



Optimism Permeates US Organic Agriculture

Summary of the US Census of Agriculture- Organic Production Survey 2008

Of the 29,000 surveys mailed in 2008 to gain information on organic agriculture in the United States, more than 25,000 were returned and 12,600 of these were from active organic farms. This extensive survey of organic agriculture was performed in response to lack of information about organic farms and the organic marketplace. The full 331 page document which has much of the information split out on a state-by-state basis, can be found at http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Organics/, here are some highlights.

Overall acreage of organic farms in the United States in 2008 was 4 million acres, about 4 tenths of a percent of the total farmland in the U.S. Wisconsin has 195,603 organic acres, Minnesota has 122, 428 organic acres, and Iowa has 94, 568 organic acres. Sales of organically produced commodities in 2008 by state: WI- 1,327,640,000, MN - 69,053,000, IA -71,545,000. Nationwide 2/3 of the organic farms sell more than 75% of their production as organic with 70% of these sales between 75-100% sold on production contracts. Numerous tables detail the nationwide and state by state sales of a wide variety of organic crops from, potatoes to fruits and specialty crops as well as field crops and diverse livestock products.

The a variety of tables provide some fascinating statistics detailing various economic factors on organic farms, such as production expenses (again on a state by state basis), the types of sales outlets organic farmers use to sell their products and how many organic farmers are involved in various federal farm programs. Only 2, 167 organic farms of the 14,000 in the U.S. were enrolled in federal crop insurance programs and only 3594 farms used the organic certification cost share program. One third of the organic farmers felt that regulatory problems were the primary production challenge they faced, with 10% stating prices were their primary problem and 20% stating production was their primary issue.

It is no surprise that the Upper Midwest is very strong in organic milk, poultry and livestock feed sales, but we also have a strong fresh vegetable market. With the good infrastructure in place for processed vegetables, an opportunity exists for the Upper Midwest to increase their production of organic canned and frozen sweet corn, snap beans, peas and other processed vegetables.

The various production practices done on organic farms (biological pest management, planned plantings to prevent contamination, buffer strips, green manures, rotational grazing and more) gives a strong picture that organic farms are actively employing measures that protect and improve the environment.

Of the farms that are currently organic, 69% nationwide have been organic for more than 10 years, with WI at a higher rate of 71%, MN at 73% and IA at 74%. Organic farmers are optimistic about the future, with 37% of the organic farms looking to increase their organic production, 41% planning to stay the same and only 4% looking to decrease their organic production nationwide and 2.4% discontinuing organic production altogether. Exempt from organic certification farms had similar percentages. A total of 392,296 crop and pasture acres were in transition to organic in 2008. These numbers illustrate that current organic farmers are satisfied with their systems of production, and that others are seeing the benefits as well. We should continue to see growth in U.S. organic agriculture for the foreseeable future.