

U.S. organic trade group lists 2015's top 10 milestones

Organic Trade Association takes look at biggest organic news

by Sustainable Food News

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The Organic Trade Association (OTA) on Monday released its top 10 milestones for 2015, including the drive for an organic research and promotion check-off program.

The top 10 organic developments in 2015:

1) *Organic sales boomed.* OTA's [2015 Organic Industry Survey](#) showed organic sales in the U.S. in 2014 reaching a new record of \$39.1 billion. Organic food sales hit \$35.9 billion, up 11 percent from the previous year. Sales of organic non-food products shot up 14 percent to \$3.2 billion. Organic food sales made up nearly 5 percent of all U.S. food sales, and for the first time traditional retailers sold 50 percent of the total volume of organic products. Online, the number of shoppers buying organic doubled. Eating out, organic lovers found organic on the menus of their favorite casual and even fast-food restaurants.

2) *Organic industry moved forward on a trail-blazing organic check-off.* In a ground-breaking move for the nation's organic sector, OTA petitioned the U.S. Department of Agriculture to begin steps to conduct a vote on an [organic research and promotion check-off program](#). The action reflected three years of dialogue with the organic sector to craft a check-off tailor-made for organic. The move to collectively invest in its future represented a game-changing move by organic stakeholders, and would enable the sector to raise funds to boost organic research, promote the organic brand, and increase organic acreage in the United States.

3) *Organic standards were tightened and improved.* In a [four-day public meeting](#) in the fall, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) recommended the removal of an unprecedented eleven materials from organic's National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. NOSB's action reflected the innovations made in organic practices that have enabled the use of fewer and fewer synthetic inputs. Once the recommendations are approved by the National Organic Program, these materials will no longer be allowed in producing, processing or handling organic food.

4) *New federal food and agricultural policies took note of organic.* The unique needs and practices of organic agriculture were recognized by federal policy and rulemakers in critical new regulations. In its final rules to implement the [Food Safety Modernization Act](#), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) revised earlier proposals regarding compost and manure handling and other proposed rules that would have negatively impacted organic. In an improvement in federal crop insurance coverage for organic farmers, USDA expanded the number of crops with organic price premiums and strengthened the organic safety net.

5) *Organic was shown to be bee-friendly, and the White House paid attention.* A [report released by The Organic Center](#) showed that organic agricultural practices maintain the health and population of vital crop pollinators, including bees which have been declining at an alarming rate. Following the release of the report, OTA met with the White House to begin discussions on including organic as a key part of the Administration's solution to support pollinator health.

6) *Benchmark studies yielded key insights into global organic trade.* Studies spearheaded by OTA on the trade flow of organic products offered valuable data for farmers, policymakers and all organic stakeholders in making future industry investment and policy decisions. [One study](#) revealed a robust global appetite for U.S. organic, and strong evidence of American farmers losing out on some key markets by not growing more organic. Another study proved organic equivalency arrangements to be a net positive for all parties.

7) *Organic profitability increased.* Organic farmers made money. Farm-gate sales of organic products totaled \$5.5 billion, up a whopping 72 percent from four years earlier, the USDA found in its [2014 Organic Survey](#) released in September. A separate report from USDA's Economic Research Service showed significant financial returns with organic crop production, largely due to the organic price premiums. A [Washington State University study](#) found that organic farming is more profitable than conventional agriculture.

8) *Consumers of all types and in all parts of the country chose organic.* Organic looked like America. As the availability of organic widened and organic offerings became more varied, there was more diversity in organic buyers. The faces of organic-buying families mirrored the U.S. population in terms of ethnic background, said OTA's [U.S. Families' Organic Attitudes and Beliefs 2015 Tracking Study](#). The majority of households in all regions of the country made organic a part of their supermarket and retail purchases.

9) *American organic had a bigger presence on the international stage.* From Europe to Asia, U.S. organic commanded a brighter spotlight on the world stage. In Milan, Italy, OTA represented U.S. organic for the first time in a [World's Fair](#). In Washington, D.C., officials signed an [organic equivalency understanding](#) between the U.S. and Switzerland, marking the final step in opening the valuable European market to the U.S. organic sector. In Tokyo, OTA hosted the first [Organic Day in Japan](#), showcasing hundreds of American organic products to thousands of enthusiastic Japanese consumers.

10) *Research revealed the environmental and human health benefits of organic.* From improving soil health and supporting water quality, to reducing our exposure to pesticides and mitigating climate change, the latest research showed the many benefits of organic food and agriculture. For a complete look at the organic research breakthroughs in 2015, see [The Organic Center's list of this year's most important findings](#).