Data Track the Expansion of International and U.S. Organic Farming

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The consumption of organic food and beverages is concentrated in Europe and the United States, but the production of certified organic products is scattered worldwide. U.S. production and domestic consumption of organic products continues to increase. Organic farming systems rely on ecologically based practices, such as cultural and biological pest management, and virtually exclude the use of synthetic chemicals in crop production and prohibit the use of antibiotics and hormones in livestock production. The international statistics on organic production are compiled by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), based in Germany. ERS has collected data from U.S.-based organic certification groups since 1997 to calculate the extent of certified U.S. organic farmland acreage and livestock. In 2002, USDA made organic certification mandatory and has accredited 55 domestic and 41 foreign groups to certify farmers and handlers to U.S. organic standards.

Organic Acreage Is Expanding Rapidly in Many Countries

More than 77 million acres of agricultural land were being managed organically by farms in 119 countries in 2005-06. The U.S. ranks fourth behind Australia, China, and Argentina in certified organic land. In Australia and Argentina, pasture and rangeland are the dominant use of the organically managed land. China is producing a range of certified organic crops, including beans, cereals, and oilseeds in Northeast provinces and tea, rice, ginger, soybeans, and vegetables in the Eastern and Southern provinces. The domestic market for organic products is expanding modestly in China and other developing countries. Most of the countries with the fastest growth in organic production—including China, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, and Ukraine—produce organic products primarily for export.

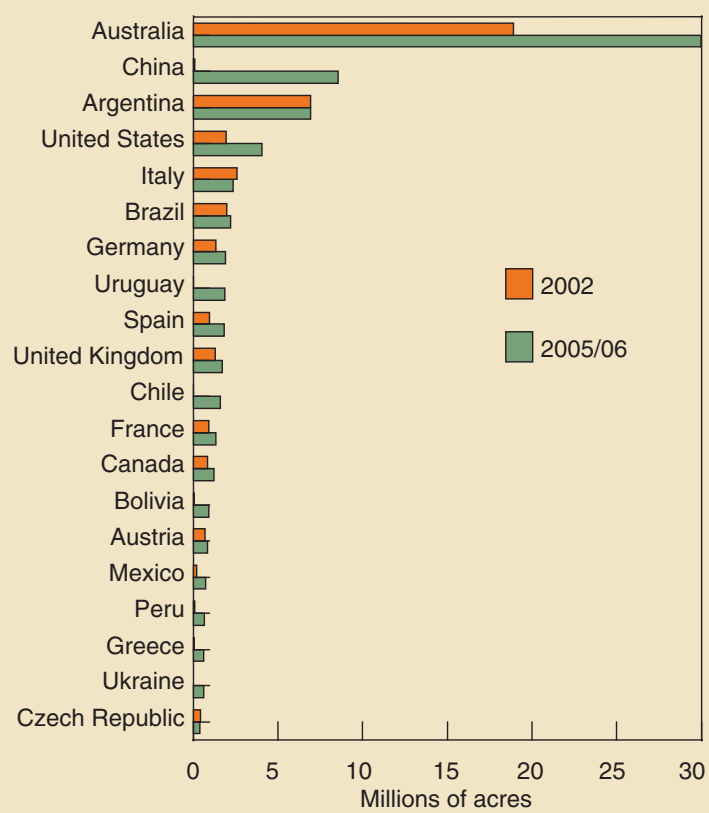
Organic Production Is Scattered Across the U.S.

Organic agriculture is showing strong growth in the United States, too, as more consumers buy organic products. U.S. producers dedicated over 4.0 million acres of farmland—1.7 million acres of cropland and 2.3 million acres of rangeland and pasture—to organic production systems in 2005, according to the most recent estimates from ERS.

The U.S. organic farm sector is diverse, with both small-scale operations marketing directly to consumers and large-scale operations targeting national and international markets.

In 2005, for the first time, all U.S. States had some certified organic farmland. Virtually all crop and livestock specialties are represented, as well as many farms that manage both conventional and organic operations as they transition into organic produc-

Certified organic farmland is increasing worldwide—U.S. ranks fourth among the top 20 countries



Source: 2002 Survey, Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL); 2005-06 Survey, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL).

Photos: Brendan Lipton, courtesy of My Organic Market

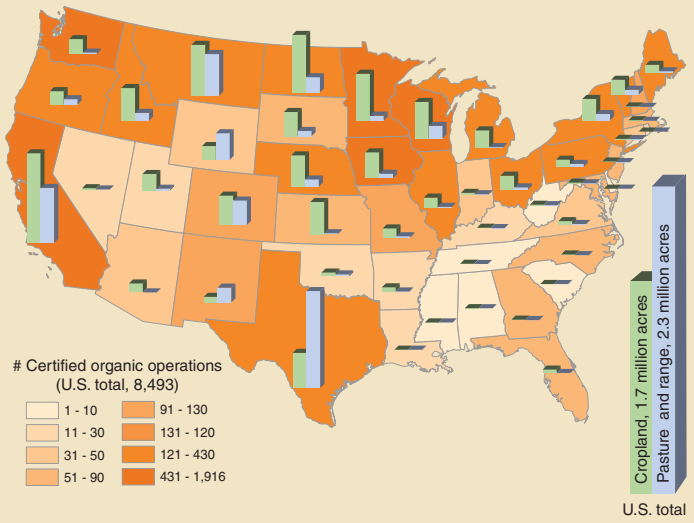
tion. California ranks first in certified operations, with just over 1,900 in 2005, up 20 percent from the previous year. States in the Northeast, Pacific Northwest, and Upper Midwest also have large numbers of organic farmers, many with specialty crop operations.

California also remains the leading State in certified organic cropland with over 220,000 acres, more than half in organic fruit and vegetable production. Other top States for certified organic cropland include North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Texas, and Idaho. Over 40 States also had some certified organic rangeland and pasture in 2005, although only Alaska, Texas, California, and Montana had more than 100,000 acres. USDA lifted restrictions on organic meat labeling in the late 1990s, and the organic poultry and beef sectors continue to expand rapidly.

U.S. Adoption Is Still Low

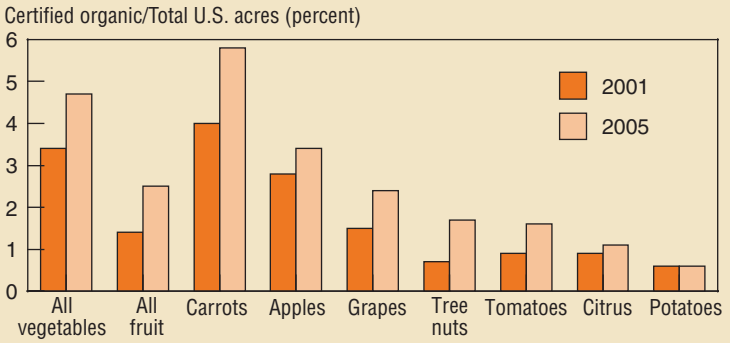
While adoption of organic farming systems showed strong gains between 1992 and 2005, the overall adoption level is still low—only about 0.5 percent of all U.S. cropland and 0.5 percent of all U.S. pasture was certified organic in 2005. Only a small percentage of the top U.S. field crops—corn (0.2 percent), soybeans (0.2 percent), and wheat (0.5 percent)—were grown under certified organic farming systems. On the other hand, organic carrots (6 percent of U.S. carrot acreage), organic apples (3 percent) and other fruit and vegetable crops were more commonly organic grown in 2005. Overall, nearly 5 percent of U.S. vegetable acreage and 2.5 percent of fruit and nut acreage was under organic management in 2005.

For the first time, all 50 States have some certified organic acreage, 2005

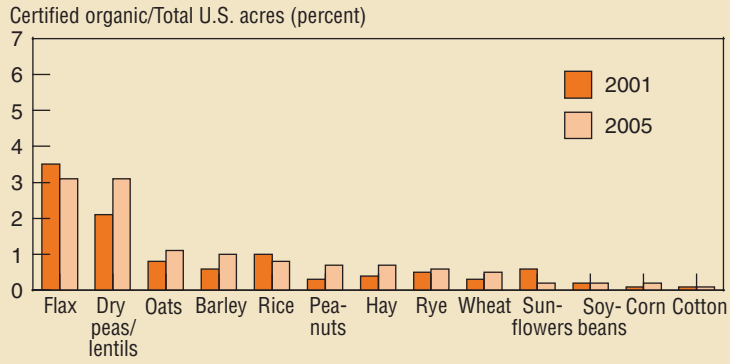


Source: USDA, Economic Research Service.

In the U.S., adoption of certified organic systems is highest for fruit and vegetables



However, certified organic systems are increasingly used for grain crops. . .adoption is higher for grains with food uses



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service.

Markets for organic vegetables, fruit, and herbs have been developing for decades in the United States, and fresh produce is still the top-selling organic category in retail sales. Organic livestock was beginning to catch up with produce in 2005, with 1 percent of U.S. dairy cows and 0.7 percent of the layer hens managed under certified organic systems. However, the low adoption rate for grain crops remains a bottleneck in the U.S. organic livestock sector—organic dairy and poultry producers continue to experience difficulty sourcing organically produced feed grains.

For more information...

The ERS Briefing Room on Organic Farming and Marketing, www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/organic/

ERS Data on Organic Production, www.ers.usda.gov/data/organic/