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Current Activities

Land Use Change

ERS economist **Ruben Lubowski** (rlubowski@ers.usda.gov) recently delivered an address on "Determinants of Land-Use Change in the United States, 1982-1997" at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in New Haven, CT, as part of an interdisciplinary lecture series sponsored by the Hixon Center for Urban Ecology. The series provides different perspectives on policies aimed at environmentally sustainable land development. Lubowski discussed the relative importance of different land-use determinants for the U.S. based on his econometric analysis of data from USDA's National Resources Inventory (NRI).

Exemptions to Methyl Bromide Ban

ERS researchers **Craig Osteen** (costeen@ers.usda.gov), **Carmen Sandretto**, and **Margriet Caswell** met with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Methyl Bromide Critical Use Exemption [CUE] Economics Review Team recently to discuss improvements in the CUE application

form and review process. Exemptions can be made if there are no economically feasible alternatives to the use of methyl bromide. In deciding which applications to put forward to the parties of the Montreal Protocol, the U.S. can consider whether the lack of methyl bromide for a particular use would cause significant market disruption (see article in April 2003 *Amber Waves*). The ERS economists helped EPA review the first application for an exemption to the methyl bromide restriction last year. Applications from the first round of petitions are currently under consideration by the international Methyl Bromide Options Committee. The next round is due in August.

Tracking the History of Food Products

Traceability systems track the flow of food products through the supply chain. Such systems could be used to manage issues like bio-terrorism, country-of-origin labeling, Mad Cow disease, and genetically engineered foods. Is mandatory traceability a useful and appropriate policy choice? The

answer partially depends on whether firms will voluntarily supply traceability data. ERS researchers are examining the rationale for and extent of tracing in the U.S. food chain and assessing where mandatory traceability may be desirable. **Barry Krissoff**, barryk@ers.usda.gov

Gauging Farmers' Responses to New Farm Programs

The 2002 Farm Act introduced counter-cyclical payments, a new type of program that supports farm revenue for eight major field crops when prices are low. Unlike traditional price supports, payments are based on historical acreage and yields and not current production. ERS researchers are looking to see if counter-cyclical payments influence farmers' planting and production decisions and, if so, how and to what extent? Because counter-cyclical payments interact with other elements of agricultural programs, like direct payments, marketing loan benefits, and crop insurance, ERS is investigating these interactions as well. **Ed Young**, ceyoung@ers.usda.gov

New Releases

Feeding Children When School Is Out

Through the Summer Food Service Program, USDA funds meals for children in low-income areas when school is not in session. In July 2001, 2.1 million children participated in this program, about 14 percent of the number who received free or reduced-price school meals during the previous school year. The ERS report *Feeding Low-Income Children When School Is Out: The Summer Food Service Program* (FANRR-30) presents findings from the first comprehensive study of this program in more than a decade. The report describes how the program operates at all levels of administration, examines factors that affect participation by sponsors and chil-

dren, and measures the nutritional quality of meals served and the extent of plate waste. **Jane Allshouse**, allshous@ers.usda.gov

Fruit and Vegetable Snacks in Schools

The 2002 Farm Bill provided \$6 million for the Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program, which offered free fruit and vegetable snacks to children in 107 elementary and secondary schools in Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, New Mexico, and Ohio during the 2002-03 school year. A new ERS report, *Evaluation of the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program: Report to Congress* (E-FAN-03-006), shows that the pilot was popular among most students, parents, State representatives, teachers, principals, and foodservice staff. The report also includes types of fruits and vegetables offered to children and strategies for delivery. **Jean Buzby**, jbuzby@ers.usda.gov

Organic Farming Expands

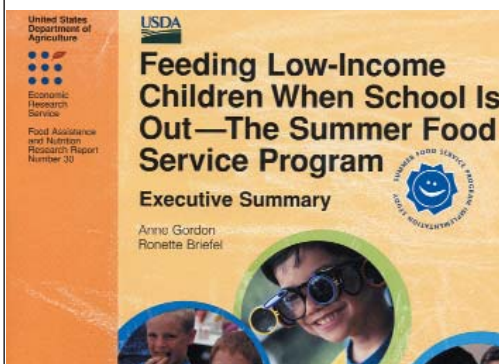
The rapid expansion of U.S. farmland managed under organic systems in the 1990s is documented in *U.S. Organic Farming in 2000-2001: Adoption of Certified Systems* (AIB-780). The uniform standards for organic production and processing adopted by USDA in October 2002 are expected to facilitate



further growth in the organic farm sector. This report updates USDA estimates of land farmed with organic practices for 2000 and 2001 and provides new estimates on the number of certified organic operations in each State. **Catherine Greene**, cgreene@ers.usda.gov

Commodity Markets and Trade

ERS Outlook reports provide timely analysis of major commodity markets and trade, including special reports on hot topics. All reports are available electronically and can be found at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/outlook along with a calendar of future releases. **Joy Harwood**, jharwood@ers.usda.gov



Recent Meetings

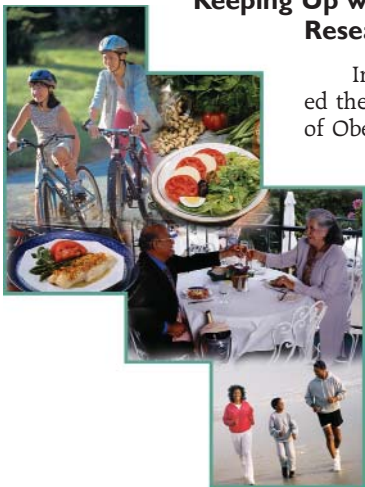
Uses of Retail Scanner Data

In June 2003, ERS hosted the workshop "Use of Scanner Data in Policy Analysis." As markets become more segmented and contracts replace spot transactions, market operations become less transparent, and the declining volume of available data associated with those transactions become less representative and therefore less useful for research. As a result, researchers are increasingly turning to retail scanner data to decipher market workings. Not only are such data plentiful (although expensive), but, with links to demographics of individual households, the data also provide a window on distributional issues. The workshop provided a forum in which experts discussed unique ways that scanner data permit researchers to address today's food policy issues. The voluminous quantity of the data, while an asset, can make working with the data difficult. Participants discussed various strategies of addressing methodological challenges in using scanner data. **David Davis**, ddavis@ers.usda.gov

Keeping Up with Obesity Research

In April 2003, ERS hosted the workshop "Economics of Obesity," jointly organized with University of Chicago's Irving B. Harris School of Public Policy. The workshop brought together leading health economists from around the country along with researchers from ERS and other Federal agencies with the goal of reviewing the current status of economic

research on obesity and overweight and discussing areas for future research. Topics covered included the role of technological change in explaining both the long- and short-run trends in obesity, the role of maternal employment in child obesity, the impact of obesity on wages and health insurance, behavioral economics as applied to obesity, and the challenges in measuring energy intakes and physical activity. **Jay Variyam**, jvariyam@ers.usda.gov



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Agricultural Trade and Policy Reform

In June 2003, ERS cosponsored an international conference "Agricultural Policy Reform and the WTO: Where Are We Heading?" The workshop explored how changes in the global food and agricultural sector, in response to new technologies and the evolving consumer demand for food, affect the international trade environment. Related policy dimensions discussed at the workshop include agricultural policy reforms, WTO enlargement, new WTO negotiations on agriculture, and regional integration, including the enlargement of the European Union. The conference was cosponsored by the University of California, University of Calabria (Italy), and the Farm Foundation, and other institutions. **Mary Bohman**, mbohman@ers.usda.gov

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Effects of Invasive Species on U.S. Agriculture

Increased global commerce has expanded the potential for invasive pests to affect agriculture, prompting ERS to launch a research program on the economics of policies to control invasive species. To review and discuss research priorities for the extramural competitive grants program, ERS, in collaboration with the Farm Foundation, hosted a workshop on the economics of invasive plant pests and animal diseases in May 2003. More than 100 representatives from higher education institutions, USDA, other Federal and State agencies, industry, and nongovernmental organizations participated in the workshop, providing perspectives on bioeconomic risk assessment, links between trade expansion and invasive introductions, and the economics of policies to exclude, monitor, and control plant pests and animal diseases. A summary of the workshop is available at the ERS Invasive Species Management briefing room (www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/invasivespecies). **Utpal Vasavada**, vasavada@ers.usda.gov

