



MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

What is Organic Agriculture?

Using tools that mimic nature, organic farmers enhance the health of their environment, resulting in pure and nutritious food. Organic agriculture uses an array of cultural and biological practices to build soil fertility, manage weeds and pests, enhance recycling of nutrients and increase biodiversity. Rather than substituting approved inputs for non-approved inputs, organic farmers continuously improve their farm system by building and balancing their soils that then produce vibrant crops and robust livestock. Organic certification, with annual inspection and review, verifies growers' and processors' compliance with USDA regulations.

Organic Production

Organic production systems emphasize proactive, knowledge-based management, on-farm resources and recognition of our interdependency with nature. Diverse crop rotations interrupt insect, pest, disease and weed problems, reducing the need for off-farm inputs. The wisdom from centuries of agriculture combined with the latest science and understanding of natural systems results in a sustainable method of food and fiber production to feed our world for generations to come.

Organic production systems are designed to:

- Maximize biological activity of the soil and minimize soil erosion
- Provide livestock with healthy feeds and living conditions
- Minimize the use of nonrenewable resources
- Minimize agricultural pollution
- Respond to site-specific challenges by using natural methods and materials

Using an organic systems approach, an organic farmer might manage crop pests first by improving the fertility of the soil with green manures and a diverse crop rotation. This would attract beneficial organisms, including soil microorganisms, birds and insects. As a last resort in solving problems, an organic farmer might apply an approved biological or botanical pesticide (not a synthetic one).



Organic farmers continuously improve their farm system by building and balancing their soils so they produce vibrant crops and robust livestock.

Organic farmers use on-farm resources whenever possible. Composts, livestock manures and plowed-down legume crops improve organic matter and provide nutrients. Mechanical cultivation, crop rotations, use of mined soil amendments and cover crops are used to control weeds and pests. Raw manure applications to organic crops for human consumption are regulated to prevent pathogenic contamination.

Farmers promote animal health through sound nutrition based on organic feeds, lush pastures, proper housing, minimal stress and preventive health care practices. Allowing animals to express their natural behavior and giving them freedom of movement and access to the outdoors results in strong immune systems for all species and exceptional longevity for organic dairy cattle.

Organic agriculture prohibits the use of non-approved synthetic herbicides, fertilizers and pesticides. Growth hormones, antibiotics and slaughter by-products are not allowed in organic livestock production. Federal organic rules prohibit the use of genetically modified organisms,

sewage sludge (biosolids) or irradiation. Items on the National Organic Program's National List of approved synthetics and prohibited natural inputs adhere to strict environmental, human health and organic compatibility criteria.



Consumers are demanding more and more organically grown food and products.

Organic Certification

The USDA organic law requires all organically labeled products meet the organic regulation. Operations that sell over \$5,000 a year in organic products must also have an annual inspection and be certified as organic. Both private and state run agencies certify operations as organic. Documentation of inputs, crop and livestock activities, harvests and sales must be done in order to verify compliance.

To qualify for organic certification, prohibited materials (including prohibited fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified crops) must not have been applied to organic crops or the soil in which the crops are grown for a minimum of 36 months prior to an organic harvest. Dairy animals must be under full organic management for one year before producing organic milk. Meat animals must be certified organic from last third of gestation. All ruminants must receive a significant portion of their nutrition from grazing, when seasonally appropriate. Day-old chicks can be purchased from any source but then managed organically to produce organic poultry products.

Marketing

Organic food and fiber is the fastest growing segment of agriculture in the United States, with growth for the past 14 years averaging between 8-20%. Both their own health, as well as the health of the environment, motivates consumers to pay a higher price (between 10-100% premium) for organic foods. The upper Midwest has marketing cooperatives, food processors, farmers markets, schools and other buyers for organic milk, grains, meats, eggs and fresh or processing vegetables. Organic products are found in mainstream supermarkets as well as specialty natural food stores. Organic foods have gained a reputation of high quality, great flavor and superior nutrition. With increasing concerns about genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, and pesticide residues the organic market is expected to continue to grow.

MIDWEST ORGANIC
& Sustainable Education Service
MOSES

The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) provides education and resources to farmers to encourage organic and sustainable farming practices. To learn more, please see:

www.mosesorganic.org