



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Organic Farming

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Background

As people look for healthier ways of living many are turning to the growing organic food industry. Lucky for Rhode Islanders, there are Rhode Island Certified Organic Farms that specialize in offering local organic produce. Rhode Island Certified Organic Farms are a growing part of Rhode Island's agriculture and valuable both to the economy and the environment of Rhode Island. This EarthWatch segment by the RIDEM and Channel 10 will provide information about Rhode Island's Organic Farm Programs and the different labels that consumers should look out for.

What Does Organic Mean?

The production of organic foods is different from conventionally produced foods in the way they are grown, handled and processed. Organic food is processed without using most man-made pesticides, fertilizers or other conventional methods like bioengineering but instead use sustainable practices to grow their produce. Not only does this maintain clean open spaces in Rhode Island but many of the sustainable practices involved in organic farming result in water and soil conservation as well.

How Does a Farm or Food Handler become part of the Rhode Island Certified Organic Program?

DEM's Division of Agriculture and Resource Marketing administers the Rhode Island Organic Certification Program. In order to be certified farms must meet strict standards developed by the US Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program (NOP). Any operation with gross agricultural income from sales of organic products over \$5,000.00 annually is required to be certified by a USDA-accredited certifier.

To be considered for organic certification, a field must have been farmed organically following NOP standards for the previous three consecutive years. Farmland that has been farmed organically for at least twelve months can be certified "transitional" while awaiting eligibility to be certified organic. However, produce from a transitional field may not be marketed as organic or used as organic ingredients in other products.

Once certified as organic, the farms can label their products with the USDA organic seal or a special Rhode Island organic sticker. Although both seals ensure consumers that the foods have been produced according to high



national organic standards, the RI Certified Organic label lets consumers know that they are supporting local agriculture and the local economy.

Consumers should be aware that different claims are made about organic products, but only some can use the organic seals as follows:

- **“100% Organic”**: This food contains 100 percent organic ingredients. May use the USDA organic seal.
- **“Organic”**: 95-100 percent organic. May use the USDA organic seal.
- **“Made with Organic Ingredients”**: Products that contain at least 70% organic ingredients. This type of labeling cannot use the USDA organic seal.
- **“Natural”, “Free-range”, “Sustainably-harvested”, etc.**: There are no restrictions on these labels and they should not be confused with “organic” labels. They **do not** carry the USDA organic seal.

Local & Organic: Casey Farm

There are many local farms in Rhode Island that have earned organic certification and among one of the oldest is Casey Farm in North Kingstown. Casey Farm has been farmed continuously since the colonial era of 1702 and offers visitors a historic and tasty treat. It earned its Rhode Island organic certification in 1993 and became certified to USDA NOP standards when those took effect in 2002.

Furthermore, it shares its organic produce with its neighbors through a program in Rhode Island known as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA allows residents from surrounding communities to pay a fee at the beginning of the growing season for a share of the farm’s produce between June and October. Residents who join the program are required to pitch in some work on the farm throughout the year too.

Educational opportunities are available at Casey Farm for students and other youth groups. They offer a three-week summer camp that educates children in sustainable growing practices and livestock, using the fields and familiarizes them with the different resident farm animals.



Casey Farm, North Kingstown

Casey Farm is an excellent example of a local Rhode Island farm that has committed to organic production and has made the experience available to many Rhode Islanders. Their environmentally friendly practices and delicious produce are sure to keep Casey Farm a favorite among Rhode Islanders.

Additional Sources:

Certified Organic Farms and Handlers in Rhode Island:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/agricult/pdf/orgbroch.pdf>

National Organic Program: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm>

RIDEM Organic Certification Program:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/agricult/orgcert.htm>

Interviews:

- Matthew Green, DEM Farm Inspector (below, left, being interviewed by Channel 10's R.J. Heim)
- Patrick McNiff, Manager, Casey Farms (below, right)

