

The Organic Production Interests of Utah's Agricultural Producers

10/05/2026



Introduction

Highlights

- USU researchers conducted a study to understand organic production-related educational and resource needs in Utah.
- Nearly half of the operations produce specialty crops such as fresh produce and flowers.
- Direct-to-consumer markets are the primary sales outlets, particularly farmers markets, CSAs, and farm stands, shops, or stores. Online sales are also an important channel, suggesting that many operations rely on relatively short and direct marketing channels to reach customers.
- Survey results suggest substantial current and potential interest in organic production among respondents.
- Educational programs should emphasize practical production strategies, enterprise profitability, and market opportunities while also addressing producers' environmental and personal stewardship goals.

According to the 2022 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture (2024), Utah had approximately 41,000 acres of certified organic farmland, representing about 0.5% of the state's 10.5 million acres of agricultural land. Certified and exempt organic farms reported nearly \$28.9 million in sales, accounting for approximately 1.3% of Utah's total agricultural cash receipts. Although certified organic forage and grain crops account for most of Utah's organic acreage, fresh produce contributes a disproportionately large share of organic

farm revenue (approximately 60.0%) because it has a much higher value per acre.

To better understand Utah agricultural producers' organic production interests, Utah State University (USU) conducted a statewide study of producers in 2024. Researchers collected data through an online Qualtrics survey, with 220 producers responding. Survey questions addressed respondent demographics, characteristics of their farming or ranching operations, and their current or previous use of organic production methods. Additional questions explored respondents' motivations for adopting or not adopting organic practices, their perceptions and attitudes toward organic agriculture, and their concerns related to organic production, markets, certification, and regulations. Respondents were also asked to evaluate the importance and usefulness of various types of information, tools, services, and educational programs that may support organic production decisions.

The following fact sheet provides an overview of survey respondents' demographic characteristics and farming operation details, including acreage under production, annual gross sales, primary agricultural products, and marketing channels used. It also describes respondents' organic production experiences, including years certified, certified acreage, and the primary motivations behind adopting organic production methods. The findings presented in this fact sheet provide valuable insights into the characteristics, experiences, and needs of Utah producers related to organic agriculture. Extension educators, agricultural service providers, policymakers, and industry organizations can use this information to develop targeted educational programs, technical resources, and support services that address producer challenges, strengthen organic production capacity, and encourage informed decision-making related to organic opportunities in Utah.

Respondent Demographics and Operation Details

Table 1 shows respondent demographics. Most of the respondents (81.7%) identified themselves as owners in terms of their role in the operation, while only about 3.0% served as CEOs, administrators, or marketing managers. Less than 5.0% of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 34, while about one-quarter were between 35 and 44 years old. Nearly half were aged 55 and above, indicating an older respondent demographic. In terms of education, 12.0% had a high school diploma or GED, whereas nearly half (44.9%) reported having a college degree, and about one-quarter held advanced degrees.

Most respondents were male (66.7%). More than half came from a farming or ranching background. Additionally, 65.4% of respondents' operations were supported by outside jobs or other income sources.

Table 1. *Respondent Demographics*

Characteristic	Category	Sample (%)
Age	25 to 34	4.8%
35 to 44	25.6%	
45 to 54	16.8%	
55 to 64	25.6%	
65 and over	27.2%	
Gender	Man	66.7%
Woman	30.1%	
Prefer to self-describe	3.3%	
Education level	High school diploma/GED	11.8%
Associates degree/some college	17.3%	
College degree (BS, BA, etc.)	44.9%	
Graduate degree (MS, PhD, etc.)	26.0%	
Farming/ranching background	Yes	58.0%
No	39.7%	
Unsure	2.3%	
Outside income	Yes	65.4%
No	34.6%	
Role in operation	Owner/partner	81.7%
General manager/CEO	2.0%	

Characteristic	Category	Sample (%)
Marketing manager	1.5%	
Distribution/production manager	4.0%	
Administration	2.5%	
Other	8.3%	

Table 2 provides respondent operation details. In terms of the operation's business duration, just over half had been in business for more than 20 years, while 25.5% had been in operation for less than 6 years. When asked whether the operation was multigenerational and family-owned, nearly half indicated it was not. However, 25.4% of respondents had two generations engaged in the operation, and nearly 13.0% reported that their operation had been running for four or more generations, suggesting strong multigenerational continuity. The number of employees varied substantially. Just over one-third (36.4%) had one or fewer employees, and another 39.9% employed between two and five people. Only 7.5% reported having more than 20 employees. In terms of acreage under production, 41.3% operated on 5 acres or less, while nearly one-third managed more than 150 acres. Fewer than 20.0% operated on 6 to 100 acres.

Leasing land was not common, as 56.0% of respondents didn't lease any land. Only 8.3% relied heavily on leased land, with more than 80.0% of their acres being leased. In terms of annual gross sales, 25.9% reported sales of less than \$10,000. The ranges of \$50,001–\$100,000, \$100,001–\$200,000, and \$200,001–\$500,000 each accounted for approximately 10.0%–12.0% of respondents.

Table 2. *Respondent Operation Details*

Characteristic	Category	Sample (%)
Business duration (years)	Less than 1 year	4.8%
1 to 5 years	20.7%	
6 to 10 years	12.8%	
11 to 20 years	9.6%	
More than 20 years	52.1%	

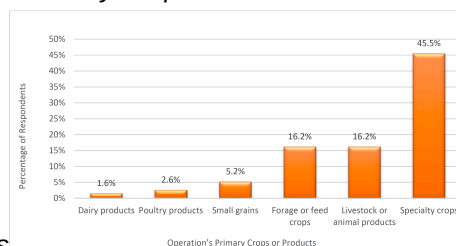
Characteristic	Category	Sample (%)
Generations involved	Not applicable	48.6%
Two generations	25.4%	
Three generations	13.0%	
Four generations	5.9%	
More than four generations	7.0%	
Number of employees	1 or less	36.4%
2 to 5	39.9%	
6 to 10	9.8%	
11 to 20	6.4%	
More than 20	7.5%	
Total acreage under production	None or not applicable	4.1%
5 acres or less	41.3%	
6 to 10 acres	4.1%	
11 to 25 acres	1.7%	
26 to 50 acres	9.3%	
51 to 100 acres	2.3%	
101 to 150 acres	4.7%	
More than 150 acres	32.6%	
Average annual gross sales	\$10,000 or less	25.9%
\$10,001–\$50,000	17.9%	
\$50,001–\$100,000	10.0%	
\$100,001–\$200,000	10.0%	
\$200,001–\$500,000	11.8%	

Characteristic	Category	Sample (%)
More than \$500,000	13.5%	
Prefer not to answer	12.9%	



As shown in Figure 1, nearly half of the operations produce specialty crops such as fresh produce and flowers, while both forage or feed crops (alfalfa, grass, pasture, etc.) and livestock or animal products (cattle, sheep, pigs, etc.) each accounted for around 16.0%. Respondents appeared less involved in producing dairy products such as milk or cheese. About half of the respondents indicated that they are not involved in animal production, while about 25.0% reported producing 1 to 100 head, and another 20.0% managed more than 100 head.

Figure 1. Primary Crops or



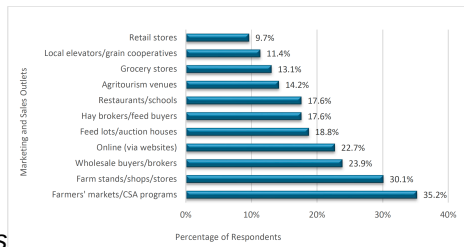
Products

In terms of the operation's primary markets or sales outlets (see Figure 2), they rely heavily on direct-to-consumer outlets such as farmers markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs (35.2%) and farm stands, shops, or stores (30.1%). Online sales were also notable, used by 22.7% of respondents. Wholesale buyers and brokers and feed lots or auction houses were also important channels. Meanwhile, sales through restaurants or schools and agritourism venues were somewhat common, while retail stores and local elevators or grain cooperatives were the least used outlets.

The results indicate that direct-to-consumer markets are the primary sales outlets, particularly farmers markets, CSAs, and farm stands, shops, or stores. Online sales are

also an important channel, suggesting many operations rely on relatively short, direct marketing channels to reach customers.

Figure 2.Primary Market or Sales



Outlets

Organic Production and Interest Overview

When asked whether their operation uses organic production methods, 40.7% of respondents said yes, while less than 1.0% reported having done so in the past (see Table 3). Another 26.9% said they didn't but had considered it or were interested, and a similar share, 26.3%, said they had no interest in organic production. Certified acres varied among respondents, as 17.9% were fully or almost fully certified organic, and 12.0% had less than 50.0% of their acres certified.

Of the certified organic operations, 22.2% had been certified for less than a year, 33.3% for 6 to 10 years, 27.8% for 11 to 20 years, and 16.7% for more than 20 years. Notably, no respondents reported being certified for 1 to 5 years. Regarding their interest in obtaining a certificate in organic farming at USU, 46.9% of respondents expressed interest, 14.1% were not interested, and 39.1% were unsure.

Overall, these results suggest substantial current and potential interest in organic production among respondents. While close to half already use organic methods, another quarter are interested in or have considered organic production, indicating a sizable group that could potentially transition.

Table 3.Organic Production Details

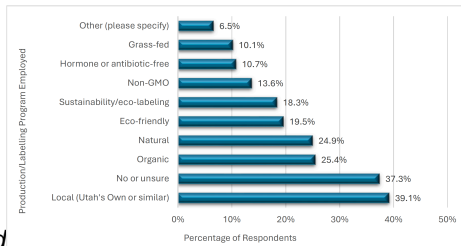
Characteristic	Category	Sample (%)
Organic production methods employed	Yes	40.7%

Characteristic	Category	Sample (%)
Interest in organic production	No, but have done so previously	0.6%
	No, but have considered	26.9%
	No, and have no interest	26.3%
	Unsure	5.4%
Acres certified organic	None	48.6%
	1% to 25%	25.4%
	26% to 50%	13.0%
	51% to 75%	5.9%
	75% to 100%	7.0%
Years certified organic	Less than a year	22.2%
	1 to 5 years	00.0%
	6 to 10 years	33.3%
	11 to 20 years	27.8%
	More than 20 years	16.7%
Interest in organic farming certificate	Yes	46.9%
	No	14.1%
	Unsure	39.1%

When asked about specific production processes or labelling programs the operation employs or plans to employ, 39.1% of respondents reported participation in local labelling programs such as Utah's Own (see Figure 3). Another 37.3% indicated they do not use or are unsure about using any labelling program. Around one-fourth reported using organic or natural labels, while fewer (19.0%) adopted eco-friendly or sustainability labels. Non-GMO, hormone- or antibiotic-free, and grass-fed programs were the least common, each reported by fewer than 15.0% of respondents.

The results indicate that local labelling programs are the most widely used, with nearly 40.0% of respondents participating in programs such as Utah's Own. Organic and natural labels are also relatively common, while environmental and production-specific labels are less frequently used. The sizable share of producers who do not use or are unsure about labelling programs suggests an opportunity for greater education about the potential marketing benefits of certification and labelling.

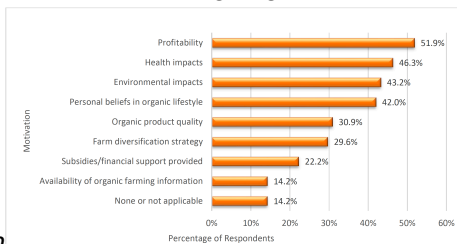
Figure 3. Production/Labelling Program



Employed

When respondents were asked what motivated them, or what might motivate them, to adopt organic production methods, profitability was the primary factor (51.9%) (see Figure 4). Other significant factors included health impacts (46.3%), environmental impacts (43.2%), and personal beliefs in the organic lifestyle (42.0%). In contrast, the availability of organic farming information was less motivating, with only 14.2% of respondents choosing it. These results show that respondents are more motivated by profitability and the environmental and health impacts of organic production over subsidies and financial support.

Figure 4. Factors Motivating Organic Production



Adoption

Conclusions

Utah's organic agricultural sector remains relatively small in terms of acreage and total agricultural sales, yet it represents an important and growing opportunity for many producers. Study results indicate that respondents represent a diverse range of farming operations, with many operating small farms, marketing directly to consumers through farmers markets, farm stands, and online sales, and producing specialty crops. Although only about 41.0% of respondents currently employ organic production methods, an additional 27.0% have considered adopting organic practices, suggesting substantial interest

in organic production among Utah producers. Nearly half of respondents also expressed interest in an educational certificate in organic farming, highlighting continued demand for research-based education and technical assistance.

The study findings also demonstrate that economic considerations remain the primary driver of interest in organic production. Profitability, followed by health and environmental impacts and personal values, were the strongest motivations for adopting organic practices, whereas government subsidies and the availability of production information were less influential. These results suggest that educational programs should emphasize practical production strategies, enterprise profitability, and market opportunities while also addressing producers' environmental and personal stewardship goals. Continued investment in Extension education, technical support, and market development will help producers evaluate whether organic production aligns with their business objectives and provide the resources needed to support successful transitions and long-term viability within Utah's organic agricultural sector.

Acknowledgments

This study was partially funded by the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). The authors of this fact sheet used ChatGPT for editing purposes only. Authors reviewed and edited the content provided and take full responsibility for the content.

Reference

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). (2024). *2022 Census of agriculture: Utah state and county data*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Census_by_State/Utah/



*September 2026
Utah State University Extension
Peer-reviewed fact sheet*

[Download PDF](#)

Authors

Kynda Curtis, *Professor and USU Extension Specialist,
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics;*
Salma Shrity, *Graduate Research Assistant, Department
of Agricultural and Resource Economics;* **Michele
Schahczenski**, *Organic Outreach Coordinator, Transition
to Organic Partnership Program*