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Organic Farms Connect Consumers with their Food, USDA Agriculture Census Reports

Washington, Sept. 30, 2014 – Certified organic agriculture producers in the United States sell directly to consumers, produce on-farm renewable energy, and are younger, beginning, farmers more often than conventional producers, according to new 2012 Census of Agriculture data released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Conducted only once every five years, the agriculture census presents a detailed look at the U.S. organic farm sector including production practices, economics and demographics.

“Earlier this year, the 2012 Agriculture Census reported that total organic product sales by farms in the U.S. increased 83 percent since 2007,” said NASS Administrator Joseph T. Reilly. “This information combined with the more comprehensive data released today shows the demand for, value of and potential for continued growth in certified organic products.”

The 2012 Census of Agriculture Organic Special Tabulation provides national and state level data on farms, land in farms and tenure; production expenses, equipment and machinery; farm income and government payments; land use and practices; operator characteristics; and more.

Some of the key findings include:

Production Practices

- Organic agriculture producers were much more likely to report direct-to-consumer sales than conventional producers. While only 7 percent of all U.S. farms sold agricultural products directly to consumers, 42 percent of organic farms reported direct sales to consumers.
- Organic farms were more likely than other farms to participate in non-traditional markets: 30 percent marketed products directly to retail outlets, 16 percent produced value-added products, and 13 percent distributed products through CSAs (community supported agriculture).
- Organic farms were more likely than other farms to invest in on-farm renewable energy producing systems, such as solar panels and wind turbines.
- Organic operations were also more likely to sell crops, such as fruits and vegetables, than livestock and poultry products. Almost 90 percent sold crops, while a slightly fewer than 50 percent sold livestock or poultry products.

Demographics

- Organic producers were more likely to be beginning farmers, with 27 percent starting farming in the last 10 years, compared to 18 percent of all principal farm operators.
- Organic operators were younger, with 26 percent under 45 years old, compared to 16 percent of all principal operators.

“These new data points from the agriculture census provide valuable information to help our stakeholders identify producer successes and needs to help them develop programs to benefit the organic industry,”

said Reilly. “NASS is committed to continuing to help measure the organic industry and is looking forward to conducting the 2014 Organic Survey early next year.”

To access the 2012 Census of Agriculture Organic Special Tabulation and all other Census data and tools, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.

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NASS is the federal statistical agency responsible for producing official data about U.S. agriculture and is committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. We invite you to provide occasional feedback on our products and services. Sign up at http://bit.ly/NASS_Subscriptions and look for “NASS Data User Community.”

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