

Tunisia

Case Example

Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit
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Case Example: Tunisia's Commitment to Supporting Organic Agriculture

Tunisia is an interesting example of a country where a strong public support for organic agriculture has contributed significantly to develop a strong organic sector, including research to support organic production and processing and exports.

Development of Organic Agriculture in Tunisia

The organic movement in Tunisia started in the 1980s and was based on private initiatives. However, the development of the sector was very slow until 1999 when the government launched a national strategy for organic agriculture (OA) that covered several key areas. These included a legislative basis for organic farming, together with support for research, education and training, extension, organization, structure and promotion. Under this program the government bears 30% of all the costs regarding the conversion of farms to organic production and 70% of the expenses for certification and inspections. This has led to significant growth in Tunisia's organic sector. The main growth areas have been in the production of organic olive and dates, crops that are relatively easy to grow organically. At the same time there has also been an increase in the volume of certified almonds, vegetables, citrus fruits, medicinal plants, honey and jojoba coming onto the market. Tunisia's organic sector ranks as the second most developed in Africa and 24 worldwide (Heinze, 2012).

Performance of Tunisia's Organic Sector

From 1997 onward, because of government support, OA in Tunisia evolved from individual producers' operations to a sector backed with state-facilitated institutions, programmatic and market development activities, and explicit nationwide policy supports and measures. This sector also witnessed a remarkable turnaround in terms of the increase in certified organic farmland (Fig. 1), the number of organic farmers (Fig. 2) and organically cultivated crops; these facts are reflected in the following organic key sector performance data (Ben Khedher, 2012). *(Ed. note: Declines in the data for 2012-13 are likely related to Tunisia's political tumult in those years, which may have effected data reporting or the certification of farmers.)*

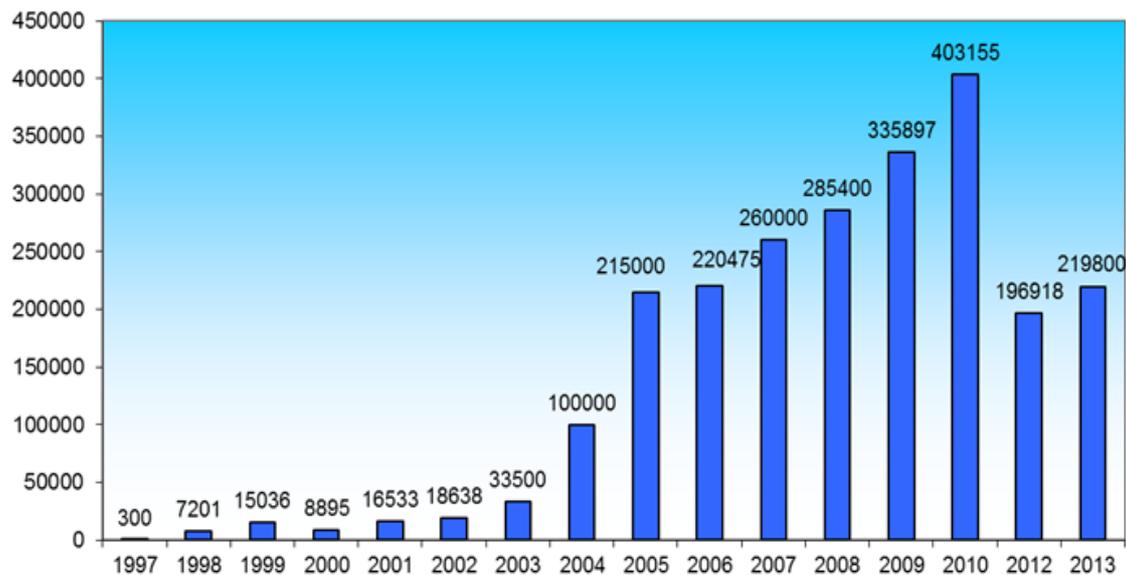


Fig. 1. Total Certified Organic Area (Ha) in Tunisia (MAHRF, 2013)

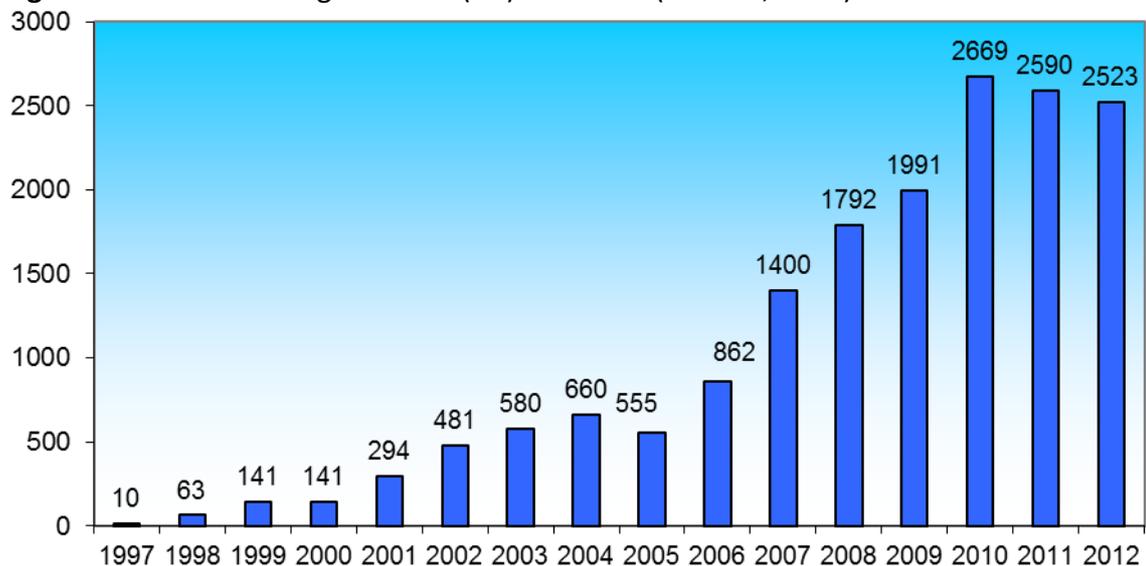


Fig. 2. Total Number of Certified Organic Farmers in Tunisia (MAHRF, 2013)

In addition, and as shown in Fig. 3, Tunisia's export earnings from OA produce has been on the rise as well, experiencing an impressive growth between 2004 and 2012.



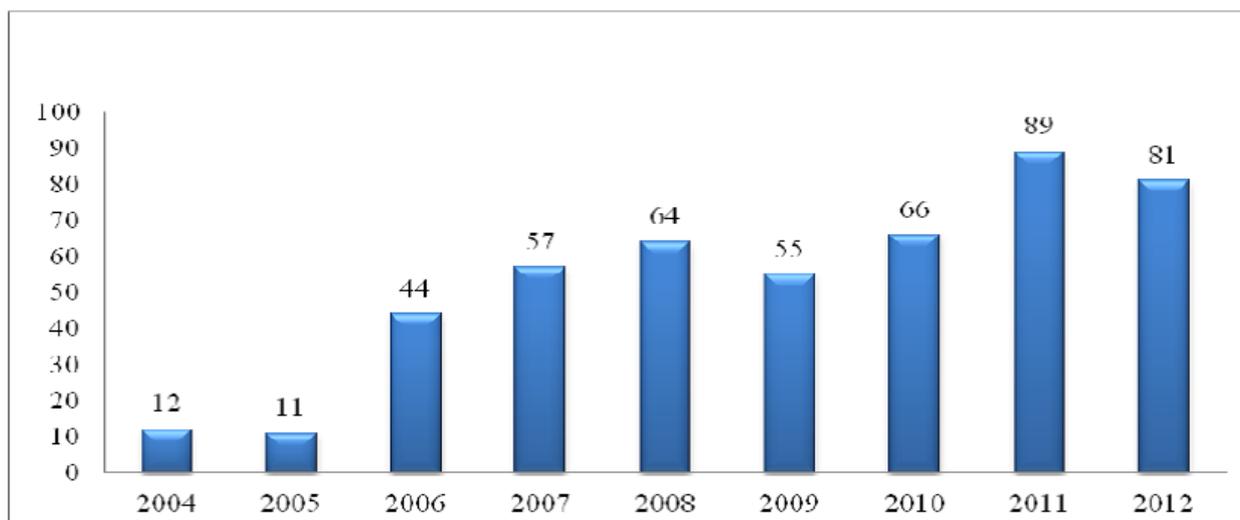


Fig. 3. Tunisia's Organic Export Value (Millions TND) (MAHRF, 2013)

The export organic crops and products include olive oil, dates, almond, vegetables, jojoba, fruit trees, dried fruits, grain crops, palm trees, aromatic and medicinal crops, and honey (The Technical Centre of Organic Agriculture (CTAB), 2013).

To give added value to Tunisian organic products, the Tunisian government has created in 2010 a logo 'Bio Tunisia' as the hallmark of the country's organic products (JORT, 2010). It has allowed the value and benefits of all organic products to be communicated to consumers both nationally and abroad.



بيوه تونس!

*Logo of Tunisian organic products
(JORT, 2010)*

Institutionalization and Specialized Institutions

The institutionalization of the OA sector in Tunisia arose from the creation of specialized central and regional level administrative government agencies and technical institutions. These include (1) the National Commission for Organic Agriculture; (2) the Technical Centre of Organic Agriculture; (3) The Regional Center of Research in Horticulture and Organic Agriculture; and, (4) The General Directorate of Organic Farming inside Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture. These specialized government OA establishments are tasked with well-defined and structured responsibilities aimed at promoting and advancing the development of the country's organic sector. Their activity areas span the design and provision of extension services, the organization of capacity building trainings and the conduct of

research covering different aspects of organic operations. Furthermore, they are engaged in activities coordinating and regulating the organic sector. These include but are not limited to: overseeing and auditing the activities of organic certification and inspection bodies to ensure compliance with existing regulations; the organization of promotional activities aimed at increasing the adoption of organic farming systems and boosting public awareness about buying and eating organic products; the dissemination of information and the transfer of technology to organic farmers to help boost their productivity; and the creation and maintenance of a database that contains the inventory of organic operations in the country as well as sector performance information (Morgera et al., 2012).

Another governmental body involved in the development of the organic sector is the Institution de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur Agricoles (Institution of Research and Higher Agricultural Education (IRESA). IRESA is an institution under the Ministry of Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources, and Fisheries (MAHRF) and it is responsible for coordinating almost all agricultural academic and research institutes in the country as well as their research activities (IRESA, 2010). To foster the development of the organic sector, IRESA created a body known as the National Commission for Planning and Evaluation of Organic agriculture Research. Its activities include working with all the stakeholders involved in the organic sector to discuss their operational problems and constraints with a view to work out how they can be addressed through research activities. Through this body, IRESA also works with the research teams and institutions under its coordination to develop and fund research projects on topics that are considered crucial for the growth of the sector. In addition, through this body, IRESA engages in the evaluation of the outcomes of government funded OA research. In collaboration with CTAB and the Organic Agriculture Regional Networks, IRESA also coordinates the transfer of OA technology to stakeholders (Ben Khedher, pers. comm. 2013) and organizes human capacity development trainings for OA technicians and farmers (Ben Salah, 2007).

Organic Agriculture Research and Training

The Tunisian government made provisions for other research and training activities on OA, including compulsory OA courses at all higher agronomic institutes of learning. Similarly, master degree programs in Sustainable Agriculture and Protection in OA 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 (Ben Khedher, 2012; Belkhiria, 2008). Equally, a diploma program in OA was developed to provide professional trainings for stakeholders involved in the country's organic sector. This program is jointly conducted by the Agence de Promotion des Investissements Agricoles (Agricultural Investment Promotion Agency, APIA) and the Agricultural Training and Extension Agency, AVFA (Kilcher and Belkhiria, 2011). In addition, through a technical collaboration with FAO, Tunisia established an organic school for farmers, which is focused on providing training for farmers based on the farmers field school model. The project, which started as a pilot, has since been replicated by the Tunisian government following its huge impact in helping organic farmers with their production activities.

In Tunisia, training and research covering certain aspects of OA played a significant role in aiding the development of the organic sector to a large extent. There were well-linked dedicated central and regional institutions with representatives at the local levels created by the government to organize OA trainings, provide extension services and technical support to organic producers, processors and exporters. To summarize, Tunisia has well-organized and elaborate institutional arrangements committed to carrying out OA research. The government provided sufficient financial support for the organic sector, and established the institutional structures needed to conduct research on organic food production systems and to provide training and technical support to organic operators.

Regulatory Framework, National Organic Action Plans and Certification Bodies

One of the decisive actions taken by the Tunisian government to develop its organic sector was to enact a national OA legislation. To this end, the Law No. 99-30 of April 5, 1999, was enacted, making Tunisia the first African country to have national organic regulations (Parrott et al., 2003). This Law, which birthed the evolution of the organic sector in Tunisia, was followed by a series of decrees through 2005, when a comprehensive version of the Tunisian organic regulatory law was issued (Barrouhi, 2010). The Tunisian organic regulations set forth general and specific requirements that guide organic production operations, post-harvest handling, processing and marketing.

In addition, the IFOAM Basic Standards, EU organic regulations and Codex Alimentarius were referenced to develop the Tunisian organic regulation, thereby making it the equivalent of those international standards (Kilcher and Belkhiria, 2011). At the same time, the Tunisian regulation is adapted to the local context of organic farmers, processors and marketers in the country. The referencing of the EU organic regulations facilitated the endorsement of the Tunisian regulation on the EU's 'third country list' and on the Swiss equivalence list (Ben Khedher, 2012).

Another step taken by the Tunisian government to stimulate and guide the development of the organic sector was to facilitate the formulation of a comprehensive OA national development strategy and action plans. These are based on planning components, which listed several constraints affecting the country's organic sector. One of these is the diversification of organic production in the country. To accomplish this, the two organic-specific plans sought to expand the country's organic products beyond its flagship products (olive oil, dates, and aromatic plants) by including organic cereals, fruits and vegetables, as well as forestry products.

Market development is another component of the plans. In this regard, action steps were mapped out to create demand for domestic organic product consumption through sensitization campaigns and by further providing for the creation of local organic marketing channels through supermarkets, hotels and tourist routes. In addition, strategies were laid out to increase the visibility of the country's organic products and its share of international organic markets through awareness

campaigns, participation in international fairs, and the branding of the country's organic products (Belkhiria, 2008).

Besides putting in place national organic legislation and action plans, the Tunisian government also created a conducive environment within which organic certification and inspection bodies can operate. Also, the national organic legislation details specific provisions spelling out the process and conditions guiding the accreditation of the inspection and certification agencies in the country.

There are also the provisions pertaining to the audit of the activities of the organic certification and inspection bodies, and the process to be followed for penalizing them when their operations do not comply with regulations. Presently, there are five inspection and certification companies operating in the country. These include ECOCERT (German), CCPB (Italian), BCS (German), SuoloeSalute (Italian) and INNORPI (Tunisian) (CTAB, 2013). With the exception of INNORPI, the remaining certification and inspection bodies are wholly foreign-owned. They conduct their inspection and certification activities using Tunisian organic regulations; they are also able to certify Tunisian organic products for European, United States, and Japanese markets (Belkhiria, 2008). Furthermore, the Europe-wide recognition enjoyed by the foreign-owned certification bodies has resulted in their services contributing to the ease of entry and acceptance of Tunisia's organic products in European markets.

Conclusion

The Tunisian government has been the main driver of the country's organic sector and it has been able to do this by establishing specialized administrative, technical and research-oriented OA institutions. The roles of each of the dedicated OA institutions were well defined and so were the responsibilities that they have had to carry out with one another. This largely helped drive, provided the focus, and synergy needed to sustain the growth of Tunisia's sector. Other than the specialized OA institutions, there were public institutions and non-governmental stakeholders playing roles instrumental to the development of the country's organic sector. Among others, such roles include the organization of human development capacity trainings, organic agriculture awareness creation and the provision of technical support for organic operators. There exists also a high level of collaborative relationships between the specialized organic institutions and other public and non-governmental establishments supporting the development of the sector. Furthermore, to facilitate the development of its organic sector, the Tunisian government had to develop a national organic regulatory framework that is internationally recognized and also adapted to the country's local agro-climatic and farmers' socio-economic conditions. Likewise, the government cooperated with non-governmental stakeholders to develop vigorous organic market development activities, awareness creation, organic national action plans and policy measures to steer the growth of the sector. The government provided sufficient financial support for the organic sector, and established the institutional structures needed to conduct research on organic food production systems and to provide training and technical support to organic operators. Finally, the sector's development was inspired by the government's well-directed interventions covering all aspects of organic agriculture and markets. In this sense, the Tunisian organic agriculture development experience

illustrates that as an infant sector, to foster its development and make it compete favourably and succeed in established markets, a country's organic sector needs the support of the state. Also, it was found that organic agriculture in Tunisia is export-oriented and further that market-oriented instruments were created to facilitate the entry of the country's organic products into international organic niche markets. The foregoing, coupled with the delimitation of the role of the Tunisian government to the creation of enabling framework to help spur and support the development of the country's organic sector further suggests that a mix of the state and market explains the success of the Tunisia organic sector.

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Relevant links:

<http://www.ctab.agrinet.tn/> (<http://www.ctab.agrinet.tn/>)

<http://www.inat.tn/fr> (<http://www.inat.tn/fr>)

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