

Washington State: A leader in organic agriculture

As sales of organic foods in the United States grow 20 percent each year, Washington is emerging a national leader in organic agriculture and the industry is experiencing enormous growth in the state. In fact, Tilth, the first regional network of organic farmers and gardeners was formed in the Pacific Northwest in 1974. Over the years, Tilth has grown into a diverse and dynamic sustainable agricultural movement.

Here are just some of the reasons Washington state is emerging as a leader in organic agriculture:

- The number of acres of certified organic land in Washington increased by 40% in 2006 to 64,325 acres up from 46,181 acres in 2005, according to Washington State University research.
- Washington state is the leading producer of organic apples, pears, and sweet cherries in the country, and one of the leaders worldwide. It is estimated that 10% of all apple acreage in the state will be certified organic in two years.
- Our state has one of the oldest and most respected certification programs in the country (Washington State Dept. of Agriculture Organic Food Program), established in 1988.
- Organic beef production has also increased, with more than 2,200 head of organic beef in 2006, compared with just over 600 in 2005.
- Consumer demand for organic milk and dairy products has made dairy one of the fastest-growing segments in the organic marketplace - Five years ago there were two organic dairies in Washington, now there are 45.
- The amount of organic farm sales in Washington grew to \$101.5 million in 2006 from \$77.4 million in 2005, a 32% jump.
- The number of certified organic producers grew to 554 last year in Washington, up from 529 in 2005. An additional 26 farms are currently in the midst of transitioning to organic.
- Out in the henhouse or on pasture, the state has 131,760 certified organic laying hens, compared with 97,200 in 2005, a more than 40% increase.
- Washington State University is leading a movement among universities nationwide to offer organic farming courses in the curriculum. This fall, WSU becomes the first university in the country to offer a major in organic agricultural systems.
- Seven WSU students majoring in organic agriculture have been selected as the first recipients of the Pacific Natural Foods Organic Agriculture Scholarship, the first scholarship dedicated to the new organic agriculture systems major at the university.

Source: Washington State University's Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources.

For more information, contact Tilth Producers, www.tilthproducers.org.