

Public Abstract

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Organic agricultural production in Missouri has grown since the inception of national organic production and labeling standards in 2002. Underlying the growth of certified organic operations and land area in Missouri are producers' motivations and perceptions regarding organic conversion. The main objective of this research is to compare organic farmers' perceptions and motives by the type of agricultural products produced on their farms. Using a multiple case study methodology, this study compares the elements of the organic adoption decision among Missouri's organic produce, row crop, livestock, and dairy farmers. In order to make comparisons between the farmer types, the study employs the concept of adoption from diffusion of innovations theory as a framework for understanding the elements of the farmers' organic adoption decisions. Comparative analysis of interview responses from farmers regarding the characteristics of organic farming reveals that motivational and perceptual differences exist between farming sectors. In general, farmers from the organic produce, row crop, and dairy farming categories have more positive views of the attributes of organic farming than livestock farmers do. The results of this study provide policy makers with important information regarding the motives and perceptions of differing types of organic farmers in Missouri. The results of this study can aid policy makers in enacting policies that are appropriate for their target population and provides public program administrators with valuable information in understanding their clientele. As demand for organic products and the number of organic producers increases, organic agricultural policy will become increasingly important to the sustainability of the organic industry.