

terms of the quantity of resources devoted to each.¹ Still economics may not be all there is to it. Some farmers may be ignorant of the advantages of alternative agriculture, and others may have other non-economic reasons for not adopting it.

Blobaum (1983) did a study of barriers to adoption of organic farming methods, focusing on non-economic barriers. Indeed Blobaum concluded, mistakenly in our view, that economics was not a barrier. He surveyed 547 organic farmers in Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri and Nebraska, and received usable responses from 214. Almost three-quarters of these farmers had formerly farmed conventionally. Blobaum concluded that in their personal characteristics they were much like conventional farmers and motivated mainly by the same practical considerations. When asked to list obstacles to adoption of alternative farming systems the farmers surveyed most often named lack of information about practices, lack of marketing information, especially about the availability of markets offering premium prices for alternatively produced output, and the need for more research, particularly about weed control in alternative farming systems. Some also indicated that the supply of organic fertilizers and other inputs was a problem. About two-

1. Estimates of the number of farmers engaged in alternative agriculture vary. The USDA (1981) gave a number of 50,000 and in another report (1980) estimated 11,200 by a strict definition and 24,000 by a broader one. Harwood (1984) states that less than 60,000 of the subscribers to the Rodale Organization's New Farm magazine describe themselves as alternative farmers. In answer to a question from one of the authors, Garth Youngberg, editor of the American Journal of Alternative Agriculture, said no one knows how many American farmers have adopted the system. Whatever the number, it is small relative to the total of some 2.5 million American farmers.