

ORGANIC & METROPOLITAN AGRICULTURE

Timeline of events

1970s

- New settlement patterns just outside urban areas leave more open space and preserves farmland
- Oregon and Washington growers were the first in the US to set organic standards¹

1980s

- Establishment of metropolitan agriculture - Total number of farms and amount of farmland in the rural/urban fringe remains stable throughout the decade

1990s

- Metropolitan areas contain 20% of all US cropland and 31% of all farms (1991)²
- Legislation to protect agricultural land against urban sprawl
- Farmers in metropolitan areas can better meet consumers' demand of freshness and locally-grown products
- Increased demand in metropolitan areas expected for goats' meat and milk, local beef and pork, organic eggs and poultry, venison (according to professional planners in the Northeast - 1994)³
- Growth of farmers markets: 174 farmers markets in NY in 1994, up from 6 in 1965⁴
- 2,120 farmers markets nationwide, with over 200 each in CA and NY (1996)⁵
- Gross returns from sales at farmers' markets are typically 200-250% higher than from wholesale market sales, and can be as much as 600% higher (1997)⁶
- \$16 million from 1996 Farm Bill was apportioned to urban agriculture projects⁷
- Supermarkets are featuring locally grown produce and promoting it as such, eg, "Vermont Seal of Approval", "New Jersey Fresh", "Always Buy Colorado"
- Community-supported agriculture (CSA - consumers pay for farms' production in advance; most produce organically) becomes popular: 400 CSAs nationwide in 1994, 550 in 1995, 600 in 1997, projected 1,000 CSAs in 2000)^{3,6,8}
- 12,000 organic farmers in the US (1997)⁹
- In WA, 300 certified organic farmers with \$40-\$50 million in sales (1997), up from 63 certified organic farmers with sales of \$2.5 million in 1988¹⁰
- Organic industry had estimated \$3.5 billion in sales in 1997, compared with \$1 billion in 1990¹¹
- USDA officials project 4-fold increase in organic food sales over the next decade (1997)⁹
- 17 states have laws governing organic foods and there are 33 private certification organizations that verify organic production (1997)¹¹
- USDA proposes national organic standards (1997). Cattlemen and poultry producers, which have thus far been prohibited from calling their products organic, would be allowed to do so. All organic livestock would have to eat organically grown food free of synthetic

- pesticides, antibiotics and hormones, not be kept in overcrowded conditions, and be allowed periodic access to the outdoors and direct sunlight.
- Coleman Natural Products, leading US supplier of beef from cattle that have never received hormones or antibiotics - founded in 1979, has 450 ranchers who supply cattle (1997) ¹²
- “Green marketing” (eg. dolphin-safe tuna): survey found that 63% of consumers are willing to pay more for products that can demonstrate a positive environmental impact, such as predator-friendly wool using llamas as guard animals ^{6,13}
- Incentives offered to encourage producers to convert to organic production methods in Germany and Denmark to help reduce crop surpluses¹⁴
- Examples of alternative income for farmers: petting zoos and exhibits, campgrounds, miniature golf courses and fun parks

Trends:

- More US farmers will be operating in metropolitan areas
- Pickier consumers, i.e., consumption that is perceived to be more healthful, varied, and ethical
- Demand for some organics

Uncertainties For The Future

- Expansion of organic production in general. (USDA Secretary Dan Glickman: ‘My belief is that this industry [organic] in 10 years could be 10 times as big as right now.’)¹⁵
- The future of small, organic farms
For: consumer confidence in local food sources; environmentalism;
Against: price differential, although this may narrow with the decline in farm subsidies for conventional agriculture; increases in organic farming could be detrimental to the environment ¹⁶
- Effect of national organic standards. There is opposition to USDA’s proposed national standards because some feel that the standards will not be strict enough, and thereby open the door for large corporations and erode consumer confidence.¹
- Organic meat industry - problems: there is not enough organic grain to feed the cattle;¹¹ slaughtering and marketing of organic livestock for small farmers
- On-farm sales of meat and milk directly to consumers. Currently, farmers can legally sell live animals to consumers who take them to custom slaughterhouses, but cannot sell cuts of meat unless they are inspected (an exemption allows farmers to sell up to 20,000 dressed chickens).⁶ In Virginia, a resolution to broaden current exemptions for on-farm sales of meat and milk is currently before the legislature. ¹⁷
- Urban and metropolitan land use - development vs recreation vs agriculture

¹At issue is that USDA may allow the use of genetic engineering, irradiation, the use of sewage sludge, and some natural-based chemicals.

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