

Information and Data Collection and Dissemination

Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit
<http://www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom>

Information and data collection and dissemination

Political justification

The existence of consolidated data on the national organic sector is an important enabling factor for the growth of the sector because:

- It is very helpful for the development of a sound national strategy to develop the sector, as knowledge on the number and location of organic producers, the type of products produced organically, the existing marketing channels, the importance of organic imports, etc. is highly useful.
- Precise data on organic operators allow policy makers to better plan the type and amount of support needed, to calculate budget and expected coverage of their policy measures, etc.
- For market actors, good and reliable data about the size and development of the organic market is of utmost importance to make informed decisions, and having access to a directory of national producers and of existing organic businesses facilitates them in establishing commercial relationship (e.g. in identifying new suppliers).
- For consumers, having access to a directory of organic farmers (especially those that sell products through direct marketing) can help find local organic products to buy.
- In international negotiations the importance of the domestic national organic sector and market needs to be substantiated by solid data.
- It is important to guide researchers, academic institutions and other support structures in providing adequate outputs and services nationally.
- Tracking sector growth is important to demonstrate the potential of organic agriculture and to attract investors, organic input manufacturers and other supporting businesses.
- Comparative annual statistics on the organic sector also enables the assessment of the impact of national (or regional) policies (including trade agreements) on organic agriculture and the adjustment of those policies to maximize effectiveness.
- Market and trade data enable policymakers to assess the impact of related policies, e.g. equivalence, on the sector.

Compiling or supporting compilation of national data on the organic sector is a typical public service that will benefit multiple stakeholders, including the government itself.

Suitable contexts

Stage of sector development: Data collection and dissemination on the organic sector is relevant at all stages of development of the organic sector. Whereas at



advanced stages it is an essential tool for monitoring sector growth, at very early stages, there will not be a lot of data to collect, and it may be less essential to collect it frequently, but it will still be relevant to assess the status of the sector, especially prior to any other support action or strategic planning.

Regulatory context: Data collection can be done or supported regardless of the organic regulatory framework. It is easier to do in a context where there is an organic regulation or officially referenced organic guarantee system, and even easier to do in the contexts where the regulation mandates all certifiers to report data to the competent authority. In a regulated environment it is also easier to argue that the data collection and dissemination role is a duty of the competent authority (as this can also help dealing with potential fraud cases).

Culture of government intervention: Data collection or collection support can be done in any culture of government intervention, as data availability is as relevant in a free market approach as in more interventionist government cultures.

Policy objectives: This action is relevant to any objective of policy support.

Possible implementation modalities

In early stage of development, governments may conduct or finance a national survey/study on the situation of organic agriculture in the country, including an overview of organic production, active stakeholders (e.g. associations, businesses, certifiers), the standards and labels in use, and existing market channels for organic products. A publicly available study report supports the organic sector development and can serve as a basis for subsequent national organic action plan development.

Countries with emerging organic sectors work with stakeholder organizations, especially peak organic bodies in the country, to support the development of directories to assist potential buyers of organic products with sourcing. Such initiatives may also be supported by international development agencies working in the country in the area of food and agriculture. These directories should be planned and implemented based on specific objectives shared by the government and collaborating stakeholder organizations (e.g. should they be aimed at increasing direct purchasing by consumers? or by retailers? hospitality businesses? exporters?).

In unregulated environments with no officially referenced organic guarantee system, the government may support efforts from the private sector to survey the status of organic in the country, or may use as a criteria whoever has an organic certificate (of whatever kind), including for foreign markets.

Financial support could also be given to the stakeholder organizations for compilation and aggregation of data about the nation's organic agriculture and domestic and export markets. When the organic sector is more developed, government may consider taking on more direct and specific roles.



The cornerstone of an organic data system comprises statistics on the number of organic producers, and the area certified including crop information. In regulating countries this can be facilitated by regulations that require certification bodies to provide the data to the competent authority. Precise data on non-certified organic production are more difficult to collect and make available to the public. Nevertheless the government may approximate the number of non-certified organic producers by other means, including cooperation with the national organic association. It can also be done by including in the national agricultural census a question on whether producers considers themselves to be organic (even if not certified) – an approach that can however give reliable results only in countries where farmers are literate and where the meaning of organic is clear to farmers.

Data on the location of organic producers and their sales channels facilitate publication of a directories of organic farms, which can be used by traders, caterers, retailers and consumers to identify organic farmers in their regions,

Data may also be collected on organic processors and other organic businesses, and on points of sale. National market studies on market figures and organic consumer behavior and trends are also very useful to the organic industry.

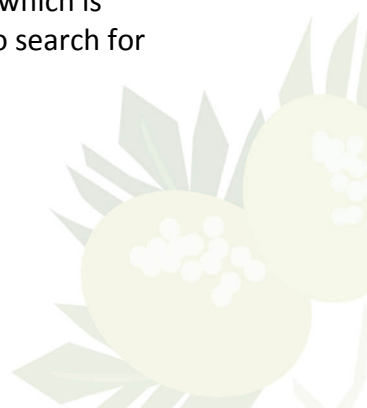
Price and other market information on various organic commodities is also a service that is useful to organic producers for planning production, marketing and sales. Currently only a few countries have such data available; examples are the US and some European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, UK), where such data are available; in some cases however, only for selected products.

Although the old format of newsletters and printed directories still exist and are used, digital tools are rapidly developing to disseminate data in a more efficient way. They range from searchable online databases and active maps to smartphone apps.

Countries examples

Argentina: The Ministry is financing the establishment of the Guia Orgánica Organic Guide) website in which consumers interested in organics can find a list of names and related information of organic points of sales, products, and information. It will be an on-line interactive mechanism between consumers and suppliers and it will be shared and co-featured by the peak organic body, MAPO, and the Ministry.

United States: The USDA gives financial support to The Organic Trade Association for the compilation and dissemination of an online organic export directory, which is published in several languages. The searchable directory enables users to search for specific organic products.



For external trade data (exports and imports), the USA introduced in 2011 selected specific HS¹ tariff codes for fresh or processed organic agricultural products². Not yet covering the full range of organic products, this HS coding does not fully capture existing organic trade, but it has proven a useful tool to evaluate changes in trade that may result from equivalence agreements such as the EU-U.S. arrangement.³ The data are available in a searchable online database at the FAS website together with overall agricultural export and import data.

The Philippines: The 2010 organic law mandates the BAR (Bureau of Agricultural Research) to coordinate with other agencies on data and information on organic agriculture. Since in The Philippines, 95% of the organic producers are not third party certified, organic certifiers cannot be used as the main source of statistics. The data are obtained mostly through collecting attendance sheets to events sponsored by the government such as training or conferences. The BAR maintains a database and publishes yearly statistics based on the collected information.

¹ HS = Harmonized System Codes, an international harmonized commodity description and coding system.

² The Organic Trade HS Codes are available at the FAS website <http://www.fas.usda.gov/organic-trade-hs-codes>

³ The export and import data is available at the website of the Foreign Agricultural Service FAS data is available here <http://apps.fas.usda.gov/gats/ExpressQuery1.aspx>