Shifting Trends: Organic Farming in Maine 2007-2022

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) has been offering farmer support programs for over 50 years, and while the findings of this report show that the demand for organic products remains strong, the number of certified organic farms has declined. Understanding the organic farming landscape in Maine is critical to shaping MOFGA's programming to continue to best support farmers at all stages of business development. In the early 2000's, the trends were heading in a positive direction — increases in the number of certified organic acreage and farms, increases in the number of new and beginning farmers, and increases in the number of women farmers. This report shows that while sales for organic products remain high — growing 67% between 2007 and 2022 and contributing $74 million in economic impact to the state — the once positive trends we saw around organic farming piqued in 2017, with slight decreases through 2022.

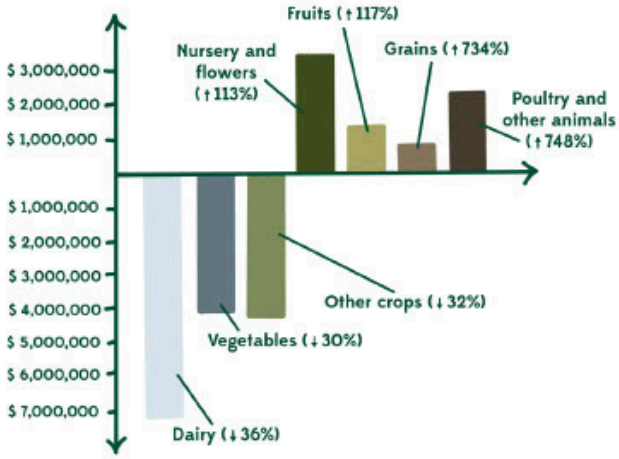
MOFGA analyzed several large-scale datasets (NASS census data and survey data, IMPLAN software results, and MOFGA's Farmer Goals Survey) to make sense of statewide trends across the organic farming sector between 2007-2022, with a focus on change over time, economic impact, farmer goals, and financial sustainability.

While we found encouraging trends for some metrics, others gave us pause, while still others seemed contradictory until we dug into the nuances. Some of the key findings are summarized below. **The full report can be found on our website.**

Key Findings

While organic product sales in Maine grew 110% from 2007-2022, increasing from over $23 million in 2007 to almost $50 million in 2022, there was a peak in 2017 at $60 million, followed by a decline in sales across Maine's certified organic farms from 2017 to 2022.

Changes in Product Sales by Organic Sector (2017 vs 2022)



From the peak in 2017, Maine organic product sales decreased across the three largest sectors: dairy, vegetables, and "other crops," which includes hay and maple. However, **several organic sectors saw increased product sales from 2017 to 2022 including fruit, nursery and flowers, grain, and poultry and other animals.**

During this period (2017 to 2022), **while organic farming revenue decreased in Maine, organic farming revenue in the United States and in the Northeast grew.** What's more, Maine lost certified organic farms, dropping from 582 in 2007 to 425 in 2022. It is interesting to note that, in light of these two trends, the average revenue per organic farm increased over the 15-year period (2007 to 2022), from $40,060 in 2007 to $115,329 in 2022, a 188% increase.

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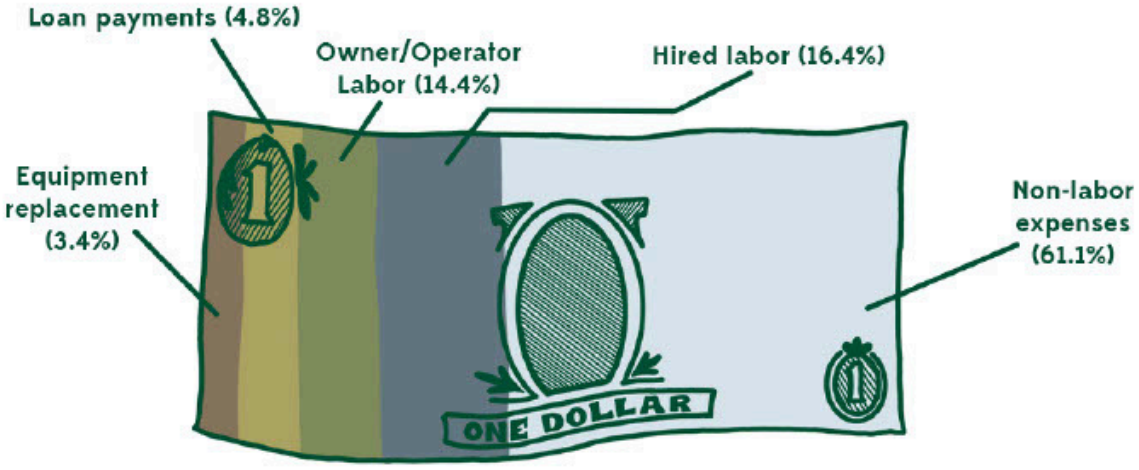
Despite the fluctuations in various sectors, the overall economic impact of Maine's organic agriculture increased from $65 million in 2007 to $74 million in 2022 (adjusted for inflation), a 14% increase.

The landscape of Maine organic farming is changing. The number of certified organic farms has declined, as has the number of young farmers, and the number of farmers citing farming as their primary occupation.

Many farms struggle to generate enough revenue to cover expenses, loan payments, and provide sufficient owner's draw. Despite these financial challenges, Maine organic farmers want to stay farming. They want to increase their incomes and their quality of life. They hope to do so by diversifying their production; focusing more of their marketing efforts towards on-farm sales; and investing in infrastructure, season extension, and increased scale. **Farmers cited climate change, and the availability and affordability of labor as their main challenges to maintaining a viable business.** As a benchmark, we determined that, on average, Maine's organic farms experience a 33% labor cost to sales ratio.

Where Does Each Dollar Recieved by a Maine Organic Farmer Go?



Maine's food access programs, such as Maine Harvest Bucks and Mainers Feeding Mainers, are growing and represent potential market opportunities for Maine farmers. However, the recent cuts in federal funding to support food access programs may put these market channels at risk.

To learn more about MOFGA's farmer resources, visit our website. We are looking for feedback as well as measuring the impact of knowledge gained on specific topics from this report. Please take a moment to complete a brief evaluation form. Thank you for your time and consideration.