

The IFOAM Africa Organic Service Center

In 2004, the IFOAM Africa Organic Service Center was created, and an IFOAM Africa Advisory Committee was established. Of the 780 organizations registered as members of IFOAM, 72 are African. These organizations provide the basis for building a strong organic movement in Africa. The key aims of the Center are to:

- Bring together the different expressions and key drivers of organic agriculture into a coherent continent-wide movement;
- Advocate for national governments to provide policy and legislation to support the development of a vibrant organic sector in their countries;
- Create deeper understanding and awareness of the benefits from using organic agriculture, particularly how it supports and enhances traditional knowledge and innovations, and brings healthy and sustaining food within the reach of the poor;
- Support the development of local certification capacity which will help adapt certification procedures and criteria to the needs and circumstances of Africa's farmers;
- Show that an organic approach meets all three of the essential components of a sustainable world – social equity, economic reliability and environmental health.



An organic farmer explains the importance of sweet potatoes and yams in organic crop rotations. Source: Neil Sorensen

SEKEM

SEKEM takes its name from a hieroglyph meaning “vitality of the sun”. In *Business Today Egypt*, the Sekem Group was described as “an economic powerhouse” and as a model for the healthy corporation of the 21st century. Internationally, the company is known for producing organic cotton, textiles, phyto-pharmaceuticals, health products, fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs. But the local market is the most important for Sekem and its long-term sustainability.

All production is based on biodynamic farming principles in which there is no unusable waste. All products can be either sold, or re-used in cultivation. Sekem's most impressive impact is on cotton production. Through the Egyptian Biodynamic Association in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, farmers have been trained in a new method of pest control, which led to a ban of crop dusting throughout Egypt. By 2000, pesticide use in Egyptian cotton fields had fallen by over 90%, around 80% of cotton was being produced organically and average yields had increased by nearly 30%.

In 2003, Sekem's founder, Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, was awarded The Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize. At that time, 2,000 people were working in Sekem and revenues had grown to 13 million Euros. Its management of the value-adding chain from the farmers to the consumers is based on partnership and transparency, an approach Sekem calls the ‘economics of love’.

IFOAM's mission is leading, uniting and assisting the organic movement in its full diversity. Our goal is the world wide adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound systems that are based on the Principles of Organic Agriculture.

Further reading and information materials:

IFOAM (2003): Organic and like-minded movements in Africa
IFOAM (forthcoming): Training Manual for Organic Agriculture in Semi-arid Regions

IFOAM (2002): Training Manual for Organic Agriculture in the Tropics

IFOAM (2003): Smallholder Group Certification Training Curriculum and Guidance Manual

IFOAM (2002): Norms for Organic Production and Processing
IFAD (2005): Thematic Evaluation of Organic Agriculture in China and India

Online Information Service for Non-Chemical Pest Management in the Tropics, <http://oisat.org/>

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Organic Agriculture for Food Security in Africa

Africa's poverty and its associated nutrition insecurity is mainly among smallholder farmers and landless people. Can organic agriculture improve their productivity and their access to food?

The majority (over 75%) of Africa's population make their livelihoods in agriculture, including forestry, fishing and herding. 200 million of its 900 million inhabitants have to survive on one inadequate meal a day, and 33 million children suffer from malnutrition. With better nutrition, the 30 million African HIV/AIDS patients could extend their lifespan by several years. Women are the population group most affected by HIV/AIDS. Yet, families and farms depend on women's work and well-being.

Africa's smallholder farmers can increase productivity

Most of Africa's farmers are smallholders and most of them are women. Their agricultural systems have attracted little attention from research and development, and are usually assumed to be inherently unproductive. In fact, Africa's farmers have developed a multitude of practices and innovations that should be seen for what they are: the basis for any realistic development. Their local production systems, their knowledge, and their crop varieties and breeds could contribute much to developing semi-arid lands and even dealing with climate change and combating desertification. An organic approach could strengthen the rich ecological knowledge of Africa's farming communities and result in enhanced productivity, and improved access to food and income.

Agricultural diversity in Africa - a traditional strength

The Green Revolution package of high yielding varieties of food crops supported by high inputs of agro-chemicals and water has largely failed in Africa. It was barely suitable for semi-arid lands, to areas lacking infrastructure, and to farmers that can't afford external inputs. The complexity of Africa's agricultural systems was thus maintained. FAO recognizes 18 distinct farming systems in Africa, most of them being combinations of crop and livestock production dominated by smallholder farmers producing for themselves and local markets. The diversity of crops grown by farmers is large – ten or more species and varieties are commonly found in most home gardens and fields.

What is organic agriculture?

Recycling of nutrients, and natural means of pest and disease control according to both traditional and modern scientific knowledge are the two most commonly known features of organic agriculture. However, it is more than just a system of production that includes or excludes certain inputs, particularly agro-chemicals and GMOs, because it builds on and enhances the ecological management skills of the farmer, the fisher folk and the pastoralist, and includes social standards. IFOAM's around 750 member organizations in more than 100 countries have formulated organic principles and basic standards that are applied in both certified and non-certified organic agriculture and which are adhered to and cherished.



The women of the Sustainable Agricultural and Community Development Program (SACDEP), located in Thika, Kenya prepared a fabulous meal for participants in the Third IFOAM International Conference on Biodiversity and Organic Agriculture, which took place at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Program. Source: Bernward Geier

The benefits of organic agriculture in Africa

Organic farming contributes to the Millennium Development Goals of improved health and food security, environmental conservation, and economic development in Africa by:

- **Increasing and stabilizing yields in semi-arid lands:** The use of manures, composts and mulches that increase both water infiltration and retention in the soil both fertilize crops and help them reach maturity when rains stop early.
- **Increasing returns for labor investment:** labor demand by organic fertilization methods is well rewarded by higher yields.
- **Combating desertification:** Ground cover and soil quality are improved and help to reduce soil erosion, to increase water uptake, and to raise the water table, thus restoring and maintaining springs.
- **Improving pest control:** The risk of pest and disease build-ups is reduced by organic methods as compared to chemicals, although migratory pests may still be a challenge.
- **Reducing debts:** Farmers are spared from the burden of debt often arising from taking external agricultural inputs on credit;
- **Coping with HIV/AIDS:** Patients can strengthen their immune system with sufficient and healthy food, and extend their lifespan and economic activities by many years.
- **Strengthening social systems:** Organic agriculture builds on local traditional knowledge, supports smallholder farm development, and suits women farmers' requirements.
- **Maximizing environmental services:** By conserving biodiversity, improving soils and avoiding chemical inputs that contaminate ecosystems.



EXAMPLES OF HOW ORGANIC AGRICULTURE CONTRIBUTES TO FOOD SECURITY

Ethiopia: Ecological agriculture with smallholder farmers in Tigray

If the rains stop early, crops grown on soil that had compost added to it resist wilting for about two weeks longer than those grown on soil with chemical fertilizer or soil with nothing added to it.

In Adi Nefas, a village where trench-bunds were made, gullies filled in, free-range grazing stopped, and compost applied to fields, a permanent stream has appeared enabling farmers to irrigate and produce two crops a year.

In another village, Guroro, farmers started using compost in the drought year of 2002. Those who used compost were able to get slightly higher yields of maize than those who used chemical fertilizer, and more than double than those who did not use any input.

Uganda: Controlling banana root diseases with green manures

Four leguminous cover crops (*Canavalia* – Jack Bean, *Crotalaria*, *Mucuna* – Velvet Bean, *Tephrosia*) are used to control root diseases and maintain fertility in organic banana plantations. Jack Bean can also be grown as a cover crop with organic pineapples. These cover crops also control weeds and can be used as animal feed.

South Africa: Rearing native chickens through organic agriculture

Poultry are a very important source of animal protein for subsistence farmers. The 'Fowls for Africa' project promoted a chicken raising programme for four local breeds known for their hardiness and good laying characteristics. The chickens were raised through a free range system without any chemicals added to their feed. This project has helped combat hunger as the farmers rearing these chickens provide for themselves as well as getting an income from selling breeding animals to other organic farms, participating in eco-tourism and interacting with educational and research institutions.

Tanzania: organic cashew-nut production

After adopting an organic production system, a cashew-nut farmer doubled his harvest from 1,300 kg to 2,600 kg a year. The price also increased from 300 to 700 Tanzanian shillings per kilo, so the farmer was able to quadruple his income in just two years.

Benin: development of organic cotton

Organisation Béninoise pour la Promotion de l'Agriculture Biologique (OBEPAB) has established support for 300 farmers. The benefits described by a farmer: 'We used to have little or no cash from our cotton crop after paying for inputs. With organic, we use biopesticides, where the main expense is time spent collecting and mixing ingredients. We had health problems from cotton pesticides. The organic fertilizers we use provide a consistent yield by improving soil fertility, unlike chemical fertilizers which depleted fertility after two or three years.'

The threat of agrochemicals

It is often assumed that the farmers in traditional agricultural systems do not use chemicals. This was undoubtedly true up to the Second World War. However, the last forty years have seen an expanded use of agrochemicals, particularly pesticides that are persistent organic pollutants (POPs) in some farming systems, especially for fruit and vegetable production as well as storage of food grains. FAO estimates (as of 2003) that Africa has a stockpile of 48,234 tons of toxic wastes of which more than 9,000 tons (20%) are POPs, and over 14,000 tons (30%) are heavily contaminated soil. The African Stockpiles Program (ASP) is being launched to help African governments clean up and destroy obsolete pesticides. Supporting farmers to adopt an organic system of production can help ensure that they know the hazards of using these chemicals so that future stockpiles do not accumulate.

Can genetically engineered (GE) crops feed Africa?

It is claimed that planting genetically engineered crops in developing countries will reduce pesticide use and increase food security. But most, if not all, of the GE crops being developed for African agriculture are not oriented towards the needs of Africa's smallholder farmers. Independent studies of growing GE crops in the United States have shown that, overall, GE varieties yield 10% less than their non-GE equivalent varieties, and that pesticide use has increased by around 20%. Even more damaging is that farmers cannot opt out of this system once they get into it because cross pollination spreads the patented genes of the GE varieties to fields planted with non-GE varieties. Therefore, all farmers are forced to pay royalties to seed corporations regardless of the varieties they plant.

An attempt to produce GE sweet potato resistant to sweet potato feathery mottle virus for Kenyan farmers has not produced the expected improvements. In field trials, the virus resistance quickly broke down and yields were lower than from well-managed and selected local varieties. In contrast, the Freedom from Hunger project in Ethiopia enabled 2,300 smallholder farmers to increase the yields of sweet potatoes from 6 to 35 tons per hectare using sustainable agricultural practices.



Certified and non-certified organic production in Africa

In 2003, IFOAM commissioned an overview of the organic movement in Africa. The survey covered both certified and uncertified organic producers in 22 of Africa's 54 countries. Representing nearly 40% of the continent's surface, these countries are where organic agriculture is most advanced.

Certified organic agriculture covers both large commercial and smallholder farmers. In global terms, only 1% (235,000 ha) of certified organic land is found in Africa, but, because most of the farms are small the continent accounts for almost 10% (39,000) of the farmers growing certified organic crops worldwide.

Certified organic farms produce almost exclusively for the European market, although there are some countries with a growing domestic market, for example in Burkina Faso, Egypt, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.

One of the biggest constraints to expansion of certified organic agriculture has been the lack of domestic certification. But this situation is changing fast. In 2004, both Egypt and South Africa established local certification bodies, and this has been a major focus of the Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (EPOPA) program in Eastern Africa. To lower certification cost for groups of smallholders, the "Internal Control System" was established by IFOAM, and is valid for imports into the EU markets. A large part of Africa's organic export is produced by smallholders.

The IFOAM survey *Organic and Like-minded Movements in Africa* makes clear, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in its evaluations of organic agriculture in Latin America, India and China confirms that production for export does not endanger food security, but improves it by increasing incomes. Production most often diversifies both local and export markets.

Uncertified organic and is undoubtedly far more extensive than certified organic production. However, 'uncertified' also means that there are no official data to quote. Local markets for organic products are emerging, not only in luxury niches, and there is an exchange of experiences from Latin America and Asia on low cost participatory systems to establish an organic guarantee system.