

SOUTHEAST

TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AT SYMPOSIUM STRENGTHEN MARKETS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR FLORIDA AGRICULTURE

The Growing Stronger Together: Community, Markets, and Innovation for Farmers symposium held on August 20th, brought together farmers, growers, agricultural professionals, educators, buyers, and industry partners for a full day of learning, collaboration, and networking in Jacksonville, Florida. Hosted by Florida Organic Growers and Rodale Institute, the event focused on strengthening the agricultural community through innovative farming practices, market development opportunities, and sustainable organic production strategies.



Panelists discussing pathways to strengthen connections between producers and buyers.

Attendees participated in sessions covering conservation, pest management, produce safety, diversified farming systems, and profitability, while gaining insights from experts and buyers on expanding market access and building stronger customer relationships. The symposium also provided opportunities for peer-to-peer networking, knowledge sharing, and partnership development, culminating in a buyer panel hosted by Rodale Institute and a networking mixer designed to foster future growth and success within Florida's farming community.

The Jacksonville Symposium received highly positive feedback from participants, with evaluations indicating strong support for both the content and overall event structure. Attendees reported increased openness to working with organic producers and adopting organic practices, while most participants indicated they plan to implement practices learned during the symposium. Knowledge gains were substantial, with the majority reporting that their understanding of organic production increased either somewhat or a great deal. Participants consistently valued sessions providing practical, real-world information, particularly around market access, customer engagement, and buyer perspectives. Future topic requests revealed interest in marketing, business development, logistics, website and communication strategies, beginning farmer education, and advanced production topics.



Attendees listening to a presentation during the Growing Stronger Together symposium.

The symposium extended beyond educational sessions, creating opportunities for participants to connect with organizations, service providers, and fellow community members throughout the day. Resource tables, informal conversations, and networking activities encouraged attendees to exchange ideas, learn about available programs and services, and build relationships that can support future collaboration across Florida's food and farming community.

Perhaps the surprise star of the symposium was the venue itself. The Jessie Ball Dupont Center, affectionately known as the "Jessie," is a former library repurposed as the home of a wide range of not-for-profit organizations serving the Jacksonville area. Many of the staff in the building came for a part of the day to join in the symposium to learn about opportunities in the community. It was like a beautiful mini campus for the day and set the mood for the successes that were shared by all who attended.

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United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program