Factsheet; Organic Farming and Value chain (Farm-to Fork) in Iran

High value organic products

The future for organic agriculture in Iran looks very positive. Currently there are 43,000 ha of certified organic agricultural land. A high growth rate experienced over the last few years suggests a fast and considerable development in this sector. Due to different climatic conditions across the country, Iran could produce a variety of crops and become a regional hub and global resource to produce high-value organic produce, such as for pistachio, pomegranate, saffron, date, fig and medicinal plants. Cultural studies have shown that Iranians have been always interested in consuming traditional products grown in villages across the country.

Development of organic agriculture land in Iran from 2000 to 2019 (ha)

2000	2003	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
57	200	15	913	11745	8853	7256	43332	42633	12155	11601	14573	18870	11915	11915	11915

Source: FIBL survey

Organic crops production in Iran (2016-2019)

	Organic area [ha]				Organic area fully converted [ha]				Organic area under conversion [ha]			
Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2016	2017	2018	2019	2016	2017	2018	2019
Almonds	30	30	30	30					30	30	30	30
Apples	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1			
Avocados	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5				
Dates	1042	3495	3495	3495	975	3364	3364	3364	67	131	131	131
Grapes, no details	567	540	540	540	567	540	540	540				
Grapes, raisins	1287	1472	1472	1472	1287	1472	1472	1472				
Kiwis	47	16	16	16	47	16	16	16				
Oilseeds, no details		650	650	650		650	650	650				
Olives, oil	209	244	244	244	120	155	155	155	89	89	89	89
Oranges	37	583	583	583	2	4	4	4	35	579	579	579
Pistachios	610	547	547	547	490	547	547	547	120			
Plums	0				0							
Pomegranate	1207	1233	1233	1233	1207	1233	1233	1233				
Potatoes	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6				
Pulses	50	79	79	79					50	79	79	79
Rice	105	21	21	21	95	9	9	9	10	11	11	11
Tea	125	25	25	25	125	25	25	25				
Vegetables, fruit	110	266	266	266	70	70	70	70	40	196	196	196
Vegetables, no details	18	40	40	40	18	30	30	30		10	10	10
Walnuts, with shell	6	0	0	0	6	0	0	0				
Wheat	70	500	500	500	70	500	500	500				

Source: The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FIBL) survey

Certified organic agriculture is being promoted in Iran by the Ministry of Agriculture and supported by FAO to address environmental problems resulting from the use of chemical

fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture. Despite many advantages of organic agriculture, the results of several case studies show that the adoption rate of 'modern' organic practices is, with less than 1%, is still very low among Iranian farmers, compared with European countries.

On the other hand, about 86 percent of farmers in Iran are smallholders who manage close to 40 percent of arable lands in Iran, and these small-scale farming systems may, at least part of it, be considered as *non-certified organic agriculture*, as these are managed according to 'traditional' and ecological farm practices which include:

- Diversified crops, animal husbandry integrated,
- Use of animal manure, wastes and by-products for soil improvement,
- Biological pest and disease control using indigenous knowledge and experiences,
- Community cooperation, family labour and local market orientation

There is an increasing public concern about food safety, but unfortunately very few people, both at farm and consumer level really know certified organic farming. For farmers, the most important challenge of transition to organic agriculture is the management of plant nutrition and protection against pests, diseases and weeds during the first years of conversion to prevent yield reduction.

Opportunities for Organic Agriculture in Iran

As in many countries in the Mid-East, the domestic market for organic products in Iran is still relatively small. However, local demand for organic products has been growing parallel with consumer awareness as well as concerns related to several food safety issues. It is typical for developing countries for the domestic organic market to start in the capital city with small, designated spaces in supermarkets. These shops are usually in residential areas that are inhabited by upper- and middle-class citizens (Sirieix et al., 2011; Kledal et al., 2009, 2010, 2012) especially in northern part of (capital) Tehran.

Based on research in Iran, the main worries for producers are: i) the declining crop yield due to the lack of chemical fertilizers and pesticides effective in increasing yield, ii) reduced farmers' income during the early years of organic farming, and iii) the easy access of farmers to agrochemicals instead of bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides. Consumer issues include i) lack of familiarity with organic products, ii) uncertainty about the organic authenticity of products, and iii) lack of product ID and reputable and well-known certification bodies. In addition, the results show that Iranian farmers have strong motives for the adoption of organic practices, yet they face numerous challenges in certifying, marketing, and accessing reliable technical information and financing.

Training farmers in organic production and supporting producers' knowledge of export standards could be provided by Dutch organizations, institutes and private sector to Iran. Based on latest FIBL statistics from 2019, there are 24 Iranian companies active in organic production and 50 companies active in organic processing, while 28 companies are exporting organic products from Iran.

National support for developing Organic Agriculture

The Ministry of Agriculture recently established a 'Committee on Organic Agriculture' to formulate policies and provide an action plan for the development of organic agriculture in Iran. The Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization of the Ministry of Agriculture has introduced a program to implement a new research department called "Farming Systems", where a research program for organic agriculture was included. Governmental subsidies on agrochemicals have been reduced drastically since 2007, which may contribute to the growth of organic agriculture in Iran.

Standards and Regulation

An updated version of "Requirement of production, processing, inspection & certification, labelling and marketing of organic food (INSO - 11000)" was published by the Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran (ISIRI) in 2014, in cooperation with universities and private companies. In these standards, a list of permitted organic inputs was included. In addition, the first draft of "Organic Wild Collection: Plant Collection Guideline" was released by ISIRI in 2009. These are national standards, which are expected to meet international recognized standards, for reason of export.

Certification bodies

The following certification bodies (national and international) for organic agriculture are registered in Iran:

1. Biosun Certifier (national inspection body (IB) and exclusive representative of international certification body (CB), bio-inspecta Switzerland), Website: http://www.biosun.ir/index-en.html
2. Pars Govah Gostar (national IB and partner of international CB, BCS Germany), Website: https://www.organiccert.ir/organic-certificates/
3. Ceres Parsi (national IB and partner of international CB, Cerescert Germany), Website: https://directory.ifoam.bio/affiliates/925-ceres-parsi
4. Govah Sabz Ferdos (national IB)
5. Talashgaran Ertegha Keifiet (TAK) – (national IB)
6. Giti Ajhan Pardis (GAP) – (national IB), website : https://giticert.com/

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