



Farming for the Future

It seems like the hot word of the day is "organic." Everything is organic. My vegetables, my baby's food— heck, even the label on my shirt said parts of it were produced organically. Organic is more than a label, though; it's more than a lifestyle. It's a whole farming industry. One of the fastest-growing food production markets is in the organic agricultural markets. Organic foods are products grown by farmers who stress the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance the environmental quality for the future. The US Department of Agriculture regulates organic farming to ensure that all products meet industry standards.

Organic farmers take upon themselves the additional responsibilities of raising crops that maintain the integrity of organic agricultural products. They take into practice behaviors that promote and enhance biodiversity. They limit the use of off-farm products and keep their farm by-products to a minimum. They work to produce an organic product with practices and materials that enhance the ecological balances of natural systems in the ecology as a whole. While they can't completely do away with all waste, they work to make sure their foods are residue free and their farming methods leave little pollution in the soil, water, and air. The most fundamental goal of organic farmers is to keep the integrity of their food products, to enhance the environment, and to make people's lives better through their products. They are farming for the future.

In 2007, there were 2,076,000 farms in the United States. The average size of a farm was 449 acres (according to the US Department of Agriculture). Farmers don't typically apply for jobs the same way a teacher or an engineer would. Many farms and farmers come from families who have farmed for years. Some farmers go to school, some don't. Students working to become farmers are in an agriculture major or area of study. Today's farmers are business people, and this is where a college education may come in handy.

Many farmers are self-employed and even hire other people to help them on the farm. One way to get into farming would be to go to a local farm and simply ask what needs to be done to help out. This would give you hands-on experience and knowledge. Someone who wants to take on the whole farming industry head-first would need to first obtain land. Research

needs to be done to figure out what product could be grown and where it would grow the best. Farming requires long hours and physical work. It is very important to be physically fit. Farmers must be flexible with their time and what is required of them. Duties may differ from day to day, and sometimes something may demand attention right at that very moment. The working conditions may be rough, as there may be jobs to do in extreme heat or cold.

There are specializations in farming (such as vegetation vs. livestock); the one addressed in this article is organic farming. On top of everything that farmers do (mentioned in the previous paragraph), organic farmers take on the additional responsibilities outlined by the Department of Agriculture to make an unmatched, environmentally friendly product.

As for potential income, a farmer is an independent businessperson. Factors such as region, supply and demand, crop growth, and their product's marketability all come in to play when it comes time to make money. For farmers, some years are good; some are not (for income). Profits from a small farm may range from \$25,000–\$50,000, and a large farm may produce in the millions of dollars. Fifty percent of full-time, salaried farmers earn between \$32,000 and \$59,000 in 2002. The highest-paid 10 percent earned more than \$81,000. The lowest paid 10 percent earned less than \$24,000.

It is a monetary investment to start and run a farm. Farmers must take into account paying for their crop, equipment, maintenance, taxes, and salaries for their hired help. The larger the farm, the more money it takes to run it.



Agricultural Career Feature

It takes a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to become a farmer. But when you're an organic farmer you have the satisfaction of knowing that the product you make is not only helping

people better their lives, but also has a lasting positive impact on the environment and the future.

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