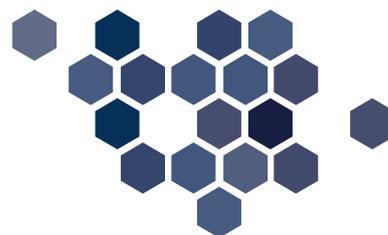


POLICY SUMMARY: **BUILDING ORGANIC EXPERTISE WITHIN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**



OVERVIEW

This policy summary provides recommendations on why and how to build expertise on organic agriculture and markets in the public sector. It outlines options for providing this support, followed by examples from various countries.

SUMMARY OF OPTIONS

Scope of organic agriculture literacy is one way to consider strategic options.

Governments can:

- Strengthen knowledge and capacity on organic agriculture throughout its personnel in a Ministry or other governmental unit. This is usually done through training programs. It can also be achieved through the hiring of international consultants to help national government staff in the development/improvement of organic policies and procedures, thereby building capacity through coaching on the job.
- Ensure that one or several people have strong experience and expertise in the organic sector. This is often achieved through hiring personnel.

This is not an either-or choice. Governments may be best served

by engaging in both options.

Choice of these options may be related to the scenarios for structuring of organic agriculture support within the government. These include:

- Establishing an organic unit, usually within the Ministry or Department of Agriculture;
- Establishing one or several organic desks within relevant departments or bureaus in the Ministry or Department of Agriculture;
- Decentralizing administration of organic agriculture support across multiple Ministries or Departments;
- Establishing a separate organic agriculture agency that can be accessed and consulted by several Ministries or Departments as well as by the private sector and civil society.

RATIONALE

When a government decides to implement a series of policy measures to promote organic agriculture and/or if the government is implementing an organic regulation, a competent authority will be appointed to oversee the resulting programs. The mere appointment of a “competent



authority” does not ensure the actual competence of the government employees that will be working on organic topics (sometimes, they also work on many other topics in parallel). One key element of sound policy implementation is to ensure that government personnel who will be in charge of organic development understand very well what organic agriculture is, the national sector and its constraints, and the positions of the various stakeholders on technical organic agriculture matters. Building capacity of government staff is therefore a prerequisite for further policy design and implementation, particularly of the staff of the unit in charge of organic agriculture, but it can also be relevant for other staff that will have to deal with organic issues one way or another.

SCOPE

Regardless of the stage of development of the sector, of the culture of government intervention, of the regulatory framework or even of the policy objectives, building expertise on organic agriculture within public institutions will be a suitable and relevant measure for any government taking up the topic of organic agriculture.

OPTIONS

Broadly increasing organic literacy

Formal teaching-learning programs are well-suited for this strategy. They can be packaged in several ways, ranging from in-person courses and workshops for staff to online learning. IFOAM – Organics International offers intensive Organic Leadership Courses to “students” from government and non-governmental backgrounds. The course includes 150 hours in-person sessions plus online learning sessions. Training for government staff may also be obtained through agreements with national or regional organizations, or from consultants. Training on standards, inspection and certification can be obtained from the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA). Training programs can be part of an arrangement with an international development agency or intergovernmental cooperation project.

Employing organic experts

Some governments have consciously hired personnel with strong organic-sector expertise. This was the case in the United States, where the USDA hired the former manager of organic certification for the State of Washington to head its National Organic Program, and he subsequently hired other organic experts for key staff positions. Moldova hired an expert organic agricultural consultant



to a high-level position in the Agricultural Ministry. He was able to operate from a position of authority to develop strategy and an organic work program.

In addition, governments should gain organic-sector knowledge by other interactions and engagements with the organic sector such as including experts in delegations and working groups, and engaging expert consultants, including IFOAM – Organics International, on specific issues and projects.

Setting-up a dedicated organic unit or agency

There is value in setting-up a dedicated unit or agency to be in charge of the organic sector, and to build organic expertise within such a unit. A common way is to have an organic unit composed of a few personnel, within the Ministry of Agriculture. Another way is to set-up a dedicated separate agency, in charge of organic agriculture development in the country. This was done for example in France with the Agence Bio.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

France: To complement government sections and task forces having organic agriculture in their portfolios, the French government established in 2001 the “Agence Bio”, the agency for development and promotion of organic agriculture. Under French law it is a public-interest, non-profit group. The agency’s members include government agencies and institutions and organic sector associations. It has staff of 15 employees, many of them with strong organic sector competency, and receives regular funding, primarily from the French government and through EU projects. Its mission is to support and monitor organic sector development through public communication and other market strategies, to manage and promote the organic label “AB”, and to facilitate stakeholder cooperation

and joint planning within the sector. Tasked to manage the “Avenir Bio” public fund for structuring the organic sector, Agence Bio functions with a large advisory council comprising the full spectrum of stakeholders involved in the organic sector. The Agence Bio model allows for public-private co-management and ensures the continuity, specialization and independence necessary for the promotion of the organic sector.

Tunisia: The development of the organic sector was basically government-led, and started with the creation of four specialized central and regional level administrative government agencies and technical institutions, which have been and remain the driving force behind the



impressive growth of the Tunisian organic sector.

United States: Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched its first Organic Literacy Initiative, aimed to educate USDA staff, especially field offices, extension agencies and other field-based service providers about organic agriculture, including certification and regulation. This online package of training and outreach materials covers a range of topics, including understanding organic agriculture and certification, and the various government programs linked to it. The Organic 101 and 201 training modules provide learners with the building blocks to understand how the organic regulations work in practice. The modules are available publicly, as well as through the USDA's AgLearn internal training portal for employees. In October and November 2012, over 1,200 USDA employees completed the AgLearn training.

Mexico: The government invested EUR 27,000 in the year 2009 for capacity building of government staff on organic agriculture in preparation for implementing its organic regulation.

Turkey: The government in 2011 engaged in a bilateral technical cooperation project with Germany, through which the organic research institute, FiBL provided capacity building to government and supply chain actors. The project goal was to increase the quality (including regulatory compliance) of Turkey's organic products bound for the EU market. Multi-stakeholder dialogue and intensive training were the main pillars of the project. Expert modules were developed for all points of the supply chain. Then training courses and workshops were held for government and private sector consultants, competent authorities, control personnel, producers, and technical staff of processors/traders. In addition to the trainings there were intensive peer exchanges between staff of the German Office for Agriculture and Food, and the Turkish Ministry of Food, Agriculture & Livestock. The project experienced success, as indicated by the decreasing incidence of quality problems in the organic supply chain from Turkey to Germany.