The Politics of Organic Farming:

Populists, Evangelicals and the Agriculture of the Middle

"If you think of the political spectrum as a circle, we're right where the two ends meet."
—Dan Specht, organic corn, beef and hog farmer, Clayton County, Iowa

Introduction

A couple of years ago, as a writer and editor for NewFarm.org, the online (formerly print) magazine of sustainable and organic farming published by The Rodale Institute, I had the opportunity to attend a series of organic farming conferences in different parts of the country. Most of the serious organic farming conferences are held in the winter, when farmers are most likely to have free time, so in the space of a few months I attended, among other events, the Ecological Farming Association Conference (Eco-Farm) in Pacific Grove, California, in late January; the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture Conference (PASA) in State College, in early February; and, in late February, the Midwest Sustainable and Organic Education Service Conference (MOSES) in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

It was an itinerary that seemed designed to highlight the distinctive regional cultures of organic farming in the United States. There are now many organic farming conferences held each year nationwide, from Georgia to Vermont to New Mexico, but Eco-Farm, MOSES and PASA are three of the oldest and the largest. Eco-Farm dates to 1981, and (as some readers will know) is now held each year at the rustically scenic Asilomar State Beach and Conference Grounds, adjacent to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. It currently attracts about 1,300 attendees per year, with upwards of 50 scheduled workshops and a justly famous, perennially over-subscribed bus tour of area organic farms. Eco-Farm offers a distinctly Californian experience. Asilomar's Arts and Crafts architecture, woodland setting and ready access to the beach gives the conference a camp-like atmosphere. There are yoga sessions in the early
morning, singles gatherings in the evenings and plenty of excellent coffee stations. A small but growing number of workshops are offered in Spanish. Among the social highlights of the weekend is a special early evening wine-tasting event, featuring dozens of organic and biodynamic vineyards from California, Washington and Oregon. So many people are using cell phones that it's often difficult to find a free circuit; but you are just as likely to be accosted by a person passing out cards explaining that your cell phone is hastening both of you to an early grave.

MOSES, the Midwestern answer to Eco-Farm, was first held in 1990, and for the past several years has convened in the municipal conference center in downtown La Crosse, a bleakly charming college town on the Upper Mississippi River that lays a plausible claim to having the most bars per capita of any small city. Although founded more recently, MOSES has outstripped Eco-Farm in size, now drawing upwards of 2,300 people from the Upper Midwest and beyond. One of the highlights of MOSES is its large tradeshow, where dozens of vendors and exhibitors display the latest farm equipment, soil amendments, books, magazines, consulting services, marketing tools and other materials of practical value to organic grain and livestock farmers. Pre-conference sessions focus on nuts-and-bolts farm management topics like organic rotations, soil fertility and organic dairy herd health. From the windows of the larger meeting rooms you can look out over the partially frozen Mississippi toward southeastern Minnesota, where dozens of bald eagles gather in the trees, studying the cold in between fishing expeditions. To a Midwesterner like myself, the audience appears to be dominated by "real" farmers: big beefy guys in their forties and fifties, with Scandinavian or eastern European surnames, serious but friendly. The Saturday night entertainment includes a cash bar featuring a variety of local, organic beers, followed by a talent show and dance.

The PASA Conference, first held in 1992, has also grown dramatically in recent years, and now draws some 1,900 people, mostly from the Commonwealth, including large numbers of
Amish and Mennonite farmers. (The densest concentration of organic farms in Pennsylvania is centered on the dairy lands of Lancaster County.) PASA is held at the Penn Stater, Penn State University's newly renovated conference center on the outskirts of State College, with its own dedicated hotel. In addition to the usual workshops, keynote presentations and exhibitors' area, PASA features an outstanding farmers market, with fresh organic bread, cheese, jams, sauces, wool and other items. Perhaps out of respect to its large Plain community membership, PASA is neither a wine- nor a beer-drinking conference. The local-and-organic foods banquet on Saturday night is a dry affair and breaks up early, with everyone retiring to their respective rooms, or, perhaps, heading into State College in search of outside entertainment, while the roads ice up and snow falls gently on the surrounding mountains. As a 30-something, unattached friend of mine pointed out, at PASA one is constantly spotting good-looking, strapping young men and then, a moment later, noticing the sweet young wife and three or four small children trailing along behind.

These are broad social contrasts, of course; and they mask enormous diversity within the audiences of each conference. I am not the only person to attend all three, either in a single year or over a period of years, to be sure. But attending them in close proximity—along with analogous events in the Pacific Northwest, in Maine, and elsewhere—led me to reflect on the different cultural contexts of organic farming in the United States and what impact this regional diversity may have on the overall shape of the movement. How are new organic farmers recruited, and how do they interact with the old guard? What does that old guard look like? Who are the local heroes, and how do they gain national prominence? What are the prevailing concerns, from the minutiae of farm management to the broader social, economic and political issues of relevance to organic farming? What is the level of engagement with state and regional (mainstream) agricultural research and extension personnel? What are the apparent attitudes of the immediate local community, and the local press?
More specifically, I have been thinking recently about the political contexts of organic farming, and of organic farmers. As a keynote speaker at MOSES pointed out one year, organic agriculture is one of the few social movements (or, if you prefer, economic initiatives) with tripartisan support: the Organic Foods Production Act was passed in 1990, under the first Bush Administration; the first Proposed Organic Rule was published (and hotly contested) in 1997, during the Clinton years; the Final Rule was finally implemented in October of 2002, in the second year of George W. Bush's tenure. (Green Party support is taken for granted—the Greens' Ten Key Values include an explicit statement about sustainable agriculture—but of course has not been put to the test of national leadership.) Recent studies have been at pains to point out that, contrary to popular belief, the consumption of organic products cuts across class and ethnic boundaries, although this by no means speaks directly to political affiliations. But even less is known for certain—although much is also assumed—about the political outlook of organic farmers. As far as I'm aware, no data have been collected on the subject, and, for a variety of reasons, it feels like an issue people are reluctant to talk about. Anecdotally, however, within the movement, it's widely recognized that organic farmers inhabit the full range of the political spectrum; many observers suspect, moreover, that the right-leaning contingency may in fact outweigh the left. "Organic farming is conservative small-time rural farmers making food for white liberal yuppie and hippie types," an Iowa-based independent organic inspector told me recently. "That's a caricature, but it's only a partial caricature. I've seen a lot of McCain signs as I've been pulling into driveways this year." "I remember there being a conversation... that there were supposedly more organic farmers that were Republicans than were Democrats," Ron Rosmann, a Democratic organic farmer who this year made an unsuccessful run for the Iowa House, wrote to me in an email after the election. "I have never been quite able to understand why that is, if it is indeed true?"
Given the historic associations between organic agriculture and right-wing politics, this situation is on the one hand not so surprising. As Philip Conford showed in his *Origins of the Organic Movement*, many of the early advocates of non-chemical farming in Britain in the 1930s and '40s were associated with conservative political movements, including Fascism. “The roots of the organic movement,” in the words of Jonathan Dimbleby, a former President of the UK Soil Association, Britain’s leading organic certifier and advocacy group, "go back to the years before the Second World War and are to be found entangled with some of the more eccentric, unstable and disreputable cultural and political ideas which then held sway.”¹ On the other hand, rumors of a contemporary, perhaps distinctively American alliance between organic farming and conservative principles runs counter to a host of other assumptions—as well as a certain amount of evidence—about the natural affinities between organic food systems and liberal political agendas. We need only point to the widespread enthusiasm with which organic advocates are embracing the outcome of the 2008 Presidential election for evidence of the latter. "The election of Barack Obama as president bodes well for the future of local and organic food in America," writes Jim Slama of the Illinois-based FamilyFarmed.org, in a recent press release. "President-elect Obama has seven main priorities - many of which have been long-standing priorities of SAC and were included in our 2008 Farm Bill platform," notes the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, the leading DC-based advocate for sustainable and organic agriculture. (Those seven priorities are: passage of an enforceable $250,000 commodity payment limitation; a ban on the ownership of livestock enterprises by meat packing companies; strict environmental regulations for CAFOs; the continuation of certification cost-share for organic farmers and the reform of crop insurance programs to make them relevant to organic producers; the encouragement of young and beginning farmers through tax incentives and other programs; increased conservation funding for sustainable agriculture practices; and mandatory country of origin labeling.)³
This paper, then, is a preliminary attempt to examine these divergent forces, and to ask what consequences they may have either for the organic farming movement in particular, or for the larger political dialogue in the United States. My goal is to explore the tensions—if any—between the progressive and conservative elements of the organic movement, and to ask whether they have received equal and proportionate consideration in contemporary discussions and analyses of the movement as a whole, in both popular and academic circles. In so doing, we will need to consider how "the politics of organic farming" has typically been framed as a topic; as well as how the political views of farmers are valued and represented within the U.S. political scene. In the wake of this historic election, it seems worth pausing to ask how the political views of farmers, including (but not limited to) organic farmers, mesh with the political agenda of organic farming advocates. Or, to put it another way, to ask how the sustainable and organic farming advocacy movement can best understand, and hence mobilize, the social and political fabric of working lands management in the United States.

We should note at the outset of this discussion that the cultural and political diversity of organic farming is justly understood to be an enormous asset for the organic movement, and it's certainly not my intention to try to undermine this. Mark Lipson, policy program director for the Organic Farming Research Foundation, the Santa Cruz-based nonprofit which mobilizes grassroots support for parity funding for organic agricultural research, notes that being able to work both sides of the Congressional aisle has been critically important to the effectiveness of their campaign. Whether encouraging organic farmers to contact their Congressional representatives by phone or mail or organizing DC fly-ins to facilitate direct meetings with key Congressional offices, it's much more powerful to be able pair up constituent farmers with representatives who share the same political party. Of necessity, Lipson points out, "Everybody we've worked with in the Administration for the last eight years has been on the Republican side. But the important thing we have tried to recognize, and to build into our outreach, is that [organic
farmers] are in every part of the country, red states and blue states." That broad geographic and political range also "translates into reach into the more mainstream commodity groups," such as the Farm Bureau or the National Corn Growers Association. Without exception, the organic farmers I have spoken to about this topic have downplayed the political divisions within the organic farming movement, and the success of this kind of activism testifies to the truth of that representation. Nevertheless, it may be that such networks fail to include all potential supporters; or that future challenges may test such alliances in ways that have yet to be anticipated.

Political vs. agricultural geographies

An initial, if somewhat unsubtle, way to approach the question of the political affiliations of organic farmers is to compare the geography of organic farming to the current U.S. political map, as reflected in the November Presidential election (Figure 1). The Organic Farming Research Foundation has generated a map showing the distribution of certified organic farms in the United States based on 2006 data from the USDA National Organic Program (Figure 2). A quick comparison of these two maps suggests that yes indeed, the distribution of organic farms correlates rather nicely to the Blue State world: with the West Coast, the Northeast, and the Upper Midwest dominating both the Democratic and the organic farming picture. Nevada's going blue seems to be a bit of an anomaly, as does North Dakota's going red, but otherwise, it's a pretty good fit. The two maps even appear to coincide with respect to certain contemporary trends, with states like Virginia, North Carolina and Florida seeing a relatively recent increase in numbers of organic farmers and, at roughly the same time, (re-) joining the Democratic fold. Vermont is more strongly Democratic than New Hampshire, and also more densely populated with organic farms; Wyoming is more strongly Republican than Colorado, and has also proved less hospitable to organics.
Figure 1. Electoral college map of the United States, 2008 presidential election results. Available online at http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/2008/.

State electoral outcomes are obviously a pretty crude indicator of local trends, however. What about at the county level? The map above (Figure 3), developed by Mark Newman of the University of Michigan, uses shades of purple to indicate the relative percentages of Democratic and Republican votes by county in the 2008 elections, giving a better representation of those areas that are closely divided between Republican and Democratic support. Here, not surprisingly, the relationship between organic farm distribution and political party affiliation appears more complex. Although strong localized concentrations of Democratic voters and organic farmers (Vermont, the San Francisco Bay Area) remain, the second political map confirms that there are many organic farms in red and red-purple areas—including central and northern Texas, southern and panhandle Idaho, parts of Montana, north-central Kentucky, and western New York—as well
as zones of blue with very few certified organic farms—a stretch along the lower Mississippi River, the southern tip of Texas, south-central Alabama, the northern woods of Minnesota. We can imagine climatological or demographic explanations for these discontinuities, but these perhaps only highlight our own prejudices: why shouldn't the Boundary Waters be a center for certified organic wild rice production, for example? Of course, the organic farm data are from 2006 and the voting results from 2008, so the space of two years may make some difference, but the broad trends are surely representative.

A more serious methodological barrier to this approach is that only certified organic farmers are readily map-able: farmers following organic practices, but choosing not to get certified, are not generally counted by either certifiers, state departments of agriculture, or the USDA Economic Research Service. Estimates of the number of non-certified organic farmers suggest that their numbers may be roughly equal to or even greater than the number of certified organic farmers, although whether the two groups are trending along parallel lines is anyone's guess. The 2007 National Agricultural Census, the results of which are due out in February, may supply some of this missing information, since it reportedly asked questions not just about certified organic status but also about organic and sustainable practices more generally; although it's unclear how readily distinguishable these different categories of data will be for analytical purposes. It would appear, however, that non-certified organic farmers may be precisely those holding more conservative political points of view. Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm in Virginia, immortalized by Michael Pollan in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, is the most vocal spokesperson for this group. Calling himself a "Christian libertarian environmentalist capitalist," Salatin has no use for the organic certification system, hopelessly co-opted as it is by the forces of "Big Organic" and practically incompatible, in his view, with the strengthening of local food systems. We will return to Salatin in a moment.
Another complicating factor in considering the politics of organic farmers is the fact that most Amish and many conservative Mennonites don't vote. For the conservative Plain Community, abstaining from engagement with the mainstream political process is a matter of religious principle. As a Mennonite colleague explained it to me, this is "based on the Anabaptist 'two-kingdom' theology, which reasons that God’s law is higher than human law, that the allegiance of the Christian is always first to God and therefore can’t be to governments, so we aren’t really citizens of the state—we just happen to be living here." The key Biblical passage for this position is John 18, when the soldiers come to arrest Jesus in an olive grove and he tells his disciples not to resist. (Specifically, 18:36: "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.")

Plain Community farmers are thought to be one of the fastest growing segments of the organic farming population, a key source of recent recruits to the organic cause, not just in Pennsylvania but also in Iowa, Ohio and elsewhere. Although it's a mistake to assume that Plain Community farmers are and always have been more ecologically minded in their farming methods than their non-religious counterparts, Amish and Mennonite farmers' reputation for business savvy, along with a frequent desire to support large and extended families on relatively small farm acreages, have contributed to a movement into certified organic production, often in conjunction with cooperative marketing arrangements. To what extent the organic Plain Community is represented (or choosing to represent itself) within the larger organic movement, either at the regional or national level, is unclear.

Finally, the high rates of organic farming in proximity to left-leaning urban centers, from college towns to larger cities, undoubtedly has more to do with access to concentrated market opportunities than with indigenous political sentiments among farmers. It seems possible too that with the rising number of small-farm entrants in recent years, these metropolitan areas may be just as important as sources of new farmers as they are as market attractants.
Perhaps, then, the politics of organic farmers are broadly reflective of the politics of those regions in which organic farmers are located, and there is no necessary relationship between political outlook and farming methods. Some observers have pointed out that as a practical matter, organic farming tends to do well in areas that are hillier or more rugged—such as Vermont, or northeastern Iowa/southwestern Wisconsin—since these have been less amenable to the expansion and consolidation trends of conventional farming, which typically render farms more difficult to transition to organic. This is particularly relevant with respect to the disarticulation of crop and livestock farming that has increasingly characterized non-organic farming systems over the past 20 or 30 years. In the Midwest, farms that have given up livestock, stopped making hay and gone to a straight corn-soybeans 'rotation' will no longer have the equipment and know-how required to resume the longer crop sequences, including small grains and pasture or hay, that are essential for organic production. Similarly, Fred Kirschenmann has described how western North Dakota is dominated by grazing, eastern North Dakota by crop farming, but the prairie pothole region in the central part of the state developed as a mixture of grazing and crop farming, which in turn made it suitable to the emergence of organic systems. "The success of organic practices is often closely correlated to landscape heterogeneity," as Timothy Vos puts it in a 2000 paper, although he seems to have been speaking in theoretical terms as much as from evidence on the ground.8

Does landscape heterogeneity also foster a particular way of being and acting in the world, irrespective of political affiliation—or coterminous with that zone where the two ends of the political spectrum bend around to meet? Much has been written about the politics of organic farming as a "worldview" or ideology; about the "ecological mindset." Vos's paper is one example, written in the early years of the proposed National Organic Program:

The controversy over the proposed rule represents an argument between different ideological positions and concomitant knowledge systems, different visions of what agriculture is and can be, and of what the middle landscape should look like. For at least
fifty years, rural space has been dominated, and transformed by, the productionist paradigm of industrial agriculture (Thompson, 1997). In this context, organic farming can be thought of as a kind of 'ecological resistance movement' (Taylor, 1995), both challenging the hegemony of the agro-industrial paradigm, and proposing and exploring alternative society-nature relations. (246)

(The author, it is worth noting, is/was himself an organic farmer and graduate student in the UC Santa Cruz Environmental Studies Program.) But if the organic vision is so intimately linked to specific views of nature, so interestingly tied to politics and ideology, how is it embraced by individuals of such widely divergent ideological viewpoints? If there is such a thing as an ideology of organic farming, one that defines itself in opposition to conventional or chemical farming, how is it compatible with so many different kinds of politics? Is the difference between conservative and progressive organic farmers merely social, not really political? Are Republican or conservative organic farmers, in other words, strictly social conservatives, divided from their Democratic or progressive organic compatriots over issues like gay marriage, Roe v. Wade, the Second Amendment and perhaps immigration, rather than anything likely to affect farm management or farm policy?9

To seek answers to these questions, let's back up a bit and see if we can characterize the various constituent groups in more detail. One way in is via their consumer (aka co-producer) counterparts. As far back as the fall of 2004, in an article in The Natural Grocery Buyer, journalist Elaine Lipson sought to challenge the assumption that organic farming was a Democratic domain. "To paraphrase Barack Obama, the senatorial candidate from Illinois who set Democratic hearts on fire at the party's July convention [Lipson wrote, prophetically, a million years ago], blue states still have plenty of very busy fast-food restaurants—and red states have their share of organic farmers, natural foods stores and innovative organic chefs." An ABC News poll on genetically modified foods, she noted, "found that about half of Republicans, 70 percent of Independents and 76 percent of Democrats" had doubts about their safety. She continued:
Every state and political party has parents who care about their children's health, and how chemicals, genetic modification, antibiotics and hormones in food will affect them. Every state has rivers, streams, lakes and groundwater affected by agricultural chemical runoff. Every state has small farmers facing hardship as large companies control more of the food production chain, and many of those farmers may find new opportunities and rewards in the organic marketplace.

The spectacular commercial success of the organic food industry, moreover, she pointed out, was bound to attract Republican attention. "If business growth is a beloved Republican value, the organic foods category is a shining star,"—what with expansion tracking in the double digits and many pioneering organic food companies getting bought up by larger conglomerates. "Organic-friendly conservatives do exist," she concluded—and were beginning to make their voices heard both on Wall Street and on Capitol Hill.¹⁰

Lipson is not alone in making these observations. A handful of conservative commentators, too, have taken notice of the organic wing of the Republican Party—and even to think about its potential role in revitalizing the GOP agenda. Paul Weyrich, a co-founder of both the Heritage Foundation and the Moral Majority, has written that "conservatives should become agrarians again," noting that conservatives have lessons to learn both from the Mennonite community and from the organic farming movement. "Agrarian life is a whole culture, not just a way to make a living, and we should seek to protect that culture and make it available to more and more families."¹¹ National Review writer Rod Dreher has written extensively about a group he calls the "crunchy conservatives," or crunchy cons, of which he counts himself a member. He formulated the idea, he explains, after confronting the apparent contradictions of picking up his weekly share of organic vegetables in a National Review tote bag. "'Ewgh,'" said a colleague, "'that's so lefty.'" "I confessed that I was a Birkenstock'd Burkean in a National Review Online essay," he goes on, "and talked about how displaced I felt as a conservative who liked both Rush Limbaugh and Garrison Keillor. My in-box quickly filled up with literally hundreds of replies from across the country, nearly all of them saying, "Me too!"¹²
Crunchy cons, according to Dreher, join CSAs and organic food coops not because they believe organic food is healthier but simply because the food tastes better. They hate TV, bemoan the mallification of America and prefer to shop at independent bookstores. With cultural heroes ranging from T.S. Eliot and C.S. Lewis to Wendell Berry, Jane Jacobs and James Howard Kunstler, they take a manly, Teddy Rooseveltian view of nature, one "which respects nature without worshipping it." Like their hippie counterparts, crunchy cons "share a belief that something has gone seriously wrong in contemporary mass society, and are grasping for 'authenticity' ... amid a raging flood of media-driven consumer culture." Perhaps not so much like the hippies, the four touchstones of their existence are "Religion, the Natural World, Beauty, and Family." (Newsflash: The Bushes themselves—or at least Laura Bush—may be crunchy cons. White House chef Walter Schieb was quoted recently by Fox News as saying that First Lady Laura Bush was "adamant that everything be organic."13) And the term is catching on: Denise O'Brien, an Iowa organic farmer who ran for state Secretary of Agriculture on the Democratic ticket in 2006 (yes, ag secretaries are elected in Iowa) told me that at one point during her campaign that year she was contacted by a couple describing themselves as crunchy conservatives and wanting to meet with her to talk about her platform. They were not farmers, they explained; but they were Republicans, and they were attracted enough to her status as an organic farmer that they were willing to overlook her Democratic affiliation.

Crunchy cons are different from David Brooks' bobos, or bourgeois bohemians, in that they value quality of life but don't necessarily have a lot of money with which to pursue it—in part, Dreher says, because they may have intentionally sacrificed higher household incomes for large families and stay-at-home-mom-ism. With this point Dreher seems to be gesturing toward another group of conservative agrarians one increasingly hears mentioned within the organic farming community: Christian Homesteaders. Founded in 1961, the Christian Homesteading Movement is a loosely affiliated group committed to "godliness, simplicity and self-reliance," as
one website puts it; and one that seems to have been undergoing a resurgence in recent years.

Their strongest common practical commitment is to home-schooling; but they typically also embrace rural living, growing one's own food, alternative energy systems, and staying out of debt.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, Joel Salatin is a hero among Christian Homesteaders; as is Ron Paul, the Texas Congressman who showed an early strong success in his bid for the GOP Presidential nomination with an anti-war, pro-small government platform that included opposition to the controversial National Animal Identification System and a promise to legalize interstate sales of raw milk. (Salatin endorsed Paul's candidacy early in 2008.)¹⁵

Some observers suggest that conservative organic farmers are more likely to be farmers who are "in it for the money"—those who have transitioned to organic primarily for the economic opportunities it offers, rather than for philosophical or ideological reasons. But the Christian conservative organic farmers I have met don't necessarily fit that mold; the lines are not as clean as that. Many organic farmers who confess that they initially transitioned because it promised a better income (and I have known Democrats and Republicans who fall into this category) are eloquent in articulating both the personal satisfaction they feel in not using (or paying for) agricultural chemicals and the ecological wonderment they have experienced in discovering that organic methods work. A Wisconsin organic (and Christian conservative) dairy farmer I interviewed once spoke about his banker's repeated efforts to get him to take on debt to scale up his operation, and his own repeated refusals: he considered it ludicrous to assume that because he was a successful small dairy farmer, he should naturally seek to become a successful large one. "To be successful as an organic farmer you do really have to be conservative, or maybe frugal is the better word, on day-to-day financial decisions," Ron Rosmann, the Democratic organic farmer candidate for the Iowa legislature, told me. "This is where the word 'low-input' gains significance." He continued: "I found that I called myself a 'conservative' Democrat while door-knocking. In other words, conservative in economic decisions and balancing our budget and
living within our means." Given the larger economic realities of farming, in other words, to say
that an organic farmer is in it for the money may be simply to say that they're in it for survival as
a non-corporate agricultural enterprise.

What really separates Republican from Democratic (or conservative from progressive)
organic farmers are their views about the appropriate and necessary roles of government. Joel
Salatin's latest book, *Everything I Want to Do is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front*,
is a good summary of the anti-government position. The book's cover illustration (which Salatin
mentions having helped design) features an overall-clad, straw-hatted figure standing in the
center of a generalized farm landscape, raising his arms to the sky in frustration as an army tank
labeled "U.S.D.A"—complete with an armed soldier taking aim from the top hatch—barrels
down the road in his direction and a congregation of pigs, cows and chickens look innocently on
from the green fields on either side. The book had its genesis, Salatin explains in the opening
chapter, in an essay of the same title that he wrote for the September 2003 issue of *Acres-USA*
(the Austin, Texas-based magazine and publishing company that is an important voice of the
organic movement's conservative wing), in which he itemized the many ways in which
government regulations stood in the way of the further development of his family's farm
operation.16 Salatin may not go as far as the Cato Institute's Chris Edwards, who has proposed
slashing the USDA's budget by 90 percent—including the elimination of "all agricultural and
rural subsidies;" the dissolution of the Economic Research Service, the Agricultural Marketing
Service, the Farm Service Agency and the Foreign Agricultural Service; privatizing the National
Agricultural Statistics Service, the Agricultural Research Service and the Risk Management
Agency; and devolving food subsidy programs to the states—but he makes it clear that he
considers government interference—from labor laws to building and zoning codes to food safety
requirements—to be the principal impediment to the development of strong, integrated local
economies with small farms at their heart.17
There are at least two major problems with Salatin's position as a basis for saving the family farm, of course: first, it suggests that all farmers can and should do all of their marketing locally, which is not realistic for many farmers in the middle of the country; and second; it ignores the serious environmental abuses perpetrated on the countryside by poorly regulated agricultural and industrial sectors. If both Republican and Democratic organic farmers share a high degree of fiscal conservatism, Democratic ones are more likely to look to government for solutions whereas Republican ones are more likely to lean into a Libertarian position that lumps corporations and government in the same corrupt category. Christian Homesteaders "depend less upon government and more upon themselves," according to Christian Homesteaders Association. While Libertarians embrace self-reliance as an invigorating condition of rural life, Democrats point to the many ways in which the self-reliance of rural peoples is being increasingly put to the test. To quote Ron Rosmann again, "I based much of my campaign theme on issues of fairness in tax structure... strong environmental issues with water quality, [and] a blend of state and local control on CAFO's.... I said we have got to have more good paying jobs in our rural areas. I said that organic and local foods could play a role in that and certainly that renewable energy jobs could as well."

(Organic) farmers and political engagement

The crunchy con/Christian Homesteader phenomenon has interesting implications for both Democratic and Republican strategists, as well as for organic farming advocates. For Republicans like Dreher—and surely now more than ever—it points to a terrain of potential swing voters overlooked by the establishment GOP. "'I think a large number of people embrace leftist politics exactly because they associate them with the more attractive positions on quality-of-life issues,'" Dreher quotes one crunchy con as saying. "'[P]eople vote Democratic not because the Democratic agenda makes any sense but because they want to eat fresh vegetables.'" For
Democrats, similarly, crunchy cons would seem to represent a constituency worth reaching out to more actively: people to whom a case could be made that the Democratic agenda does indeed make sense, in part because it yields fresh vegetables, but also because it seeks to protect both people and land from the worst excesses of unregulated capitalism.

For students of the organic movement, Dreher's concept suggests that the conservative tradition may be playing, and have played, a largely overlooked role in the articulation and practice of organic management. Despite Conford's work on the conservative origins of the organic movement in England, histories of organic farming in the United States have tended to focus on the 1960s counter-culture and the emergence of environmentalism in the wake of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as the driving forces in finally bringing organic agriculture to fruition. The idea of contemporary crunchy conservatives following in the footsteps of religious back-to-the-landers points out a way to take the conservative element of organics seriously, which many "politics of organic farming" (told historically) analyses leave out. The hippie heritage gets most of the attention.

To some extent, this elision may itself have been historically produced. Suzanne Peters, in a 1979 Ph.D. dissertation on organic farming as a social movement, emphasized the way in which the work of J.I. Rodale as a popularizer tended to ignore or patch over the political differences between different elements of the organic idea. Basing her conclusions on extensive interviews with organic farmers, researchers and others in and around the movement, including J.I. Rodale's widow, Anna, Peters noted that Rodale's role was, first, to synthesize the two intellectual traditions underlying non-chemical farming in Europe—the work of Sir Albert Howard in England, and of Rudolf Steiner on the Continent—and then to blur the lines between the various strains of radicalism, progressivism and agrarianism that would give force to the organic movement in the United States. "In the pages of *Organic Gardening and Farming* [Rodale's landmark serial publication, founded in 1942], the organic farmer was politically no
different from any other farmer," Peters writes. "[T]he overwhelming message was organic farming as nonpartisan, and certainly nondisruptive. . . . Rodale never tied the spirit of the organic movement to any political commitments that might shake his already slender chances of support." When J.I.'s son Robert Rodale took over the reins from his father around 1970, he continued this tradition of political agnosticism, steering carefully down the center of the various currents of the organic movement. "You can be a Republican, Democrat or whatever and do an effective job of waking up the politicians to the problems of organic growers, and the opportunities that natural methods represent," he wrote in one of his editorials in the magazine in 1972. The Rodales' substantial influence on the representation and understanding of organic farming in the United States, in other words, had a distinctly centrist and even actively de-politicizing character.

Paradoxically, however, one of the distinguishing characteristics of organic farmers, in the opinion of many observers of the movement, is their high level of political engagement. (I invite anyone who doubts this to subscribe to O-Dairy, the organic dairy listserv: your Inbox will never be the same.) Jack Knight, the Midwest-based organic inspector quoted near the beginning of this paper, suggests that this may in part be a character trait cultivated more generally by the conditions of rural life: despite the fact that "farmers in general have this anti-government attitude," Knight told me, organic farmers of his acquaintance tend to be "very integrated into their communities," for instance through involvement on local school boards and county conservation boards. "These are not loner or eccentric types," as he put it. In thinly populated parts of the country, if you want community, you have to take your turn in supporting it. Perhaps too, it's linked to the greater emphasis on skilled and attentive management required by organic methods. "Organic farmers are thinkers," says Denise O'Brien, in a typical comment. "They know about the interaction of the microbes in the soil, and they're also in tune with the broader
social agenda, taking care of their communities. Instead of being all about feeding the world, they're more interested in taking care of the neighborhood."

Organic farmers have also begun running for elected positions beyond their local communities. Organic vegetable farmer David Zuckerman has been a Progressive Party member of the Vermont State House of Representatives since 1996 (he was just re-elected), and is now chair of its House Agriculture Committee. I have already mentioned Denise O'Brien's run for Iowa Secretary of Agriculture in 2006 and Ron Rosmann's bid for a state congressional seat in 2008. (Both live in the more conservative western part of the state, and both lost by slim margins.) At the national level, in 2006, Democrat Jon Tester of Montana became the first organic farmer elected to the U.S. Senate, narrowly defeating three-term incumbent Conrad Burns. Tester is part of the Democratic turn in Western states; as an article in the *New York Times* noted recently, it is now possible to walk through the West from Canada to Mexico and not set foot in a state with a Republican governor (Democrats now occupy the governor's mansions of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Kansas and Oklahoma).

The strange irony of organic farmers' political engagement, of course, lies in its stark contrast to their actual numbers. Despite dramatic growth over the past two decades, those numbers are still tiny: in 2007 there were approximately 13,000 certified organic producers in the United States. If this suggests a total figure for both certified and non-certified producers of, say, 30,000, that would represent about 1.5 percent of total farmers in the United States. Curiously, the ratio of organic farmers to non-organic farmers in the United States is roughly similar to the ratio of farmers to non-farmers; while their relative political presence is similarly outsized in both cases. (Somebody noted during the 2008 Presidential campaign that Latinos now outnumber farmers in Iowa—there are about 119,000 residents of Hispanic descent, and about 90,000 farmers. Nevertheless, farmers are iconic both within and of the state, while Latinos remain almost invisible.) Historically, farmers' disproportionate cultural capital in America is linked
both to Jeffersonian agrarianism and to late 19th-century Populism, in which farmers made a compelling case about the damaging effects of corporate power on American democracy. As anachronistic as it may be in fact, farmers' powerful hold on a kind of symbolic political authority is re-enacted every four years in the weeks leading up to the Iowa caucuses, in which farmers stand in for Iowans, Iowans stand in for Midwesterners, and Midwesterners stand in for mainstream America.

Jon Tester's win in Montana, furthermore, points to a fascinating new development in the symbolic relationship between organic and "conventional" farming. In a November 2007 interview with Dennis McDonald, chairman of the Montana Democratic Party since 2005, an editor for High Country News observed that Montana now had a situation in which all the "top Democrats—Gov. Brian Schweitzer, Sen. Tester and Sen. Max Baucus—have roots in ranching or farming. All of them, and you, present that image to the public. Yet really, not many Montanans are directly involved in ag anymore. Does it mean that the politics revolve around ag in some way?" The conversation continued:

McDonald: I believe that rural constituents, farmers and ranchers but not limited to them, deliver to the country a moral compass, a moral direction for the country.

HCN: And when the Dems connect with that rural constituency, regardless of number of rural voters, it lends authenticity to the party?

McDonald: Authenticity, that's a good word for it. I encourage Democrats elsewhere to consider it. I see it happening big-time in places like Colorado, where Sen. Ken Salazar and Congressman John Salazar (brothers elected in 2004) are examples. They both grew up on a small southern Colorado farm, and one of the things you come away with when you talk to them is how genuine they are, just down-to-earth genuine folks.

This discussion would seem to suggest that farmers have as much to offer the Democratic Party as the Democratic Party has to offer farmers, if not more: authenticity, a way to connect with rural voters, who still identify with agriculture even if they are not directly involved with it. It seems possible that organic agriculture (at least in the middle of the country) is making successful inroads on the idea of authenticity—positioning itself or coming to be seen as 'real' farming, even
'traditional' farming. And not without some justification: unsubsidized, family-scale farming in the Midwest and West has for some time now only been profitable either by being organic or making use of some other value-added marketing strategy (such as direct or cooperative marketing of grass-fed beef). As Suzanne Peters argues at length, almost from its origins the organic farming movement in America has relied heavily on the agrarian ideal, or the "myth of the garden," as she puts it. But for organic farming to be able to lay claim to agrarian authenticity at a mainstream level is something new.

In her 2004 book *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*, Julie Guthman powerfully undercut the widespread notion that "organic farming is the agrarian answer," demonstrating instead why, and "how organic agriculture has replicated what it set out to oppose." By focusing on California, Guthman addressed the most advanced (in both extensive and intensive terms) stage of organic agriculture in the United States and the context in which the agrarian ideal was least applicable, since California has, as Guthman strongly emphasized, "never had an agrarian tradition" (174, emphasis in original). The paradox of organic farming in California, as Guthman eloquently shows, is that it relies on "an agrarian populist imaginary" to conceal from itself its fundamental implication in the capitalist exploitation of both land and labor (176). As we have seen in this paper, the agrarian populist imaginary is still alive and well within the organic movement, both within California and beyond. I'd like to suggest, however, that the agrarian attachments of the organic movement—even the fundamentalist Christian ones—need to be taken seriously, because despite their contradictions they offer a point of access for a broad range of necessary discussions about the future of the countryside.

More recently, Amy Guptill and Rick Welsh have suggested that marketing networks like OFARM (the Organic Farmers' Association for Relationship Marketing, founded in 2001 and made up of eight organic farmers' cooperatives in the Midwest and Great Plains) could represent
a viable alternative to the "conventionalization of organics." For most OFARM producers, farming organically "has as much to do with higher prices and greater autonomy than [sic] with environmental and social stewardship. In this sense, the producers that OFARM represents are less like organic market gardeners and more like the medium-scale manufacturers displaced in the latter part of the twentieth century through corporate consolidation," and "OFARM itself is reminiscent of the networks of small manufacturing plants and other firms that emerged in particular places around the world: a network of specialized, quality-focused producers balancing cooperation and competition within a framework of trust" (61). Guptill and Welsh's analysis of OFARM is interesting because it offers a different model for agricultural producer empowerment, one that is potentially more applicable within the actual economic conditions of the post-industrial American Heartland. The success of Organic Valley/CROPP, the nation's largest organic cooperative, based in La Farge, Wisconsin, is another instance of a practical solution to the twin demands of sophisticated market access and democratic producer engagement.

The politics of organic farming in the contemporary context have largely been discussed in terms of the political maneuverings involved in the formation, implementation and enforcement of the National Organic Standards. Samuel Fromartz opens his book *Organic, Inc.* with the story of Arthur Harvey, the organic inspector, blueberry farmer and tax resister from Maine who filed suit against Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman shortly after the Organic Standards took effect in October of 2002. Harvey identified a series of inconsistencies between the Standards and their authorizing legislation (the Organic Foods Production Act), including the allowance of non-organic ingredients in organic food processing and the so-called 80/20 clause with regard to the transitioning of dairy herds. A U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in Harvey's favor in January of 2005, and the resulting flurry of activity and debate within the organic sector provides the narrative focus for Fromartz's book. As a business writer, Fromartz is interested in
the "intersection of idealism and pragmatism" characterizing many business start-ups, including those in the organic food industry, "springing as it did from a range of motives and movements: back-to-the-land simplicity, agrarianism, anti-industrialism, environmentalism, nutritional and health concerns, and, of course, the love of fresh, whole, natural food."23

The question usually posed for organic farming is why it's not more progressive in its political impact: why and how it has fallen short of its full transformative potential for the food and farming system. Answers are many. Complementing Julie Guthman's deep economic analysis, Mark Winne, in his recent book Closing the Food Gap, a kind of memoir of his 25 years as executive director of the Hartford Food System, offers an explanation based more on practical contingency, recounting how "the organic movement lost social justice" after initially defining itself around three principles: "that organic farming had to be environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially just."24 As the standards were developed, "political pragmatists" decided to relinquish the social justice element (including concerns related to farmworkers' rights as well as poverty issues) fearing that they might "scare away the Republican votes that were needed" to secure passage of the OFPA (133). Winne places equal blame for this failure on anti-hunger advocates, who he notes were skeptical of the organic movement because of the assumption that organic food would be expensive food, and therefore irrelevant, if not in fact antagonistic, to anti-hunger efforts, which were "inclined more toward quantity than quality. At a watershed moment in U.S. food and farm policy, with the 1990 farm bill before Congress and organic farming about to move from adolescence to adulthood, antihunger and sustainable farming interests did not even search for common ground. They were like two trains passing in the night" (134).

The debates leading up to the 2008 Farm Bill featured perhaps the strongest differences of opinion to date as to how organic farming should best negotiate its priorities within the larger goals of agri-food system reform. Midwestern progressive Democratic organic farmers, among
other subgroups, are adamant that meaningful commodity payment limitations would be the single most effective measure in arresting the pace of consolidation and corporatization in U.S. agriculture. On the other hand, organic agriculture has begun to achieve success in reaching more modest goals, such as moderate increases in federal funding for organic research, the continuation of the organic certification cost-share program and some conservation funding targeted for organic practices. "Many people have asked if the incremental gains for organic and sustainable agriculture are worth the price of perpetuating the many large-scale flaws that are also embodied in the bill," wrote the OFRF Policy team in their Fall 2008 newsletter, after the Farm Bill finally passed. "Early in 2007, a key Congressional staffer asked us, 'What do you really want? Do you want to get a better share of the pie? Or do you want to blow up the whole process?' It was a tough question, in part because the prospect of the process blowing up seemed almost plausible at that point. But what if it had blown up? There was no assurance that we could engineer a better outcome.... Our approach was to fight for a fair share while tunneling under some of the policy structures that hold back bigger changes, opening some cracks and undermining those structures for future dismantling." 25

Politicians most supportive of organic farming tend to come from states and districts in which organic farming has been most successful, like California, Wisconsin, Oregon and Vermont. The Congressional Organic Agriculture Caucus, formed in April of 2003 with an initial membership of 16 Democrats, five Republicans and one Independent, is dominated by members from Western states, with eight members from California, three from Oregon and five from Washington state. 26 The Organic Caucus has not been very active since its founding, but it is nevertheless a good indication of which Congressional members regard it as important, and/or safe, to support the organic cause. For organic and sustainable farming advocates, focusing on the Senate and House Agriculture and Appropriations Committees has been more to the point. 27
The politics of organic farming is frequently posed as Big Organic vs. Beyond Organic, Petaluma Poultry vs. Joel Salatin; with the former group perpetually threatening "the integrity of the organic label" and the latter group protesting federal control of the word "organic" full stop. But this debate largely ignores the plight of the Agriculture of the Middle, defined both as medium-sized farms and as farms in the middle of the country. By many measures, the starkest divisions in United States today are those separating urban vs. rural (or in current parlance, metro vs. non-metro) areas. As Ron Rosmann puts it, “The United States has no coherent rural policy.” Maybe we should talk not just about ecological sacrifice zones but about political sacrifice zones, despite the Obama campaign's 50-state strategy.

The social and political diversity of organic farming is nicely consonant with its agro-ecological rationale. Residents of small rural communities, and participants in the relatively small world of organic farming, may be reluctant to raise political discussions with the potential to expose divisions over hot-button social issues seemingly irrelevant to the nitty-gritty details of farm management. But political affiliation can have serious consequences at the local level. Not long ago I met a soil scientist and federal employee who described to me how Natural Resource Conservation Service employees actively encouraging farmers to adopt specific conservation practices can find themselves reprimanded by their superiors. "If someone's out there aggressively pushing conservation measures to a farmer who doesn't want to hear it, that farmer can call his state representative and complain, and the message will come back to tone it down. We don't talk about it publicly, but we talk about it among ourselves all the time." In another example, Denise O'Brien told me how responsibility for a new farm-to-school program in Iowa was assigned by the state Secretary of Agriculture (her former opponent, Republican Bill Northey) first to a staffer in weights and measures, then to an outside consultant, neither of whom had the relevant expertise, and finally to the state organic program office, which has its hands full with other responsibilities. "There are plenty of people with local food system expertise in Iowa,"
O'Brien noted. "It just goes to show you that you can get legislation passed, but that doesn't necessarily mean things will get implemented."

The thought experiment posed by this paper—what if the political diversity of organic farming matters?—points toward two possibly contradictory conclusions. First, it suggests that the organic movement should pay more attention to its conservative as well as its progressive roots: that the Joel Salatins of this world should be treated not just as colorful characters within a rainbow of organic opinions but as agricultural thinkers with a potentially expansive social impact. Second, it suggests that right-leaning organic advocates should be called to account for the real political consequences of their positions—encouraged to recognize the deep interconnections between rural livelihoods and government action. In today's organic world, no farm is an island.
Salatin also caused a stir during a keynote presentation at a conference in Vermont. "There is a reality that the world is divided into those who want to be farmers and those who don't want to be a woman on that farm." Salatin also caused a stir during a keynote presentation at a conference in Vermont.

"I was there once in June," an organic dairy farmer in Vermont told me, "and it was a mess. And you don't want to be a woman on that farm." Salatin also caused a stir during a keynote presentation at a conference in Vermont.

Eco-Farm a couple of years ago when he said that he couldn't understand how organic farmers could be pro-choice. Not surprisingly, Salatin is a lightning rod for these issues. A number of people within the organic farming community have shared with me the opinion that Michael Pollan "really got snowed by Joel Salatin." "I was there once in June," an organic dairy farmer in Vermont told me, "and it was a mess. And you don't want to be a woman on that farm." Salatin also caused a stir during a keynote presentation at a conference in Vermont.

Review


Ben Kiernan's important and distressingly hefty recent book *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (Yale, 2007), notes the "frequent combination" of racial hatred, agrarian ideologies, and cults of antiquity underlying genocidal and expansionist campaigns. "Genocide requires not just brutal force and racial hatred, but most often also a cult of antiquity glorifying a lost history, a vision of ideal land use, and its deployment as justification for territorial aggression," he observes (23, 27). This is certainly not to say that agrarianism is always linked to racism, much less to genocide, but the association is disturbing nonetheless. As Kiernan also points out, however, agrarian ideology often appeals most to those not actually involved in agriculture: farmers and peasants themselves are usually too close to the labor and hardship of farming to indulge in romantic idealizing.


6. Salatin, *Everything I Want to Do is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front* (Polyface, Inc., 2007), p. 117. "I disagree with the folks who say that certification has increased the organic market," Salatin writes: "I will not yield these sales. I would suggest that had the same effort been put into breaking down local food barriers, we would be selling far more alternative food than we are, but it would be through cottage businesses, community canneries and processors, and neighbor-friendly retail venues" (120).


9. Not surprisingly, Salatin is a lightning rod for these issues. A number of people within the organic farming community have shared with me the opinion that Michael Pollan "really got snowed by Joel Salatin." "I was there once in June," an organic dairy farmer in Vermont told me, "and it was a mess. And you don't want to be a woman on that farm." Salatin also caused a stir during a keynote presentation at Eco-Farm a couple of years ago when he said that he couldn't understand how organic farmers could be pro-choice.


Ron Paul's candidate site, www.ronpaul2008.com, has been replaced by www.campaignforliberty.com, which contains a lot of economic position material is sadly devoid of agricultural policy statements.

Calling itself "The Voice of Eco-Agriculture" ("To be economical, agriculture must be ecological"), Acres-USA was founded in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1970 by Charles Walters, a former editor for the National Farmers Union who was strongly influenced by the work of both agricultural economist Carl Wilken and University of Missouri soil scientist William Albrecht. Since 1995 the organization has been run by Charles' son, Fred Walters. Their magazine has always featured strongly worded political editorials and gives regular coverage to some of the more off-beat theories of soil fertility and agro-ecosystem health. The Acres-USA philosophy is described on their website as dedicated to healthy soil, appropriate technology and the survival of the family farm. "The loss of the family farm deprives society of an element essential to a democratic nation, a thriving rural base. Independent farmers who maintain small- to medium-size operations, with their intimate knowledge of natural processes and their distrust of artifice and pretense, are a necessary check against the excesses of urban civilization." See http://www.acresusa.com/other/philosophy.htm.


For an interesting discussion of the recent resurgence of agrarian populism as a reaction against corporate power in North Dakota, see Ted Nace, "Breadbasket of Democracy," Orion, May/June 2006.


Mark Winne, Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty (Beacon Press, 2008), p. 132. Subsequent page references given in the text.


The following table lists membership of the Congressional Organic Caucus as of December 2006, with indications of members defeated or retiring their seats as of the close of the 2008 session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership of the Congressional Organic Caucus (as of Dec. 2006)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Co-Chairs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR 4th)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA 17th)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI 3rd)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rep. James Walsh (R-NY 25th) retiring; seat won by Dan Maffei (D)</td>
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Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD 1st) defeated in primary; seat won by Frank Kratovil (D)

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<th>Members (organized by USDA-SARE region)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northeast</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rep. Tom Allen (D-ME 1st) ran for Senate and lost; seat won by Chellie Pingree (D)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI 6th)</td>
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<td>Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI 5th)</td>
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<td>Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH 10th)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI 2nd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep. Virgil Goode (R-VA 5th) winner not yet declared; neck and neck with Tom Perrillo (D)</td>
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27 The Senate Agriculture Committee now has a Subcommittee dedicated to "Nutrition and Food Assistance, Sustainable and Organic Agriculture and General Legislation," chaired by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT); the House Ag Committee has a Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture, a significant categorization given that there is also a subcommittee on "Specialty Crops, Rural Development and Foreign Agriculture" (it is a major step for organic agriculture to no longer be considered a specialty crop). Other Senate subcommittee members are Sen. Norm Coleman (R-MN, Ranking Member--but seat hanging in the balance against Dem. Al Franken); Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Sen. Robert Casey (D-PA), Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Sen. Dick Lugar (R-IN), Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS), Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID). Current members of the House Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture are (recently defeated members struck through): Rep. Dennis Cardoza (D-CA 18th), Chair; Rep. Randy Neugebauer (R-TX 19th), Ranking Member; Rep. Bob Etheridge (D-NC 2nd); Rep. Timothy Mahoney (D-FL 16th); Rep. John Barrow (D-GA 12th); Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY 20th); Rep. Randy Kuhl (R-NY 29th); Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC 5th); Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX 11th); and Rep. Robert Latta (R-OH 5th). (Sources: www.congress.org; and the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.)

28 To give one example, the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska recently pointed out that "living in a rural area is a greater indicator than either race or income in predicting access to a high-speed [Internet] connection." Center for Rural Affairs newsletter, Sept. 2008, p. 1.