

**Research Update:**  
**One Box Does Not Check All:**  
**Investigating Farmers' Likelihood of Certifying Organic, Dropping**  
**Out of Certification, or Remaining Noncertified**

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Market trends have motivated growers to take advantage of economic opportunities in the organic certified industry. Price premiums, access to markets, environmental concerns, and philosophical beliefs have been the main drivers of organic certification adoption among fruit and vegetable (FV) farmers. The production of and demand for organic products is mainly driven by consumers' concerns regarding health, the environment, and animal welfare. Still, some farmers have dropped the certification, and a vast number prefer to farm conventionally.

Understanding farmers' reasons for becoming organic certified is important for expanding the supply of organic foods. While most studies have focused on understanding why farmers become certified organic after practicing conventional or noncertified systems, our study provides an all-inclusive characterization of FV farmers and investigates their motives for choosing their status on the organic certification spectrum. Using data from an online survey of 1,559 FV producers registered in Food Industry MarketMaker, this study investigates key drivers influencing farmers to (i) stay in the conventional agriculture, (ii) produce noncertified organic food, (iii) get certified as organic, or (iv) drop their certification status.

Using a multinomial logit regression, we calculate the marginal effects to estimate the drivers and barriers that lead farmers to choose their status from among the organic and conventional

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categories. Results show that market access and farmers' demographics, sources of information, and perceptions are key factors influencing growers' status with regard to organic agriculture.

Market access is a major factor influencing farmers' certification status. Using multiple market channels drives farmers to certify. One explanation for this may be that these producers are potentially taking advantage of their certification status to access price premiums and diversify their produce distribution.

Results also suggest that organic certification costs are a barrier to certification, and they are likely too high for small FV operations. Bigger farms, which have more resources, may be more likely to become and remain certified.

Farmers obtaining information from extension services and growers associations were more likely to farm conventionally.

Finally, perceptions about organic agriculture and its certification process were leading drivers affecting farmers' decisions to produce organic food (certified or not).

This study provides insights into characteristics and drivers of conventional, organic noncertified, certified, and certified dropped out operations. Our findings can help policy makers, industry stakeholders, extension agents, and researchers derive incentives and programming to enhance the organic objectives and support the long-term sustainability of organic agriculture.

**Keywords:** barriers, conventional, drivers, fruit, organic, perceptions, market access, vegetable