

# U.S. Organic Farming in 2000-2001

## Adoption of Certified Systems

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### Introduction

U.S. farmland managed under organic systems expanded rapidly throughout the 1990s and has sustained that momentum, as farmers strive to meet consumer demand in both local and national markets. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) implemented national organic standards on organic production and processing in October 2002, following more than a decade of development, and the new uniform standards are expected to facilitate further growth in the organic farm sector. As the organic farm sector expands, a small amount of university-based research and technical assistance, Federal cost-share funds, and other State and Federal support for organic farmers is also beginning to emerge.

USDA's organic standards incorporate an ecological approach to farming that affects the entire production and processing system, unlike many new farming technologies—such as improved crop varieties and innovative yield monitoring tools—that typically alter only a single input or aspect of production. Farmers who shift to organic farming systems from chemical-intensive systems must make changes across the spectrum of their production inputs and practices. An increasing number of farmers in the United States and around the world have begun to explore that challenge in recent years.

This study updates USDA estimates of land farmed with organic practices during 1997 with estimates for 2000 and 2001, and provides new estimates on the number of certified organic operations in each State. U.S. farmers and ranchers have added another million acres of certified organic cropland and pasture since 1997, bringing the 48-State total to 2.34 million acres in 2001. Certified organic livestock operations grew even faster during this period. Most crop/livestock sectors and most States also showed strong annual growth between 2000 and 2001. Overall, certified organic cropland and pasture accounted

for 0.3 percent of U.S. cropland and pasture in 2001, although the share is much higher in some crops, such as vegetables at 2 percent.

The United States ranked fourth in land area managed under organic farming systems, behind Australia (with 19 million acres under organic management), Argentina (6.9 million acres), and Italy (2.6 million acres), in a recent worldwide survey (Yussefi and Willer, 2002). Argentina and Australia each had about 1.6 percent of their land area under organic management, much of that acreage in pasture. The U.S. was not among the top 10 as a percentage of total farmland, which included Switzerland (9 percent of total land area under organic management), Austria (8.64 percent), Italy (6.76 percent), Sweden (5.2 percent), the Czech Republic (3.86 percent), and the United Kingdom (3.3 percent). Worldwide conversion levels are currently the highest in European Union (EU) countries, which have been developing consumer education initiatives and providing direct financial support to producers for conversion since the late 1980s to capture the environmental benefits of these systems and support rural development. Many EU countries have set targets for organic farming adoption of 10-20 percent of agricultural land area by 2010 (Lampkin, 2002).

While government intervention in the United States has focused primarily on market facilitation, several States—Minnesota and Iowa in particular—have begun subsidizing conversion to organic farming systems as a way to capture the environmental benefits of these systems (Plank, 1999; DeWitt, 1999). Also, at least nine USDA agencies have started or expanded programs and pilot projects to help organic producers with production and marketing problems and risks (Dimitri and Greene, 2002), and the 2002 Farm Act for the first time included several initiatives to assist organic farmers.