

The Organic Farmer Support Programme

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An initiative of *The Organic Farmer* sponsored by  BIOVISION

Dear Farmers,

Every week, the editors of *The Organic Farmer* receive questions from farmers wanting to know if they can get markets for their organically grown farm products. The major complaint from most farmers is that they are forced to sell their produce like any other conventional produce. They feel that organic foods have health benefits, and therefore should fetch more in the market because they are of higher value to the consumer.

They are right. But the problem of marketing is a thorny issue for farmers across the country. This is due to the fact that organic production is a recently accepted mode of agricultural production in the country. Organic produce is currently available in small quantities and has thus not made an impact in mainstream supermarkets, green grocers, farmers markets etc. In addition, there are few consumers of organic produce, due to lack of awareness about the benefits of eating healthy foods, as well as the limited availability of the organic products.

On the other side, the traders and the customers too are in a difficult situation. Those who are more health conscious are often willing to pay higher prices for food that can be trusted to be natural and without any poisons or artificial chemicals added. The only problem so far is: How can they be sure that the products they are buying are organically produced? And how do farmers prove that their products are organic? Organic produce often looks like any other vegetable or fruits, or milk or meat. It probably tastes a lot better, but consumers would not know this until they get home and put it on the table.

Proof is needed

To be able to sell their products as organic, farmers need to prove to the buyers that it is indeed organic. This is where the issue of certification comes in. Farmers wishing to sell their produce as organic have to undergo a process of inspection by an established certification company. They will then be issued with a certificate showing they have complied with all the requirements of organic production. To convert a farm into organic

production may take up to 3 years. During this conversion period, the farmers can still sell their produce labelled as "In Conversion" as long as they can prove that they are under conversion and using only organic farming methods.

Most other countries have official standards for organic farming. The most famous systems are that of The Soil Association (in England) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). The Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) is a Government Department has recently printed the Kenya Standards for Organic Food, which farmers, who want to sell their produce as organic have to comply with.

In order to get fresh produce inspected in the field and to be able to label it "organic", as we also mentioned in the January issue, the company EnCert has been formed to work as an inspection and certification body to help farmers to prove to their customers that - yes indeed - this cabbage or those tomatoes for instance, have indeed been grown organically. EnCert has its own label which can be used by farmers once certification has been approved. Use of an EnCert label will prove to the customer that the labelled product is guaranteed to be organic.

TOF initiative

The inspection process has its costs as you can read on the following page. And here, our one-year-old newspaper is launching "The Organic Farmer Support Programme". As part of its first anniversary gift to farmers, *The Organic Farmer* (TOF), together with the Swiss foundation BioVision, has arranged to support 10 farmer's groups in the country to help them get certification for their organic produce. This capacity building initiative will be a milestone for the organic movement in Kenya.

Not only will TOF help the 10 farmers' group start organic produc-



tion according to the set standards, but it will also assist with price negotiations and finding good markets for their produce. To this end, our newspaper has had long negotiations with a number of market outlets in Nairobi who have expressed willingness to buy the produce. These include Nakumat, Fresh N'Juicy and Kengeles chain of restaurants. In future we plan to find more buyers of organic produce as the farmers show seriousness in the venture and increase their volumes

Farmers' commitment

Farmers' groups participating in this programme will be required to make their own transport arrangements for the delivery of their produce to the buyers. We expect the farmers' groups to exercise the utmost care to ensure that the products are of high quality and meet all the requirements of organic production. Farmers must show a high degree of honesty, trustworthiness and transparency. The integrity of the system established will ensure that the produce is acceptable to the buyers. Any farmer found to be cheating in the production process, for example by using chemicals, will cause their entire group to be disqualified from the project.

The newspaper will arrange a training programme for participating farmers' groups to ensure they are familiar with all the procedures of production and certification requirements

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The conditions for group selection

As you have seen on the previous page, *The Organic Farmer* and BioVision, the Swiss Foundation, will partly sponsor the certification of 10 farmers' groups. Certification of organic produce will help farmers in three areas:

- i) It will ensure that their production systems meet the set standards of organic production.
- ii) It will give an assurance to both the traders and consumers that the produce is organic.
- iii) The certification logo will help the consumers identify the organic produce on the shelf, and to pay for it a higher price, since it is of higher value. Certification hence increases the income for farmers.

Selection criteria

To qualify for this improvement initiative, the farmers' groups will have to meet certain conditions as set out by *The Organic Farmer* and its Advisory Board. Among these conditions is the willingness of the groups to take part in the process and adhere to the guidelines of organic production.

The groups will also have to meet the following conditions:

- a) Establish a central unit responsible for ensuring members' compliance with the organic production guidelines.
- b) Have a common marketing system for certified products; no member will be allowed to sell their products individually.
- c) Follow the guidelines for the group's internal control as will be established and directed by EnCert from time-to-time.
- d) Be able and willing to pay the requisite annual inspection fee as outlined on page I (the fee can also be paid in installments).

According to the local certification company EnCert, individual farmers

Dear Farmers ...

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before the farmers start selling their produce through *The Organic Farmer* network.

The selection board will consist of the editors of *The Organic Farmer* and a number of specialists on the environment, organic farming and staff from agricultural institutions in the country. Applications will be assessed on merit, but the first groups to apply may stand a better chance of being selected.

have to pay more to be certified. However farmers' groups are given concessionary rates for the certification. It is therefore advisable that farmer' groups go for group certification. The following are the certification fees for a farmer group of 20 farmers (groups with more than 20 farmers will also qualify for assistance).

Initial Application fee	Ksh10, 000
Annual inspection fee	Ksh35, 000
<u>Annual license fee</u>	<u>Ksh15, 000</u>
Total	<u>Ksh60, 000</u>

As an anniversary gift to farmers *The Organic Farmer* and BioVision Switzerland will support each farmers' group in paying the application and the annual license fee, to a total 25'000/=. A group of 20 farmers, for example, is required to pay Ksh 35,000 per year. This means that every farmer in the group is expected to pay Ksh 1750 per year or Ksh 146 per month. This is not expensive when considering that it will guarantee the farmers a ready market for their produce while at the same time bring an investment for the future.

The Organic Farmer has undertaken to pay for the application and annual license fees for the 10 groups during the conversion period of 2 years and also for a third year. Later the farmers will have to pay all the annual fees once the marketing system is established. The certification company is also willing to pay the application and annual license fees for two extra groups during the conversion period. This means that a total of 12 groups will benefit from the programme.

Integrity and accountability

For the project to succeed, the groups will be expected to show a high degree of honesty, trustworthiness and transparency in their operations. This will ensure that members follow the laid down procedures and set standards of organic production. Many organizations have failed to meet their objectives due to lack of accountability of financial management on the part of those running the organizations. For example, the groups will rely on selected members of the groups to deliver the produce to the market and deposit the payments in the group's bank account. Those charged with such a responsibility will have to show a high degree of accountability and transparency to ensure the funds are

not misused or diverted for individual gain. Any dishonest officials will lose their positions, including membership in the group. This will help protect the members' earnings and ensure the smooth running of the project. Groups that do not pay their inspection fees as agreed with *The Organic Farmer* may not qualify for assistance and will therefore be excluded from the programme.

Requirements

Interested groups are required to write an application letter to the editors of *The Organic Farmer* giving the following details:

- 1) Name of the group, location, mailing address and other contacts.
- 2) Date of registration of group (provide a photocopy of registration certificate).
- 3) Number of men and number of women in the group.
- 4) Name of the chairman, vice chairman, treasurer, secretary.
- 5) A list of members' names.
- 6) Estimated total area of the group members' farms.
- 7) Area already under organic management.
- 8) Types of commodities currently produced by the members

In Addition, the group should answer the following questions:

- 9) What are the main crops the members now grow for family use and for cash sale?
- 10) Are you adding value to the products? If yes, how and which products?
- 11) What kind of record keeping system do you practise?
- 12) What mode of irrigation is installed in members' farms (rain fed, furrow, and sprinkler)? Do you have a borehole or access to water source (river, reservoir, etc.)?
- 13) Which domestic animals are you keeping?
- 14) What transport arrangements do you have to ensure the products reach the market on time and in good condition?
- 15) Are you receiving any other form of assistance from other donors, NGOs churches or government, be it financial or material support?
- 16) Does the group operate a bank account? If so, where?

Know the standards of organic farming

The standards for organic production play an important role for the farmer as well as for the customer.

Organic farming implies friendly farming techniques that help to minimize pollution and damage to the environment. It is governed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). In this mode of farming, emphasis is on natural ways of soil fertility management, such as the use of compost, manure, mulches and agroforestry techniques wherever possible. The main aim, first and foremost, is to encourage natural ways of soil fertility management and physical soil protection in order to ensure the products' quality and maintain a sustainable environment. Organic farming prohibits the use of synthetic products and has a limited list of permitted substances for control of pests and diseases.

The rules for organic farming are outlined in Organic Standards. In Kenya, we have the standards of EnCert, a Kenyan body that offers opportunities for products to be certified as organic. The EnCert standards define the requirements, and lay



down the practices and criteria that must be met and maintained when food or other products are described as organic (or in other terms, indicating that they have been produced according to EnCert requirements). At a minimum, these standards comply with the Guidelines for Organic Production, Processing and Labelling of Agricultural Products developed by the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS). They are based on guidelines established by IFOAM,

and also efforts have been made to make them compliant with the European Union (EU) Regulations.

As is the case with certification requirements the world over, farmers' groups undergoing the process of certification shall be inspected on a regular basis, but at least once a year. However, EnCert reserves the right to make unannounced inspection visits. Inspectors may take samples for the detection of substances not allowed in the standards. An inspection report will be drawn up after each visit and countersigned by the responsible person in the group.

Where farmers are found to have seriously violated the standards, EnCert will withdraw all the group's references and certification of organic production. It is not possible to publish the entire EnCert standards in this issue of *The Organic Farmer*. We will, however, publish the key requirements of organic production. Each farmers' group being certified organic will get a copy of the standards with the entire list of allowed and forbidden fertilizers and chemicals and other means for pest and disease control.

What is allowed and forbidden in organic farming

Crop Production

- There shall be a period of organic management (conversion period), meeting all the requirements of the standards, before the resulting product may be considered as organic.
- Crop production and handling systems return nutrients, organic matter and other resources removed from the soil by recycling, regeneration and addition of organic nutrients.
- Organic seeds and planting materials of appropriate varieties and quality should be used - where available.
- A functional crop rotation for all annual crops should be established and followed.
- Weeds, insect and other pests and diseases should primarily be controlled by a combination of: an appropriate choice of crops and varieties, appropriate rotation programmes and proper attention to cleaning routines and hygiene.
- All relevant measures are taken to ensure that organic soil and food is

protected from contamination.

- Effective steps are taken to protect organically grown crops from contamination during harvesting, storage, handling and transportation.

What is prohibited

- Genetic engineering is prohibited in organic production and processing.
- Use of chemical and hormone herbicides is prohibited in weed management.
- Use of Nicotine.
- Use of methyl bromide and formaldehyde for soil sterilization.
- Strychnine for killing moles.
- Steam sterilization or pasteurisation of soils for pest and disease control.
- Human sewage sludge as a fertilizer for use on crops for human consumption.

Animal Husbandry

- All livestock to be handled, housed and transported under conditions which reflect proper care and concern for their welfare at all times.
- All animals to have access to pasture

or an open-air exercise area or run, whenever the physiological condition of the animal, the weather and the state of the ground permit.

- Livestock to have access to water at all times.
- Organic animals are fed with organic feedstuffs, preferably using organic feed from the unit or, when this is not possible, using feed from other organic units.
- All practical measures are taken to ensure the health and well-being of the animals through preventive animal husbandry practices.
- Accurate records of production activities should be maintained.

Restricted practices

- Castrations, dehorning, trimming of beaks, tail docking of lambs, ringing, cutting of teeth.

Prohibited practices

- Embryo transfer techniques and cloning
- Mutilations such as docking (removal of tails), trimming of ears.
- Hormones for promoting growth and weight gain

Changing conventional to organic farming

It takes up to two years to convert a farm from conventional to organic production.

The conversion from a conventionally managed farm to organic farming should not only improve the farm ecosystem, but also ensure the economic survival of the farm. Therefore, the adjustments which are required on the farms, and the related chances and risks, have to be analysed carefully.

Conversion to organic farming needs a new way of thinking, too. The first and probably most important conversion has to take place in the mind of the farmer. The decision for organic farming is also a decision for continuous learning. Before taking a decision on whether to convert the farm to organic management, farmers should get a clear understanding of what organic management would mean to their farm. Training courses, suitable printed materials and professional advice are possible sources of knowledge. That's why farmers' groups sponsored by *The Organic Farmer* will undergo a 3-day training workshop.

It is important that all persons involved in the farm (usually the farmer's family), are involved in the decision making process. Also, the situation of the farm should be analysed carefully, considering the requirements of organic farming, since new farming methods need to be introduced and applied. These include soil management, nutrient management, weed management, pest and disease control, animal husbandry, and fodder cultivation, among others. Thus, the necessary areas where change will be needed can be identified. Support from field advisors or experienced organic farmers can be of great help in this analysis.

To become familiar with the methods of organic farming and to see whether they would work in the prevailing conditions, some methods can be tested in a small area. Based on the results of the discussions, analysis and experience, farmers and their families will be in a better position to take a decision on whether to "go organic" or not. This is important in terms of the economic consequences. Some changes involve an increase on the work load or labour requirements. As the quantity of the

production may decrease, at least in the first years of conversion, farmers need to find ways to overcome the constraints. The change to organic farming does not only mean a change from the use of chemicals, it entails the use of only those permitted materials and practices as defined in the Standards for Organic Farming (see previous page). A conversion or transitional period is mandatory before a product is declared organic.

Conversion procedure

Organic production takes place on clearly defined units of land, such that the production and storage areas are clearly separate from those of any other unit not being converted. Land contaminated by environmental pollution (for instance from factories, traffic, sewage sludge) or by pesticides residues may render the land ineligible for organic conversion or may require a longer period to convert. Farmers should have clear plans on how to go about the whole process. Such plans should include field histories and plans for progressive step-by-step conversion.

Where the land was previously under intensive cropping, the conversion programme begins with a fertility-building phase. Once land has been converted to organic production, its conversion should not be switched back and forth between organic and non-organic management. Farmers whose land is in conversion should take reasonable measures to identify and avoid potential contamination.

Separation of conventional and organic

If the whole farm is not converted to organic management (split production), the converted part needs to be clearly defined, so as to have fixed demarcation and divisions from to

the conventionally farmed parts. There also have to be separate production and storage areas, separate accounting and strict division of responsibility where more than one person or family manages the farm.

A conversion period enables the establishment of an organic management system and gives time to build soil fertility. The conversion period should be long enough to improve soil fertility significantly and to re-establish the balance of the ecosystem (this takes an average of two years).

EnCert may, however, with the approval of the competent regulatory authority, extend or reduce the conversion period with regard to the previous use of the land in question. In particular, EnCert may reduce the conversion period provided that:

- the land was already in conversion or fully organic;
- the degradation of the chemical or other prohibited product used does not result in a significant level of residues in the soil and, where a perennial crop is involved, the crop residues;
- Products of the subsequent harvest are not sold as organic.

Produce from conversion period

The produce may be sold as "in-conversion" under the following conditions:

- A production plan or conversion plan has been approved by EnCert.
- The land and production has been inspected and registered as "in-conversion".
- At least 12 months have elapsed from the start of conversion to harvest.

The start of the conversion period is often calculated from the date the application is approved by EnCert.

