



# The Organic Center

(In)credible Science. Credibly Sourced.

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# The Organic Center: Science for the Organic Movement

We are the trusted source on the science of organic farming and products.

Our mission is to convene credible, evidence-based research to fill knowledge gaps, support organic farmers and businesses, and strengthen trust in the organic label.

We partner across the supply chain—farmers, brands, certifiers, and researchers—to communicate organic's impact clearly and effectively.

The Organic Center | [organic-center.org](https://organic-center.org)





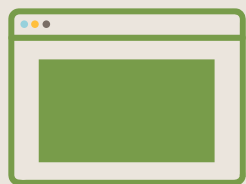
# Communicate benefits of organic to consumers

The Organic Center communicates directly with consumers and industry, sharing the latest credible research on how organic farming and products can protect their health and the planet.

We serve up the facts in easy-to-digest content such as:



Recipes



**Microsites**  
dedicated to  
specific research  
topics



**Educational  
Videos**



**Newsletters**



**Webinars**

The Organic Center | [organic-center.org](https://www.organic-center.org)



**organic-  
center.org/publications**

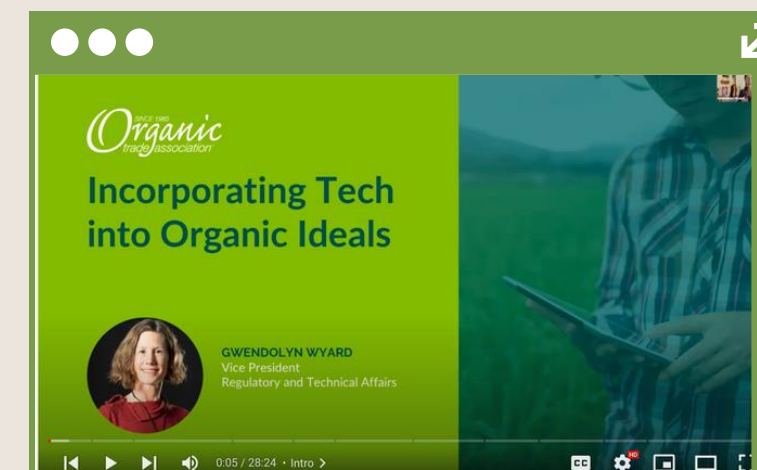
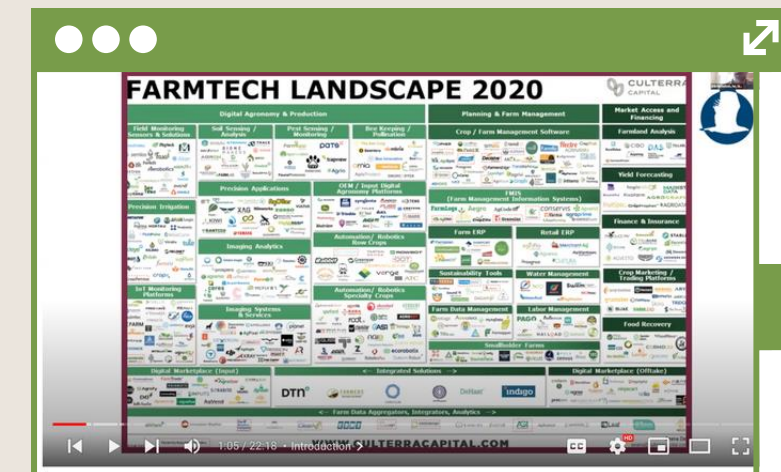


# Build Communities

The Organic Center brings stakeholders from across the industry together to address important and emerging issues related to organic.

Together we:

- Develop critical research projects (USDA OREI, AFRI)
- Host an annual Organic Confluences conference





## Fill Knowledge Gaps

The Organic Center works to fill critical industry knowledge gaps by facilitating and directing research projects to providing tools and training to help organic farmers and businesses thrive.





# Support Industry Advancement



Build Research Teams and Connect Industry Leaders



Work with the Organic Trade Association



Provide scientific review and recommendations for National Organic Standards Board





# The State of U.S. Organic Rice:

## Barriers, Insights, and Opportunities



## Presented By

**Esteemed Speaker**



**Alvaro Durand-Morat, PHD**  
*Assistant Professor*  
Department of Agricultural  
Economics and Agribusiness  
***University of Arkansas***

**Discussion Panelist**



**Luis Espino, PHD**  
*Rice Farming Systems Advisor*  
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**Moderator**



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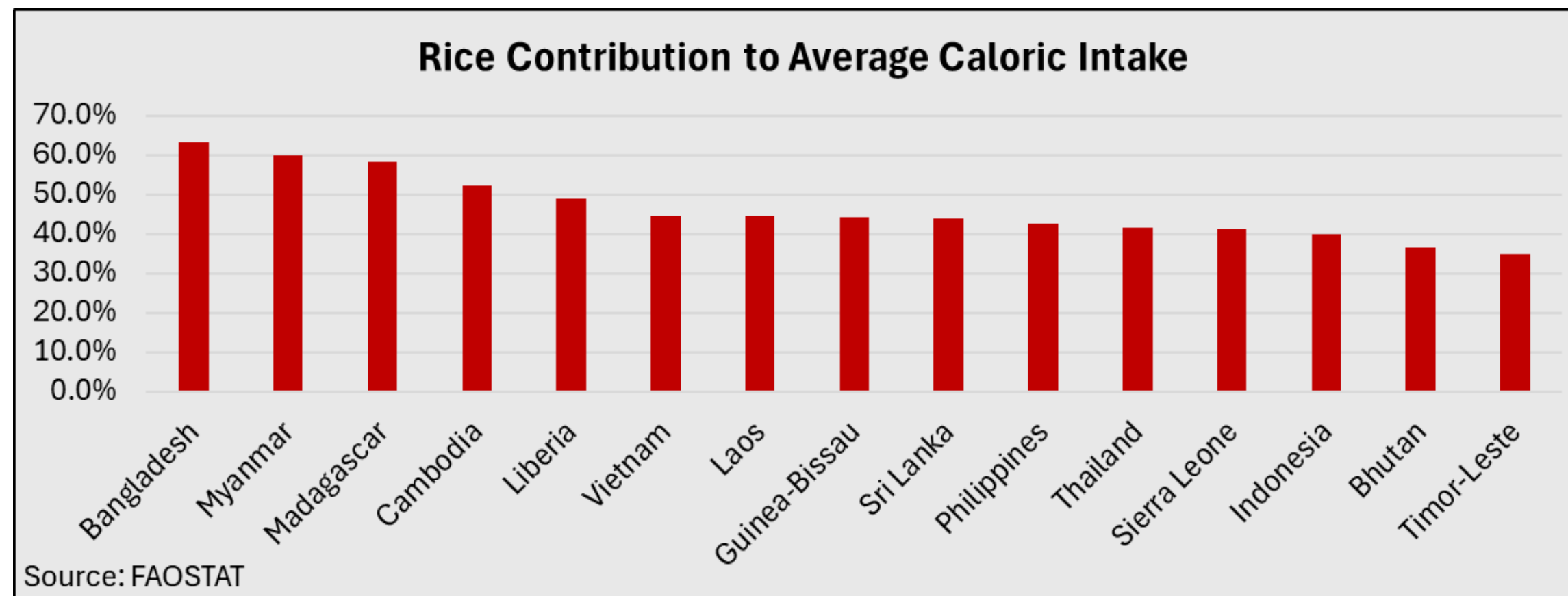
# Challenges and Opportunities for US Organic Rice

Alvaro Durand-Morat



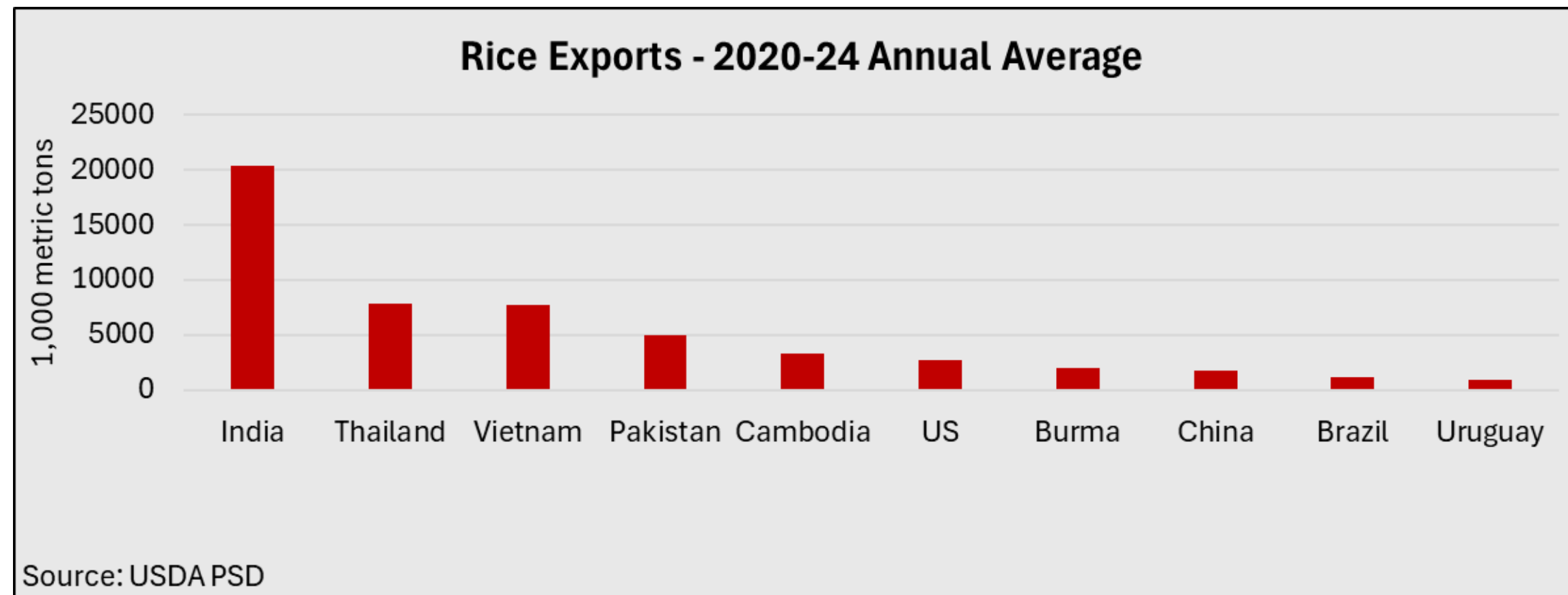
# Rice in the Global and U.S. Food System

- Rice is one of the world's most essential food staples, providing about 21% of global caloric intake and 15% of dietary protein



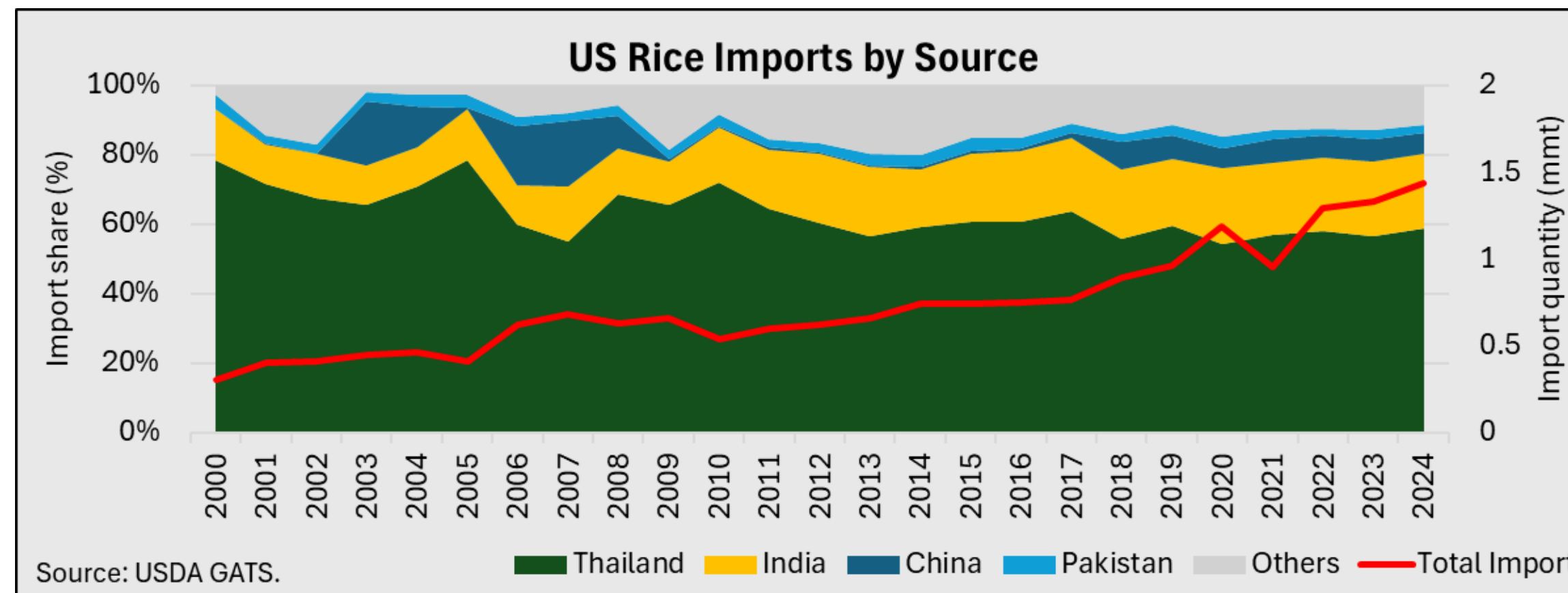
# Rice in the Global and U.S. Food System

- The US ranks 13th globally in rice production, but low domestic consumption allows for substantial surpluses.
- The US consistently ranks among the top rice exporters.



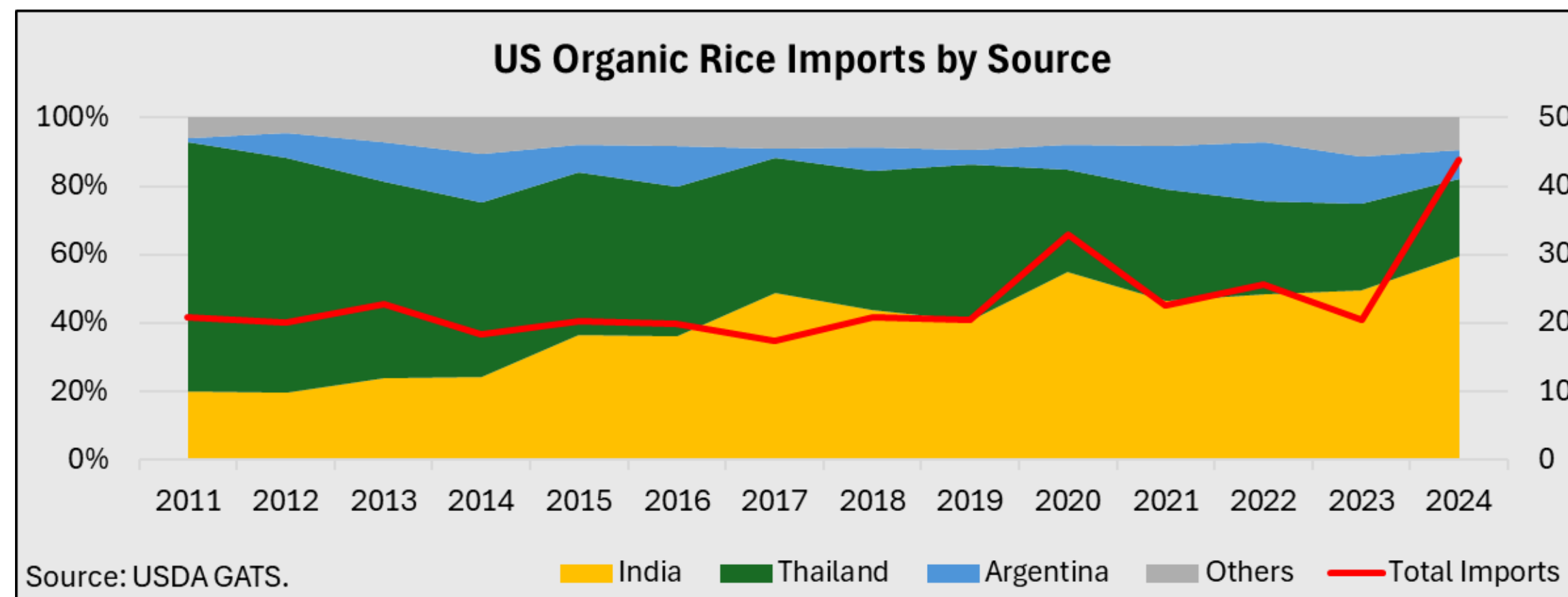
# Rice in the Global and U.S. Food System

- While rice exports are ongoing, rice imports are growing.
  - Average of 1.24 MMT/year valued at \$1.2 billion/year since 2020.
- The bulk of the rice imported is fragrant (jasmine and basmati).



# Rice in the Global and U.S. Food System

- Imports of organic rice also show a positive trend.
  - Average of 29,000 MT/year valued at \$36.6 million/year since 2020.
- The bulk of the organic rice imported is long grain non-fragrant.



# Research Problem/Question

- The puzzling question is  
*If US growers have the agronomic know-how and infrastructure to lead in conventional rice, why is organic production lagging as consumer demand grows?*
- Funded by USDA's Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, this study aimed to explore the disconnect between rising U.S. demand for organic rice and the limited domestic supply.

# Identified Market Trends

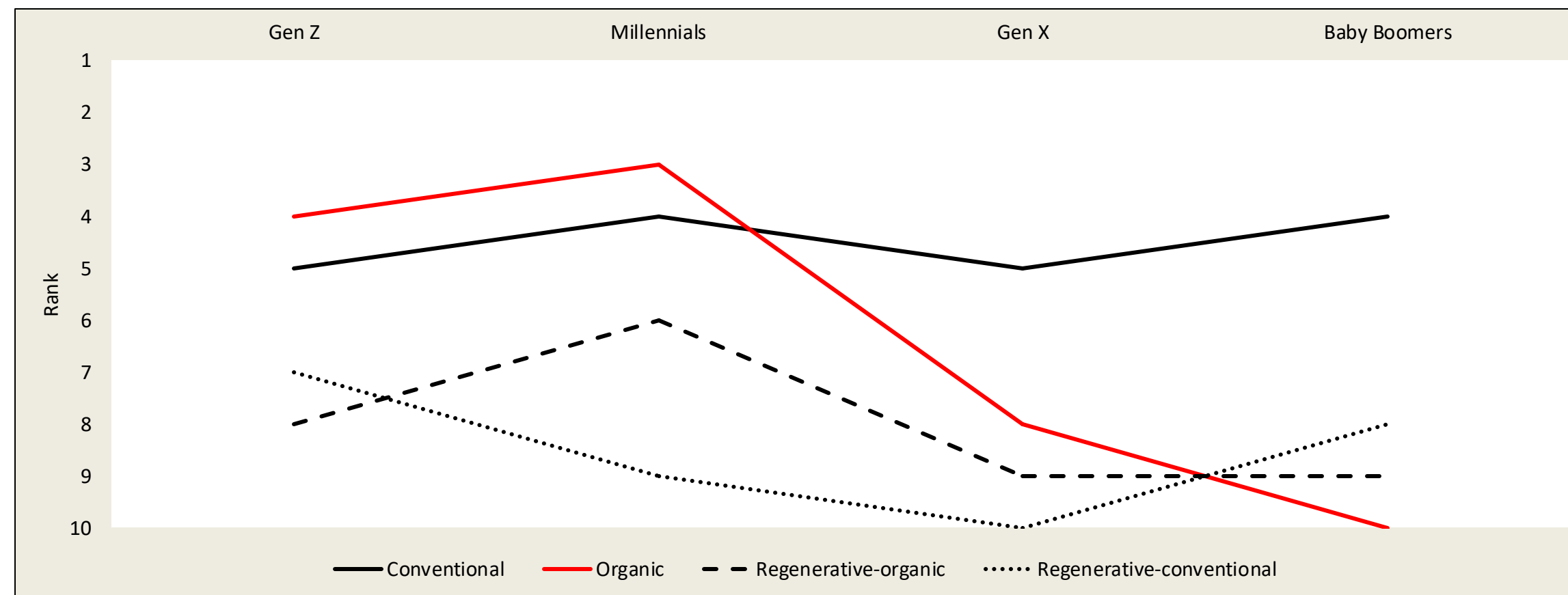
- Rising rice consumption of conventional and organic rice
  - Driven by shifting demographics, diets, and views on sustainability
- Rice production potential
  - *The conditions to excel in rice production are in place, which should support a thriving organic production sector as well*
- Lack of information about the US organic rice market
  - *Particularly when it comes to producers' views on organic farming*

# Research Approach

- Consumer survey
  - *A representative sample of the US population (1,034 responses)*
  - *Assess attributes, including organic, influencing rice purchase decisions among the U.S. rice consumers.*
- Producer survey and focus groups
  - *A combined phone and online survey were distributed to 6,288 rice growers (173 certified organic) between January-April 2024*
  - *A total of 141 completed responses*
  - *Four focus groups with organic rice farmers in Beaumont and El Campo, TX, and Yuba City, CA, in 2022 and 2023*

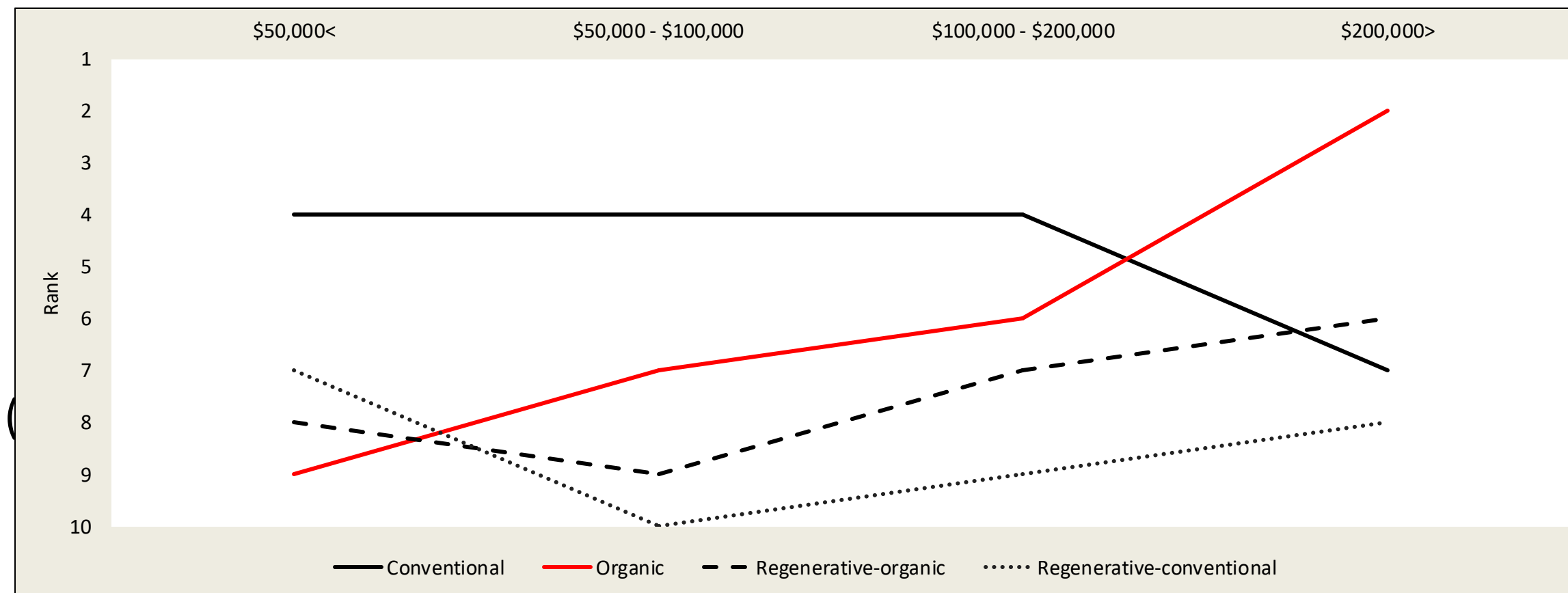
# Key Findings – Consumer Assessment

- For the pooled sample, organic rice ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in importance after food safety, price, produced in the US, and conventional.
- Younger generations value organic more than older generations.



# Key Findings – Consumer Assessment

- Preference for organic increases with income.

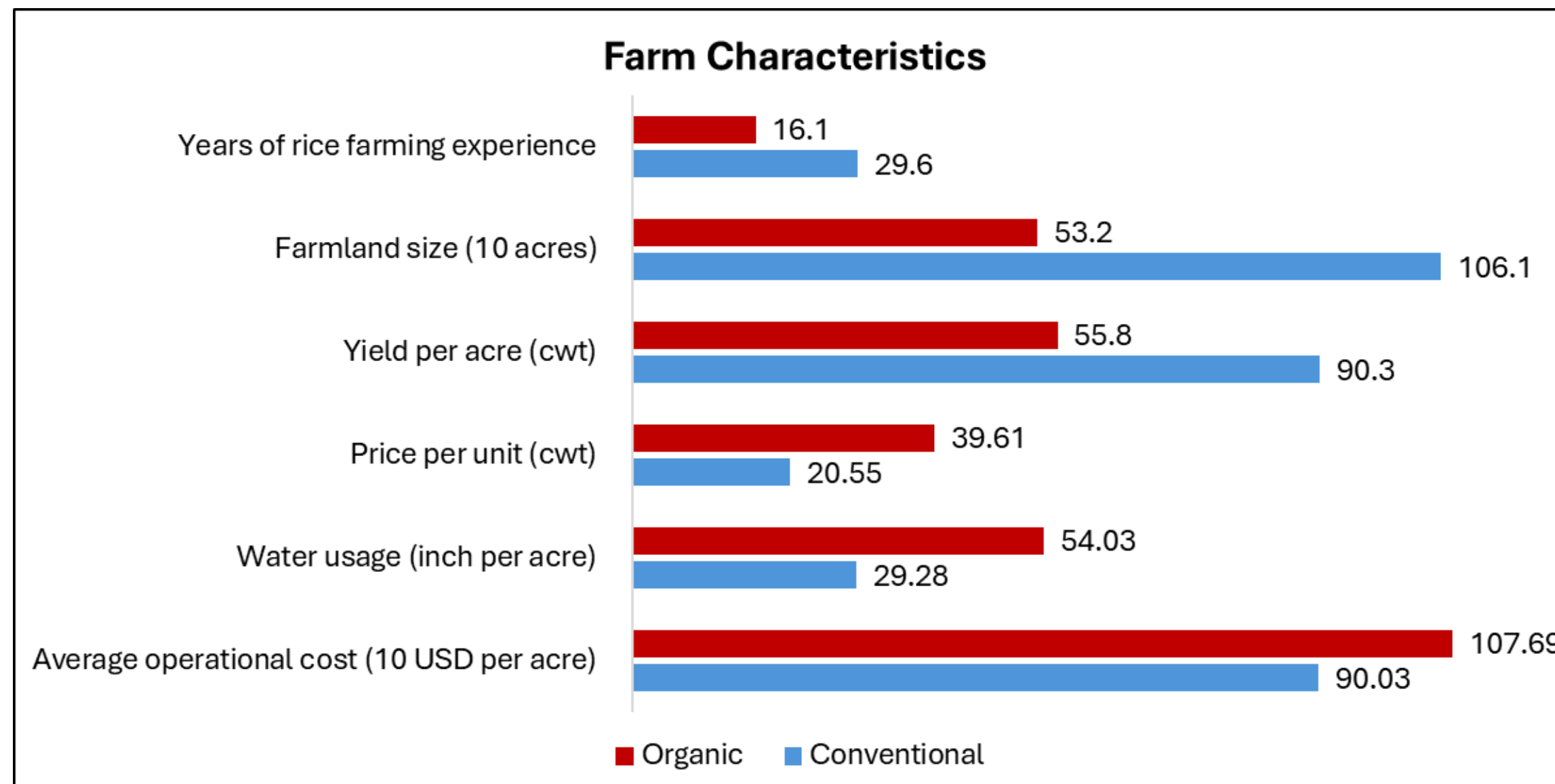


- Regenerative (the concept

edge/clarity of

# Key Findings – Producer Assessment

- Significant (5% level) differences in farming characteristics between organic and conventional farmers



# Key Findings – Producer Assessment

- In-depth focus group discussions suggest that:
  - *Organic rice yields are between 40-50% lower than conventional.*
  - *Higher seeding rates for organic, in some cases double the rate of conventional*
  - *Water usage is less clear: in CA, some farmers argue organic consumes twice as much as conventional, while others argue it consumes less because of dry-down periods. In TX, most farmers agreed that water use is the same for conventional and organic*
  - *Organic rice prices usually double conventional rice prices.*
  - *Overall, the main issue for organic rice seems to be fertility in CA and weed control in TX*

# Key Findings – Producer Assessment

- Other interesting findings:
  - *Organic growers also placed greater emphasis on sustainability and long-term resilience.*
  - *Conventional and organic rice farmers ranked profitability as the top operational priority. Conventional growers placed greater value on ease of management, while organic producers were more focused on reducing production costs.*
  - *All organic growers reported regularly eating organic food, while more than half of conventional growers said they rarely or never do.*
    - Over 90% of organic rice producers reported eating organic rice themselves, compared to over 50% of conventional farmers who had never tried it.

# Key Findings – Producer Assessment

- Barriers to expanding production of organic rice:

For Organic Rice Farmers	For Conventional Rice Farmers
Weed management	Lack of knowledge/interest
High input costs	Risk and profitability
Limited suitable land available	Management constraints
Need for better safety net	Lack of market information

# Key Findings – Producer Assessment

- Barriers to expanding production of organic rice:
  - *Organic rice farmers see rice imports as the main threat to expanding US organic rice production*
  - *The higher risk of organic rice is another important barrier. As one Arkansas grower observed*  
*“If the reward matched the risk on organic, more of us would already be doing it.”*
  - Another organic farmer elaborated,  
*“The risk in organic rice is substantially higher than in conventional, so farmers should be rewarded for that. On the other hand, there is a lot of price resistance (in part due to cheap imports, in part due to changing marketing structure with bigger retailers).”*

# Recommendations

Challenge	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 17% of conventional farmers responded “Do not know” when asked what would motivate them to adopt organic practices.</li><li>• Most conventional farmers lack information about organic markets and certification.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Boost Awareness and Education:</b> Launch targeted outreach to increase the visibility of organic rice. Provide region-specific resources on transition steps, risks, and profitability.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organic farmers perceive organic rice farming as significantly riskier than conventional farmers.</li><li>• Concerns about profitability, weed/pest pressure, and lack of market access were the top reasons for not adopting organic practices.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Support Risk Management:</b> Adapt policies (e.g., safety net programs) and technical support tools to reflect the higher perceived risk in organic rice farming.</li></ul>

# Recommendations

Challenge	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers cited insufficient government support as a key barrier to organic adoption.</li> <li>• Some conventional farmers are open to adopt organic practice if there is greater profitability and/or government support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Enhance Incentives:</b> Expand organic transition programs, with support aligned to farmers' concerns (e.g., land suitability, input cost).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conventional farmers reported they do not know any organic rice buyers in their area.</li> <li>• Organic farmers reported that a lack of buyers is not a major concern, indicating better-connected markets in certain regions such as CA and TX.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthening Market Access:</b> Invest in local buyer networks and cooperatives to connect farmers to organic rice markets, especially in conventional-dominant regions such as AR.</li> </ul>

# Key Findings – Producer Assessment

Challenge	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both groups prioritize profitability, sustainability, and pride in their operations.</li><li>• Farmers downplay the influence of peers or external perception when making decisions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Align Messaging with Farmer Values:</b> Frame organic adoption around profitability and land stewardship: values shared by both conventional and organic growers.</li></ul>

# Questions?



# THANK YOU!

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