

Summary: Organic Agriculture and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

Market Opportunities for Certified Organic Production

Strong demand for certified organic production continues to outstrip domestic supplies. This results in increased imports of organic products, especially in grains and livestock feeds. For BFRs, this market opportunity for U.S. organic products may be particularly attractive but may also come with distinct challenges, ranging from limited agronomic information to limitations of USDA risk-management and financing programs.

Secretary Vilsack has directed all USDA agencies to reduce obstacles in their programs for organic production and marketing, and better provide information to existing and prospective organic operators. One example of this effort is the internal USDA training on “organic literacy” which has been completed by over 30,000 USDA employees. As implementation of the Secretary’s directive continues, the impact for BFRs remains to be assessed.

Queries

In general, how can USDA do better to inform BFRs about options for organic production, and facilitate success when they choose to enter the organic market? Specifically:

- What are the information gaps for BFRs about organic production and markets?
- What obstacles are encountered by BFRs in USDA programs regarding organic production?
- Do BFRs encounter specific financing and credit obstacles related to organic production?
- What are BFRs’ concerns about organic certification and USDA National Organic Program regulations?

Key Resources:

- www.usda.gov/organic. This is the main directory for all USDA programs related to organic production and markets. Produced by the USDA Organic Working Group.
- www.ams.usda.gov/nop. This is the main page for the National Organic Program (part of the Agricultural Marketing Service), including standards and certification instructions.
- www.ams.usda.gov/OrganicInfo. “Is Organic an Option for Me?” training modules, resource guide, and other “organic literacy” materials.