University Farm Organic Certification Best Practices
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An overview of the University Farm
The University Farm seeks to...
Help facilitate the economic development of local farms in the Tri-Counties through obtaining the organic certification as a producer of fruits, vegetables, herbs, meats or value added products in order to be a leader in the region for value added crops. Furthermore, the University Farm plans to become a certifying agent to lower the cost of certification and serve as the first certifying agency within the state of TN. The Farm sees an opportunity for specialization in herb cultivation due to the natural conditions of the soil and the ability to dry and store herbs for a long periods of time before having to sell much easier than fresh produce that requires immediate demand to avoid natural spoiling.

Through best practice research and community outreach, the organic certification coordinator’s project focus is on exploring options for growers that will increase profits, strengthen connections in the community, and enhance healthy community options. With an emphasis on value added crops, specifically organically certified crops, an examination and cross comparison between two different certifications, USDA organic and Certified Naturally Grown (CNG), resulted in the following recommendations for local growers.

Recommendations
- Considering the local grower demographic, small, mixed-agriculture productions that sell to local South Cumberland farmers market, farmers would benefit greater from the CNG certification than the USDA.
- Benefits of CNG...
  ○ Cost effective... Lower annual funds, scholarship opportunities
  ○ Time efficient... Requires less reporting, shorter and more simplistic application, peer-reviewed audit
- CNG withholds all necessary requirements for growers to sell products at farmers markets as organically grown, but if growers want to sell to grocery stores a USDA certification is required.
- Herbs are relatively straightforward to cultivate, only requiring bi-annual summer harvests. After touring St. Mary’s lavender fields and understanding their partnership with Thistle Farms, there is space for development of dried herbs on the Plateau.
- The next steps would be to connect with farmers or any land owners to see if there is interest in the matter as well as to connect with larger herb or tea companies such as Thistle Farms to see if there is a demand.