

Building Organic Expertise within the Public Sector

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

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Political justification

Extra effort may be needed to sow and grow knowledge and understanding of organic agriculture and markets into relevant government departments. Most agronomic experts within ministries and departments related to agriculture will have been trained in conventional agricultural systems, and agricultural economists to globalized supply chains. Exposure and additional training on organic systems may be a critical factor in shifting to focus on or at least include organic agriculture in the work programme. Knowledge building will have the initial effect of building support for the sector, and longer-term effect of capacity to design and implement organic sector work programs.

Suitable contexts

If government is going to intervene in favor of organic agriculture in any way (whether it is just to regulate it or also with supportive measures), it is important that some personnel in government institutions be knowledgeable about the organic sector. 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.

Possible modalities of implementation

Governments could pursue a strategy to broadly increase organic agriculture literacy throughout its personnel, or to ensure that one or more of its employees have strong background and knowledge of the organic sector – or both. Formal teaching – learning programs are well-suited for both strategies. They can be packaged in several ways, ranging from in-person courses and workshops for staff to online learning. The tutorials and linked documents in this toolkit’s Foundation could be an initial learning step. There are several options for further knowledge building. IFOAM – Organics International offers intensive [Organic Leadership Courses](#) to “students” from government and non-governmental backgrounds. The course includes 150 hour in-person sessions plus online learning sessions. Training for government staff may also be obtained through agreements with national or regional organizations. Experts within government agencies or hired as consultants are another option for design and delivery of customized organic training programs. Training programs could be part of an arrangement with an international development agency or intergovernmental cooperation project. Another way for a government to gain expertise is to hire organic experts in governmental positions. This was the case in Moldova, which 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 programme. Government employees may also be trained for organic-sector roles outside their

formal employment, such as in conducting organic inspections for certification bodies.

Countries examples

United States: In 2012, the 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 package of training and outreach materials highlights the range of USDA programs and services for organic farmers, ranchers, and processors. The initiative explains what organic means, how certification works, and how to connect current and prospective organic operations with helpful resources. The USDA [Organic Resource Guide](#) details a multitude of programs and services available to organic or transitioning producers and handlers, including contact information and website references.

Some of the training materials can serve as quick reference guides and handy outreach materials to give clients the information they need. The Organic [101](#) and [201](#) training modules, key to the initiative, 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, and thousands of visitors to the USDA National Organic Program's (NOP) website viewed the modules as well. Field office agencies have placed a strong emphasis on the training program.

Turkey: Turkey is a major supplier of agricultural products Germany, including organic products. However, the organic supply has been somewhat constrained by lack of full capacity along the supply chain to meet the regulatory requirements of the EU and quality requirements of buyers. A German-Turkish cooperation project aimed to close these gaps. Sponsored by the Federal Office for Food and Agriculture, the project was implanted by the organic research institution, FiBL and the peak Turkish organic association, ETO, in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Livestock. 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. Demonstration farms were also organized as a component of the training. A concept of best Turkish Organic Practices was developed and used for the training and dialogue. The basic module of the training included organic principles and practices, quality/integrity management systems and practices, and consulting methods.

Additional specialized modules were delivered to targeted groups. Course participants took an exam and received a certificate for the basic course. 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.

