



SOUTHEAST

TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

May 2026

L'HOSTE CITRUS: FOUR DECADES OF ORGANIC FARMING, INNOVATION, AND RESILIENCE

Just south of New Orleans in Braithwaite, Louisiana, L'Hoste Citrus stretches across 35 acres of coastal farmland. The Mississippi River runs along the front edge of the property, while pecan trees frame the family home. Behind it, the farm unfolds in rows of citrus, newly cleared ground, and young plantings sit among older trees that have been tended to for decades. This working farm tells a story of steady work—built through thoughtful decisions and long-term stewardship.

Founded in 1981 by Lester and Linda L'Hoste, the farm has supplied citrus to its surrounding community for more than forty years. Its location near the Gulf of America brings both opportunity and challenge. Fresh irrigation can be difficult to source, hurricanes are always a concern, and saltwater intrusion is a constant possibility. Still, the L'Hoste family has continued farming here, guided by faith, curiosity, careful management, and a willingness to adapt.

Citrus remains at the heart of the operation, but over time L'Hoste Citrus has grown into a diversified, multi-crop farm. Satsumas and lemons now stand alongside persimmons, peaches, vegetables, compost systems, and a thriving on-farm nursery—each added through experimentation, persistence, and learning.



From Conventional to Certified Organic

Lester L'Hoste's path to organic farming began long before certification was common. After purchasing the land in 1981, he initially grew citrus conventionally. But after decades working in industrial chemistry at an oil refinery, he became increasingly aware of how synthetic agricultural inputs are made and how they move through the environment.

Unable to overlook the health and ecological consequences, Lester made a decision that would reshape the farm. He began transitioning away from conventional practices, focusing instead on soil health, observation, and long-term

sustainability. In 1996, L'Hoste Citrus became a certified organic operation—one of the early adopters in the region.

Since then, the farm has sold more than two million pounds of certified organic citrus, primarily through farmers' markets and direct sales. For Lester, organic farming was never about labels or trends, but about producing clean, high-quality fruit and remaining accountable—to customers, to the land, and to future generations.



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Built on Citrus, Grown with Intention

Citrus has always been the backbone of the farm, with satsuma mandarins prized for their sweetness, easy-to-peel skins, and adaptability to the region's climate. Over the years, L'Hoste Citrus also produced organic grapefruits, navels, and Meyer lemons.

In recent years, citrus greening and extreme weather have taken a heavy toll. A severe, week-long freeze that dropped temperatures to 18°F devastated much of the mature grove, especially trees already weakened by disease.

Rather than rushing to replant, Lester adopted a slower, deliberate approach. Dead trees were left in place long enough for their root systems to break down naturally, returning organic matter to the soil and reducing disturbance. That patience also allowed time to reassess what made sense going forward.



Small-scale hoop house production and additional crops have since been added, spreading risk while keeping citrus at the center of the operation. Diversification hasn't replaced citrus—but it has created flexibility in the face of changing conditions.



Soil, Stewardship, and the Next Generation

Organic management at L'Hoste Citrus prioritizes soil health and close observation. Fertility begins with compost—about a thousand yards each year—monitored carefully to meet organic standards and applied along orchard rows. Weed control is handled primarily through mechanical methods, avoiding synthetic herbicides.

One of the most active areas on the farm today is the citrus nursery. Inside the greenhouse, hundreds



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of young trees are grown from Lester's own rootstock and grafted by hand. Selected for cold tolerance and potential disease resistance, these trees represent the future of the orchard. Replanting happens gradually, guided by what has survived and what aligns with the farm's long-term goals.



Knowledge, Accountability, and a Farm Built to Last

Decades of hands-on experience—and conversations with other growers—have shaped Lester's approach. Today, he gives back through mentorship, including his role with the Southeast Transition to Organic Partnership Program, where he shares both successes and failures with growers navigating organic production.

Meeting customers face-to-face at farmers' markets remains one of the most rewarding parts of farming. It's where accountability is real and relationships last.

L'Hoste Citrus looks different today than it once did—smaller, more diversified, and shaped by careful adjustment over time. There is no fixed blueprint for the future. Decisions are made season by season, based on what the land can support and what feels sustainable.

Through floods, freezes, shifting markets, and changing regulations, Lester and Linda L'Hoste have remained rooted to this land. Their farm reflects a lifetime of work informed by curiosity, patience, and faith—moving forward one tree, one crop, one season at a time.

Notes From the Field

- **Delay replanting after removal:** Leaving roots in place can improve soil structure and reduce disturbance before establishing new trees.
- **Prioritize organic matter:** Regular compost and manure inputs support soil health and flexibility in organic systems.



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