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Characteristics of Conventional and Organic Apple Production in the United States

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Abstract

While U.S. acreage and production of apples has declined in recent years, consumer demand has spurred a fast-growing organic apple sector. Apples managed under certified organic farming systems now account for about 6 percent of total U.S. apple acreage. In 2007, USDA conducted the first comprehensive survey of the production and marketing practices used by organic and conventional apple growers in the United States as part of the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS). In this report, we use data from ARMS and other sources to examine trends in the U.S. apple sector and compare production and marketing characteristics under organic and conventional farming systems. According to ARMS data, conventional and organic apple production systems shared many similarities in 2007, including the predominance of dwarf and semi-dwarf trees, tree density, and a focus on fresh-market apples. These systems do differ in the way pests and nutrients are managed, and a higher share of organic production comes from new varieties like Gala and Fuji. While conventional apple yields were higher than organic yields in 2007, organic apples commanded a price premium at every level—farm-gate, wholesale and retail—of the supply chain.

Keywords: Fresh apples, processed apples, production practices, pest management, pesticides, apple prices, organic price premiums

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