

# "Synertunity": Integrating Organic Agriculture and Conservation Programs in U.S. Farm Policy

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WI

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# Organic Farming Research Foundation

- Started by CA organic farmers 1990. Majority of national board are working organic farmers.
- National competitive grants program to fund organic research and education since 1992.
- Demographic and other information on the national population of organic farmers (surveys).
- Media resource on organic issues.
- National policy analysis and advocacy for organic research (appropriations, USDA & Land Grant reports, action network).



# Synergistic Opportunity!

Deliberately leverage  
organic market growth for  
wider adoption of whole-  
system conservation  
management.



# WHY?

- Complementary strengths and needs.
- Interaction has been minimal.
- Policy-shaping forces are aligning for historic opportunity.

# Policy Context of Organic & Conservation

1. "Drivers" of policy-maker interest.
2. Current status of integrating activities.
3. Approaches to integration in the next Farm Bill.



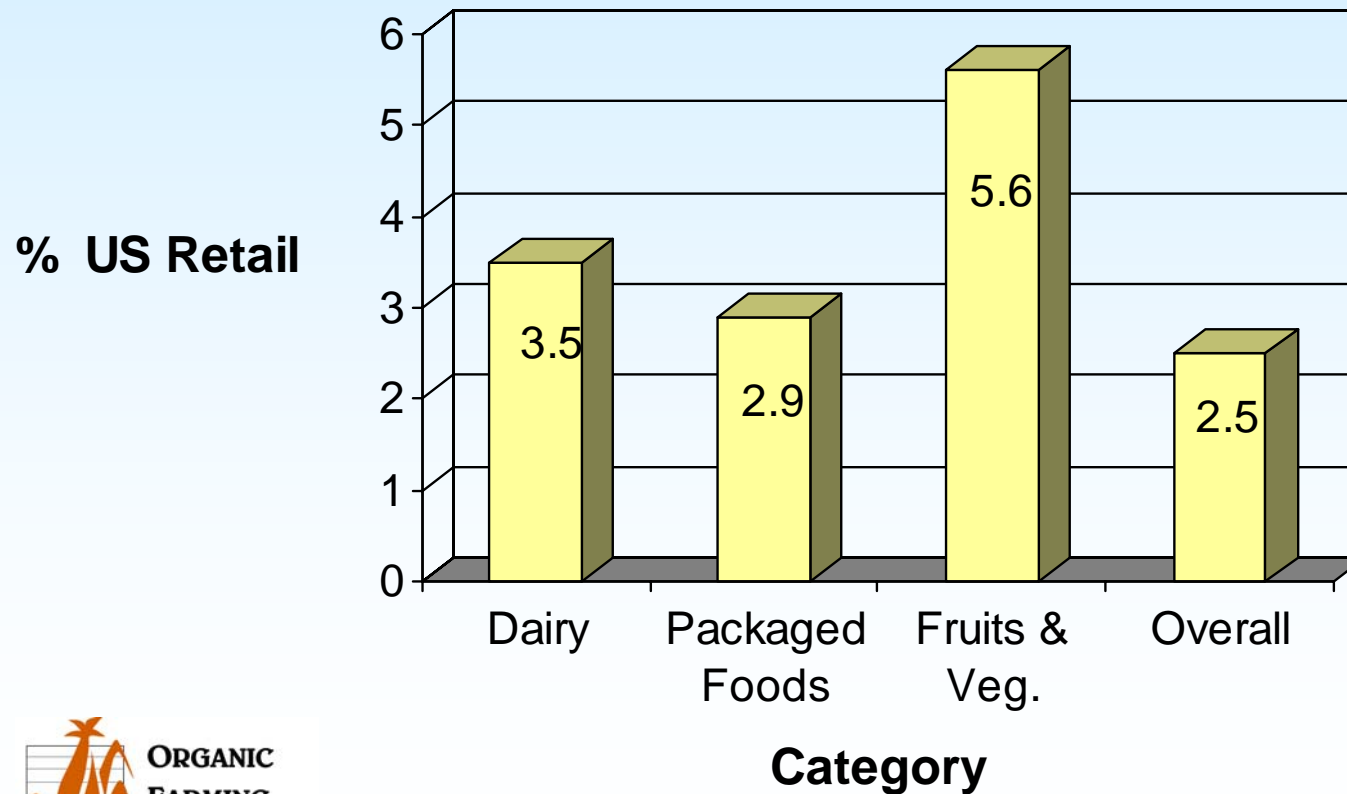
# Organophilic “Policy Drivers”

- Organic market growth & players.
- Lag of domestic supply growth.
- Green Boxes/WTO/U.S. budget.
- Conservation interest groups' focus on ag.
- Red/Blue political crossover.

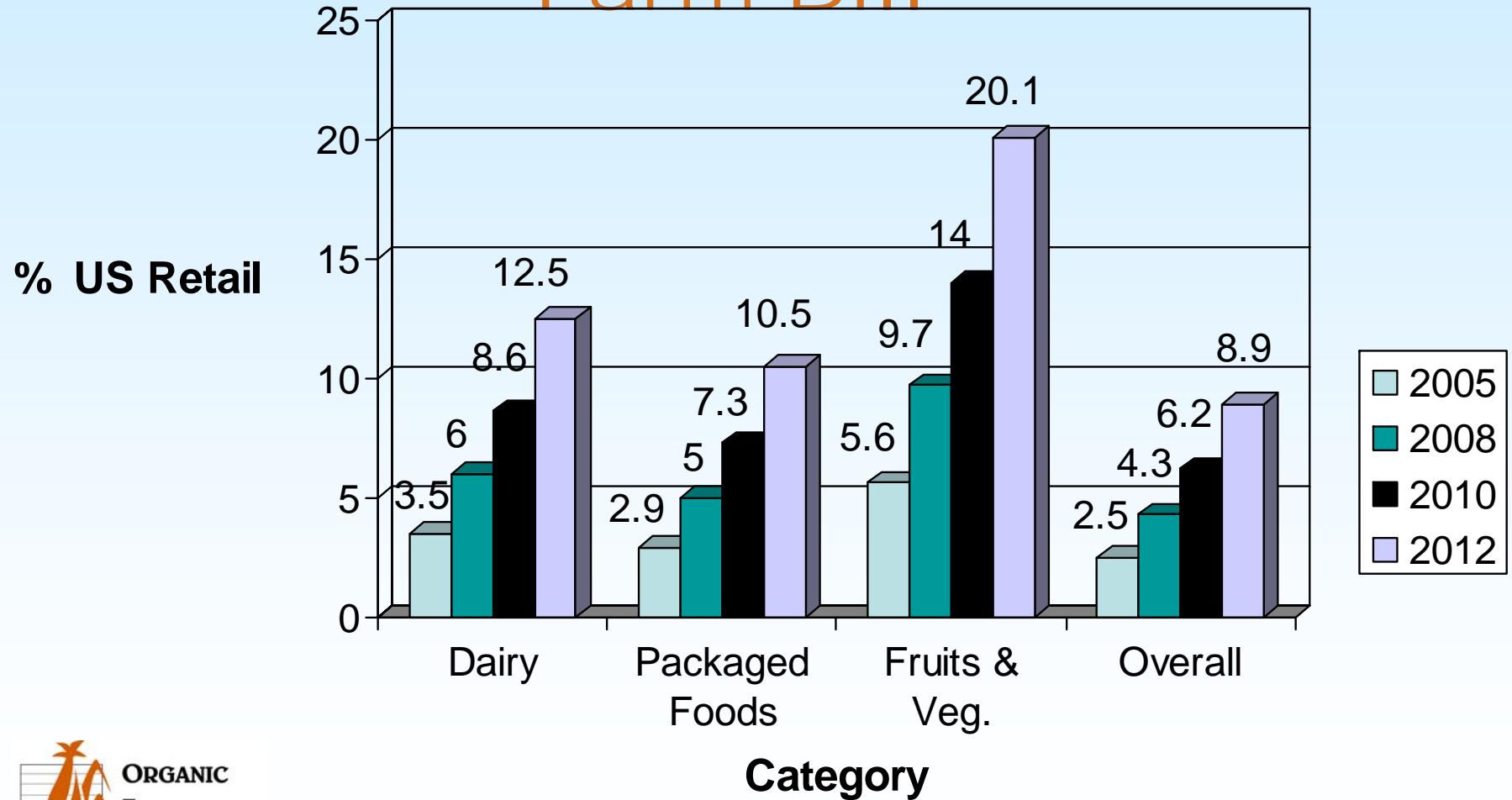


# 2005 Organic Share of U.S. Retail \$

From Nutr. Bus. J. March '06



# Organic Share Growth @ 20%/yr Thru Term of '07 Farm Bill

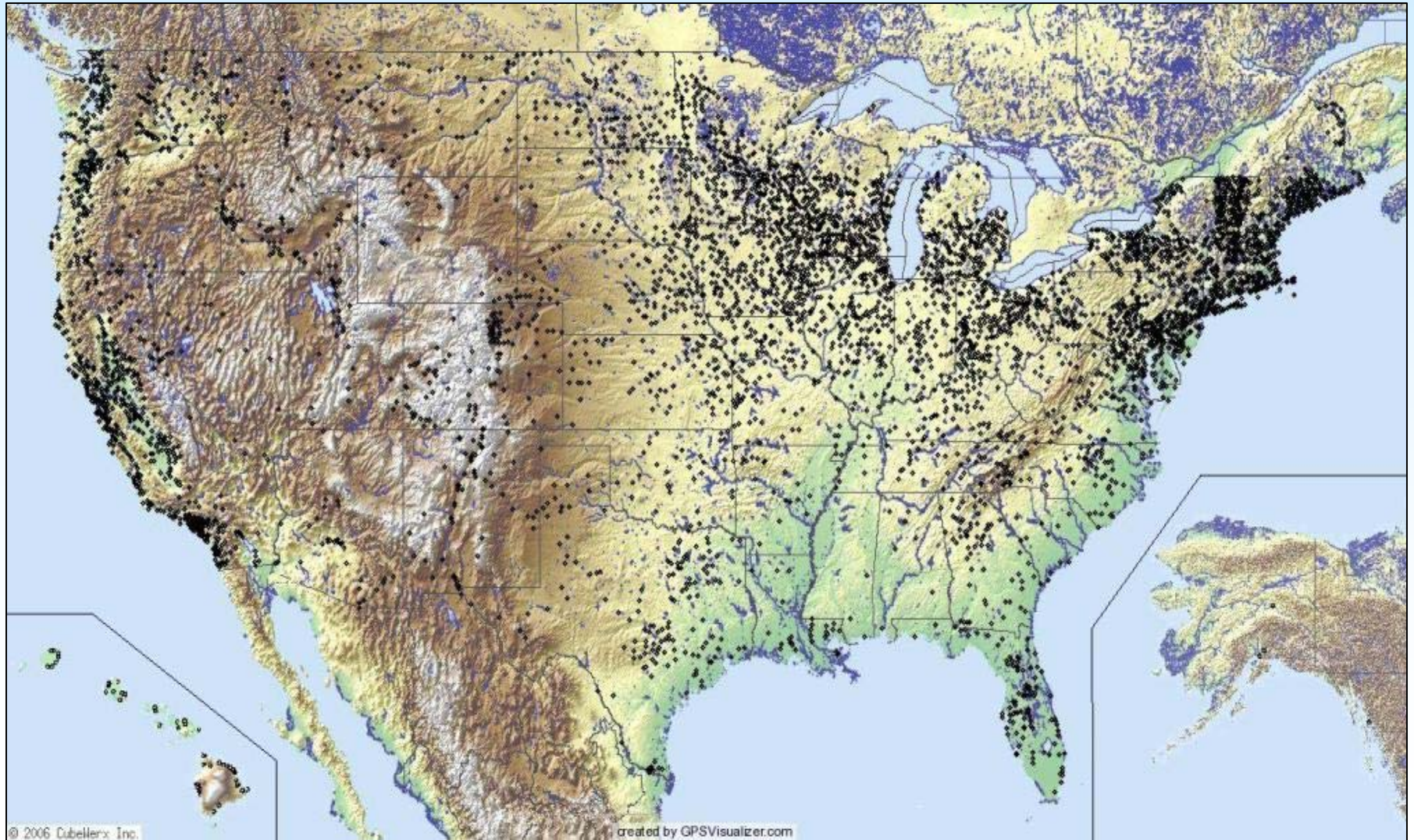


# Growth Lag of Domestic Conversion

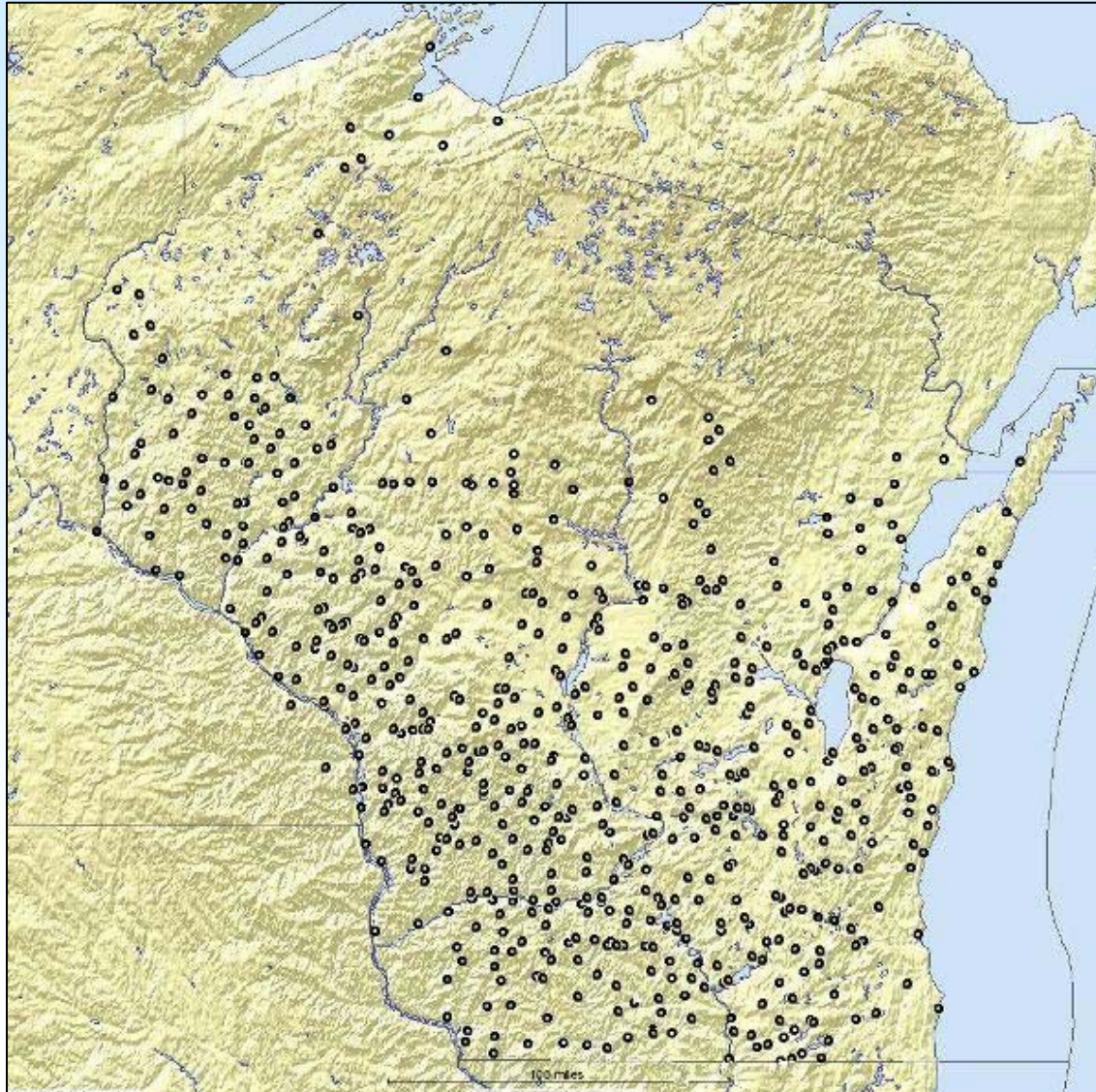
- While retail share was moving past 2%, U.S. organic acreage was stagnant at 0.4%.
- Biggest gap is in grain belts.
- Organic trade deficit is ~10:1!
- China, Mexico, Argentina, EU, grabbing organic market share.



# U. S. Organic Farms (2004)



# Wisconsin Organic Farms (2004)



**Organic Growers:**  
960

**Organic Acres:**  
120,643 (2003)

**Sales of Organic Commodities:**  
\$20,828,000 (2003)



# Green Farm Supports

- Despite WTO 'Doha Round' collapse, momentum towards "greener" farm support systems will not go away.
- This momentum has both international and domestic drivers.
- Budget pressures may make shifts to conservation harder, highlighting need for organic-conservation alliance.



# Conservation Politics

- All major conservation interest groups are taking a stronger interest in ag policy.
- Organic ag is a natural alliance for most of these groups, if goals are aligned intentionally.



# Crossover Appeal

- Organic agriculture has the potential for real red-blue crossover, as well as urban-rural.
- Organic producers can influence farm-country legislators, if we know what we want (that's the hard part).



# Current Momentum Towards Integration

- 9 states are using EQIP practice standards to support organic transition.
- Glimmers of organic in CSP implementation.
- NRCS renewing Memo of Understanding with Organic Trade Assoc.



# What Do We Want?

Approaching construction of the Farm Bill means:

- Details, deals and devils.
- Be careful what we wish for; the Laws of Unintended Consequences loom large.



# Basic Principles

- Build on existing program foundations, start transforming.
- Doesn't all have to happen in one Farm Bill.
- Whole-farm, whole-system emphasis, beyond single-practice.
- Robust organic, not lowest-common-denominator.



# Final Thoughts

- Organic-Conservation policy integration will take place on some level; momentum is strong and growing. Let's direct it.
- Policy design has many possible forms. Let's be creative.



# SYNERTUNITY

- Organic and Conservation advocates and practitioners need to carry on an active dialogue over the next 6-12 months, in order to pursue this historic opportunity for synergistic success in the policy arena.



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