

POLICY SUMMARY:

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR VOCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC EDUCATION ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE



OVERVIEW

This policy summary provides recommendations on why and how to provide government support for vocational and higher education. It outlines options for providing this support, followed by examples from various countries.

SUMMARY OF POLICY OPTIONS

Governments can consider the following alternatives for structuring this type of support:

- Create special organic agriculture departments and degrees within existing agricultural universities.
- Provide some opportunity for organic agriculture education and specialization within standard agricultural degree and/or vocational programs.
- Support NGOs to offer organic vocational training programs.
- Provide assistance to developing countries to establish organic agriculture education in their vocational and university systems.

RATIONALE

Much of the knowledge being dispensed through agricultural education channels (e.g. intensive use of agro-chemical inputs, high yielding varieties, new plant breeding techniques, optimization of animal weight gain without consideration for animal welfare) is not relevant to organic farming, or opposes it. To support the growth of the organic sector it is crucial to develop organic agriculture education in parallel to conventional agronomy and animal husbandry. In many cases, organic knowledge will also benefit those who work in the conventional sector, in particular when it comes to improving the sustainability and resilience of conventional agriculture. Therefore, it is an efficient use of public funds to include organic agriculture or agro-ecological approaches as a voluntary or compulsory component of agricultural vocational training and academic programs.

SCOPE

The development of organic vocational training and academic programs is suitable to many contexts and policy objectives, with the exception of a country where organic agriculture is at a very early stage of development. In this case, a lack of knowledge in the country to design and implement professional education programs will be a barrier unless substantial outside support and expertise is introduced.



At such early stages, people who want to specialize in organic agriculture would typically go abroad for studies. After some domestic universities have accumulated experience working on organic agriculture research and projects, and there are experienced organic professionals in the country, specific organic courses can be set-up and demonstration sites can be established.

POLICY OPTIONS

Creating special organic agriculture departments and degrees within existing agricultural universities

This policy option is a best practice to ensure a stable pool of organic experts, who can work both on organic education and on organic research. Certain governments have gone even a step further and established fully organic agricultural universities (e.g. recently Gujarat state in India).

Providing opportunity for organic agriculture education and specialization within standard agricultural degree and/or vocational programs

A dedicated organic university or university department, is a real asset for the country, but it is also very important to offer organic specializations in lower-level education programs, such as diplomas and even school programs

in areas where many school students will end up working in agriculture. These specializations may be offered in the context of a general agricultural degree. Short of specialization, higher education institutions can at least offer one or a few organic agriculture courses, which are either mandatory or voluntary for agriculture students.

Supporting NGOs to offer organic vocational training programs

Governments may also support organic vocational training in the form of grants and subsidies to specialized organic vocational training programs run by NGOs. Such training programs may be focused on certain policy objectives, such as reducing unemployment. These can be focused on either rural or urban organic agriculture systems. One such program in Belgium is a full year course offered for free to unemployed individuals.

Providing assistance for cooperative projects to establish organic agriculture education in vocational and university systems

Public institutions can also support time-limited projects that include cooperation between organic training institutions to produce educational systems and materials. Several such cooperation projects among higher education institutions are funded by the EU. Similar projects can also be funded by developed countries as development-cooperation projects.



COUNTRY EXAMPLES

EU: Member States are increasingly supporting the integration of organic agriculture education in public institutions. There are study courses and specialized degrees in organic farming at various state universities and universities of applied sciences across the EU. Wageningen University in the Netherlands, the University of Hohenheim in Germany, the Organic Agriculture Faculty of Witzenhausen attached to the University of Kassel (Germany), the Aarhus University in Denmark, all of which offer MSc degrees in Organic Agriculture or Agroecology. Additionally, a number of European organic/agroecology double degree programs have been established through cooperation among various European public and private universities. The few EU countries that do not offer a special organic agriculture degree usually have at least some education programs offering a specialization option in organic agriculture.

Switzerland: Almost all Swiss agricultural schools have offered a course on organic agriculture since 1996. By 2009, several specific “organic agriculture” technical educational programs existed in the German-speaking part of the country, while directors of agricultural schools in the French-speaking part had made an official commitment to develop similar programs in their schools. A two-day organic farming course is mandatory to every agricultural

student/apprentice, and optional organic specializations are always available. Twelve agricultural schools throughout the country offer organic agriculture training courses. There is also a specialized organic agriculture vocational school for (future) organic farmers called “Bio-Schule Schwand.” The ZHAW University of Zürich offers a specialization on organic agriculture as part of the Environmental Engineering BSc. The University HAFL Zollikofen offers a supplementary qualification in organic agriculture as part of the Agronomy.

Tunisia: There are compulsory OA courses at all higher agronomic institutes of learning. MSc degree programs in Sustainable and Organic Agriculture have been developed and offered in some of the higher institutions of learning in the country. These programs serve the dual purpose of training students on OA and as a way of researching organic production systems. A diploma program in OA was developed to provide professional trainings for stakeholders involved in the country’s organic sector. It is jointly conducted by the Agricultural Investment Promotion Agency and AVFA, the Agriculture Training and Extension Agency. The latter is a public administration affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture and is in charge of developing and monitoring agricultural education curriculums. It supervises the 39 agricultural



professional education centers across the national territory.

India: Almost all the agricultural universities offer some education in organic farming, and some offer a full course. Himachal Pradesh Agricultural University in north India and the 4 agricultural universities in Karnataka (south India) have set up departments of organic farming. In 2016, the State of Gujarat announced that it will set up India's first university exclusively dedicated to organic farming and research. Initial funds (EUR 1.4 million) have been allocated in the state yearly budget.

Philippines: The Government established the Cordilera Organic Agriculture Development Center (COARDC) at Benguet State University. The program started with 10 students in 2010 who graduated in 2012, becoming the first batch of certified organic agriculturists of the province. In the school year 2013-2014, there were 41 students enrolled in the program. Other universities have also started to include an organic curriculum. Since 2012, there is also an on-line distance learning certificate course on organic agriculture offered by the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU).

Thailand: the state university of Maejo has declared itself the first Organic Agriculture University in Thailand. This was included in the university's 15 years plan approved in 2012. The university is converting

its land to organic agriculture and is opening an organic food center on the campus where students and staff can eat and buy organic products supplied by local organic farmers. Organic agriculture is being included as a compulsory part for all agricultural students (even though students can still learn conventional agriculture methods as well).

China: As part of its 5-year plan 2016-2020, China is planning to invest around EUR 187 million in new farmers training. The training will be for farmer and farm managers with preference for young graduates from college who are interested in agriculture. The program has a focus on organic, ecological and sustainable agriculture, and aims to get one million qualified farmers with international market access by 2020.

Nigeria/United Kingdom: The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) has started to integrate organic agriculture into their BSc of Agriculture and the organic agriculture group of the university offers a biennial certificate-based International Summer School in Organic Agriculture. The offerings were supported by a development cooperation project between OAPTIN (the Organic Agriculture Project in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria) and Coventry University in the UK. The project developed an organic curriculum and teaching materials suitable for Nigerian Tertiary



Institutions, and provided capacity building for university staff.

Colombia: in the 90s the public education system started including organic agriculture and agroecology in different academic program ranging from technical levels to postgraduate levels. Several universities offer specialization in organic agriculture or agroecology.

United States: Washington State University was the first, in 2009, to offer students a major in organic agriculture. Today, at least twelve public colleges and universities provide students the option for an

organic agriculture/agroecology major, minor, or certificate. One of these is the University of California – Santa Cruz, which offers a six-month apprenticeship program in ecological horticulture requiring on-farm residency and university degree programs in agroecology.

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