

Organic Agriculture in Tunisia

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 All photos by Mohamed Ben Khedher.



The organic movement in Tunisia started in the mid-1980s, and is based on private initiatives. However, the development of the sector was very slow until 1999. Over the last years, organic agriculture has attracted much attention in the Tunisia for both environmental reasons, market opportunities and important developmental steps. This was the result of policies supporting this sector, as underlined in a national strategy and Organic Action Plan, launched by the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (TMAF) in 2005. The most important aspects are as follows:

- Elaboration of a national regulation during the

period of 1999-2005.

- The recognition of Tunisia as an equivalent country by the EU on June 2009, and by Switzerland on May 2011.
- Agreements with of seven accredited (six foreign and one national) inspection and certification bodies by the TMAF
- In May 2010, the Ministry of Agriculture launched the organic label "Bio Tunisia".
- Adaptation of national and international research results at experimental stations and in organic farm trials.
- New research projects dealing only with organic agriculture and related to plant and animal production.
- Involvement of many organizations and formal bodies at administrative and technical levels. The Technical Centre of Organic Agriculture (TCOA) is considered to be the driving force of the organic sector.
- Tunisia is a member of IFOAM, ISOFAR and MOAN (Mediterranean Organic Agriculture Network).



The Technical Centre of Organic Agriculture (TOAC) in Sousse is a driving force within the Organic sector of Tunisia.

- Training modules in organic agriculture for agricultural technician and engineer students in different agronomic institutes.
- Training days, short sessions and short courses in various topics of organic agriculture for technicians, engineers and farmers.
- Good partnership established between TCOA and the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (MAIB) in Bari, Italy in terms of training.
- Investment subsidies fixed at 30 % of the value of equipment, implements and means specific to organic projects.
- Annual subsidies over a five-year period to cover the inspection and certification fees, equivalent to 70% of the cost, provided that the overall value of the subsidies does not exceed 5 000 Tunisian Dinars for individual farmers and 10.000 Tunisian Dinars for farmers' associations.

The main achievements in the organic sector of Tun-

sia can be summarized as follows:

- Seven Mediterranean Training weekly sessions were organized in collaboration with MAIB. Participants came from Mediterranean countries and Tunisian Regional Organic Networks, and were supervised by European and Mediterranean experts.
- An ISOFAR-MOAN-TCOA symposium on "Soil Fertility and Crop Nutrition Management in Mediterranean Organic Agriculture" was organized on March, 2010 in Sousse, Tunisia.
- A Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) was achieved between FAO and Tunisia on organic agriculture.
- During the decade 2000/2010, the amount of certified land increased by a factor of 27, from 15036 to 403 155 ha. The amount of actors involved in organic business increased by a factor of 19, from 141 to 2669.
- 42 organic farmers' associations, representing 82.5% of the total organic farmers and 25% of



the total organic agricultural area, are playing an important role.

- 122 processors and 60 exporters are contributing a lot to the development of the organic sector.
- Since there is also organic area that is not certified, the total organic agricultural area is 175 066 ha. Hence, Tunisia is ranked 27 in the world, 12 in Europe, 2nd in Africa and 1st among the Arabic countries with respect to the amount of organic land.
- Tunisia has the third largest organic olive area in the world.
- Organic animal production is still in the beginning and the number of certified animals is still low.
- The export market is estimated to 33 Million Euros. The volume is 16 700 tons mainly from olive oil, dates and aromatic plants. The organic production in Tunisia is still export-oriented even if the domestic market is getting started and is promising in some cases.
- The objectives for 2016 is to reach 500 000 ha of total organic area associated with more diversified plant and animal production, 60 Million Euros in the export market and 1% for the dome-

stic market.

- An ISOFAR-MOAN-TCOA symposium on “Plant Protection Management in Mediterranean Organic Agriculture” will be organized on May, 2013 in Sousse, Tunisia.

The outlook for organic agriculture in Tunisia is very positive. The growth rate, experienced over the last few years, suggests a fast and considerable development of the sector. Many crops, areas, pasture and animals can be easily converted because the conversion conditions are very favorable. The climatic conditions are favorable for crops and animal husbandry, the country has a rich biodiversity, and there is a rich body of traditional knowledge and a high level of entrepreneurial skills among the farmers.

The success of the national strategy is linked to that it deals with all aspects of organic agriculture, and implies coordination and cooperation between all partners. A future probable success factor is the valorization of local identities such as pomegranate, dates, olive oil, aromatic and medicinal plants. The international cooperation within research, training, information, communication and marketing is facilitated by the good geographical position of Tunisia.

Local markets are useful for the organic producers of Tunisia.

