The Small Farm Comeback

Michael Bomford, PhD
Presented to Participants in the US Department of State’s Multi-Regional Small Business Development Project
Changing face of US agriculture

US farmland
$(10^7 \text{ ha})$

US farm population
$(10^6)$

Fewer Farmers...

Job Voyager, 2009

(Link to Interactive graph)
Percent of farms with sales < $250,000

Number of Farms

- 0% - 60%
- 61% - 70%
- 71% - 80%
- 81% - 90%
- 91% - 95%
- 96% - 100%

USDA - 2007 Census of Agriculture
Small Farms Factsheet
Change in Number of Farms, 2002 - 2007

United States Net Increase
+75,810

1 Dot = 20 Farms Increase
1 Dot = 20 Farms Decrease
7,000 Farmers’ Markets in 2011
(up from 340 in 1970)
Direct marketing of farm products

• Promotes consumption of fruits and vegetables; reduces consumption of processed food
• Increases employment per food dollar and proportion of food dollar retained locally

Industry group value-added shares of the food dollar

2006 industry group value-added

“Other” comprises advertising (2.4¢) and legal and accounting (1.6¢).
Small farms more likely to sell direct to consumer

Source: USDA 2009.
Kentucky has unrealized potential to meet growing demand for organic food.
Median number of species per ha

Bar chart showing the median number of bird and plant species in various farm sizes and types. The chart indicates that small organic farms have the highest number of bird species in both farm size categories, followed by large organic farms, large conventional farms, and small conventional farms. Plants show a similar trend but with slightly lower values across all farm types and sizes.