



Photo credit: Randy Tunnell

## Organic Farming, Here and Now

**I**n August 2012, the **Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF)** commissioned a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on organic agriculture in the United States and Canada. The review included more than 125 journal articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals from 2000 to 2012 as well as reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Rodale Institute, the United Nations, the Organic Trade Association, and the Organic Center. The result is a 75-page report, **Organic Farming for Health and Prosperity**.

At a glance, the report clearly shows that organic farming practices are beneficial for human health, economic prosperity, healing

the environment, and slowing climate change. Yet, several key challenges persist that inhibit organic farming's growth. Consequently, the **OFRF** is working to develop an integrated, unified policy both to support organic farming and to spread the word about its many advantages to society.

This document is a summary of the **Organic Farming for Health and Prosperity** report, with compelling, broad-ranging information to inspire consumers and retailers to invest in organic. This summary can also begin educating government officials, policymakers, and other community leaders about the extraordinary benefits to be derived from organic farming.

To read the full report, visit [ofrf.org](http://ofrf.org).

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**ORGANIC  
FARMING  
RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION**





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## Putting Organic Policies to Work

Increasing organic farmers and acreage through low- or no-cost changes to the current agricultural system will support a thriving economy, people, and planet.

Unfortunately, many farmers and associated businesses view the conversion from conventional to organic as difficult or cost prohibitive. But practical, attainable, and affordable solutions and resources are at hand.

We – that is, governments, investors, educators, and consumers – must structure policies that support sustainable types of agriculture that reliably produce crops, livestock, and more while maintaining natural resources. Here's how:

- ▶ **Policy Priority #1:**  
Increase funding for organic farming research
- ▶ **Policy Priority #2:**  
Provide fair and appropriate insurance options for risk management
- ▶ **Policy Priority #3:**  
Promote government and institutional procurement of organic food
- ▶ **Policy Priority #4:**  
Create a robust organic transition assistance program
- ▶ **Policy Priority #5:**  
Create environmental markets
- ▶ **Policy Priority #6:**  
Improve conservation programs

To read about each priority in detail, visit [ofrr.org/organic-priorities](https://ofrr.org/organic-priorities).



## Organic Farming Does Well as It Does Good

The benefits of organic farming extend exponentially beyond delivering delicious nourishment and quality agricultural goods to markets worldwide.

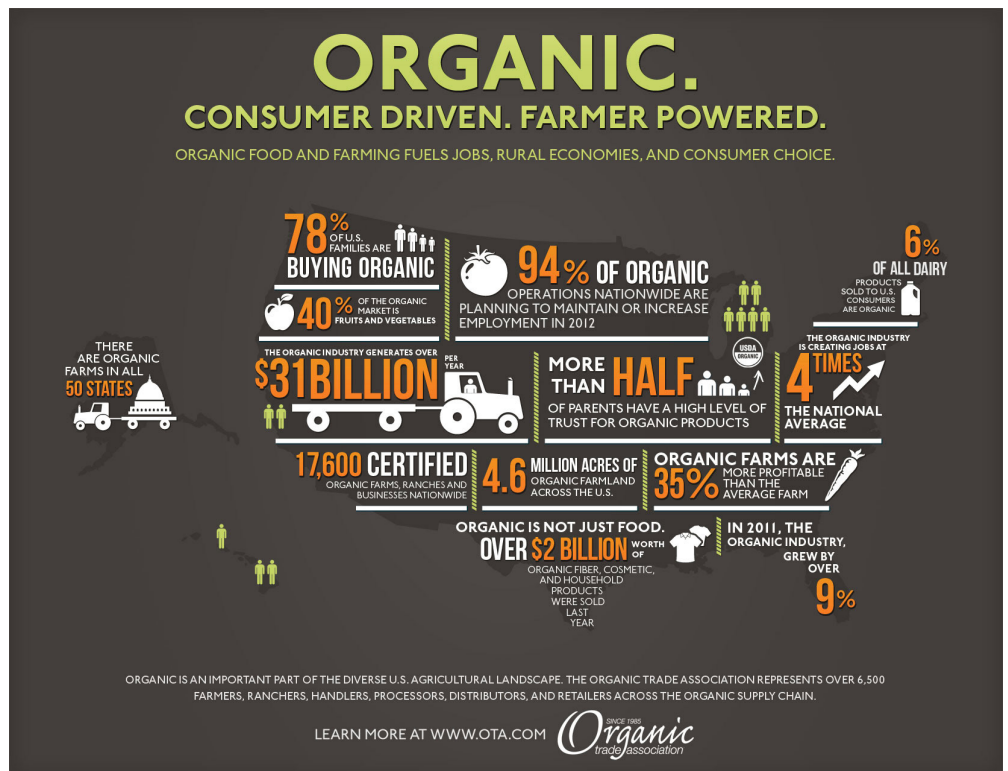
### Improves Land and Water

Excessive tillage and the use of synthetic materials – a destructive cycle of fertilizers, pesticides, and fumigants – have severely damaged American soil. Organic farming practices such as crop rotation, growing cover crops, and using animal manures can rebuild soil quality, enhance microbial activity, and cycle the nutrients needed to produce high-quality crops and forages.

Because agriculture is dependent upon water availability, agricultural practices in turn impact water quality. Research shows that organic farming contributes to cleaner water – from local waterways to lakes and even oceans – by using biological fertilizers that release nutrients slowly, build soil organic matter, increase soil water-holding capacity, and reduce leaching of nitrates into groundwater.



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### Enhances Biodiversity

Certified organic farmers in the United States are legally required to conserve biodiversity on their farms. This means that both above—and below—ground biological communities must provide genetic diversity for crops and livestock while maintaining well-functioning and productive ecosystems.



Because of their reliance on diversified cropping systems, organic farms support larger populations of beneficial organisms, such as songbirds and native bee pollinators, than do non-organic farms. Organic farms also encourage balanced populations of beneficial insects that help keep crop pests under

control, as well as an array of soil macro- and micro-organisms that decompose dead and waste materials and recycle nutrients.

But more than birds, insects, and other crop-friendly organisms benefit from organic farming. When the health of an environment is improved, all living beings associated with that environment thrive and flourish.



## Slows Climate Change

Global warming is one of the biggest threats to life on earth today. Accelerated climate change has already increased the frequency and intensity of droughts, floods, heat waves, and major storms. Our current destabilized climate changes affect crop production and water availability, causing hunger, malnutrition, and social unrest worldwide.

Scientists have expressed a sense of urgency about the need to mitigate release of greenhouse gases before further destructive, catastrophic changes occur in the world's environment. Organic farming can effectively mitigate climate change by increasing carbon sequestration in the soil, reducing greenhouse gas release, and consuming less fossil fuel. Evidence also shows that not only can organic agriculture help slow climate change, the farms themselves are more resilient and fare better under global warming conditions than non-organic farms can possibly do.



Organic farming practices can rebuild soil quality.



## Grows a Healthy Economy

For investors, the organic agricultural sector is one of the few fields that demonstrates consistent growth over the last decade. In fact, the organic industry grew from \$3.6 billion in 1997 to \$31.5 billion in 2011, and it continues to grow.

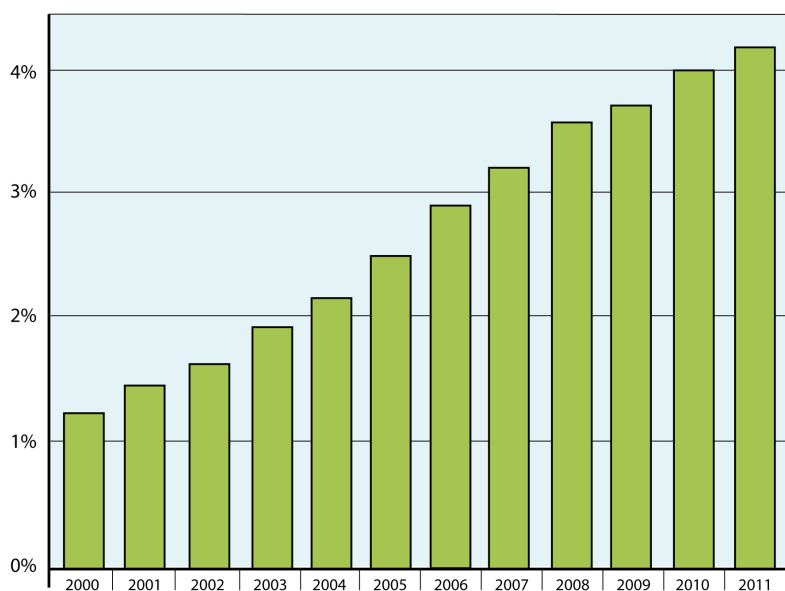
For farmers, organic agriculture is profitable because the demand for organic foods vigorously outpaces supply and yields a high price premium. Since owners of 78% of the organic farms in the United States report they plan to maintain or increase their organic production levels over the next five years, this sector will continue to play a contributing role in revitalizing America's rural economy.

For communities, organic agriculture presents great opportunity for communities to hire people, provide jobs, and deliver healthful food.

How we thoughtfully build infrastructure to meet consumer demand for organic in areas of research, education, and policy will shape our ability to sustain a viable and prosperous country.

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ORGANIC PRODUCTS' SHARE OF TOTAL US FOOD SALES



Based on data from Organic Trade Association 2011



Now is the time to change our country's current agricultural policies, which do relatively little to support organic farmers and, in some cases, work against their interests.

OFRF builds the vital infrastructure that supports the success of organic farmers. Our four areas of focus are:

- ▶ **RESEARCH** – Provide research that is relevant and responsive to organic farmers' needs
- ▶ **POLICY** – Grow organic champions in Congress and federal agencies
- ▶ **EDUCATION** – Integrate organic farming programs into all agricultural universities
- ▶ **COMMUNITY** – Cultivate a broader and deeper connection among organic supporters



P.O. Box 440, Santa Cruz, CA 95061 | 831-426-6606

## The Time for Support is Now

Now is the time to change our country's current agricultural policies, which do relatively little to support organic farmers and, in some cases, work against their interests. By building a broad, deep base of support for organic farming, and by increasing the number of champions for organic farmers in Congress and federal agencies, we can help make America stronger and healthier.

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) is the only national nonprofit champion of the American organic family farmer. Founded in 1990, OFRF is hard at work both in the fields and on the Hill. In addition to promoting organic champions in Congress, OFRF integrates organic farming in agricultural universities, provides research that is responsive to organic farmers' needs, and partners with organizations to secure the connection between organic farming and a healthy planet.

To learn more and read the full 75-page **Organic Farming for Health and Prosperity** report, visit [ofrf.org](http://ofrf.org).

Thank you for furthering the success of this vital work. **Support organic and tell a friend.**