

U.S. Congress. 1982. Organic Farming Act of 1982, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Forests, Family Farms, and Energy of the House Committee on Agriculture, June 10, 1982, 97th Congress, 2nd session on H.R. 5618, U.S. GPO, Washington, D.C.

H.R. 5618 -- bill to require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a network of volunteers to assist in making available information and advice on organic agriculture for family farms and other agricultural enterprises, and to establish pilot projects to carry out research and education activities involving organic farming, with special emphasis on family farms.

Per USDA's report on organic agriculture (1980): major problems confronting farmers and our agriculture system include -- (1) increasing costs and uncertain availability of energy and chemical fertilizers; (2) excessive soil erosion, loss of soil, organic matter, and a resultant decline in soil production and tilth; (3) degradation of the environment, including hazards to human and animal health from heavy pesticide use; (4) demise of the family farm and localized marketing systems. Indications are that even a partial shift to low-energy agricultural systems, including the use of more organic farming techniques, would alleviate many of these problems.

Per Dr. Terry B. Kinney, ARS, USDA studies relating to the economic and marketing aspects of organic farming show --

- ♦ lower production costs
- ♦ although the legume-based crop rotations on most organic farms do reduce acreage available for cash crops (eg. corn and soybeans) the net farm income is quite often comparable to the net income of conventional farms
- ♦ soil erosion benefits through use of grass, legume and small grain crops in rotation systems
- ♦ emphasis on tillage methods that keep crop residues and organic matter near the soil surface, which helps reduce erosion, opening up the soil to infiltration
- ♦ organic agriculture contributes to reductions in soil erosion, plant nutrient and pesticide run-off, and the leaching of these materials into groundwater
- ♦ organic soil fertility management through the use of animal and green manures, cover crops, crop rotations, etc. results in less susceptibility to loss through run-off than other fertilizer methods
- ♦ re: uncertainty of petroleum supplies -- largely self-sustaining nutrient recycling systems typical of organic agriculture enhance long-term sustainability of the system
- ♦ major obstacles to widespread adoption of organic farming methods revolve around the issue of farm policy and structure, and the financial and entrepreneurial situations of individual farmers