

# Organic Agriculture and Markets in the Pacific Islands

Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit  
[www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom](http://www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom)

## **Organic Agriculture and Markets in the Pacific Islands**

Sustainable development is a high priority for all Pacific Island governments and people. Sustainability is usually equated with environmental soundness in order to ensure the continued provision of goods and services to present and future generations, but it is more than that. Sustainability is about ecosystem integrity, social well-being, economic resilience, and good governance.

Organic agriculture has a significant contribution to make towards sustainable development of the Pacific due to its environment and climate friendly production systems, providing not only resilient farming systems but also contributing to mitigation; its suitability for small holders; and its adaptation to local conditions. The entire organic system is based on participation and public-private partnerships, whereby smallholders are integrated into markets. Further, the diversity of food cultures, traditional knowledge and nutritional security are safeguarded by organic agriculture. Some of these benefits of organic agriculture are explored in more depth in the section on the potential benefits of organic agriculture.

While some Pacific countries have developed agricultural industries based on conventional chemical agriculture current farming practices in many Pacific communities are largely organic, based on age-old systems that are free from the residues of agrichemicals and where environmental integrity remains largely intact. In the past farming was predominantly for subsistence living, but in the cash driven societies that we live in today, there is now a need from overseas markets to ensure that products being labelled and sold as 'organic' meet international standards. Third party certification began in the Pacific in the late 1980s but it has been slow to develop with a recent surge in certification since 2011.

The organic movement in the Pacific recognized one of the major challenges facing Pacific Island organic producers is the high cost of certification, auditing and compliance involved in meeting importing country organic standards and/or international standards. In order to address this issue 2 projects commencing in 2007 were undertaken funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and implemented by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) respectively. The main outcomes of these projects were: an analysis the existing situation of organic agriculture and fair trade production in the Pacific islands and a set of Pacific regional standards for organic agriculture products which was developed through a locally owned process and multi-sector participation. These projects also facilitated development of a regional strategy and national plans to lay the foundation of sustainable organic agriculture development in the region. 2 key groupings that were tasked with driving the organic sector forward in the Pacific were formed: the first, the Regional Organic Task Force (ROTF) is a technical group representing all sectors and countries involved in organics. This group was charged with developing the Pacific Standard and was to be responsible for implementing the

initial Regional Action Plan. The second group, the Pacific High Level Organics Group (PHLOG) consists of Pacific leaders who have shown a commitment to organic sector development in the region and provide high-level political support and advocacy. The first Pacific Organic Standard was officially launched by the Chair of the PHLOG and Prime Minister of Samoa, at the Ministers' of Agriculture and Forestry Conference in Apia Samoa in September 2008. This now provides a platform for further regional policy development around organic agriculture.

In 2009 the ROTF recognized the need to evolve from a technical body to a representative peak body for organics and fair trade in the region and so the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) was formed.

POETCom established its secretariat in the Land Resources Division of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in Suva Fiji in 2012, with funding support from the European Union funded Increasing Agricultural Commodities Trade (IACT) Project. This has enabled steady progress with coordinated development across the region. 2012 also saw the Pacific Organic Standard welcomed into the IFOAM Family of Standards.

Another significant development in 2012 was the resolution of the Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (HOAFS) for the Pacific Islands<sup>1</sup> at their bi annual meeting to, "promote and mainstream organic agriculture into SPC and national agriculture strategies in recognition of its role in food and nutritional security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, enhancement of biodiversity and the livelihood opportunities it can provide". The Ministers of Agriculture then endorsed this resolution in the Communiqué following their meeting in Nadi in September 2012.

2013 saw the implementation of the export support scheme as part of the Pacific Organic Guarantee Scheme with an MOU signed between POETCom and 3 certification bodies, BioAgricert (Italy), Biogro (New Zealand) and the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia, to provide certification services to the Pacific Organic Standard, allowing Pacific producers to export for the first time under the Pacific Organic Standard and allowing commencement of the marketing of a regional organic brand "Organic Pasifika".

The POETCom with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) began in 2013 developing models for Participatory Guarantee Systems tailored to the diverse situations of Pacific organic growers. With learning from the first Pacific PGS's BioCaledonia and BioFetia in New Caledonia and French Polynesia respectively, 3 pilot PGS were established in Fiji and Kiribati focusing on specific products (virgin coconut oil, coco sap sugar and papaya). The island communities of Cicia, Fiji and Abaiang, Kiribati fully embraced the idea of organic and PGS. The traditional leadership engaged in both islands and decided that

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<sup>1</sup> The Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (HOAFS) meet every 2 years and consists of the Agriculture departments heads from the 22 SPC island countries and territories. The Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry (MOAF) meet every 4 years.

they would declare their whole islands organic. The PGS then put form and rigour around that declaration providing systems to verify compliance with the Pacific Organic Standard. In these cases the PGS is greatly strengthened by the support and direction of the traditional leadership. In Abaiang, Kiribati a bylaw has been established and their island development plan is framed around maintaining the organic status of the island. Abaiang is the focus of many development projects due to its vulnerability to climate change impacts (it is a low coral atoll less than 1 metre above sea level). The organic bylaw and PGS now forms a framework giving the community a valuable tool for managing these different interventions and deciding what will benefit their community in the long run.

In Cicia, the local high school is fully involved in the PGS, participates in a reforestation programme and produces food for the school's boarding students organically. Organic agriculture is also integrated through the agriculture curriculum. The PGS also galvanised the community when there was an offer to bring in a sawmill and timber treatment plant to log the pine forest on Cicia. The timber treatment plant would have meant the island risked its organic status and the community decided not to accept the mill as they were committed to the long term benefits of organics.

A PGS training package has been developed and that is now being utilised to assist further development. The Solomon Islands have established a PGS through respected local NGO Kustom Gaden Association with the first local group established in remote Rendova Province. Fiji has established 2 more PGS groups, one through NGO Foundation for Rural Enterprises and Development (FRIEND) and another known as Bula Coffee. The Bula Coffee PGS adds a new dimension to PGS in the Pacific as it built on a wild harvest system.

A unique aspect of PGS in the Pacific is the regional PGS Mark "Organic Pasifika Guaranteed". PGS can apply to POETCom to be licensed to use this mark which facilitates not only recognition of organic product in the local market but is recognized across the 22 Pacific Island countries and Territories facilitating intra regional trade in organic products. This trade is in its infancy but already small quantities of organic products such as forest nuts, virgin coconut oil and cocosap sugar are being exported to other Pacific Island countries for their developing organic markets.

Interest in PGS in the Pacific Islands continued to expand as market opportunities for PGS certified products evolved, and examples are generated of how organic and PGS can be tools for holistic and sustainable social and economic development.

Third party organic certification continues also to grow in the Pacific however costs remain high and in some cases prohibitive. A significant proportion of the costs relate to travel expenses as inspectors have to be flown in from usually Australia or New Zealand and often due to flight logistics, geographic spread or locations of grower groups. Inspectors are required to stay on island a considerable amount of time. Aware of the steep costs, POETCom initiated training of organic inspectors based in the Pacific Islands. With the assistance from Agrana Fiji Limited, an organic exporter and two European Union funded programmes, the "Pacific Agriculture

Policy Project" and the "Increasing Agricultural Commodities Trade Project," 17 trainees from 7 Pacific Island countries have begun the process of training to be organic inspectors.

Training was delivered by the International Organic Inspectors Association together with the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) and with support of Biogro and Bioagricert. The aim is to build a pool of locally based inspectors that POETCom's partner certifying bodies can contract to undertake inspections on their behalf, reducing travel costs to operators.

Awareness-raising on the role and potential for organic agriculture in the Pacific expanded on social media and through public events in 2015. POETCom launched the Organic Pasifika Facebook page, twitter account and its own website, greatly expanding the information reach for organics in the region. The region's first large scale public awareness event was also held in 2015 at the University of the South Pacific Fiji and live-streamed across the world. The debate "Organics Can Feed the Pacific" attracted almost 200 to the event and was widely shared through social media with an estimated 100,000 tweets and numerous related media articles published. Connected to this event was the launch of a pesticide awareness campaign in Fiji, calling for stronger regulation of pesticides in the country.

To support development of local/national markets and value chains in 2015 POETCom began developing an "Organic Tourism and Hospitality Standard" which will provide a way for hospitality providers to be certified under "Organic Pasifika" and include their organic status and values as part of their brand. The Tourism Standard will provide a range of options from whole destination certification through to a food outlet or menu item and will be piloted late in 2016.

The movement remains farmer and farm support organization driven, but support is building from national governments as awareness of the potential for organics increases. Regional research and academic institutions are also engaged, including the University of the South Pacific and the National Agricultural Research Institutes of Papua New Guinea.

## **Markets & trade**

### ***Exports***

Most of the organically certified products from the Region are for export, but there are indications of growing local markets through basket (box) schemes, unverified organic claims on labels, PGS development and increased awareness. As yet, however, there are no mechanisms for collecting local organic market data. The following is a summary table listing the main crops that are currently organically certified in the Pacific region:

<b>Products</b>	<b>Countries</b>
Vanilla, ginger & other spices	Fiji, Vanuatu, Niue, Samoa
Cocoa	Vanuatu, Samoa, PNG
Virgin Coconut Oil	Samoa, Fiji, Solomon Islands
Coconut meal	Vanuatu
Nonu /noni (Morinda Citrifolia)	Cook Islands, Samoa, Fiji, Niue, French Polynesia
Honey	Niue
Bananas	Fiji, PNG, Samoa
Coffee	PNG, Samoa
Livestock( Beef, Goats and Sheep)	Vanuatu, Fiji
Fruit & Vegetables	Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa, French Polynesia
Forest nuts	Solomon Islands

Spring water and salt have also been certified as approved inputs (non agricultural) in Fiji

The main international markets for the listed products are Australia and New Zealand representing the main destination for the export of organic products due to the proximity. Japan is a growing market and other markets include China, North America and the European Union.

There is growing interest and activity in the area of fair trade programmes and certification, and efforts are being made by POETCom to link organic producers into these systems as a way of adding further value to products and ensuring maximum benefits to the farmers. There is also interest in the region to identify trading models outside the well-known fair trade certifications that may be better suited to Pacific communities and producers.

Many examples exist of successful organic exporters from the region. Examples can be found at the following links:

Fiji [www.herbex.com](http://www.herbex.com)

Cook Islands [www.nonicookislands.com](http://www.nonicookislands.com)

Niue [www.niuevanilla.co.nz](http://www.niuevanilla.co.nz)

Papua New Guinea [www.coffeeconnections.biz](http://www.coffeeconnections.biz)

Solomon Islands [www.kokonutpacific.com.au](http://www.kokonutpacific.com.au)

Samoa [www.womeninbusiness.ws](http://www.womeninbusiness.ws)

Vanuatu [www.venuivanilla.com](http://www.venuivanilla.com)



### **Domestic Markets**

Generally the domestic markets for organic certified products are slowly developing but in some cases they are virtually nonexistent. Organic products are commonly sold as conventional without premium price or any acknowledgement of the organic status of the product. Some initiatives are ongoing or are in the pipeline to promote the awareness of the consumers about organic products, in particular in linking the concept of organic with local food consumption as part of strategies to reduce non-communicable diseases, which are a major health issue in the Pacific Islands.

Interesting opportunities are now being explored within the tourist structures of several countries that have larger tourism industries (e.g. Fiji, Vanuatu, Cook Islands and Samoa) focusing on development of Pacific cuisine and linking small holder organic farmers directly with tourism and hospitality providers. There are now several up-market island based resorts in Fiji who have their island organically certified and who commit to serving guests organic produce from their land.

“Organic Tourism” is expected to develop further with impetus provided by the launch of the Tourism and Hospitality Standard.

The growth in interest in PGS in several counties also implies that there is an opportunity for further development of domestic markets and the acceptance of PGS certification across the region has stimulated initial regional trade in organic goods.

### **Legislation**

SPC developed a policy brief on organic agriculture in 2009. The policy brief aims to assist governments and others in the region to develop relevant policy and focuses on how organic agriculture can assist in meeting regional challenges. It outlines seven initial policy recommendations. Until very recently there have been no significant changes in legislation in the region and no indication Governments were considering policy in the area of organic agriculture but since 2012 organic is gaining mention and recognition in national policy and planning documents, such as the recent “Over arching sector plan for productive industries” in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands Organic Policy. POETCom has also been approached to provide some policy advice to Governments in the region and in response has developed this organic policy toolkit to assist Governments develop policy supportive of organic.

### **Government and international (development) support**

SPC as a regional intergovernmental organization continues to provide support for organic sector development and now houses the POETCom secretariat. But as current project funding cycles come to an end the need for bridging finance and developing a longer term financing strategy to support the organic movement is critical.

POETCom national affiliates continue to receive assistance from partners such as OXFAM New Zealand, Canada Fund, UNDP small grants programmes and bilateral donor assistance from Australia and New Zealand. In a few cases national Governments also provide financial support for organic certification costs as in the case of Samoa, Tonga and Niue where the national governments cover certification fees for large national grower groups.

## **Outlook**

As governance and management structures are strengthened, and with the implementation of the Pacific Organic Guarantee System, including PGS, the export certification scheme, and regional organic branding, growth and momentum are likely to continue. Growing understanding of the role and potential for organic agriculture in adaptation to climate change will provide a basis for incorporating organic agriculture as a development tool in Pacific agriculture and climate change policy, trials and demonstrations will be required for farmers and policy makers to widely adopt. There is also an expectation that the local market for organic products will start to expand as the tourism and hospitality industries start to look towards organic and sustainability as part of the Pacific islands brand.

## **Links/Further reading**

[Graphs/Statistics on Organic Agriculture in the Pacific Islands, 2014](#)

Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community [www.organicpasifika.com](http://www.organicpasifika.com)

Pacific Organic Standard, <http://www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/08/POS.pdf>

Growing Our Future POETCom Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017  
<http://www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/08/POETCom-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

