

'It's simply difficult to grow crops organically, on a large scale': Gigantic organic farm failure in South Dakota underscores challenge of scaling up production

The food company General Mills, maker of Cheerios, [announced](#) in 2018 that it would convert [Gunsmoke Farms, located northwest of Pierre, South Dakota] to organic production. The company planned to turn it into an educational hub to teach other farmers "how to implement organic and regenerative agriculture practices."

Now, some of Gunsmoke Farms' neighbors say that the farm is doing more environmental harm than good.

Among the critics is [Dwayne Beck](#), a soil scientist who manages South Dakota State University's [Dakota Lakes Research Station](#), 40 miles east of Gunsmoke Farms. Beck was skeptical about the project from the beginning. "It scared me, because normally organic [farming] entails lots of tillage, and those soils are very fragile," he said.

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Months later, Beck said his fears were realized. He collected photographs of the damage: small drifts of wind-blown soil in a roadside ditch, and a country road that disappears into a brown cloud of blowing dust.

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"It's in a deep hole," [organic farming expert Gary] Zimmer said, referring to the farm. "I don't know how you get it back out organically. It's hard to farm organically if you do it really well, and have your intensive management. But 30,000 acres, poorly managed, is a really good sign for failure."

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