

INTRODUCING THE NATIONAL ORGANIC FARMING HANDBOOK



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Organic Farming Handbook

Developed to support NRCS field staff, ag, & conservation professionals working with organic producers.

The handbook describes organic systems and identifies key resources to guide conservation planning and implementation on organic farms.

“go-to guide for helping organic farmers and ranchers with conservation” –NRCS Chief Weller



United States
Department of
Agriculture

November 2015

National Organic Farming Handbook



Background: Developed based on a Conservation Innovation Grant with NCAT.

Audience: NRCS staff and Ag Professionals.

Discussed Farmer Audience version/section.

Looking for feedback if there is interest and value in a different approach for a different audience.



National Organic Program

Managed by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, the [National Organic Program](#) develops, implements, and administers national organic production, handling, and labeling standards. If you're wondering whether organic is a good option for your operation, visit the USDA's [Organic Literacy Initiative](#) resources to learn more.

Organic Conservation Planning Resources



NEW: Organic Farming Handbook (eDirectives)

With funding from Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), the following guides were created by [Oregon Tilth](#) for use by NRCS staff:

- > [Resources for Conservation Planning on Organic and Transitioning-to-Organic Operations](#) (PDF; 1MB)
- > [Common NRCS Practices Related to Pest Management on Organic Farms](#) (PDF; 15MB)
- > [Cover Crop in Organic Systems](#) (PDF; 18MB)
- > [Conservation Buffers in Organic Systems - Western States](#) (PDF; 2MB)
- > [Conservation Buffers in Organic Systems - New England](#) (PDF; 740KB)
- > [Nutrient Management in Organic Systems](#) (PDF; 4MB)

The [Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#) has a number of resources related to pollinator habitat assessment and design on organic farms.

The [NRCS Organic Initiative Practice List and National Organic Program Rules Matrix](#) (PDF; 52KB) correlates the



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

February 2016

National Organic Farming Handbook



Organic Farming Handbook

Range of NRCS staff worked to develop—a mix of geography, specialty, roles, etc:

- Glen Abney, Area Resource Conservationist, Kentucky
- Thomas Akin, Conservation Agronomist, Massachusetts
- Alice Begin, Resource Conservationist, Maine
- Lindsay Haines, Conservation Program Specialist, National Headquarters
- James Howard, District Conservationist, California
- David Lamm, National Soil Health Team Leader, ENTSC
- Pat Murphy, State Resource Conservationist, Wisconsin
- Todd Peplin, Farm Bill Specialist, Oregon
- Susan Samson-Liebig, Soil Quality Specialist, North Dakota
- Ruth Shaffer, Water Quality Specialist, Michigan
- Cheryl Simmons, Natural Resources Specialist, CNTSC
- Ben Smallwood, Conservation Specialist, National Headquarters
- Sudie Thomas, Wildlife Biologist, South Carolina
- Pedro Torres, Tribal Liaison, California
- Kalven Trice, Senior Economist, National Headquarters
- Rafael Vega, District Conservationist, Indiana

Organic Farming Handbook

Many partner organizations worked with NRCS to develop:

- Black Family Land Trust,
- Carolina Farm Stewardship Association,
- Center for Rural Affairs,
- Florida Organic Growers,
- Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service,
- National Center for Appropriate Technology,
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition,
- Northwest Center for Alternative to Pesticides,
- Oregon Tilth,
- Virginia Biological Farming Association,
- Wild Farm Alliance

Organic Farming Handbook

- A. Overview of Organic Agriculture (principles, conservation needs & opportunities)
- B. NOP (regulations and roles, certification process)
- C. Conservation Planning with Organic (considerations for 9 steps, CAP 138)



November 2015

National Organic Farming Handbook



Organic Farming Handbook

D. Integral Conservation Activities

- Nutrient Management
- Cover Crops
- Compost
- Crop Rotations
- Tillage & Residue Management
- Integrated Pest Management
- Buffers and Natural Areas
- Grazing Management
- Livestock Living Conditions, Facilities, and Structures



Nutrient Management Plan (590) for Organic Systems Western State Implementation Guide



March 2014

National Center for
Appropriate Technology (NCAT)
www.ncat.org

Oregon Tilth
www.tilth.org

Organic Farming Handbook

Appendix 1: USDA Organic Regulations related to conservation

Appendix 2: Additional Resources



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Transition

- Land free of prohibited substances for 3 years
- “Split” operations are allowed and common
- Transition label / marketing
- **Always encourage checking with certifier!!!**





OMRI Listed – Naturally Trusted

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[print page](#)

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2 results

2 items found.

View the OMRI Generic Materials List Glossary in PDF format [here](#).

Click on the arrow or the material name to view more details about each material.

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▼ Bedding

Status: Allowed
Class: Livestock Management Tools and Production Aids
Origin: Nonsynthetic
Description: Roughage (e.g. hay, straw, corn stalks, rice hulls, peanut hulls) used as bedding must be organically produced. Wood products used as bedding may not contain prohibited substances.

NOP Rule:



Plants

Status: Allowed
Class: Crop Fertilizers and Soil Amendments, Crop Management Tools and Production Aids
Origin: Nonsynthetic
Description: Includes aquatic or terrestrial plants or parts of plants such as cover crops, green manures, crop wastes, hay, leaves, meals and straw. Parts of plants used as soil amendments and foliar feeds are permitted. May be from nonorganic sources. Specific materials must be evaluated using the OMRI GMO Decision trees to determine compliance. See also COCOA BEAN HULLS, COTTON GIN TRASH, COTTONSEED MEAL, PLANT EXTRACTS, and individual plant listings.

NOP Rule: 205.203(c)(3) Uncomposted plant materials.

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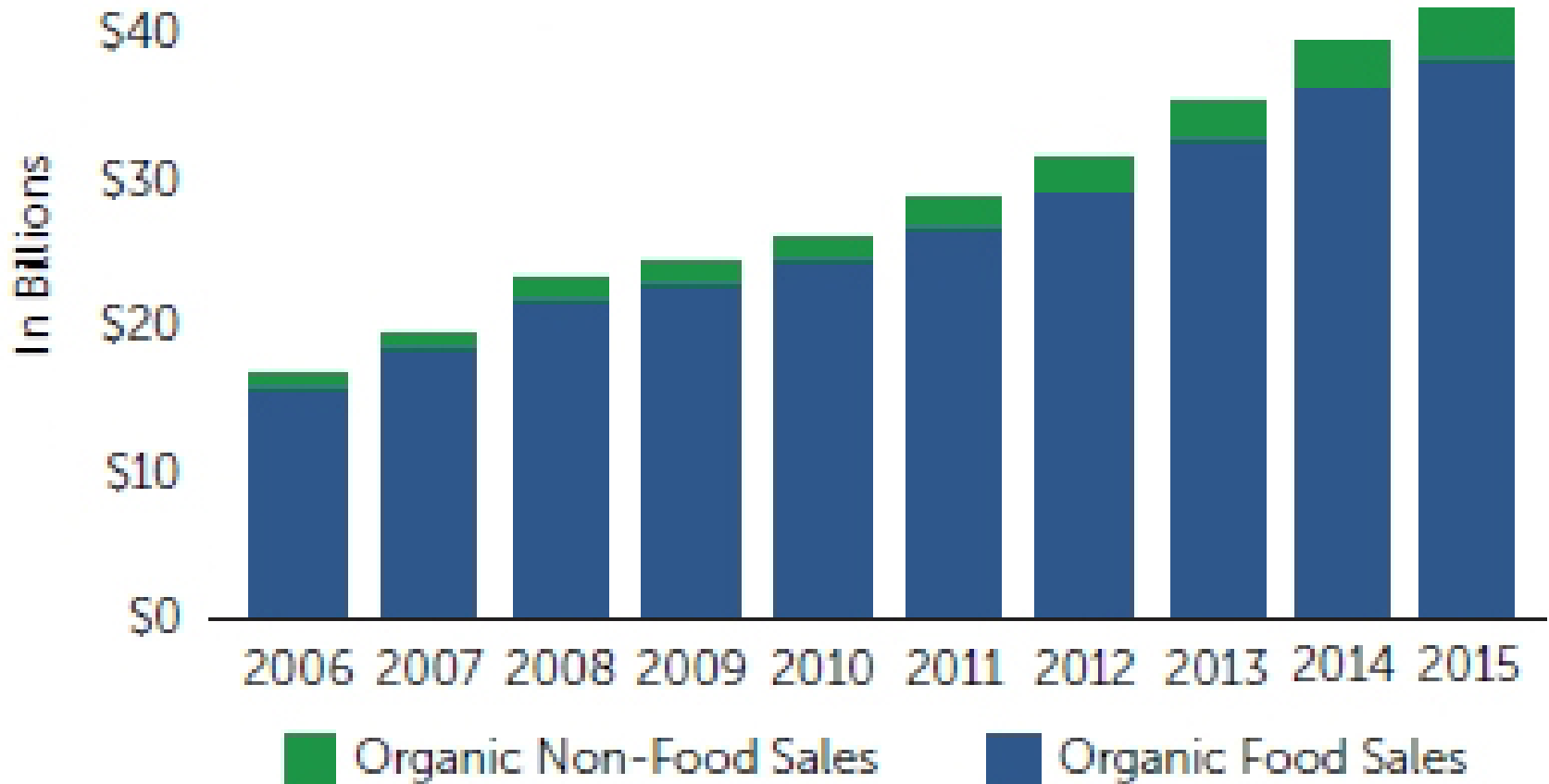
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Donate

\$43.3 billion in total organic sales, \$39.7 billion were organic food sales, up 11 percent from the previous year, and non-food organic products accounted for \$3.6 billion, up 13 percent. Nearly 5 percent of all the food sold in the U.S. in 2015 was organic.

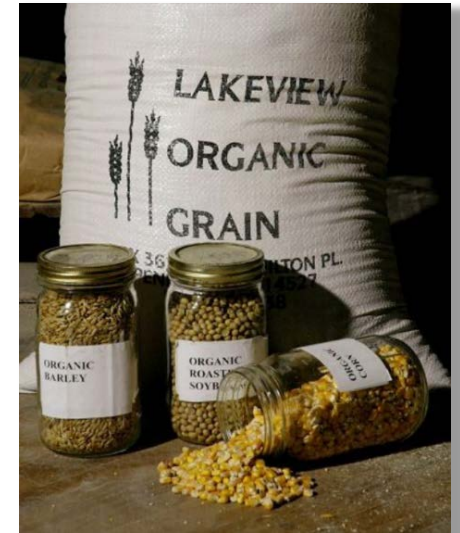
Total U.S. Organic Sales and Growth, 2006–2015



Source: Organic Trade Association

Supply of organic foods is not meeting demand

- **Short domestic supply of organic livestock feed & grains.**
- **High demand for fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy & specialty crops.**



U.S. Sales of Livestock, Poultry and Products, 2014

\$1.1 B



Milk



Milk was the #1 commodity
in sales for the organic industry.

\$420 M



Eggs



\$372 M



Broiler
Chickens



\$216 M



All Cattle
and Cows



\$50 M



Turkeys



www.agcensus.usda.gov

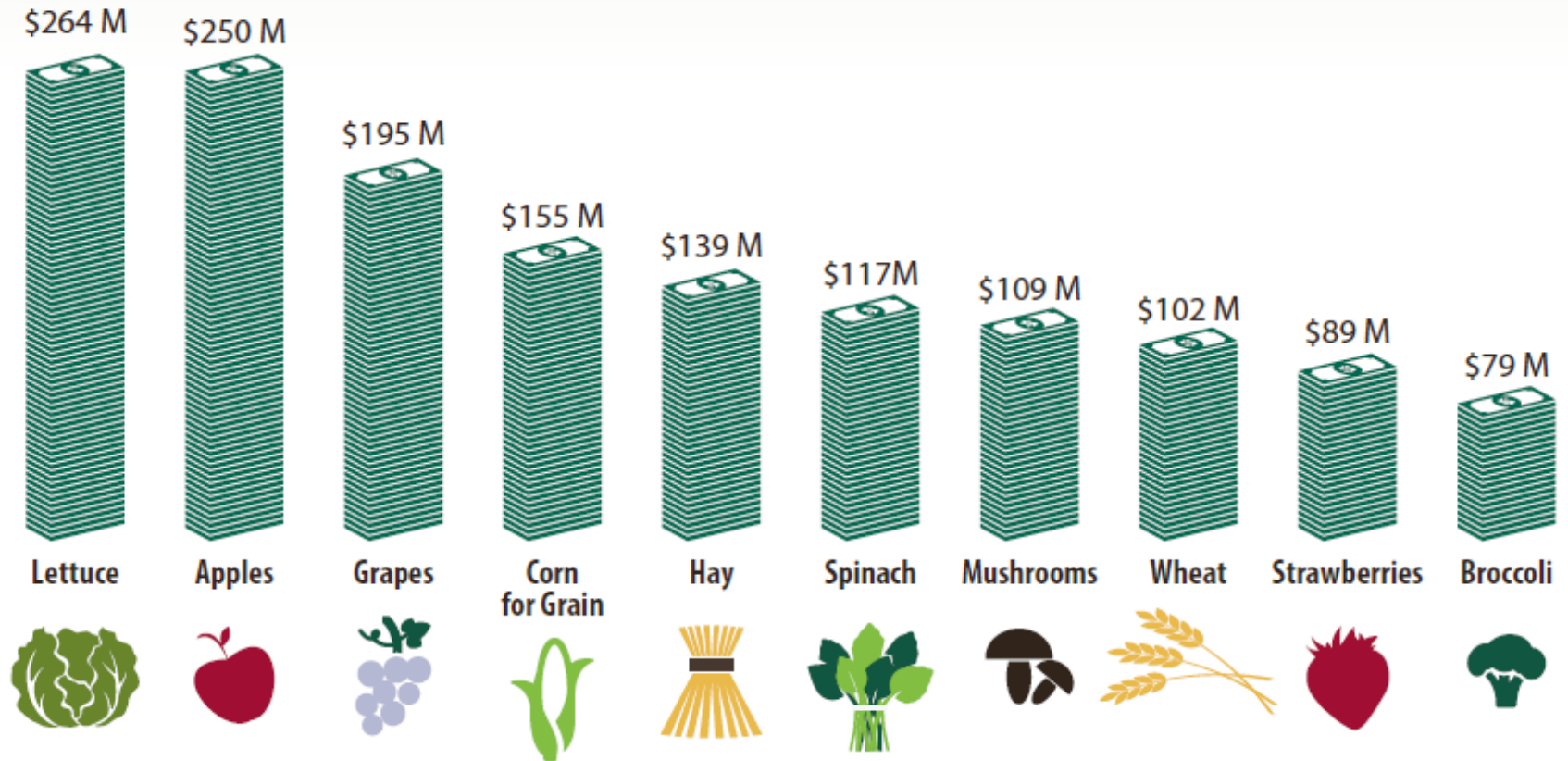
U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

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CENSUS OF
AGRICULTURE

U.S. Top 10 Organic Crops by Sales, 2014



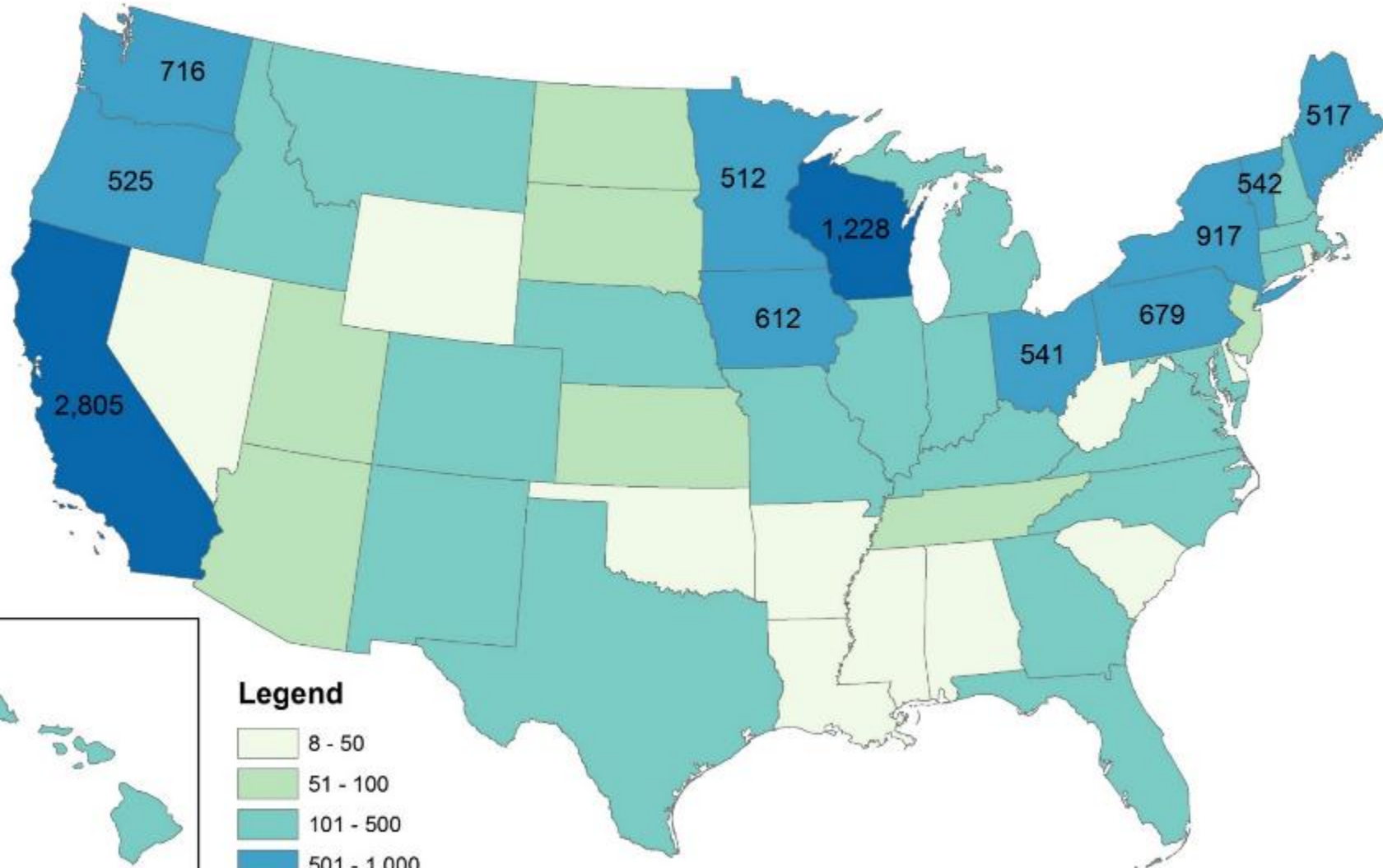
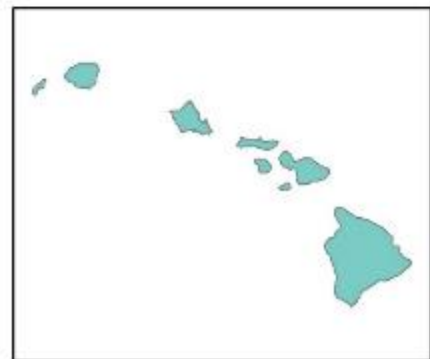
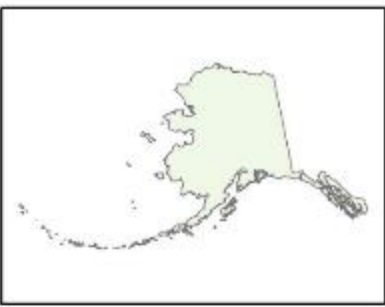
www.agcensus.usda.gov

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National Agricultural Statistics Service

USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

>20,000 certified operations in US

Number of Certified and Exempt Organic Farms: 2014

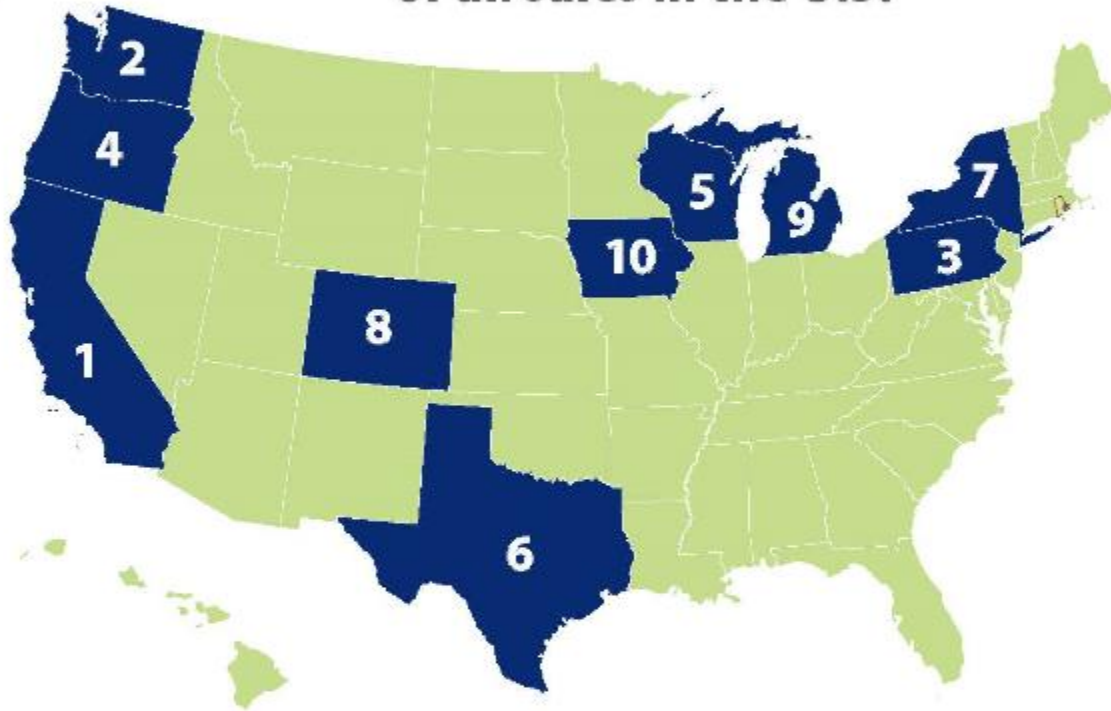


Legend

- 8 - 50
- 51 - 100
- 101 - 500
- 501 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 2,805

Top Ten States in Organic Sales, 2014

These states account for 78%
of all sales in the U.S.



California	\$2.2 B
Washington	\$515 M
Pennsylvania	\$313 M
Oregon	\$237 M
Wisconsin	\$201 M
Texas	\$199 M
New York	\$164 M
Colorado	\$147 M
Michigan	\$125 M
Iowa	\$103 M

www.agcensus.usda.gov

U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

USDA CENSUS OF
AGRICULTURE

Production Practices Used by Organic Farms, 2008 and 2014

Production Practices	2008 Organic farms that use this practice (percent)	2014 Organic farms that use this practice (percent)
Green or animal manure	65	67
Buffer strip to isolate organic products	58	66
Water management practices	51	53
Organic mulch/compost	51	50
No-till or minimum till cropping	38	41
Planting location planned to avoid pests	35	38

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**CENSUS OF
AGRICULTURE**

Production Practices Used by Organic Farms, 2008 and 2014

Production Practices	2008 Organic farms that use this practice (percent)	2014 Organic farms that use this practice (percent)
Crop variety for pest resistance chosen for pest resistance	33	36
Maintain beneficial habitat for insects or vertebrates to manage pests or disease	32	34
Biological pest management	31	34
Choosing planting dates to avoid presence of unintended materials	26	29
Practice rotational grazing	21	22
Beneficial organisms applied or released	16	18
Free range grazing	16	15

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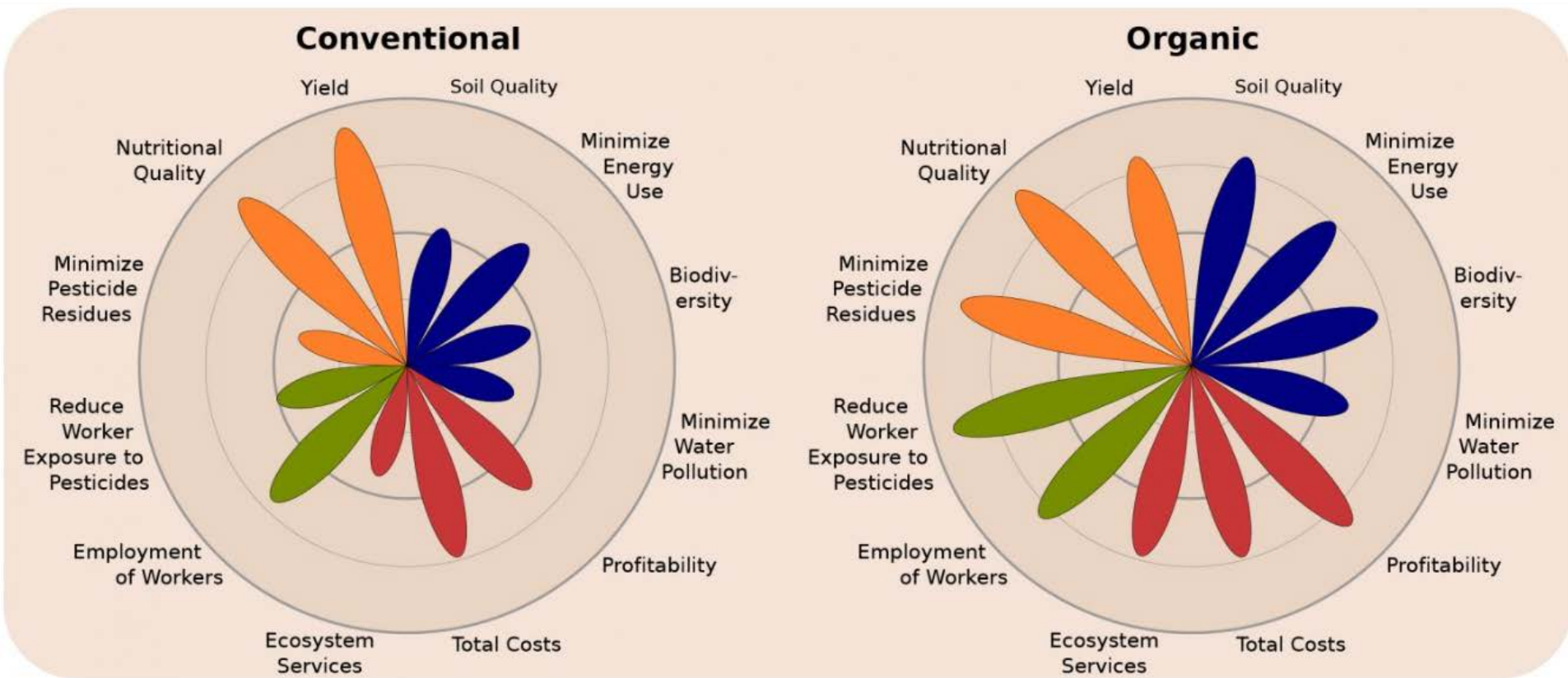
ARS Farming Systems Project

In-Depth Review Briefing Book of
Long-Term Field Experiment to Evaluate Sustainability of Organic and Conventional
Cropping Systems
(The Beltsville Farming Systems Project; Project Number 1265-21660-002-00D)



Organic agriculture key to feeding the world sustainably.

February 3, 2016 WSU



An assessment of organic farming relative to conventional farming illustrates that organic systems better balance the four areas of sustainability. Credit: Reganold and Wachter. Read more at: <http://phys.org/news/2016-02-agriculture-key-world-sustainably.html#jCp>

THE
FARMING SYSTEMS TRIAL
Celebrating 30 years



FST FACTS

- Organic yields match conventional yields.
- Organic outperforms conventional in years of drought.
- Organic farming systems build rather than deplete soil organic matter, making it a more sustainable system.
- Organic farming uses 45% less energy and is more efficient.
- Conventional systems produce 40% more greenhouse gases.
- Organic farming systems are more profitable than conventional.

A photograph of a vast field of green crops, likely corn, under a clear blue sky. The crops are in the foreground and middle ground, filling most of the frame. In the background, there is a line of trees and a few utility poles. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

Conservation Planning in Organic Systems

USDA Organic Standards & Conservation

- “maintain or improve natural resources, including soil and water quality.”
- Range of conservation topics



USDA Organic Standards & Conservation

- NOP is broader than conservation: includes handling, labeling, marketing, etc.
- Few are quantitative.



USDA Organic Standards & Conservation

- Example: a “producer must manage crop nutrients and soil fertility through rotations, cover crops, and the application of plant and animal materials”





United States Department of Agriculture

PROPOSED RULE: Organic Livestock & Poultry Practices

Proposed changes to the organic regulations would address organic livestock & poultry living conditions, health care, handling & transport.

Proposed Provisions include:



OUTSIDE TIME FOR ALL SPECIES

LIMITS ON
Indoor Ammonia Levels

Defined minimum
perch space per bird



EASY ACCESS to the **OUTDOORS**

Minimum indoor & outdoor
space requirements



GROUP
Housing

required for swine
(except for special conditions)



Organic feed & water required
for all species being transported for 12+ hours

Outdoor soil requirements
for all species

Phased-in implementation

60 DAYS for public comment
www.regulations.gov

Conservation Planning Considerations

Problems & Opportunities:

- Natural areas—improve biodiversity, beneficial habitat, buffer areas
- Nutrients—manure for N can result in excessive P, compost/manure storage
- Tillage—reduce tillage or mitigate impacts
- Livestock & pasture—pasture during grazing season
- Residues—may be limited
- Transition—incentive to convert conservation land

Conservation Planning Considerations

Inventory & Analyze:

- Soil—complex cropping systems may be challenging in RUSLE2 and WEPS. Accurate tillage operations, compost, etc. [\[webinar and guide\]](#)
- Water—potential for excessive P or soluble N; some pest control (pyrethrum-risk to fish; spinosad to bees), evaluate with WIN-PST

Conservation Planning Considerations

Inventory & Analyze:

- Air—concern about chemical spray drift and airborne soil particulates with prohibited substances
- Plants—prevention, avoidance, and biological controls to deal with crop pests
- Animals—manage pastures to maintain adequate forage (120 / 30%) and protect water resources



Conservation Planning Considerations

Alternatives:

Consider impact of organic regulations/practices:

- Restriction on synthetic substances for weed, insect pest, and disease control; fertility; and seed treatment.
- 3 year land transition
- Organic seed/planting stock
- Treated lumber

Conservation Planning Considerations

Decision & Implementation

- Producers are responsible for contacting their certifier to verify compliance of planned activities with organic standards.
- Unless included in their OSP, obtain approval prior to implementation.



Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition (CAP 138)

An NRCS Conservation Activity Plan that helps farmers who are interested in transitioning from conventional farming practices to organic production by addressing the natural resource concerns on their operation.

NOP OSP

NRCS CAP 138



**Resource
Inventory
Supplement**

**Resource
Inventory
Section I**

**RUSLE 2
Inventory
Section II**

**NRCS Practice
Summary
Section III**

Resource Inventory

- May serve as a portion of an OSP, but it is not a replacement for one.
- The producer is responsible for completing all of the OSP requirements not addressed by the Resource Inventory.
- The Resource Inventory, when submitted with the CAP 138 Resource Inventory Supplement, contains all of the required components of an OSP

**QUESTIONS?
COMMENTS?**





Integral Conservation Activities with Organic

NOP-NRCS Crosswalk

Crosswalk matches USDA organic regulations with NRCS conservation practices.

NOP	NRCS resource concern	NRCS practices
205.205 Crop Rotation	Soil erosion Soil condition	Conservation crop rotations (328) Cover crops (340)
	Water quality	Nutrient management (590)

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1075355.pdf

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcs143_008316

Nutrient Management



Substances

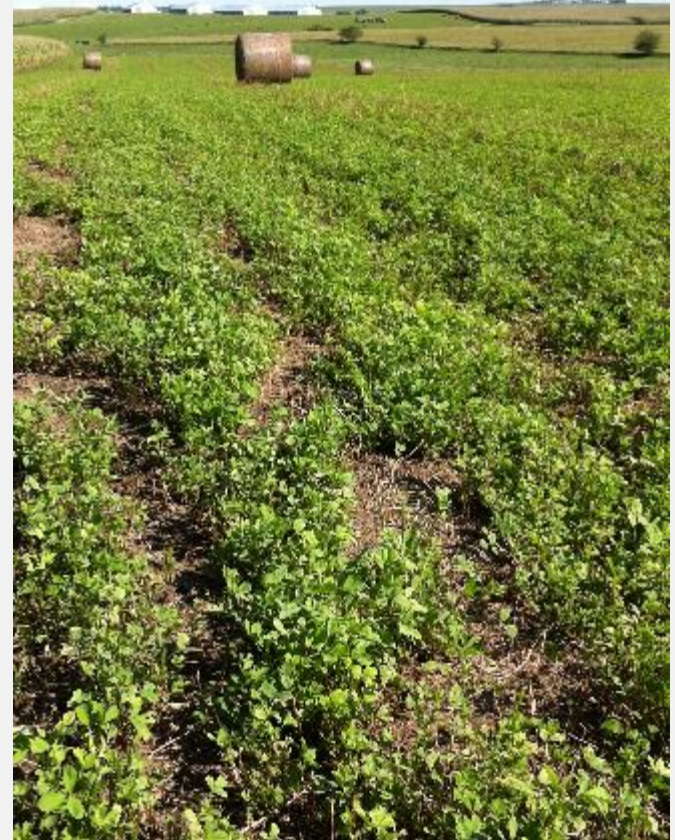
- No synthetic substances
- National List is the list of exceptions
 - Ex: biosolids not allowed; elemental sulfur is allowed synthetic (extraction)

- OMRI

The screenshot shows the OMRI search interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text 'sulfur' and a 'Keyword search' button. Below the search bar, there are two filter sections: 'OMRI Website Content' and 'Products and Materials'. The 'OMRI Website Content' section has checkboxes for 'Frequently Asked Questions', 'Press Release', 'Manufacturer', and 'Site Content', all of which are checked. The 'Products and Materials' section has checkboxes for 'Generic Material', 'Livestock Vitamins Minerals', and 'OMRI Listed Product', all of which are checked. Below these filters, there is a link for 'Advanced Filters' with an 'open' button. The search results are displayed in a list format, showing 122 total results. The first result is 'ACOIDAL Fungicide-Miticide Micronized Wettable Sulphur WDG (Water Dispersable Granule)'. The details for this product are: RULING BODY: NOP; STATUS: Allowed with Restrictions; PRODUCT CODE: qin-4634; CLASSIFICATION: Crop Pest, Weed, and Disease Control; CATEGORY: Sulfur - elemental; RESTRICTION: May be used as a plant disease control or an insecticide (including acaricide or mite control) if the requirements of 205.206(e) are met, which requires the use of preventative, mechanical, physical, and other pest, weed, and disease management practices; COMPANY: Quimetal Industrial S.A.; DATE LISTED: 12/09/2013; EXPIRATION: 12/01/2016. The product is marked with a 'CP' icon and an American flag. Other products listed include 'ActivHume - S', 'Ammonium sulfate', 'Blu-Min 35.5% Zinc-Granular with Sulfur', 'Brandt Lime Sulfur', and 'BT 320 Sulfur 25 Dust', each with its own icon and flag.

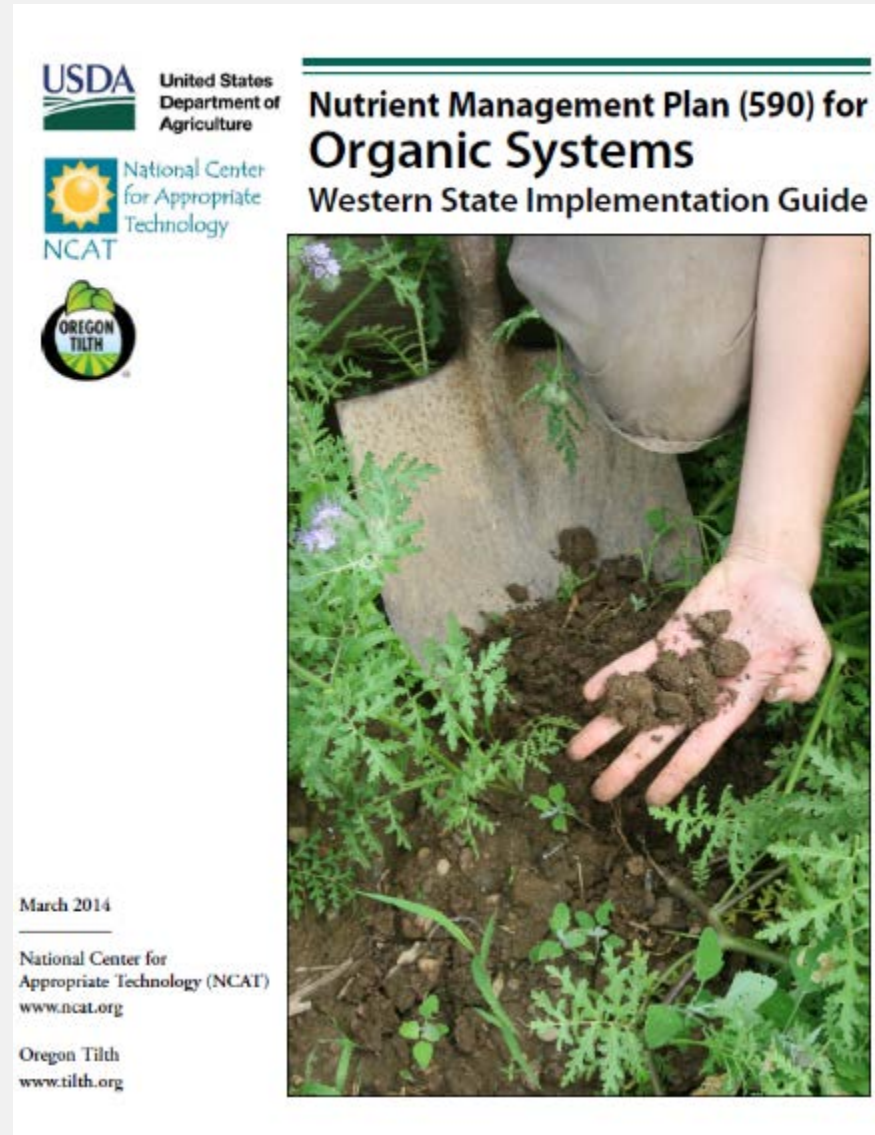
Soil Fertility & Nutrient Mgt

- a) ...minimize soil erosion
- b) ...(use) rotations, cover crops, and the application of plant and animal materials
- c) ...manage plant and animal materials to maintain or improve soil organic matter content



Resources (selected)

- Sources of Organic Fertilizers and Amendments (ATTRA)



Cover Crops



Cover Crops

- ... (use) rotations, cover crops, and the application of plant and animal materials (*Soil Fertility & Nutrient Management Standard*)
- The producer must implement a crop rotation including but not limited to sod, cover crops, green manure crops, and catch crops that provide the following functions... (*Crop Rotation Standard*)

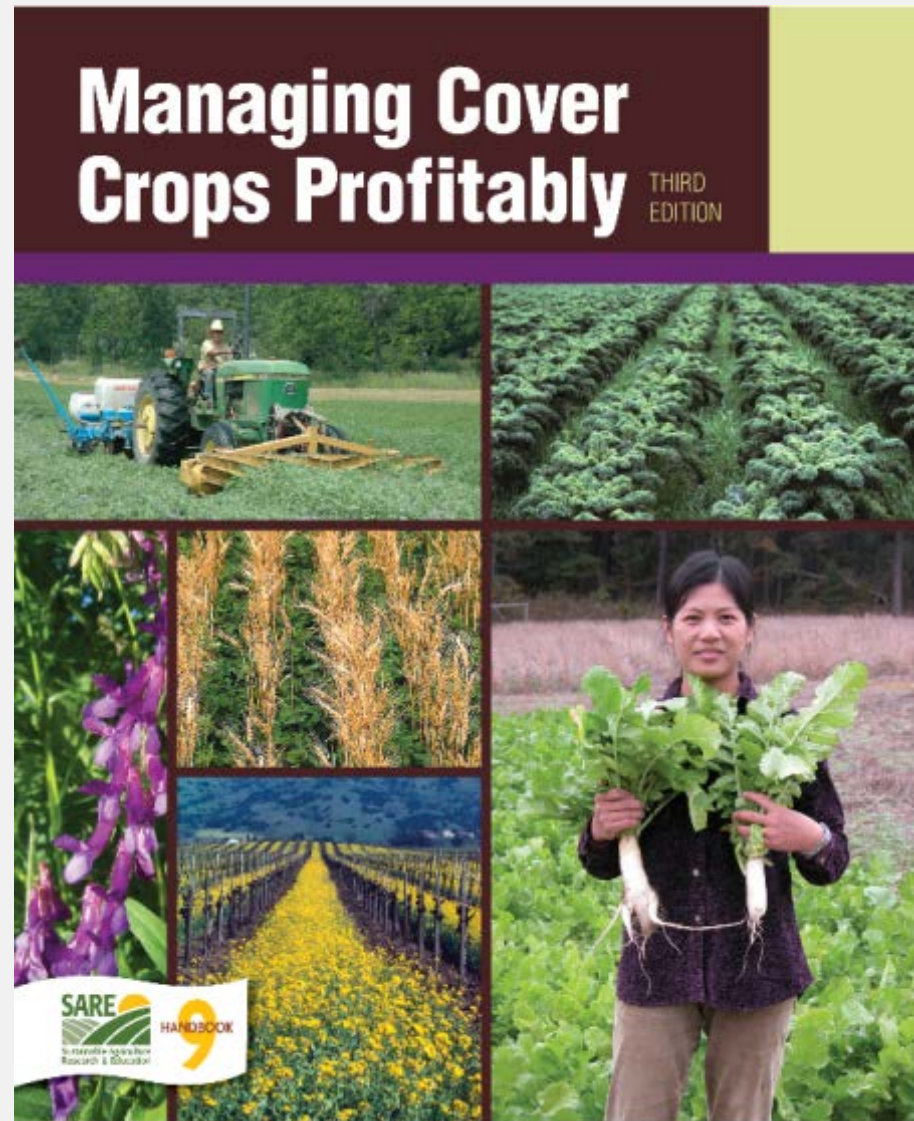


Seeds

**ORGANIC
ALFALFA**

Resources (selected)

- Cover Cropping in Organic Farming Systems (eOrganic)

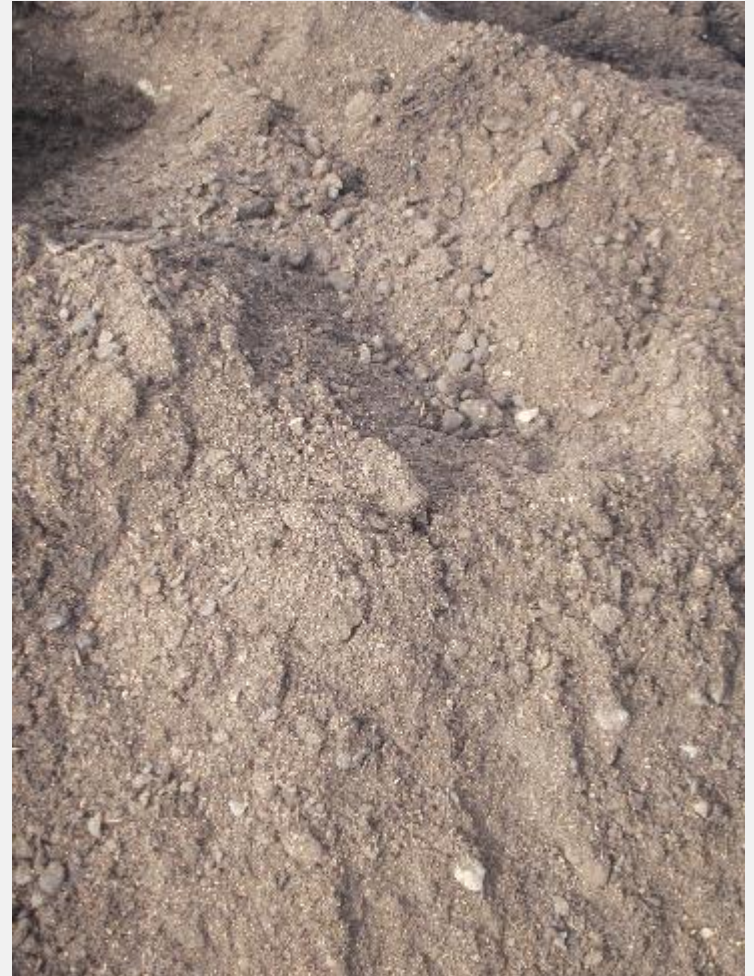


Compost



Manure Standard

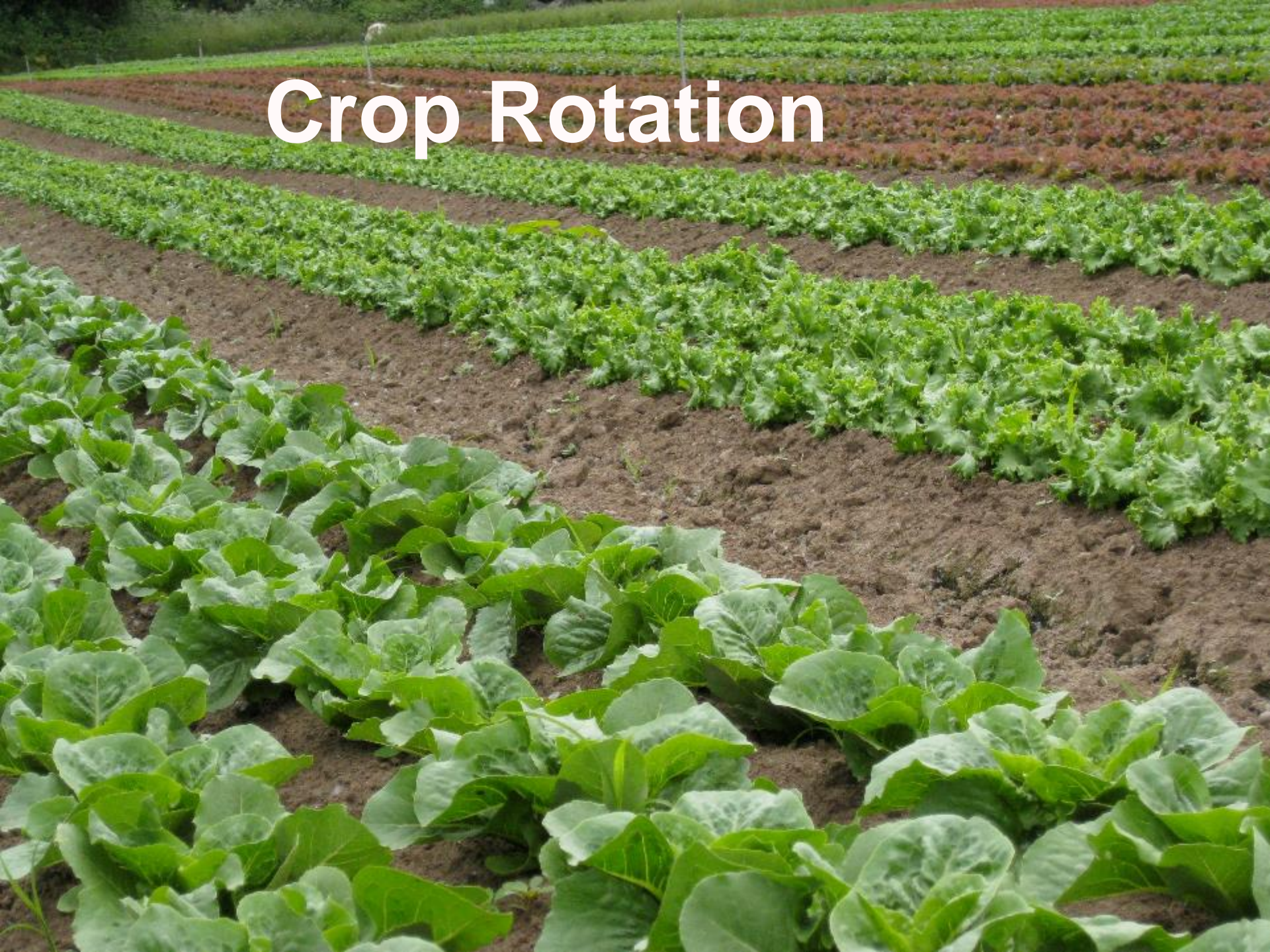
- Crop for human consumption—raw manure incorporated at pre-harvest intervals:
 - 90 days if edible portion does not have contact with soil
 - 120 days if edible portion does have contact with soil particles
- “Conventional” manure
- Composted



Compost Standard

- NOSB Guidance
 - Attain 131° F for at least 3 days and mix or manage pile to ensure all feedstock heats to that temp
 - Processed manure: heated to 150° F for at least 1 hour and dried to 12% or less, or equivalent heating and drying that produces product that is negative for *Salmonella* and fecal coliform.

Crop Rotation



Crop Rotation

must implement a crop rotation to provide these functions:

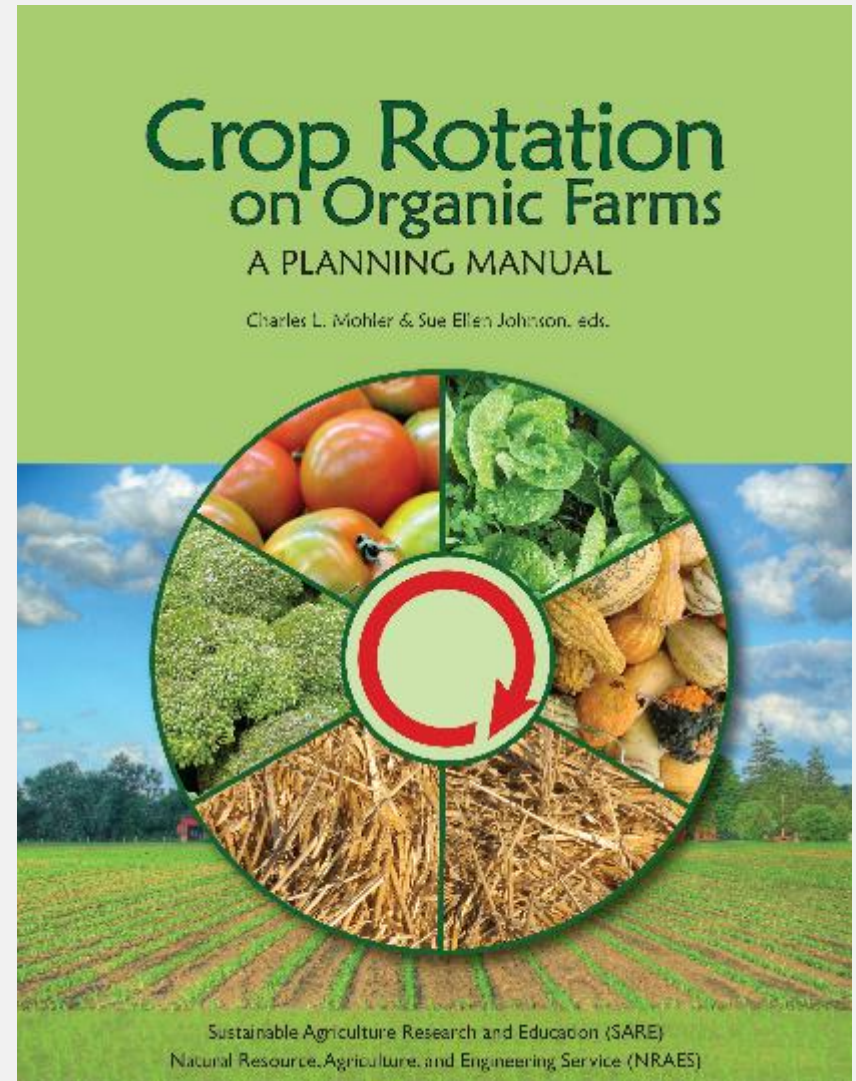
- (a) Maintain or improve soil organic matter content;
- (b) Provide for pest management in annual and perennial crops;
- (c) Manage deficient or excess plant nutrients; and
- (d) Provide erosion control.

§ 205.205



Resources (selected)

- Crop Rotations on Organic Farms (Center for Environmental Farming Systems)





Tillage and Residue Management

Tillage & Residue Management

Tillage and cultivation practices should maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil and minimize soil erosion (205.203(a))



Integrated Pest Management



Pest Management

1. Prevention: crop health, resistant varieties, etc.
2. Mechanical, physical, cultural: beneficials, mulch, cultivation, etc
3. Use allowed inputs when other practices are insufficient



Weed Management

- (1) Mulching with fully biodegradable materials;
- (2) Mowing;
- (3) Livestock grazing;
- (4) Hand weeding and mechanical cultivation;
- (5) Flame, heat, or electrical means; or
- (6) Plastic or other synthetic mulches:
Provided, That, they are removed from the field at the end of the growing or harvest season.





Buffers & Natural Areas

Buffer

Fields or farm parcels must have:

“buffer zones such as runoff diversions to prevent the unintended application of a prohibited substance to the crop or contact with a prohibited substance applied to adjoining land that is not under organic management.”



Buffer

“A buffer zone must be ***sufficient*** in size or other features (e.g., windbreaks) to prevent the possibility of unintended contact by prohibited substances applied to adjacent land areas”



Natural Resources & Biodiversity

- “maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation, including soil and water quality.”
- “natural resources of the operation” defined as *soil, water, wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife.*”
- Guidance: Natural Resources and Biodiversity Conservation (NOP 5020)
- Examples that demonstrate compliance with this broad section

Topics	NRCS Assistance May Be Available ³	Examples of Activities ⁴
Examples Relevant to All Types of Organic Certification		
Soil Stability and Water Quality	☑	Creating, conserving, and restoring vegetative covers (forests, shrublands, woodlands, grasslands, riparian areas, and wetland areas) that control erosion and filter nutrient, pesticide, and pathogen pollutants. Minimizing disturbances, maximizing diversity, living roots and cover.
	☑	Using no-till or permanent cover, conservation tillage, terracing, contour farming, micro-irrigation, windbreaks, cover crops, grass waterways and soil health practices.

Organic Grazing



Livestock Feed

- All feed, pasture and forage must be organically produced
- Allowed substances may be used as additives and supplements (vitamins, minerals)



Pasture Requirement

- During the grazing season, ruminant animals must be able to obtain feed grazed from pasture
 - Not less than 120 days/year
 - Pasture must account for 30% of their Dry Matter Intake/DMI on average



Photo by USDA NRCS

Pasture Requirement

- Pasture must be managed as an organic crop
- Don't put soil and water quality at risk
- Buffers, possibly with secondary fencing (farm boundary)
- No pressure treated lumber in contact with animals or soil (fences)



A scenic view of a farm with rolling green hills, a red barn, and several black cows grazing in a field. The foreground shows a lush green field with several black cows grazing. In the middle ground, there is a large red barn with a white roof and a smaller red building. A white fence runs across the field. The background features rolling green hills under a cloudy sky.

Livestock Living Conditions & Structures

Photo by USDA NRCS

Livestock Living Conditions

- Year-round access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, clean water for drinking, and direct sunlight...
- ...must be well-drained and managed to prevent runoff of wastes and contaminated waters.



NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE



2016 WEBINARS



The Organic Agriculture Webinar series was developed by NRCS and Oregon Tilth for NRCS field staff, and may also be of interest to partners, producers and others.

Join the webinars live at 3 p.m. EST at ConservationWebinars.net. Webinars will also be archived for later viewing. Nearly fifty organic webinars are currently available (use the search term "organic").

Webinars are free, open to all, and brought to you by the NRCS Science and Technology Training Library.

See full details on reverse.

February 2, 2016, 3 p.m. EST
Conservation Buffers to Support Beneficial Insects on Organic Farms

March 17, 2016, 3 p.m. EST
Natural Resource and Biodiversity Conservation in Organic Production

April 5, 2016, 3 p.m. EST
Transitioning to Organic Production

June 7, 2016, 3 p.m. EST
Weed Management in Organic Cropping Systems

August 2, 2016, 3 p.m. EST
Residue and Tillage Management in Organic Farming Systems: Eastern States

October 4, 2016, 3 p.m. EST
Residue and Tillage Management in Organic Farming Systems: Central States

December 6, 2016, 3 p.m. EST
Residue and Tillage Management in Organic Farming Systems: Western States



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- Environmental Benefits of Organic Agriculture: Energy and Climate Change
Participate to learn about the energy and climate change benefits of organic farming practices.
- Environmental Benefits of Organic Agriculture: Soil
Participate to learn about the benefits of organic farming practices to soil.
- Organic Farming and Soil Health
Participate in this webinar to learn about implementing soil health principles in organic farming systems, including a discussion of the role of soil health in ...
- Environmental Benefits of Organic Agriculture: Biodiversity
Participate to learn about the biodiversity benefits of organic farming practices.
- Commonly Used Organic Inputs
Participate to learn about commonly used inputs in organic production, regulations governing inputs, and how to use the Organic Materials Review Institute ...
- Opportunities for Conservation in Organic Livestock Systems
Join this webinar to learn about the wide range of opportunities for NRCS support in organically-managed livestock operations.
- Environmental Benefits of Organic Agriculture: Water Quality
Participate to learn about the benefits of organic farming practices to water quality.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?



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