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<http://organictransition.umn.edu/>

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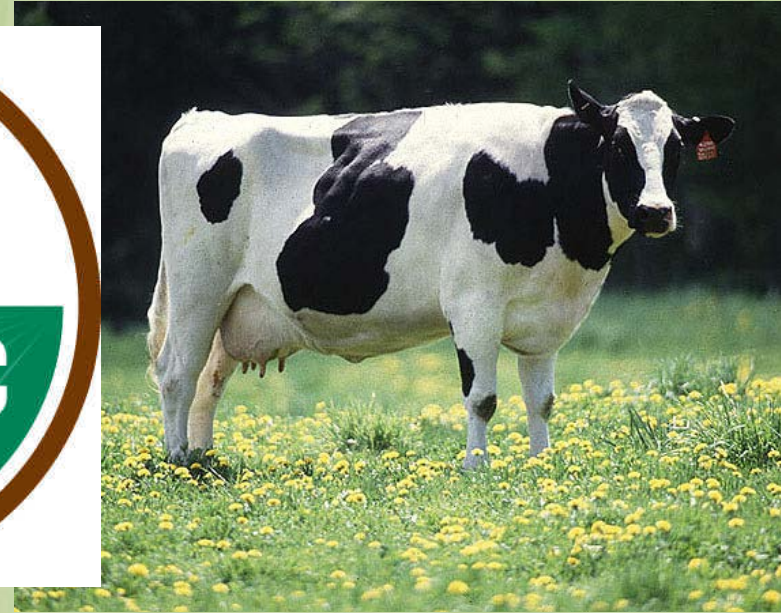
History of Organic Farming



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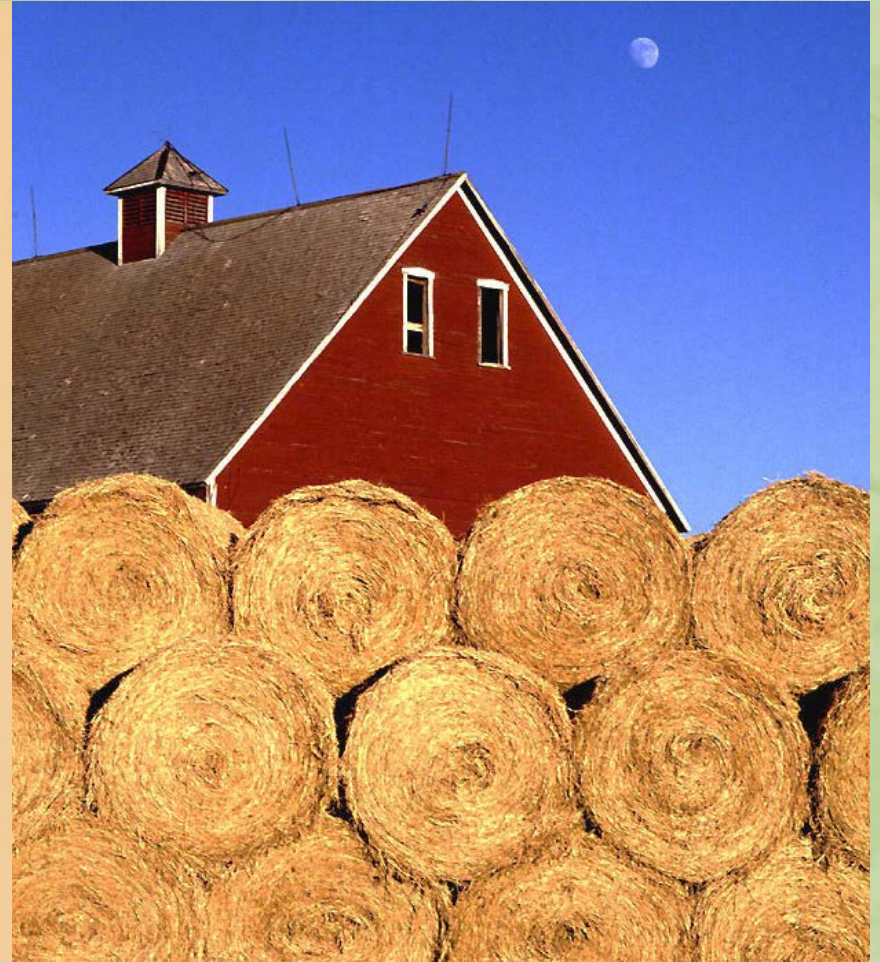
Introduction



- The National Organic Program (NOP) was established in 2002
- Movement began many years before

History of Organic

- I. Beginnings
- II. U.S. Movement
- III. USDA
Involvement
- IV. Organic Today



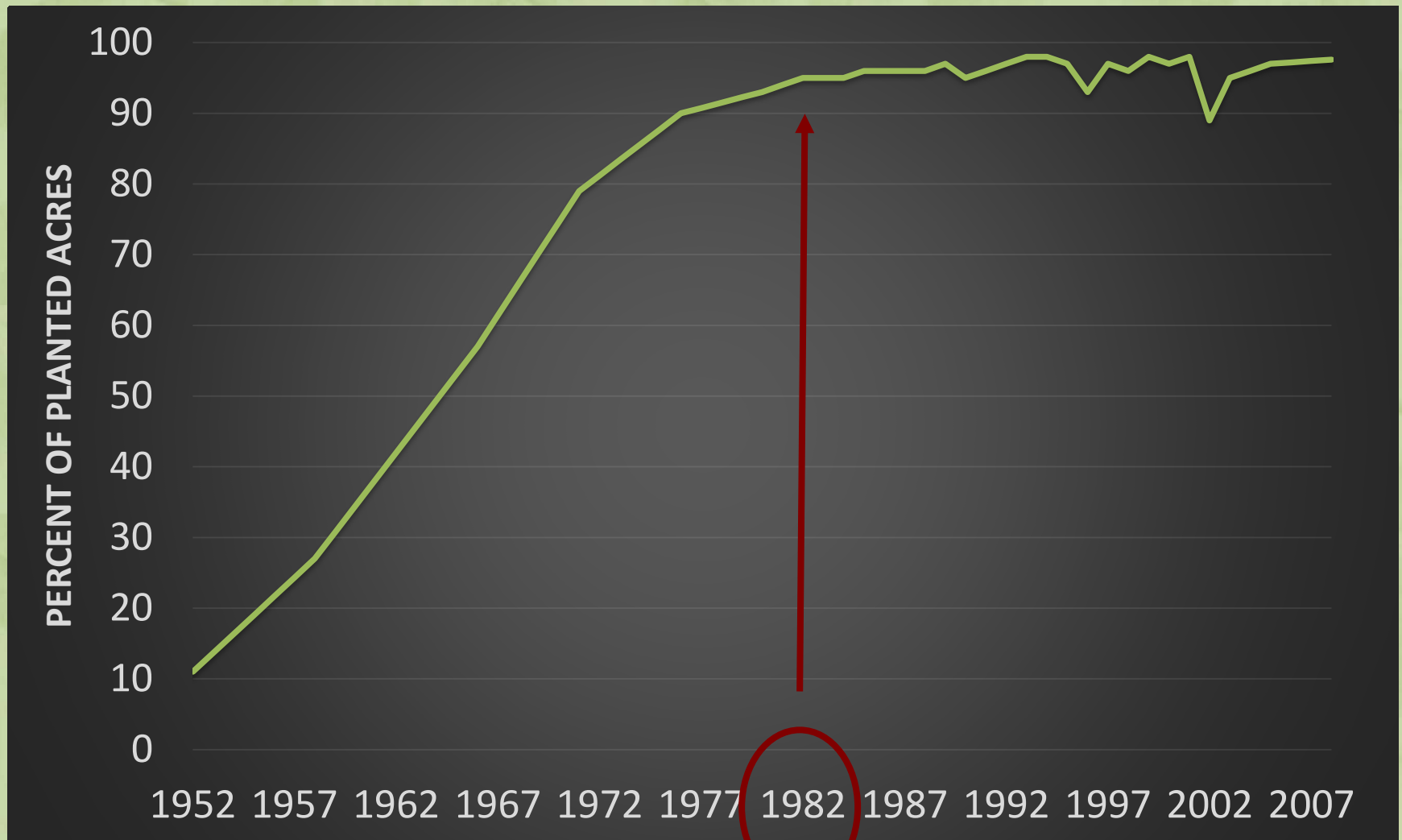
Prior to Organic Movement

- Early 20th century
- Industrialization of agriculture
 - Mechanization
 - Specialization
 - Use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides



Cultivation in the 1930s

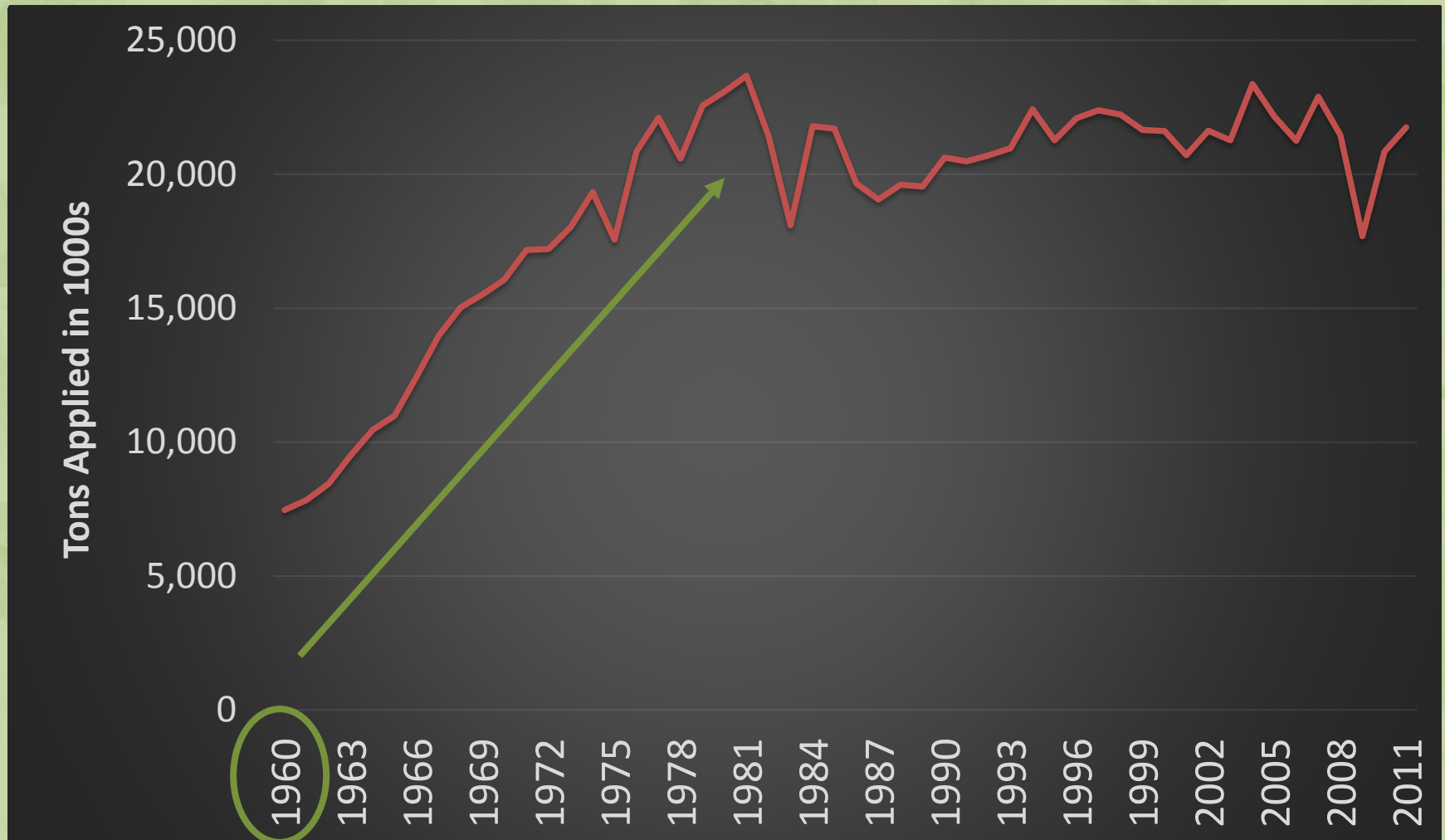
Corn Acreage Treated with Herbicides, 1952-2008



Economic Research Service, USDA, 2016

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Fertilizer Use in U.S. Agriculture, 1960-2011



Economic Research Service, USDA, 2016

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The Roots of Organic Farming



- Europe
- 1920s – 1950s
- Opposition to industrial agriculture
- Emphasis on soil health

Sir Albert Howard (1873-1947)



- The “father” of organic agriculture
- Concepts:
 - Healthy soils for healthy plants and animals
 - Humus (the organic component of soil) was critical for health soils
- Never used the term “organic”

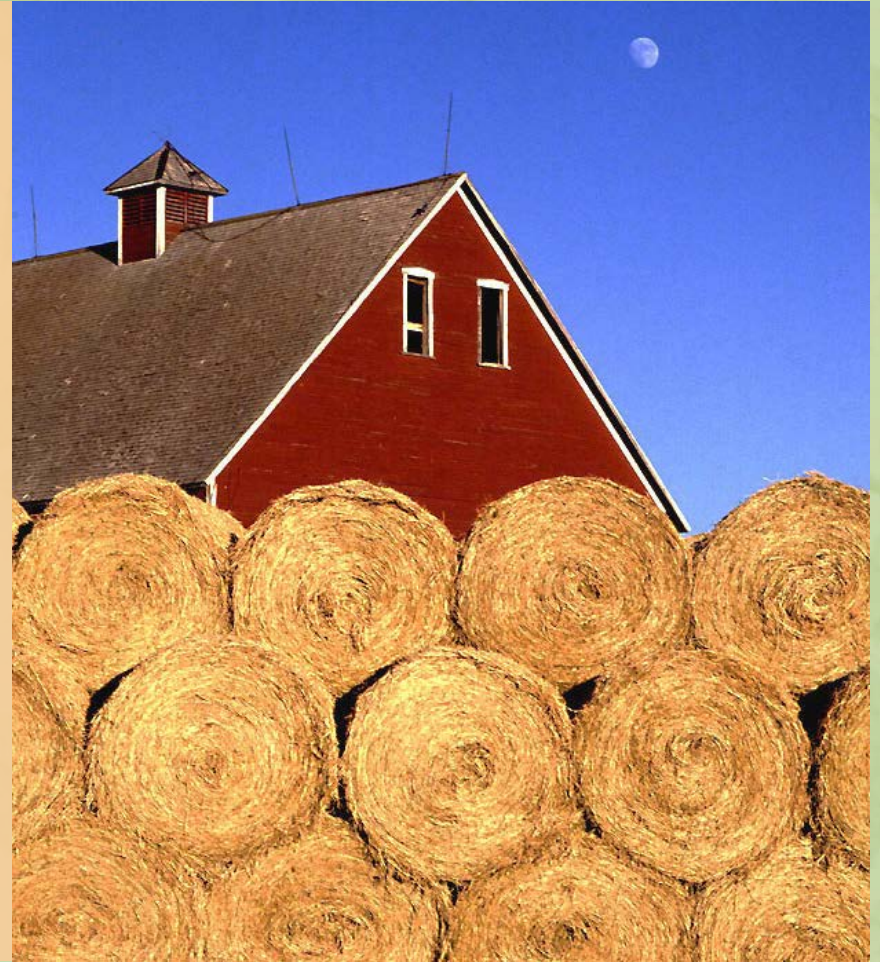
Lord Northbourne (1896-1982)

- Coined the term “organic” in 1939
- Introduced the concept of the “farm as an organic whole”



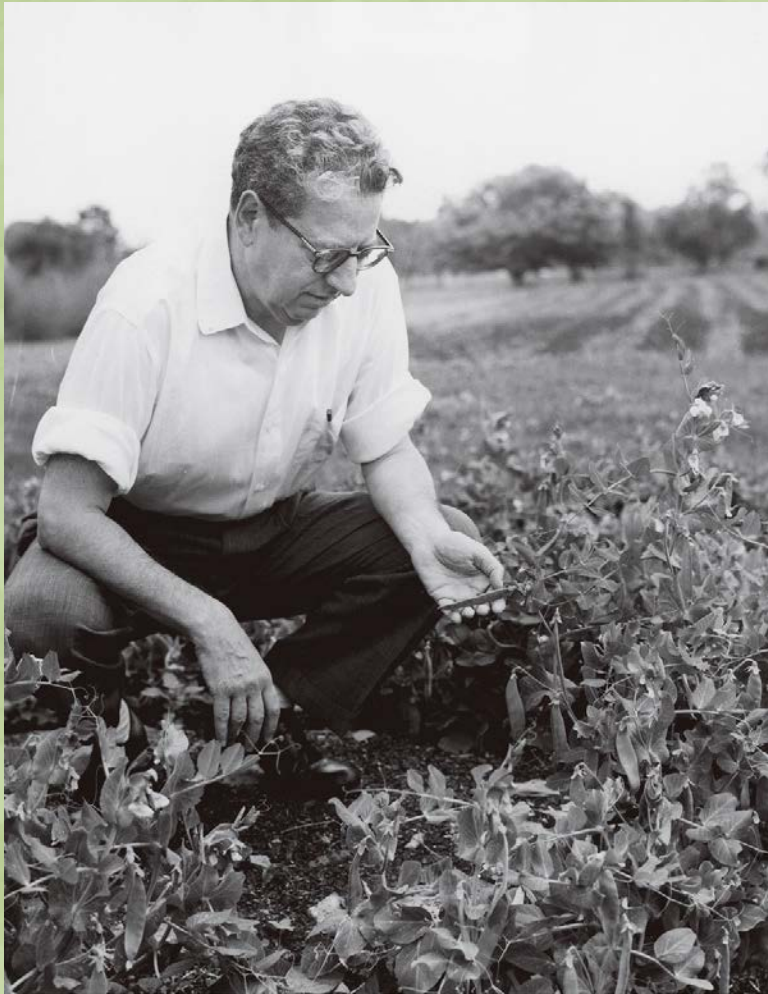
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J.I. Rodale

(1898 – 1971)



- Inspired by movement in Europe
- Introduced organic farming concepts to the U.S.
- Founded the Rodale Institute (still influential today)

Concerns of U.S. Organic Movement (1960s)

- Pesticide hazards to health of people and animals
- Decline in soil health
- Water pollution
- Costs of synthetic inputs
- Loss of family farms and local markets



Unhealthy soil (due to erosion)

Early Organic Community



- No governmental oversight
- Organic on a local scale with word of farmer trusted
- Information acquired from other farmers and Rodale Institute
- No organic premium or formal markets

1970s

- Different groups of farmers and consumers cooperated to develop their own:
 - Organic standards
 - Certification processes



“Organic farmers were working out systems on their own farms; often they were isolated and faced harassment and ridicule in their own communities. Two of the greatest challenges at the time were lack of growing information and confusion about what organic meant.” -- Atina Diffley, *Turn Here Sweet Corn*



1980s

- In 1980, 3 states (OR, ME, CA) had legal definitions of “organic”
- Organic Growers and Buyers Association helped MN pass organic regulations in 1985



Meeting of the Organic Growers and Buyers Association in Madison, MN

Rise of Private Certification

- By mid-1980s, many different certifying agencies existed
- Each developed their own organic rules



Organic Practices Varied Across the Country

- Use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides
- How long to transition
 - Often 12-month period
 - Some thought too long, others not long enough



Urea application

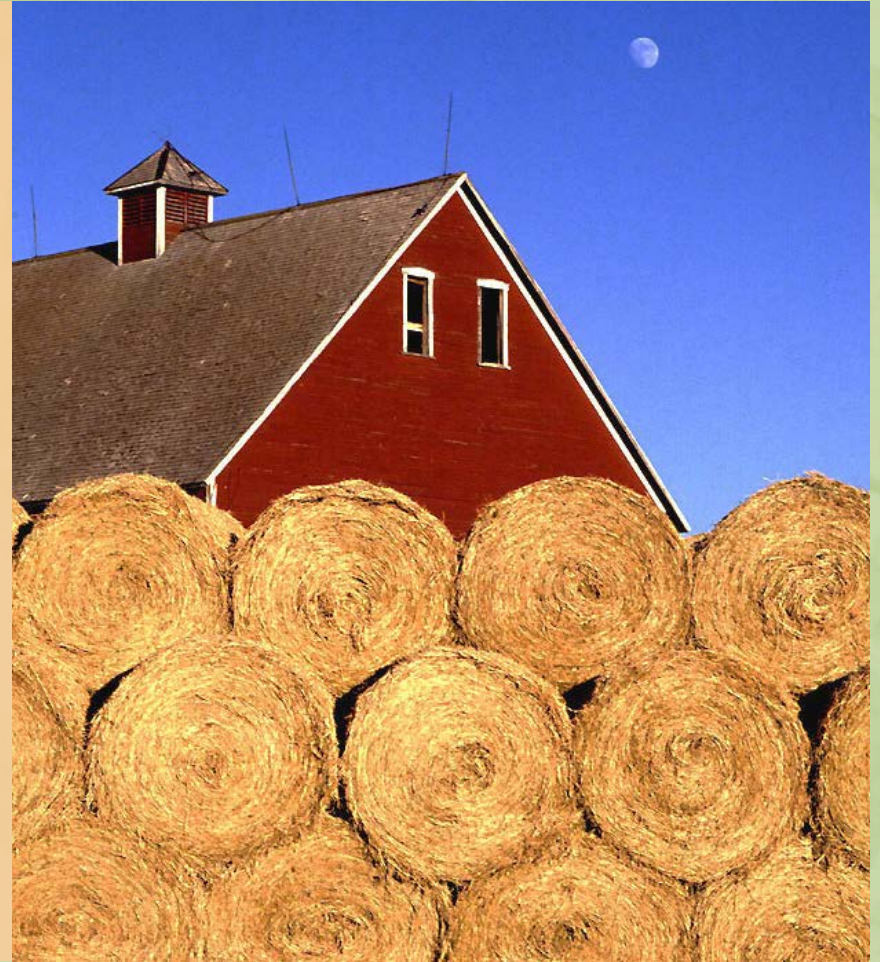
Problems Due to Lack of Consistent Standards




- Marketing more difficult due to uncertainty of what organic meant
- Worries over “cheaters” using organic label without organic methods

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The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) 1990

- Result of organic industry petition for the USDA to regulate organic
- Passed by Congress in 1990



United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service



Goal of OFPA

For “organic” to become a marketing term with uniform standards so that consumers would be assured of the integrity of the term

What OFPA Did

- Mandated USDA develop national organic standards
- Made it illegal to use term “organic” unless standards were met
- Required certification



National Organic Standard Board (NOSB)

- Formed to advise USDA
- Citizen volunteers
- Organic farmers, processors, retailers, scientists, environmentalists, advocates, and certifying agents




National Organic Standard Board meeting

USDA's First Attempt at Defining Organic (1997)



Pesticide application

- Met with outrage
- Included irradiation, sewage sludge, GMOs, synthetic pesticides
- USDA withdrew this version

 In 1997, when the USDA issued the first proposed organic rule, it did not reflect organic standards. They also ignored the recommendations of their National Organic Standards Board. I did an in-depth critique of the proposed rule, which informed the rest of the organic community. It inspired 275,000 comments to be submitted about the proposed rule, which set a new record at the time. Luckily, the USDA withdrew that proposed rule.”

---Jim Riddle, organic farmer and advocate



Jim Riddle and his wife, Joyce Ford

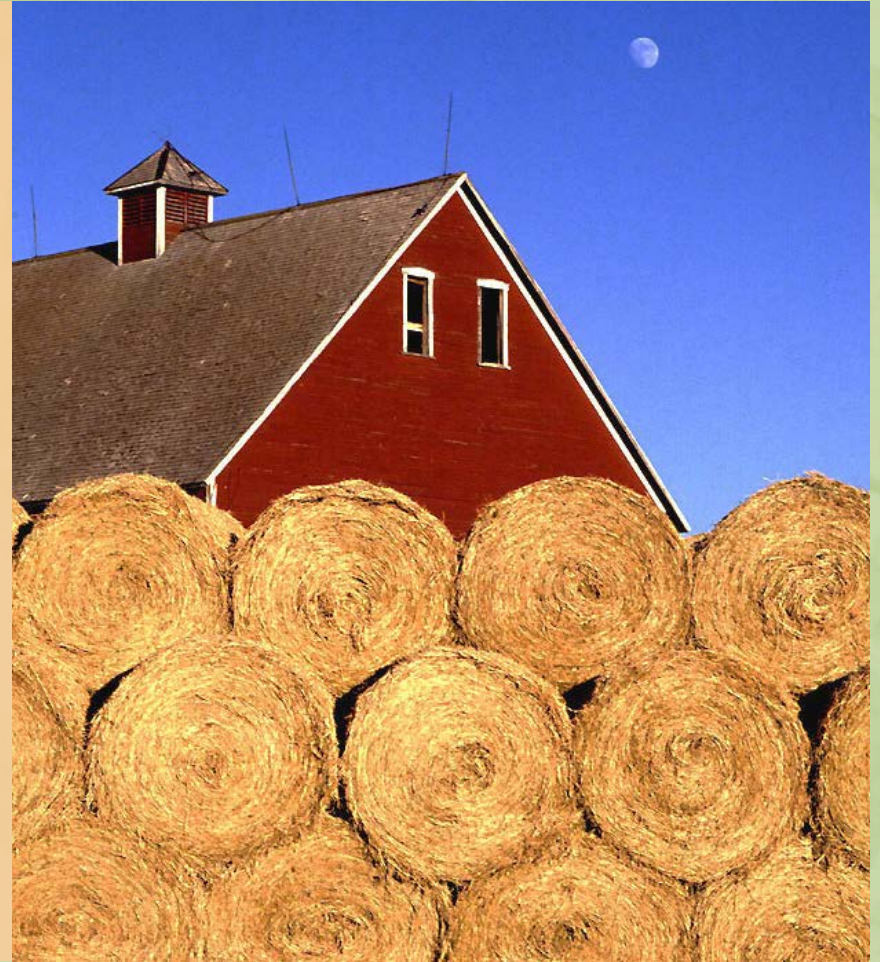
USDA's Second Attempt (2000)



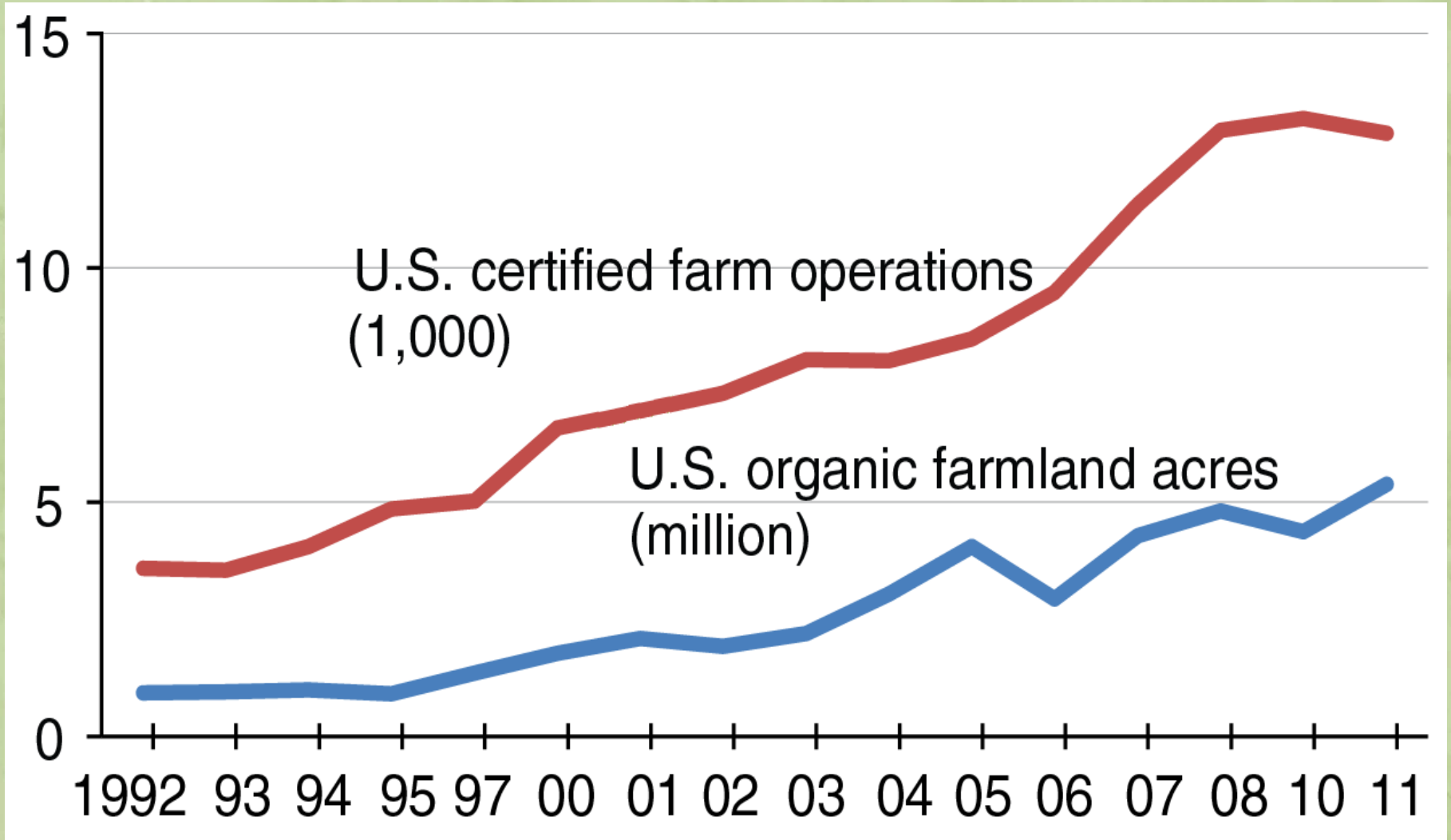
- The Final Rule was released in 2001 and went into effect in 2002
- Still in use today
- By 2002, producers were using the USDA certified organic seal

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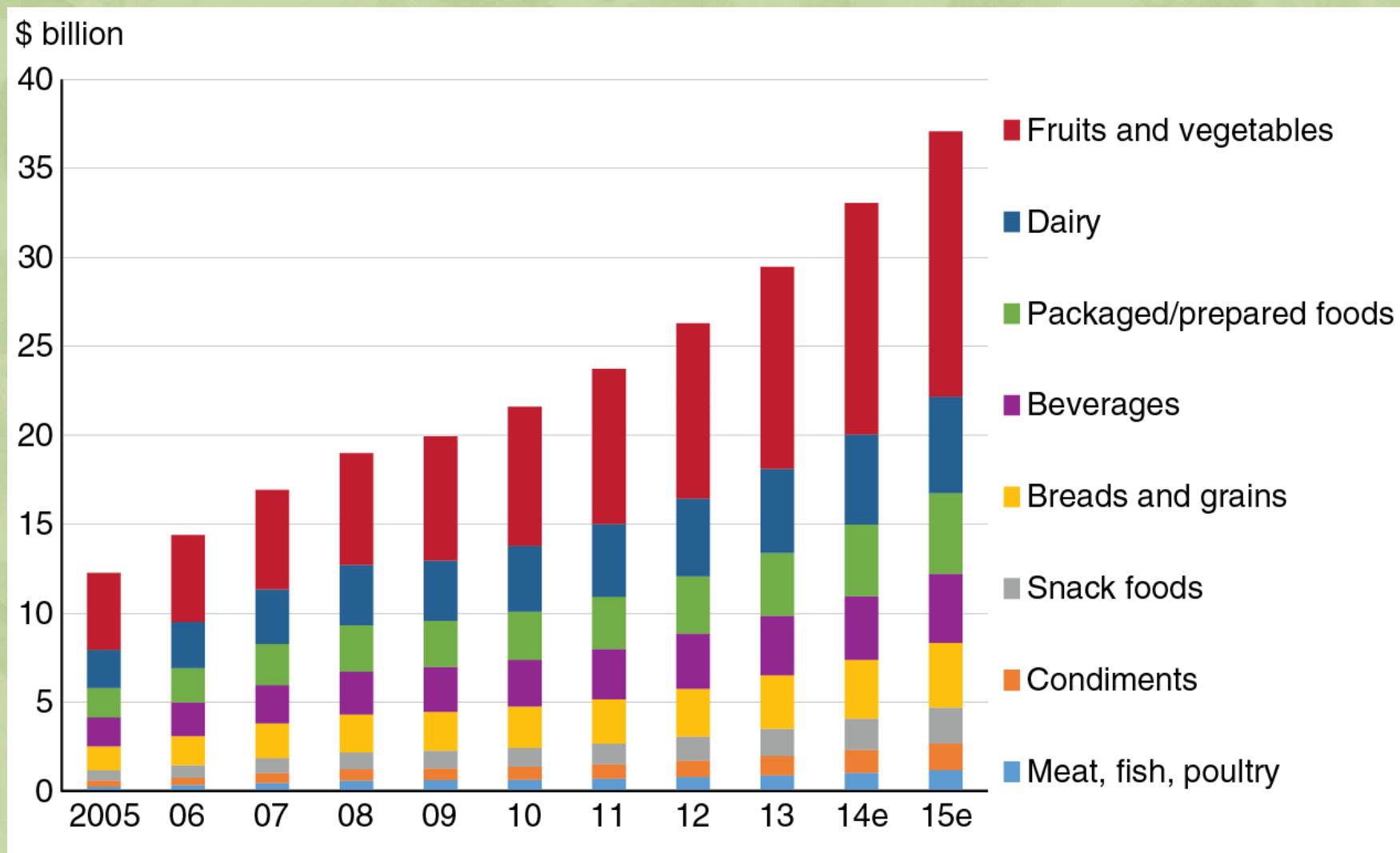


U.S. Organic Farmland Acres and Number of Operations, 1992-2011



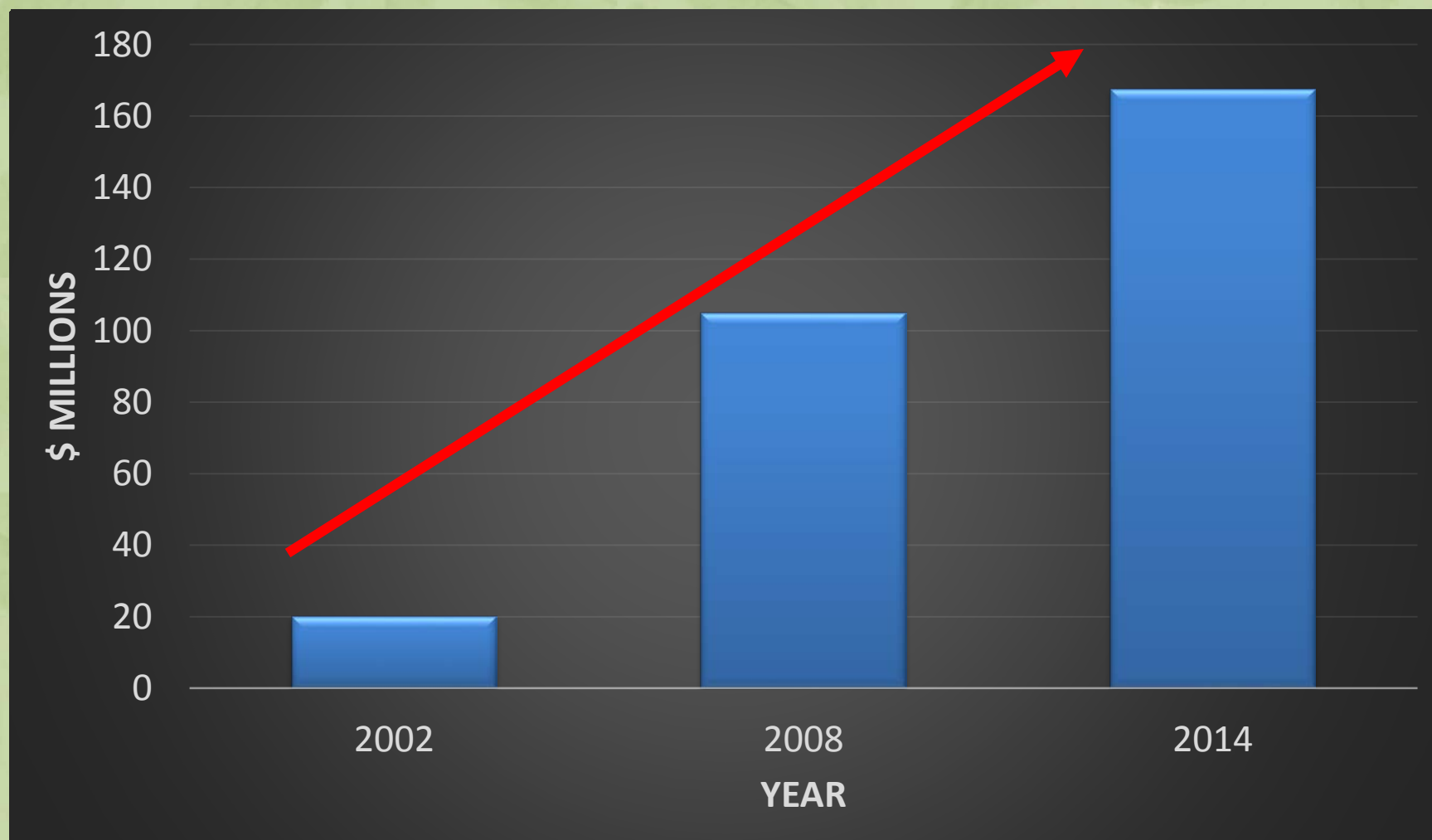
Source: USDA-ERS, 2013

Organic Food Retail Sales, 2005-2015e



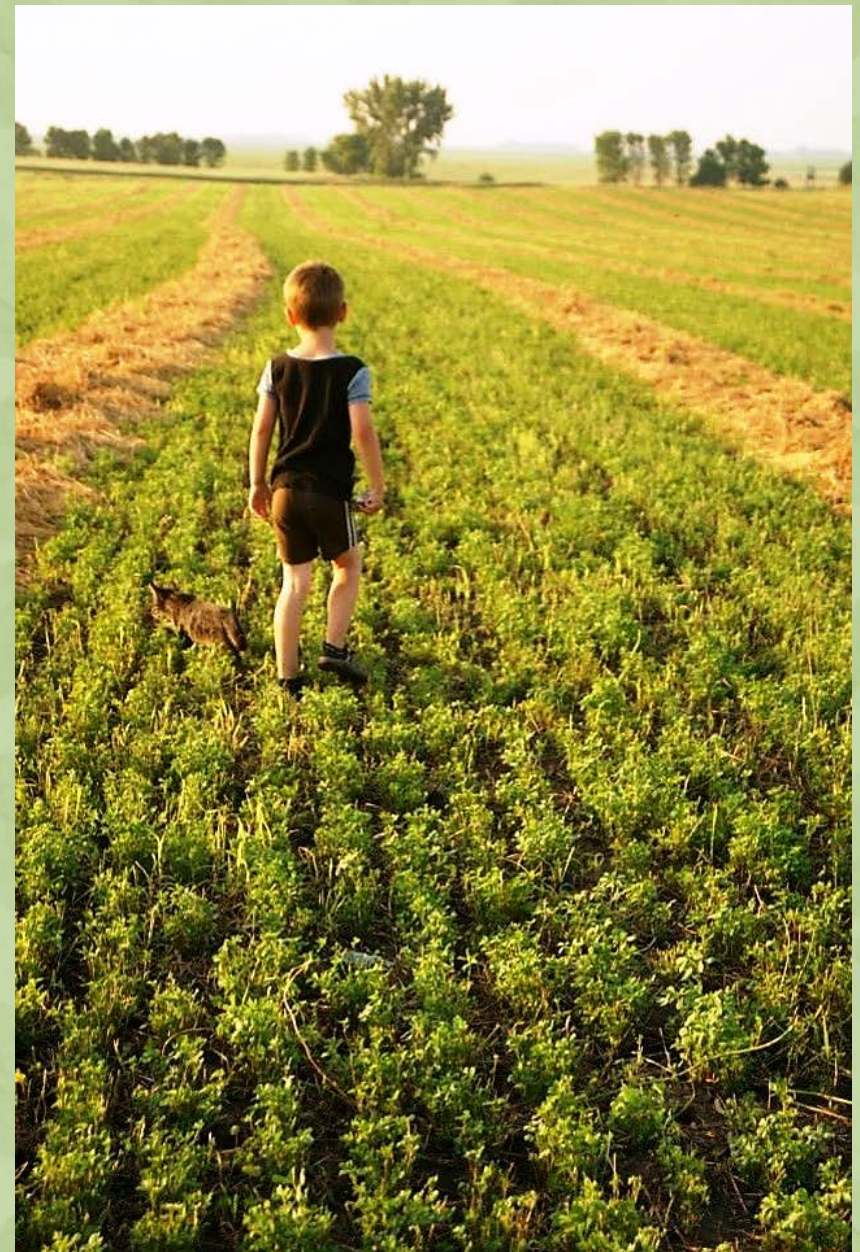
e = estimated. Source: USDA ERS using data from Nutrition Business Journal, 2015

U.S. Mandatory Spending on Organic Agriculture, 2002-2014 Farm Acts (farm bills)



The Future

"In the end, each of us is involved in the history of agriculture because each of us is an eater and each of us is an organism of this earth. As eaters we will define and determine the history of agriculture as we drive our cars, as we shop the grocery aisles, as we eat at the local restaurants, as we buy our clothes. And as long as we are eating, we are creating the history of agriculture." -- Carmen Fernholz, Organic Farmer



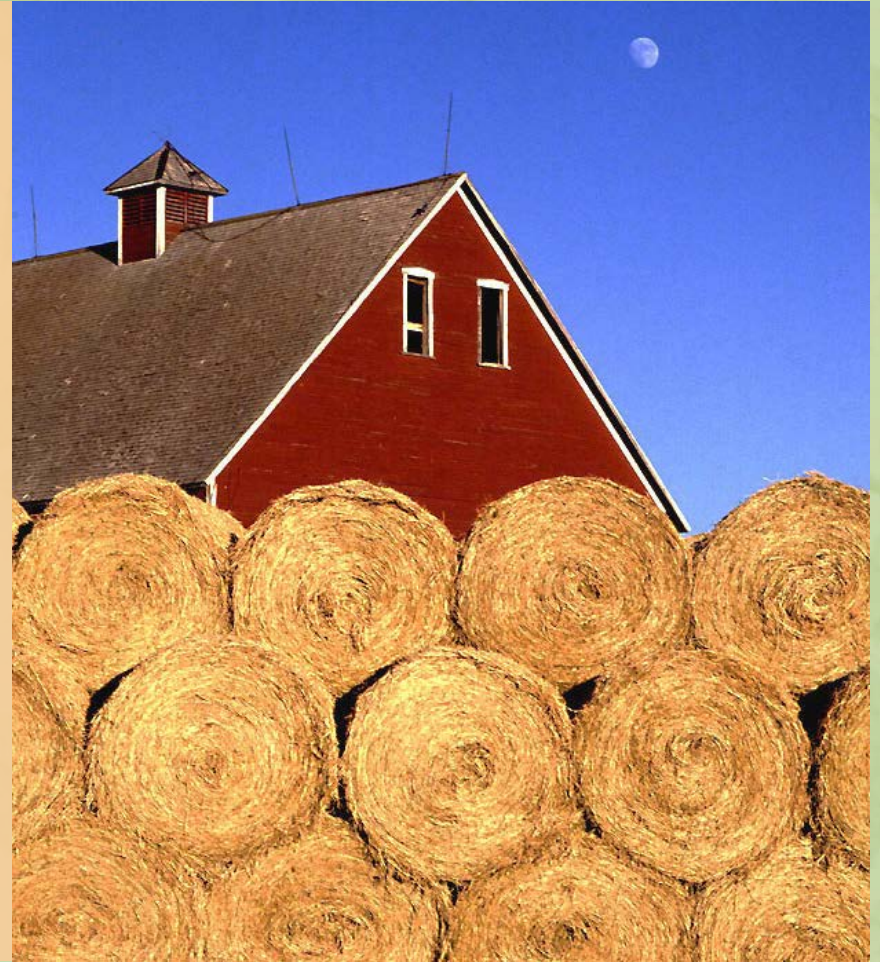


For More Information

- [National Sustainable Agriculture Oral History Archive](#)
- [Organic History – Roger Blobaum](#)
- [A History of Organic Farming: Transitions from Sir Albert Howard’s War in the Soil to the USDA National Organic Program](#)
- [Organic and Sustainable Agriculture Collection – Wisconsin Historical Society](#)

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United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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