

Organic Agriculture Is Booming. Here's How You Can Help Keep Up the Momentum

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by [Steve Holt](#) for [Thrive Market](#)



It's easy to get down about the state of American agriculture, what with all the factory farming, foodborne illness, and corn syrup-fueled diseases ravaging our populace. Amid these very real concerns, though, it's easy to forget about the victories good food advocates have won along the way: [greater transparency in food labeling](#), more nutritious options, and lots more local food.

One of the biggest good-news food stories—that has largely been under-reported, sadly—is the rise of organic agriculture.

According to new numbers released earlier this month by the United States Department of Agriculture, the number of certified organic farms [jumped 12 percent between 2014 and 2015](#)—the biggest spike since 2008 and a 300 percent increase since the USDA began tallying organic operations in 2002. The 21,781 certified organic farms raise and grow products valued at \$39 billion, according to the Organic Trade Association.

The reason for the continued growth, as we can probably guess, is increased consumer demand for clean, chemical-free food. And [as we've reported here before](#), checking for the [USDA Organic](#) seal is the most reliable way to ensure that the food you're buying is sustainably and cleanly produced.

"Organic food is one of the fastest growing segments of American agriculture," said secretary of agriculture Tom Vilsack in a press release. "As consumer demand for organic products continues to grow, the USDA organic seal has become a leading global standard. The increasing number of organic operations shows that USDA's strong support

for the vibrant organic sector is helping to create jobs and opportunities in rural communities."

But despite Vilsack's understandable optimism about the state of organic agriculture, some groups say it isn't enough. Consumer demand requires that more U.S. farm acreage be converted to organic. According to the last USDA agriculture census, **organic food comprised close to 4 percent of all sales** (a number which is steadily rising), while organic land acreage remains below 1 percent. According to the Environmental Working Group, this has **caused food companies to look abroad** for tens of millions of dollars worth of organic staples, such as soybeans, corn, and rice.

1. SIGN EWG'S GROW ORGANICS! PETITION

Colin O'Neal, EWG's agricultural policy director, says the modest increases in organic funding from USDA over the last few years pale in comparison to the \$93 billion the agency spends on agriculture over the life of a Farm Bill. The EWG says Congress must restructure agricultural spending to give incentives for farmers to switch more of their acreage to organic.

"The incentives are all backwards. We know that **farm pollution is making people sick and is bad for the environment**. Many farmers are doing their part, but most of the money in the farm bill goes to the largest, most successful farm businesses—instead of supporting small family farmers, environmental stewardship and organic farming."

Agree? **Sign the EWG's "Grow Organics!" petition here.**

2. VOTE WITH YOUR DOLLARS

Remember—every time you buy organic produce, **pantry staples**, and even **beauty products**, you're supporting organic agriculture. It doesn't get easier than that.

Photo credit: Alicia Cho
