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This project is a collaborative effort between the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) and the National Organic Coalition (NOC).

OFRF is a national nonprofit organization that fosters the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems. OFRF takes a three-prong approach to this work, leveraging on-farm research, grower education, and advocacy to bring more farmers and acreage into organic production. Through these efforts, we are working to create a more resilient and sustainable agricultural system that values healthy environment and healthy people. https://ofrf.org/

The National Organic Coalition (NOC) is a national alliance of organizations working to provide a "Washington voice" for farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, consumers, and others who care about organic agriculture. NOC seeks to advance organic food and agriculture and ensure a united voice for organic integrity, which means strong, enforceable, and continuously improved standards. NOC provides information and educational opportunities about the multiple health, environmental, and economic benefits that organic agriculture provides. The coalition works to assure that policies are fair, equitable, and encourage diversity of participation and access. https://www.nationalorganiccoalition.org/

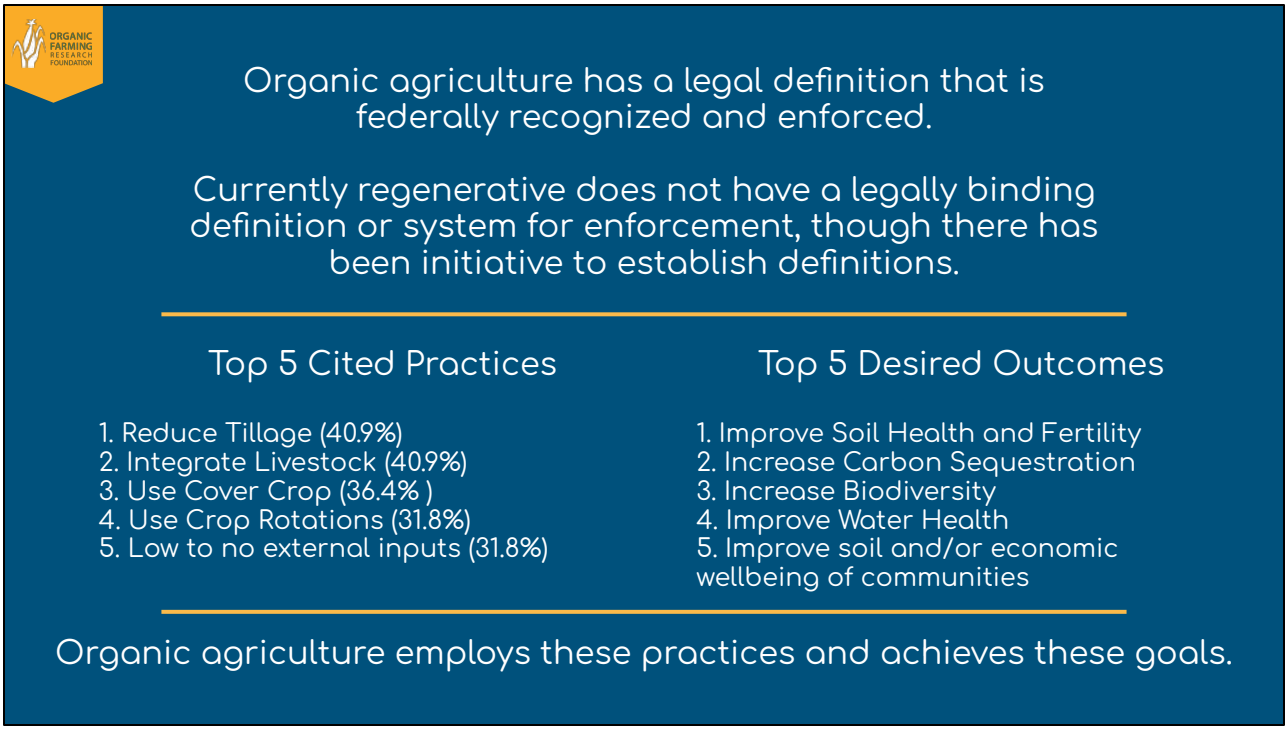
Consumers are showing an increasing interest in understanding the environmental impact of their food choices. Meanwhile, farmers, who are on the front lines of climate change, are actively exploring farming practices that can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

This means we are at a unique moment to promote transformative farming practices that can address these issues through research, education, and on-farm trials. However, it's important to expand our understanding of the farming systems responsible for generating these benefits and how to effectively scale up these systems. Organic farmers are among the original regenerative innovators, yet organic is often overlooked as a climate solution.

You may have heard the term "regenerative" buzzing around a lot lately. Although it has gained widespread traction among farmers and the food industry, definitions of the term vary widely. Unfortunately in some cases it is being picked up by conventional agriculture that adopts a single conservation practice such as no-till and labels it regenerative.

When practiced well, organic and regenerative agriculture share similar principles and goals of strengthening ecosystems and communities.

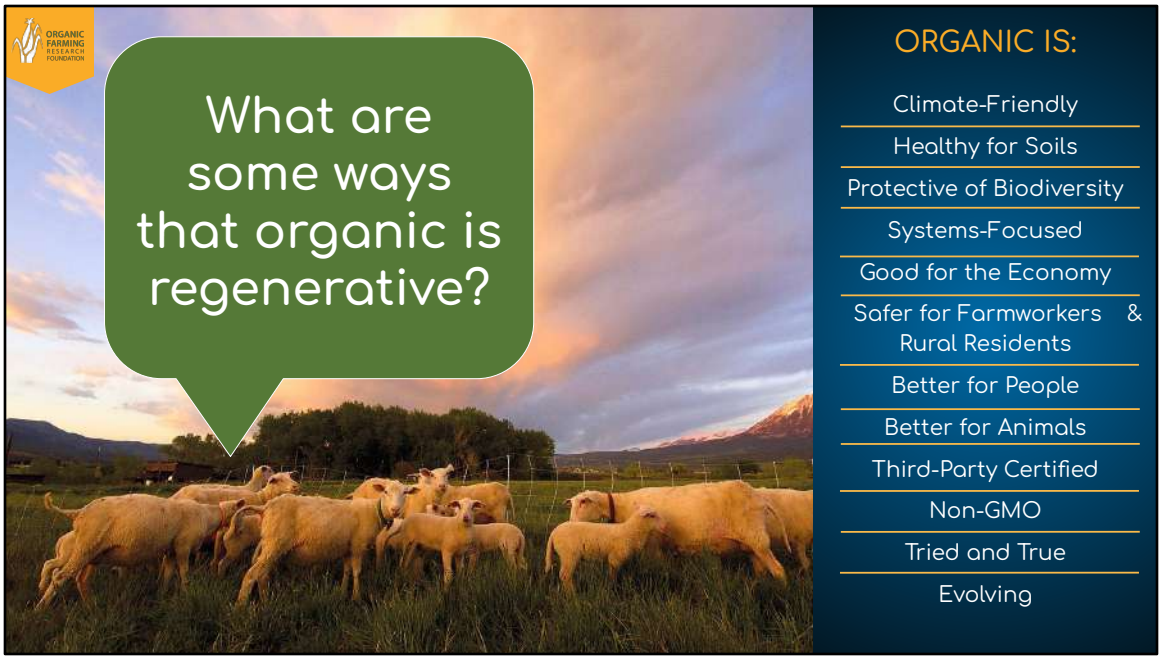
OFRF is working to help articulate the benefits of organic by sharing the latest science on pesticides, soil health, and biodiversity and by clarifying the regenerative aspects of the organic standards. By continuing to promote advocacy, education, and research around organic farming we can further achieve these shared goals.



The NRDC conducted a Scientific Literature Review of Journal Articles on the term "regenerative agriculture." Looking at 229 sources they identified the 5 top cited practices associated with regenerative agriculture and their desired outcomes.

Organic farmers have long been engaged in systems-based regenerative approaches. Yet organic is often overlooked in the conversation about climate solutions.

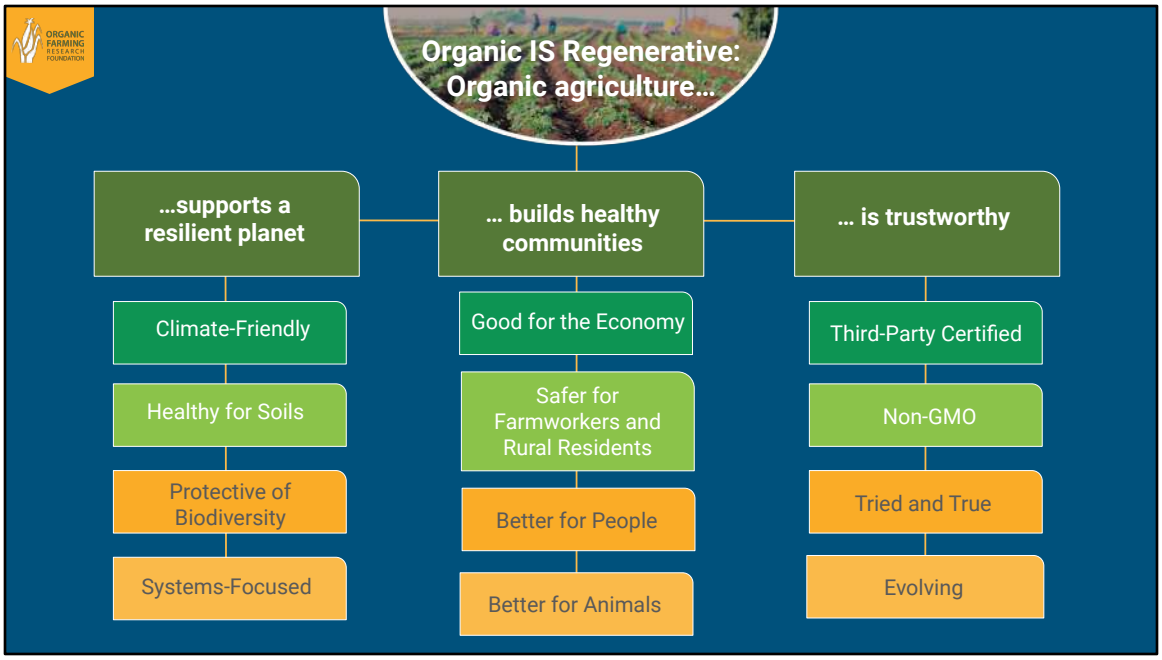
Organic agriculture has a clear legal definition, is grounded in principles that collaborate with nature, foster healthy soil, and contribute to clean water, biodiversity, and thriving farm communities; it shares many of the same principles and goals of regenerative farming. It is the original climate smart agriculture.



In our research for this project we began with an extensive review of the messaging that already exists around organic & regenerative agriculture and the synergies between them. We found consistent evidence that when practiced well, organic *is* regenerative.

It's important to note that we intentionally focused on the positive aspects of organic practices, highlighting what it is rather than what it isn't. While we recognize that organic isn't perfect, organic is one of the best tools we have right now to provide a verifiable framework for sustainable and regenerative farming.

Our goal with this information is to provide resources to equip you to respond to any questions about the merits of organic practices and their contribution to regenerative land stewardship.



We distilled what we found into three main themes or categories, and significant concepts that accompany them. The three themes are: Organic agriculture supports a resilient planet; Organic agriculture builds healthy communities, and Organic agriculture is trustworthy.

This slide provides a map of the messaging we developed. It shows the overarching idea that organic is regenerative, followed by the three key concepts, and then their associated themes below those. We're going to zoom in on these categories and themes one by one.

Let’s look closer at the first theme, which is Organic Supports a Resilient Planet. This theme includes concepts that Organic Is: Climate Friendly, Healthy for Soils, Protective of Biodiversity, and Systems-Focused. Let’s look a little closer at these.

Organic farming practices offer immense potential for climate mitigation and resilience.

Organic is Climate-Friendly: organic farming reduces greenhouse gas emissions and builds climate resilience.

Supporting statement: “Organic agriculture is a climate-friendly food production system that offers an enormous opportunity to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.” - National Resource Defense Council, Grow Organic report.

Evidence: “Nearly 90% of organic farmers use cover crops, which protect soil, help sequester carbon, and prevent erosion. Organic growers also lead the way in crop rotation, intercropping, and green manures, all of which are research-backed methods to improve resilience and increase fertility.” - OFRF’s National Organic Research Agenda

Additional evidence:

- Research indicates that organic farming systems can sustain higher levels of soil organic carbon (SOC) and have lower per acre GHG emissions than conventional systems (Schonbeck 2020; Crystal-Ornelas et al., 2021, as cited in Vélez testimony)
- The deeper, more biologically active soils of mature organic systems that have higher SOC can improve crop and livestock resilience to drought and other

- weather extremes. (Lori et al., 2017, as cited in OFRF soils report, pg 24)
- Organic is among the most comprehensive and time-tested agricultural systems for mitigating and adapting to climate change, and it has the benefit of being enforced through a rigorous legal standard. (7 CFR Part 205, Subpart E as cited in NRDC report, pg 14, ref 60)
- The USDA NOP Climate-Smart Agriculture Crosswalk course has additional information on how organic farming practices sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions based on scientific research. (https://usda.blackboard.com/bbcswebdav/courses/NOP-997/HTML/pages/Climate-SmartAgriculture.html)
- OFRF's Organic for Climate toolkit also provides additional resources for Consumers, Advocates, and Policymakers (https://ofrf.org/organicforclimate/)

Organic is Healthy for Soils: organic farming practices contribute to the long-term fertility of the soil.

Supporting statement: Maintaining and improving healthy soil is a core requirement of organic agriculture, making organic agriculture a key tool in addressing climate change.

Evidence: The USDA National Organic Program Standards mandate best conservation management practices, including diversified crop rotation, cover cropping, careful nutrient management, and other practices to build Soil Organic Carbon and protect soil health. - from USDA National Organic Program Final Rule, as cited in OFRF soils report, pg 13.

Additional evidence:

- NOP standard: §205.203 Soil Fertility and Crop Nutrient Management Practice Standard. “(b) The producer must manage crop nutrients and soil fertility through rotations, cover crops, and the application of plant and animal materials.” (Retrieved from https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-I/subchapter-M/part-205?toc=1)

- Organic farmers also grow cover crops, which keeps the soil under vegetative cover for longer periods of time, preventing wind and water from carrying away topsoil. (Snapp et al., 2005 and Hartwig & Ammon, 2002, as cited in CCOF report, pg 24, ref 158, 159)
- As a consumer, unless you are buying directly from a farmer who you know personally, the USDA Organic label is the only way to know that these sustainable practices are in use. (Notes from partner at GM)

A note on Tillage in Organic Systems

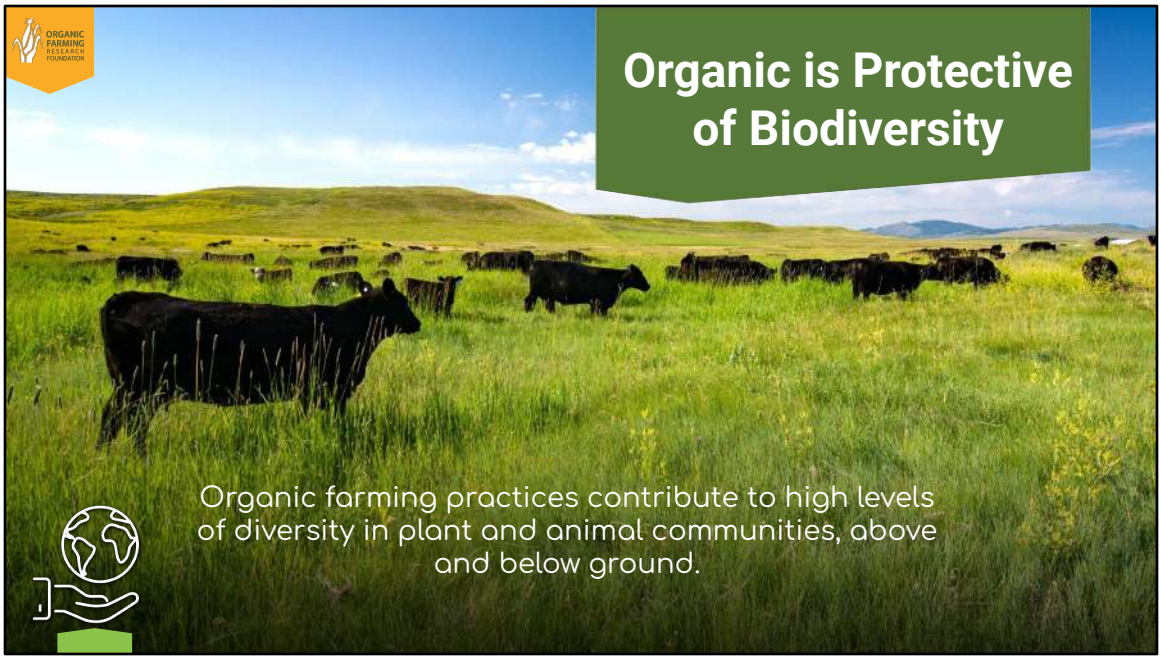
Research has shown that judicious use of shallow cultivation does not negatively impact most of the soil profile and can benefit soil microbial biomass.

Concern is often expressed that tillage breaks up soil aggregates and fungal networks, or can harm larger soil organisms including earthworms, and accelerates the decomposition of SOM. However, evidence shows that use of some selective tillage, as employed by many organic farmers to help control weed pressure has minimal negative consequences.

** Reducing tillage to a degree that is practical for organic crop production enhances soil microbial biomass (fungal + bacterial) more effectively than continuous no-till **

In a recent meta-analysis comparing: 1. reduced tillage (defined as non–inversion and <6 inches) and 2. no tillage against conventional tillage, the authors found that reduced tillage supported double the microbial biomass compared to conventional systems, while strict no-till increased fungal biomass by only 25%.
(Morugán-Coronado et al., 2022)

Shallow tillage has less negative impact on soil life and soil health than deep inversion tillage, and shallow tillage in conjunction with organic practices can enhance SOM (Cooper et al., 2016; Zuber and Villamil, 2016).



Organic is Protective of Biodiversity: organic farming practices contribute to high levels of diversity in plant and animal communities, above and below ground.

Supporting statement: Fostering robust populations of diverse plants, animals, insects, and soil-dwelling organisms is a fundamental principle of organic production. - Guidance: Natural Resources and Biodiversity Conservation, 2016, as cited in CCOF, pg 25, ref 184

Evidence: Research has found that organically managed lands have higher rates of both species richness and abundance when compared to conventional cropping systems.

Additional evidence:

- A comprehensive meta-analysis shows that organic farming significantly increases populations of beneficial insects, birds, and soil-dwelling organisms, as well as non-bird vertebrates (mammals, reptiles, etc.) and plants. (Crowder et al., 2012, as cited in CCOF report, pg 26, ref 187)
- Organic farmers are also required to preserve and protect biodiversity and natural resources, with the aim of replenishing or maintaining ecological

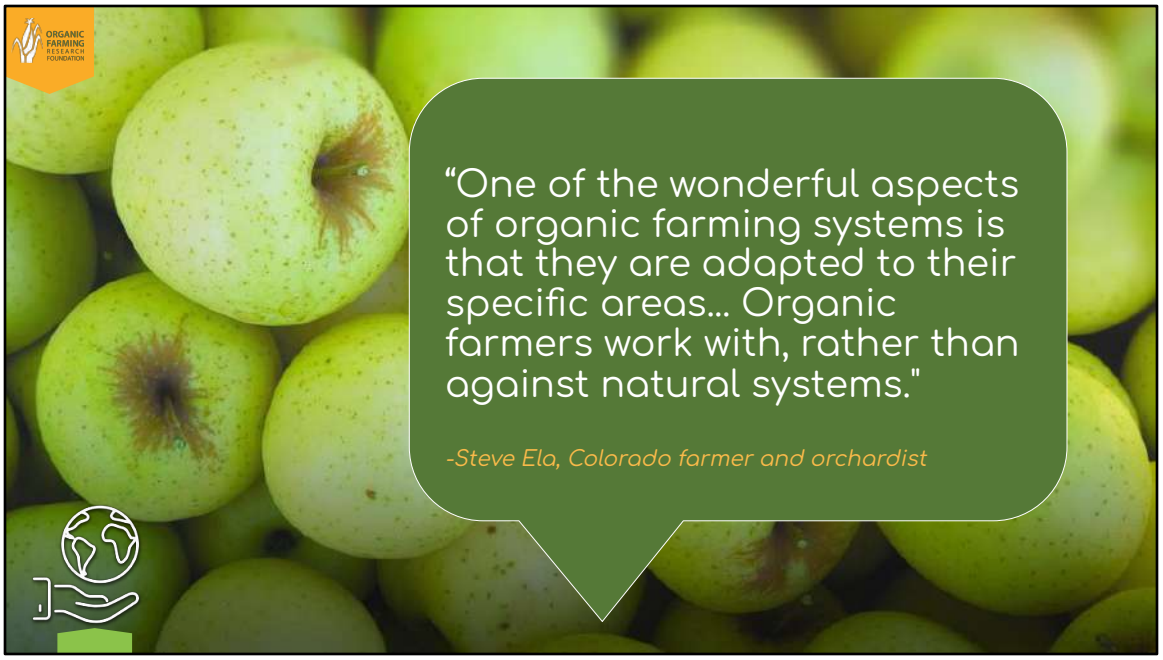
- balance on farms. (USDA National Organics Program, as cited in NRDC report, pg 7, ref 5)
- Bees benefit the most from organic management, though other arthropods and birds also benefit (Tuck et al. 2014; Bengtsson and Weibull 2005; Seufert and Ramankutty 2017).
- Below ground biodiversity also benefits from organic management: a meta-analysis looking at differences in soil microbial abundance found that organic systems had 32% to 84% greater microbial biomass carbon, microbial biomass nitrogen than conventional systems (Lori et al. 2017)

Organic is Systems Focused: organic agriculture is based on whole-systems thinking, not on any single practice.

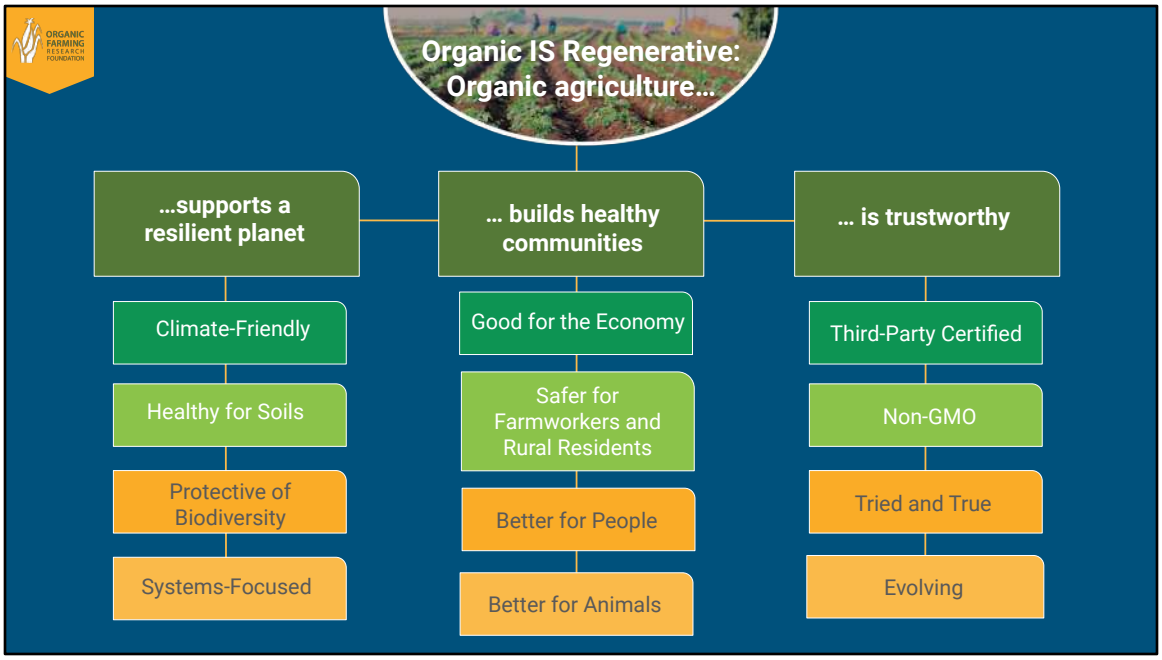
As the Organic Farmers Association put it: “Organic farms are managed in concert with natural systems to enhance the ecology of our local ecosystems, including clean air, water, soil, and food.”

Supporting statement: “In organic production, overall system health is emphasized, and the interaction of management practices is the primary concern.” -Organic Agriculture Overview, USDA

Evidence: "Organic agriculture is a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It emphasizes the use of management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs, taking into account that regional conditions require locally adapted systems." - (Farmers Advocating for Organics/World Health Organization, Codex Alimentarius Commission, 1999, as cited in https://www.fao.org/organicag/oa-faq/oa-faq1/en/)



This quote was part of testimony that Steve Ela shared to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in 2022.
https://www.nationalorganiccoalition.org/blog/2022/12/14/steve-ela-testifies-before-congress



Zooming back out to our map, we're going to move on to the second theme: Organic Agriculture builds healthy communities.

The concepts in this category are that organic is: good for the economy, safer for farmworkers and rural residents,better for people, and better for animals. We'll go through those one-by-one.

Organic is Good for the Economy: organic agriculture provides economic benefits and opportunities for growth.

Supporting statement: "Organic food sales in the United States in 2022 broke through $60 billion for the first time, hitting another high-level mark for the resilient organic sector. Total organic sales – including organic non-food products, were a record $67.6 billion, according to the 2023 Organic Industry Survey released by the Organic Trade Association."

As an over $67 billion sector of the U.S. economy, organic farms and businesses create jobs throughout the supply chain.

Evidence: The organic sector is expected to remain stable or grow as generations who are conscious about health and the environment prioritize purchasing organic food for their families, especially their children. (Organic Trade Association, 2017, as cited in CCOF report, pg 17, ref 96)

Additional evidence (share if desired):

- While more research is necessary, there is some Data that shows that the organic sector creates jobs, contributes to local economic development, and

- reduces poverty rates, while raising median household incomes. (CCOF report, pg 11) There is a connection between organic farming “hot spots” and economic growth in communities.
- Farms that sell locally buy most of their inputs and services from nearby businesses and have proportionally higher local labor expenditures, which recirculates dollars within the community and generates downstream employment. (Shideler et al., 2018, and Hughes & Boys, 2015, and Pinchot, 2014., as cited in CCOF report, pg 14, ref 70, 71, 72, 73)
- With 20% higher average crop prices, organic price premiums contribute to profitable organic farms across the nation and have been an important incentive for farmers to transition to certified organic production. (Greene et al., 2017, McBride et al., 2015, Crowder & Reganold 2015, Chavas et al., 2009, Cavigelli et al., 2013, and Greene & Vilorio 2018, as cited in CCOF report, pg 13, ref 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23)
- For farms that are able to offer year-round employment, there is an added benefit to farmworker families. Farmworkers on organic farms express that year-round employment is “very valuable to them” because a secure job in one place provides the basis for a safe and stable family life and allows their children to receive an education without constant interruption. (Hamerschlag & Strolich, 2006, as cited in CCOF report, pg 34, ref 337)

Organic is Safer for Farmworkers and Rural Residents: organic protects the health of farmers, farmworkers, and people in agricultural areas.

Supporting statement: Organic farming contributes to a non-toxic environment that protects the health of farmers, farmworkers, and eaters.

Evidence: Organic farmers guard health by avoiding nearly all synthetic pesticides and fertilizers commonly used in conventional farming, which ensures that people are less exposed to harmful chemicals, whether in their workplaces, in their communities, or at the dinner table. (NRDC report, pg 23)

Additional evidence (share if desired):

- Organic farms can use only natural inputs, like compost and natural pesticides. Any proposal to use a synthetic input in organic agriculture must meet strict criteria—including that the substance and its breakdown products will not adversely affect human health. (7 CFR § 205.105., 7 CFR § 205.600, as cited in NRDC report, pg 23, ref 134, 135)
- Certifiers review all inputs that organic farmers plan to use and conduct random tests to ensure that no prohibited pesticides are used. Organic

- producers must also meet very strict pesticide residue standards. (7 CFR §§ 205.670, 205.671. as cited in NRDC report, pg 26, ref 181)
- There are additional benefits to communities around organic farms who have access to organic food products, because eating organically grown foods has documented health benefits. (Branch, Consumer Reports (online), 2019, as cited in NRDC report, pg 27, ref 184) (More info on reduced exposure to pesticide residue through consuming organic foods available there.)

This quote is from the Roadmap to an Organic California, Benefits Report, produced by California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF):

“Given the cancer, neurodevelopmental, and other health risks associated with synthetic pesticides, organic agriculture is an important alternative approach for protecting farmworkers and their families.” (CCOF report, pg 35)

Organic is Better for Animals: organic farming prioritizes healthy animals.

Supporting statement: Organic management reduces stress, reducing the incidence of diseases and supporting animal welfare.

Organic Livestock Standards
- Fed an all-organic diet free of antibiotics and hormones.
- Ruminants required to graze on organic pasture at least 120 days a year.
- Year-round access to the outdoors, fresh water, clean air, shelter, and exercise areas.

(Livestock health care practice standard, 2018. https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&SID=e5f6fa6eed887c3ad28f21f4068e1e51&rgn=div8&view=text&node=7:3.1.1.9.32.3.354.12&idno=7)

USDA is currently finalizing new organic animal welfare standards, the 'Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards' rule. These standards include changes to ensure outdoor access in organic poultry production. This is an example of the way...that the National Organic Standards are designed to be evolving and improving with use over time.

Additional evidence (share if desired):

- Studies show that organic farms harbor fewer antibiotic resistant microbes than their conventional counterparts and that organic meats are less likely to be contaminated with antibiotic resistant bacteria than conventional meat products. (Sapoka et al., 2014, Sapoka et al., 2011, Lestari et al., 2009, Cui et al., 2005, Luangtongkum et al., 2006, as cited in CCOF report, pg 32, ref 269, 270, 271, 272, & 273)
- Use of antibiotics and hormones is prohibited in organic production. Instead, organic producers must use holistic practices to maintain the health of livestock, such as providing a forage-based diet on certified organic pasture for at least 120 days per year; providing adequate space and year-round access to outdoors; allowing livestock to engage in natural behaviors; and choosing appropriate breeds based on site-specific conditions such as resistance to the region's prevalent diseases and parasites. (Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production, 2018, and Livestock health care practice standard, 2018, as cited in CCOF report, pg 32, ref 267 & 268)

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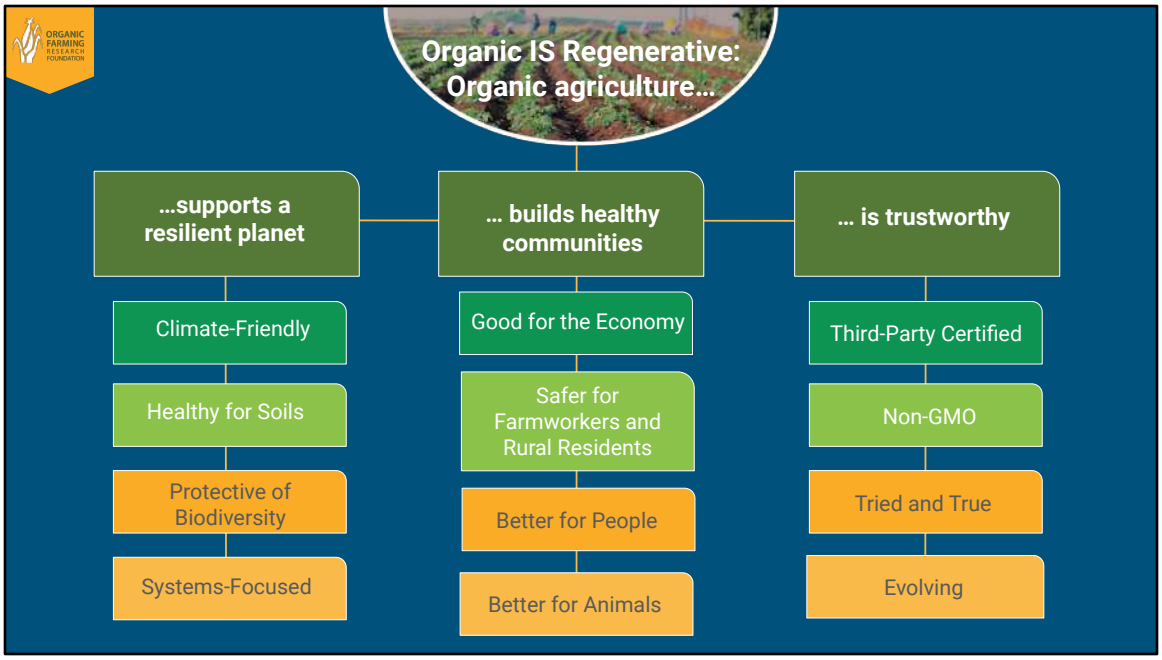

Zooming back out to our map, we're going to move on to the third and final theme: Organic Agriculture is trustworthy.

The concepts in this category are that organic is: third-party certified, non-GMO, tried and true, and evolving. Let’s take a closer look.

Organic is Third-Party Certified: the national organic program (NOP) provides integrity and accountability.

Supporting statement: Organic farming has a clear and accepted legal definition which makes it a solid tool for holding farmers and food producers accountable to sustainable practices, and letting consumers know what they are supporting with their food purchases.

Evidence: In order to sell products labeled "organic" farmers and food processors must undergo a rigorous certification process which includes working with a USDA-accredited third-party certifier who reviews a comprehensive organic systems plan and conducts annual inspections.

Additional evidence:
Any agricultural product sold, labeled, or advertised as organic in the United States must be produced in compliance with the federal Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 and the USDA National Organic Program. (National Organic Program, 2018, CCOF report, pg 8, ref 1)

These practices ... were codified in the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA).

Pursuant to OFPA, USDA created the National Organic Program (NOP), which establishes protocols to safeguard organic integrity, including rigorous scientific review of allowed inputs and ingredients and third-party oversight to ensure that everyone follows the rules. (Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 as cited in NRDC report, pg 6, ref 3)

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Organic is Tried and True: organic agriculture is time-tested and scientifically supported.

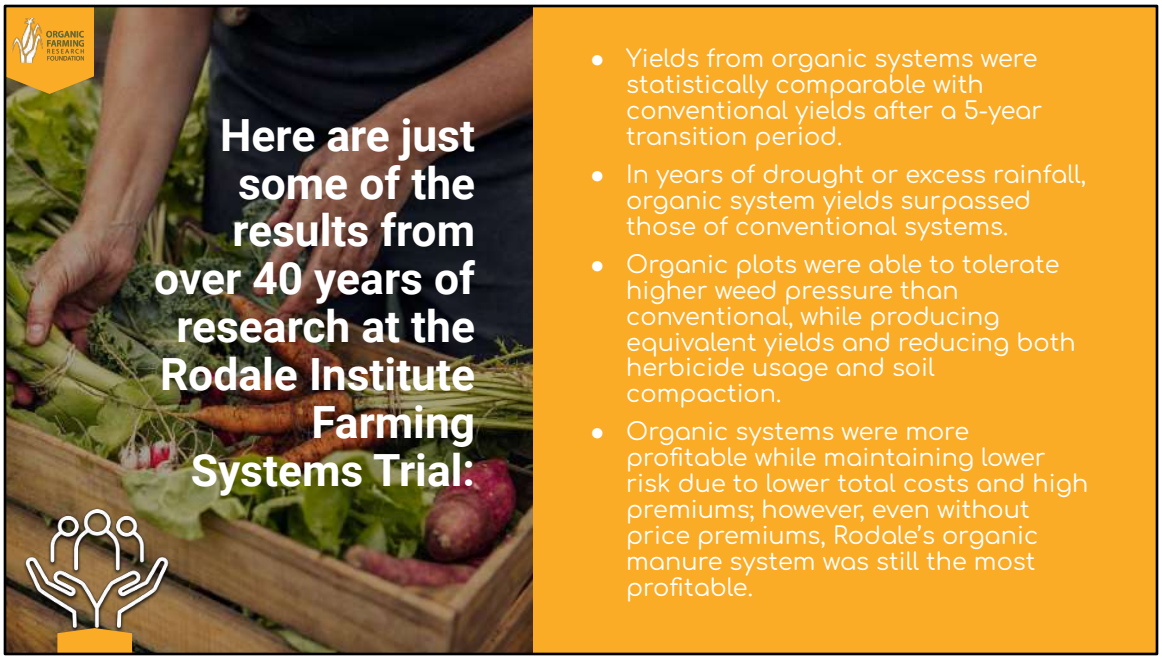
From the National Resource Defense Council's Grow Organic report: "Organic agriculture is a time-tested, scientifically supported approach to farming and ranching that centers ecological diversity, soil fertility, and natural systems."

Organic farming is not new, Indigenous Cultures the world over have been practicing organic methods of caring for land and cultivating crops since time immemorial. Many of the methods used in organic farming today have their roots in Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous farming practices.

Evidence: The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA) created a National Organic Program (NOP) that provides a consistent framework and third-party certification system for agricultural products labeled "organic," informed by decades of experience of farmers and ranchers, soil and plant scientists, food system workers, environmentalists, and consumers. (NRDC report, pg 4)

Additional evidence (use if desired):
The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) is a Federal Advisory Board made up of

15 public volunteers from across the organic community. The NOSB considers and makes recommendations on a wide range of issues involving the production, handling, and processing of organic products. The NOSB also has special responsibilities related to the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. (https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/nosb)



The Rodale Institute recently released a Farming Systems Trial 40-Year Report outlining the myriad of research that has taken place over the last four decades at their site, showing that in their experience organic systems not only have the capacity to feed the world, but to increase the bottom lines of farmers and keep harmful chemicals out of our food system. As with any research study, the findings are mainly applicable to that region, soil type, and specific agronomic system.

Organic is Evolving and Improving: the organic standards are designed to be responsive to changing needs.

Supporting statement: There are built-in pathways for improvement within the organic standards, which means they can continue to evolve.

Evidence: Established by the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) and governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), the NOSB considers and makes recommendations on a wide range of issues involving the production, handling, and processing of organic products. The NOSB also has special responsibilities related to the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. (https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/nosb)

For example, the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) final rule, was passed in 2023, in response to NOSB recommendation, to reduce fraud in the organic marketplace; strengthen oversight of organic producers, handlers, and certifiers; and improve USDA's enforcement mechanisms.

"The SOE rule is the biggest update to the organic regulations since the original Act in 1990, providing a significant increase in oversight and enforcement authority to

reinforce the trust of consumers, farmers, and those transitioning to organic production," Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt (https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/strengthening-organic-enforcement)

Another example is the Pasture Rule, which was passed in 2010 and amended the requirements for “livestock feed and living conditions.” It states that “producers are required to: provide year-round access for all animals to the outdoors, recognize pasture as a crop, establish a functioning management plan for pasture, incorporate the pasture management plan into their organic system plan (OSP), provide ruminants with pasture throughout the grazing season for their geographical location, and ensure ruminants derive not less than an average of 30 percent of their dry matter intake (DMI) requirement from pasture grazed over the course of the grazing season.”

A more recent example of organic standards being amended and improved over time is the Origin of Livestock Rule, which was passed in 2022. From the USDA: "The U.S. Department of Agriculture published the highly anticipated Origin of Livestock (OOL) final rule for organic dairy. This change to the USDA organic regulations will promote a fairer and more competitive market for all organic dairy producers, by making sure that certified USDA organic dairy products are produced to the same consistent standard. 'This action demonstrates the USDA’s strong commitment to America’s organic dairy farmers,' Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. 'The Origin of Livestock final rule provides clear and uniform standards about how and when livestock may be transitioned to organic dairy production, and how transitioned animals are managed within the organic dairy system. Now, all organic dairy livestock producers will have the confidence and certainty they are operating in a fair and competitive market'." (https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/03/29/usda-publishes-origin-livestock-final-rule-organic-dairy#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20Origin%20of%20Livestock%20final,within%20the%20organic%20dairy%20system)

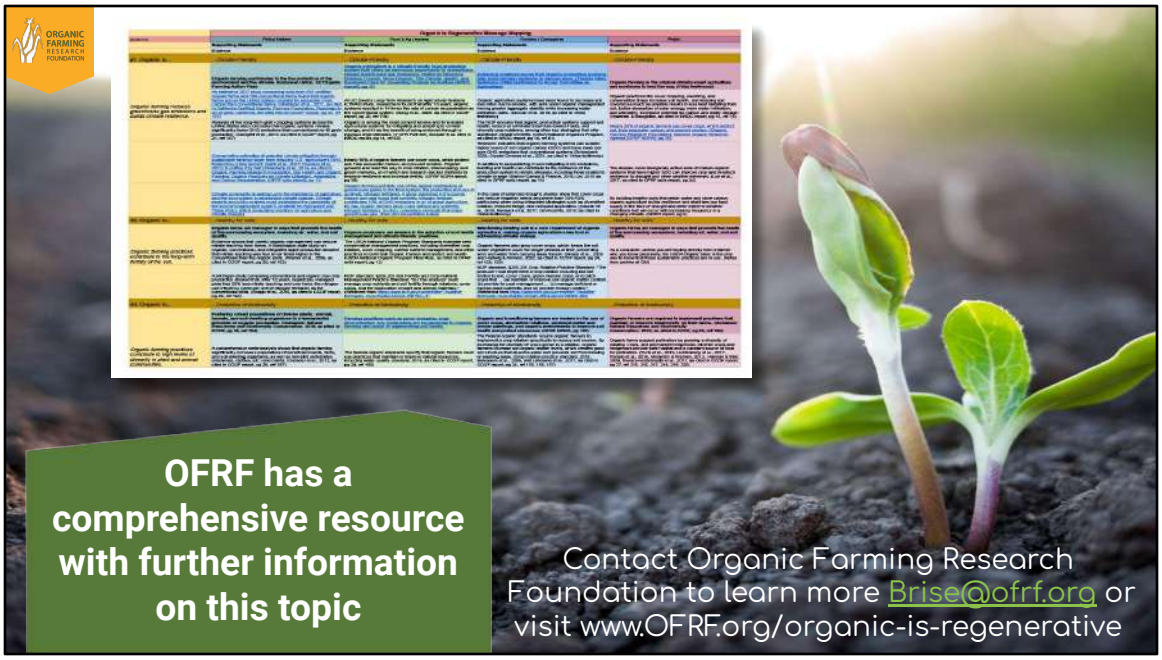
Another example is the Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) rule, which passed in January 2024. This rule amends the organic standards around animal welfare by describing living conditions, healthcare, transportation, and slaughter practices that support animal welfare for mammalian livestock, and establishes indoor and outdoor poultry space requirements and stocking density limits, and clarify that enclosed porches will not be considered outdoor space for this requirement. Organic producers need to be in compliance with this new ruling by January 2025. (https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic-livestock-and-poultry-standards)

Organic farming practices support the same goals as regenerative farming: building healthy ecosystems and communities. And organic farming does this in a way that already has a clear legal definition, and scientific backing.

It is critical that we continue to invest in organic agricultural research, practices, and farmers.

OFRF reviewed dozens of resources in the process of creating these messaging materials. We have created a spreadsheet that includes a full list of resources, but there were a few that we drew on the most heavily, including:

- OFRF's Soil Health and Organic Farming report
- OFRF's National Organic Research Agenda
- CCOF's Roadmap to an Organic California report
- NRDC's Grow Organic; the Climate, Health, and Economic Case for Expanding Organic Agriculture Report



The Organic is Regenerative message mapping spreadsheet and the Organic is Regenerative toolkit from OFRF are available to help you learn more about these topics and share these messages with others. Visit www.OFRF.org/organic-is-regenerative to access the toolkit. We welcome feedback, comments and questions on this messaging toolkit. Contact brise@ofrf.org