OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER
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Organic Farms: Growing in New York

Numbers of Farms, Acreage and Sales All on the Rise

Consumer interest in organic products has grown in recent years, as reflected by rising sales nationwide—with a 56 percent increase in New York from 2008 through 2014. The number and total acreage of organic farms in New York also rose over that period, despite nationwide declines.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), organic production involves food or other agricultural goods that are produced through approved methods including cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity. Organic production includes farms and ranches as well as food production and handling facilities.[1]

USDA promotes organic farming as a means to reduce erosion and pollution and improve soil health. As of July 1, 2016, there were nearly 22,500 certified organic operations, including farms and other facilities, nationwide. Of these, over 1,400 were located in New York, ranking the State third in the nation.

Organic Farming

In 2014, the United States as a whole had nearly 14,100 organic farms, covering approximately 3.7 million acres of land nationwide. Both numbers were down modestly from 2008. This decline was primarily due to a smaller number of farms that are exempt from certification (farms that comply with USDA organic standards and have less than $5,000 in gross annual organic sales). While the number of exempt farms fell, certified organic farms increased by over 1,700 during the period.

Despite the drop in the number of organic farms nationwide, sales of organic products increased significantly, from $3.2 billion in 2008 to $5.5 billion in 2014. Sales of organics rose again, by an estimated 12 percent, in 2015, according to USDA.

Sales by organic farms in New York State rose 56 percent from 2008 through 2014.

1 Data for this report is drawn primarily from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2014 Organic Survey supplemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Count of Certified Organic Operations.

FIGURE 1
Top States for Number of Organic Farms

	Number of Organic Farms
California	2,805
Wisconsin	1,228
New York	**917**
Washington	716
Pennsylvania	679
Iowa	612
Vermont	542
Ohio	541
Oregon	525
Maine	517

Source: USDA, 2014 Organic Survey

New York ranks third nationally for the number of organic farms.

While organic sales remain a relatively small segment of total agricultural sales, the Department reports that it expects continued growth, with indicators including the fact that "top food retailers…have expanded their organic food offerings in recent years, and have announced initiatives which could further boost demand."[2]

Crops constitute 60 percent of total organic sales. Yet the sales of organic livestock and poultry grew especially rapidly over the period, increasing by over 100 percent.

Organic Farms in New York

New York, with its 917 farms, ranks third nationally for the number of organic farms and comprises over 6 percent of the nation's total. Only California and Wisconsin have more organic farms. Figure 1 shows the top ten states for numbers of organic farms.

New York has approximately 213,000 acres of land dedicated to organic farming, a little less than 6 percent of the U.S. total. This places New York fourth among the states. In comparison, Montana, which only has 1 percent of the nation's organic farms, ranks second in the nation for acreage as the average size of its organic farms is much larger than those in New York. Figure 2 shows the top ten states for amount of organic farmland.

FIGURE 2
Top Ten States for Organic Farmland

	Total Amount of Organic Farmland (thousands of acres)
California	687
Montana	318
Wisconsin	229
New York	**213**
Oregon	204
North Dakota	135
Minnesota	133
Wyoming	129
Texas	127
Idaho	125

Source: USDA, 2014 Organic Survey

2 "Consumer Demand Bolstering Organic Production and Markets in the U.S.," http://blogs.usda.gov/tag/organic-trade-association/.

Unlike the nation as a whole, New York added organic farms from 2008 through 2014, gaining nearly 100 such farms with over 44,000 additional acres. According to the USDA, 43 percent of organic farmers in New York plan to increase organic production over the next five years, while another 42 percent expect to maintain current production levels.

Organic Products in New York

In 2014, New York ranked seventh in the nation for total sales of organic products. Its approximately $164 million in sales accounted for 3 percent of the U.S. total. Similar to the nation as a whole, sales of New York's organic products increased significantly, rising by over 56 percent from 2008.

While New York ranked seventh in overall sales of organic products, it ranked in the top five for both the number of organic farms and sales of a variety of agricultural products. Figure 3 shows the number of farms and sales of the top organic agricultural products in the State as of 2014.

New York's top organic agricultural product is milk from cows. It ranks second in the nation for the number of organic farms with milk cows and for sales of organic milk. New York also ranks second in the nation for the number of farms for organic beef and farms for organic hogs and pigs.

Organic farm sales in New York totaled $164 million in 2014, seventh in the nation.

FIGURE 3
Top Organic Agricultural Products in New York

	Number of Farms	Sales (thousands)	National Rank
Milk Cows	402	$93,600	2
Vegetables & Melons	196	$13,600	5
Chickens	91	$334	5
Beef Cows	90	$1,400	2
Strawberries	33	$512	4
Maple Syrup	33	$2,700	3
Hogs & Pigs	31	$376	2
Blueberries	28	$379	7
Apples	24	$704	6

Source: USDA, 2014 Organic Survey, OSC Analysis

Conclusion

Agriculture has always been an important part of New York's economy. With an increasing number of farms and a significant expansion of sales from their products, organic farming has taken its place as an integral part of the agricultural economy in the State. In New York as well as nationally, increased consumer interest in organic foods can be expected to drive continuing growth in this emerging sector.

Rising consumer interest may drive more growth in this increasingly important farm sector.

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