



This data brief summarizes findings from Organic Seed Alliance's (OSA) most recent State of Organic Seed report as they relate to the role of organic regulators and certifiers, including trends in organic seed sourcing, the enforcement of the organic seed regulation, and recommendations for encouraging the expansion of organic seed systems.

Overview

Organic seed represents the first link in the organic supply chain, serving as the foundation of organic integrity from seed to plate. *State of Organic Seed* is an ongoing project that monitors organic seed systems in the U.S. Every five years, OSA releases this progress report and action plan for increasing the organic seed supply while fostering seed grower networks and policies that aim to decentralize power and ownership in seed systems.

While organic seed is a regulatory requirement for certified organic producers, the benefits of growing and planting more organic seed go well beyond helping these producers meet a regulatory requirement. In short, OSA believes that organic agriculture is a necessary social movement that can create a sustainable and equitable path for our seed, food, and farming systems.

Key findings

Unfortunately, OSA's newest data shows **no meaningful improvement in organic producers using more organic seed compared to five years ago**. We arrived at this conclusion through surveys and interviews with targeted stakeholder groups, including a national survey of organic producers and organic certifiers. Some of these findings include:

- **Producers report variety unavailability as their top reason for not sourcing organic seed.** Certifiers report having a hard time identifying what might be substituted as an equivalent variety per the organic seed regulation.
- **We saw an increase in organic producers reporting a processor/buyer requirement as the reason for not sourcing organic seed.** More than 30 percent of respondents identified this as a challenge, and certifiers also report these buyer requirements as barriers to organic seed sourcing.

"Processors (buyers) demanding varieties in contract that are not available as organic continues to be the most significant roadblock to increasing use of organic seed in large row crop production."

- Organic Certifier

- Fewer producers report that their certifiers are requesting they take extra measures to source more organic seed (see Figure 1). This is an important finding, since our data also shows that when certifiers encourage producers to improve their organic seed sourcing, these organic producers respond accordingly by sourcing more organic seed (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Percent of grower reporting that their certifier requested greater steps to source organic seed

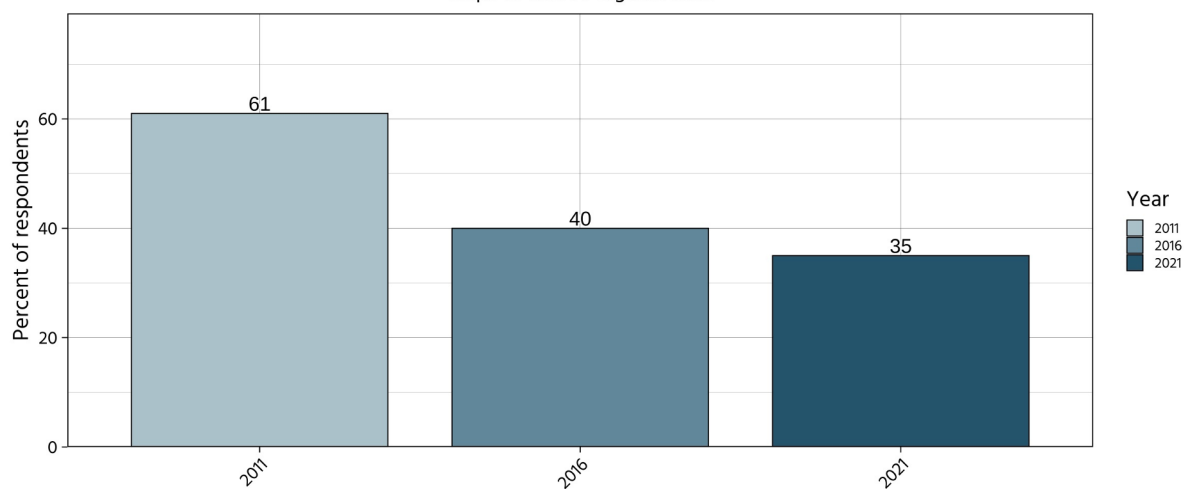
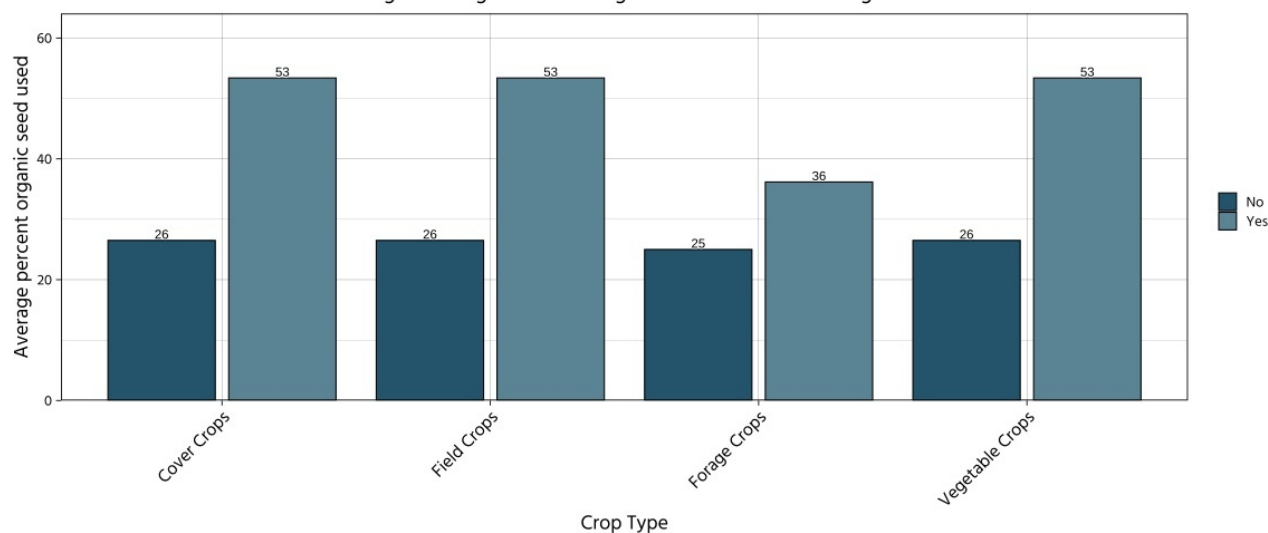


Figure 2. Organic seed usage based on certifier ratings



- A major gap in data and resources is a reliable, national database of all commercially available organic varieties. A more robust organic seed database would support sourcing and enforcement of the organic seed requirement and could support market assessment of commercial availability.

"We need to constantly reinforce that the grower needs to do more work to locate or trial organic seed."

-Organic Certifier

Certifiers share their perspective

In 2020, OSA conducted a survey of accredited certifying agencies (ACAs) based in the US. Twenty-two certifiers responded, representing more than 80 percent of certified organic farms in the US. Survey questions ranged from ACA's perspectives on organic seed sourcing to their enforcement of the organic seed requirement. Our findings show that more than 70 percent of organic certifiers perceive that organic seed availability is on the rise and nearly 70 percent say stronger regulations that aim to strengthen enforcement of the organic seed requirement are needed.

Certifiers also shared challenges in evaluating equivalent organic varieties if growers claim they are unable to source a specific variety as organic. Based on certifier responses and other data, OSA believes the following recommendations are top priorities for ensuring that more organic seed is planted on organic land.

Recommendations

- The organic seed regulation should be strengthened and consistently enforced, regardless of farm size.
- Buyers/processors who contract with organic producers to use specific varieties should be held accountable to the organic seed regulation.
- Training organic certifiers, inspectors, and producers in organic seed availability and enforcement tools would improve organic seed sourcing and support consistent enforcement of the regulation.
- There is a need to improve existing databases, or develop a new database, that reliably includes all commercially available organic seed to support sourcing and enforcement, including eventually closing the exemption that allows organic producers to use non-organic seed.

