1**
Information on soil health management for organic farms	**2**	**2**
Information on effective organic crop rotations	**3**	7
Information on organic markets	**4**	**3**
Information on organic crop varieties	**5**	8
Market development for organic products	6	**4**
Organic and/or transition crop enterprise budget templates	7	9
Financial planning tools for transitioning to organic	8	**5**
Advance contracts from buyers during transition	9	10
Certified transition label	10	6

Resource	100% Certified	Trans.	Split
Information on organic pest, disease, and weed management	**1**	**1**	**1**
Information on soil health management for organic farms	**2**	**2**	**3**
Information on effective organic crop rotations	**3**	7	**5**
Information on organic markets	**4**	**3**	**2**
Information on organic crop varieties	**5**	8	6
Market development for organic products	6	**4**	**4**
Organic and/or transition crop enterprise budget templates	7	9	10
Financial planning tools for transitioning to organic	8	**5**	8
Advance contracts from buyers during transition	9	10	7
Certified transition label	10	6	9

Resource	100% Certified	Trans.	Split	Not Pursuing
Information on organic pest, disease, and weed management	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Information on soil health management for organic farms	**2**	**2**	**3**	**2**
Information on effective organic crop rotations	**3**	7	**5**	**5**
Information on organic markets	**4**	**3**	**2**	**3**
Information on organic crop varieties	**5**	8	6	6
Market development for organic products	6	**4**	**4**	**4**
Organic and/or transition crop enterprise budget templates	7	9	10	9
Financial planning tools for transitioning to organic	8	**5**	8	8
Advance contracts from buyers during transition	9	10	7	7
Certified transition label	10	6	9	10

Resource	100% Certified	Trans.	Split	Not Pursuing
Information on organic pest, disease, and weed management	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Information on soil health management for organic farms	**2**	**2**	**3**	**2**
Information on effective organic crop rotations	**3**	7	**5**	**5**
Information on organic markets	**4**	**3**	**2**	**3**
Information on organic crop varieties	**5**	8	6	6
Market development for organic products	6	**4**	**4**	**4**
Organic and/or transition crop enterprise budget templates	7	9	10	9
Financial planning tools for transitioning to organic	8	**5**	8	8
Advance contracts from buyers during transition	9	10	7	7
Certified transition label	10	**6**	9	10

Support for Transition

Support for Transition

Support
Mentoring from experienced organic farmers
One-on-one technical assistance during transition
In person workshops or short courses
Books or other printed materials
Online courses or webinars

Support for Transition

Support	100% Certified	Trans.	Split	Not Pursuing
Mentoring from experienced organic farmers	1	1	1	1
One-on-one technical assistance during transition	1	3	3	2
In person workshops or short courses	3	2	2	3
Books or other printed materials	4	5	5	5
Online courses or webinars	5	4	4	4

Recommendations

Outreach:

- *Adopt a value-based approach to appeal to a wider audience of farmers*
- *Focus outreach to specific groups for greater success*
- *Keep an eye on the special needs of Transitioning farmers*
- *Provide individualized, in-person support*

Recommendations

Technical Assistance and Research:

- *Develop more effective weed and other pest management strategies*
- *Study the relationship between yield and successful transition*

Conclusion

Our results make it clear that there is plenty of work to do by a wide variety of organizations and agencies working in the organic sector that have specializations in crop research, farmer education, infrastructure development, market development, and policy development.


Questions?