



# GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR ORGANIC RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

## OVERVIEW

This policy summary provides recommendations on why and how to provide public support to organic research and extension. It outlines options for providing this support, followed by examples from various countries.

- Provide financial support to experts in the private sector/ civil society to advise farmers on organic methods.
- Support training courses on organic farming systems.

## SUMMARY OF POLICY OPTIONS

Governments may consider several policy approaches to supporting research and extension.

### Research

- Provide dedicated funding for organic research that is integrated within various research institutions.
- Support the development and maintenance of specialized organic food and agricultural research institutions either in the public or private sector.
- Assist domestic researchers to access funding support for organic research from international/third country sources.
- Establish a national or regional organic research agenda.

### Extension

- Mandate government extension advice on organic agricultural systems.

## RATIONALE

As source for innovation, scientific research is key to:

- Increasing the sustainability, productivity and competitiveness of organic farming systems.
- Conversion to organic farming, as the absence of organic solutions to specific local agronomic problems is one of the main bottlenecks for farmers to convert.
- Recognition of the benefits of organic agriculture (both by consumers and by policy makers), which requires scientific evidence of the positive externalities associated with its production methods and products.

While there is considerable potential for innovation in organic farming systems, current spending on research for organic agricultural systems does not adequately reflect this potential.

Extension services to disseminate research results and develop capacity



of organic farmers to meet challenges and improve their systems is crucial for development of organic farming. Conventional farming can also benefit from applying organic innovations to increase their sustainability and even their profitability e.g. integrated pest management.

Support to organic research does not require a lot of extra financial resources, but rather a shift of priorities.

## SCOPE

Government support to organic research and extension is important in all contexts, regardless of the stage of development of organic agriculture and whether or not the organic sector is regulated. Research has indicated that organic advice by extension personnel is among the factors most strongly influencing organic farming adoption at early stages of sector development, while national organic research activities become the most influential factor at later stages of development.

## POLICY OPTIONS

### *Research*

#### **Integrating organic research in public research institutions**

This is an appropriate approach for governments with established budgets for food and agricultural research. A

government can reserve a specific percentage of its agricultural research budget for work on organic systems. It can also mandate establishment of organic research departments or new programs and budgets in specific research institutions. These actions may require legislation.

#### **Supporting development of specialized organic research institutions in the public or private/civil society sector**

Some countries have a specialized institute or program that strongly dominates or coordinates organic research (even though other institutions may also conduct organic research). This is the case in Switzerland, Tunisia and Hungary. The lead in organic research can be taken by a public institution, or it can be taken by a non-governmental institution that receives important public financial support.

Another model is a hybrid of the two previous models. A distinct organization can operate as a “center without walls,” where the research is performed in interdisciplinary collaboration between research groups in different institutions and universities. This model is used in Denmark and India.

#### **Assisting domestic researchers to access funding support for organic research from international/third country sources**

If a government does not have



sufficient resources to fund the needs for organic research, this option may be considered. Developing country governments can include organic research in the scope of development cooperation projects that they secure. They may also support compilation and dissemination of information on international and third country donors making sustainable agriculture research funds available to developing countries. A drawback of this option is that support is usually connected to time-limited projects and does not provide continuity.

### **Establishing a national or regional organic research agenda**

The agenda, including prioritization of organic system research topics, should be established in a participatory process involving various stakeholders of the organic movement. The participatory process can be implemented by the private sector/civil society with support from the government, or the government can implement it directly. Government can use the results of the survey to further focus its budget for organic research on the priority needs.

### ***Extension***

#### **Mandating the delivery of advice on organic agricultural systems in government extension service**

In this case, the first priority will be to adequately train existing extension personnel and ensure their “buy in” on organic agricultural systems as

legitimate and benefitting farmers. Alternatively, specialists in organic agriculture may be hired to deliver organic extension services on behalf of the government agency.

#### **Providing financial assistance to private sector businesses or associations to offer organic agriculture advisory services**

If it is infeasible to provide public extension service on organic systems, or if it is a preferable approach for other reasons, governments can subsidize the service delivery. Terms of financial support should be designed to ensure that advisory service offered to organic producers is equitable as related to extension services provided on conventional systems e.g. cost, quality, frequency.

#### **Supporting training programs on organic agriculture**

Governments may organize training programs directly or provide funding to non-governmental organizations and businesses to provide the programs. Training can take the form of hands-on workshops and short courses. Organic farmer field schools have been effective in Swaziland, the Philippines and Tunisia. As with extension, developing countries can include organic agriculture training in the scope of development cooperation projects.



## COUNTRY EXAMPLES

**Cuba:** When it adopted organic agriculture as its main policy in the 1990s, Cuba established research programs that laid the foundations for food self-sufficiency through organic management. Cuba led a number of sophisticated experiments and innovations in organic systems such as bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides and the use of fermentation. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA) has given priority to organic research themes by approving research projects linked to diversification, agroecology, organic agriculture and related topics. Although the Alejandro de Humboldt Fundamental Tropical Agriculture Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture is the primary actor of organic research, nearly all agricultural research centers, and agricultural universities in Cuba have been involved in organic research.

Practical results of the research are incorporated into Cuba's Agricultural Knowledge and Information System and is used for extension. Extension is organized under the Directorate of Science and Technology of the Ministry of Agriculture, which supervises various governmental, academic and NGO actors delivering extension services and ensures that they use up-to-date, clear and consistent information.

Cuba is a popular destination for exchange visitors from other countries to learn about organic

innovations they can replicate in their (tropical) situations, and to be inspired by the research and extension linkages in Cuba.

**Morocco:** In 2011 the government signed a joint public-private contract with the organic sector (represented by AMABIO, the Moroccan association of organic agriculture) within which the government commits to allocate EUR 3.6 million of public money to support organic research, and EUR 1.8 million for extension (capacity building for farmers). The contract covers the period 2011-2020.

**Egypt:** The Government supports agricultural research through the Agricultural Research Center (ARC) and in universities. Within ARC, the Central Laboratory for Organic Agriculture (CLOA) was established to focus on organic research. CLOA researches and promotes organic production of various crops, especially vegetables and fruits. It also has extension services.

**India:** The Indian Council of Agricultural Research, ICAR, started in 2004 a network project on organic farming at 13 centers in different agro-ecological regions of the country. Since then, these research centers have been working on the development of package of practices for different organic crops and cropping systems. In 2016, the Indian government decided to set up the National Organic Farming



Research Institute in Sikkim. Further, the government of Gujarat Province is establishing India's first university exclusively focusing on organic farming education and research.

**China:** The Certification and Accreditation Administration (CNCA) launched a program of organic demonstration counties. By 2015 seven counties were accepted and there were 30 more applicants. Additionally, the Ministry of Environmental Protection has a "National Organic Production Base" of organic demonstration farms, which includes 150 farms, and is growing. By 2013 in Taiwan the Council of Agriculture had also established eight "organic agriculture research teams" and "organic technique service groups" to conduct research and extension.

**Bhutan:** A capacity development program for farmers is implemented directly by the National Organic Program (NOP) in the Ministry of Agriculture. Since 2008, the NOP has directly trained 259 personnel of the Ministry of Agriculture. After the training of trainers, the staff (including NOP staff and agricultural extension officers) carries out further training of farmers.

**Swaziland:** The government supports an EU-funded project aimed at training 1,200 smallholders on organic agriculture techniques and setting-up 6 organic farmer field schools with 12 trained organic extension workers.

**Canada:** The province of Quebec is intensively supporting organic research and extension. Quebec has a 200 ha research site called Platform for Innovation in Organic Agriculture dedicated to organic research, which was created in 2012 and supported by a EUR 10 million government funding. There is a public support program to facilitate access of organic farmers to technical advice. The program reimburses up to 85% of the costs of technical advice services.

**Switzerland:** FiBL is a private organic research institute with about 50% of its budget coming from public funds (about EUR 8 million in 2014). Three other federal research centers have been involved in organic farming for many years. One of these, Agroscope, dedicates about 16% of its annual budget to organic research. Some public universities also carry out some organic research. Advisory services are tightly linked to research. FiBL's advisory service has coordinated national organic extension provision since 1977, but receives financial support from regional governments. Additionally, the federal government funds specialized organic advisers within the general agricultural advisory service.

**Denmark:** The development of a strong research agenda in Denmark has been characterized by a collaborative dialogue between the organic sector and government institutions, particularly by the



Ministry of and Fisheries, and a commitment to fostering organic research in the government's national strategy for agricultural research. Against this background, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries took the initiative to establish the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF) in September 1995, and it set aside about EUR 13 million for research and development during the 1996 - 1999 period. DARCOF was a "center without walls" where scientists remained in their own locations while working across institutions. About 100 researchers across 20 institutions were engaged in the DARCOF programs. In 2008, the Ministry decided that its premier organic research institute

should become an international research center, and from the base of DARCOF it founded the International Center for Research in Organic Food Systems (ICROFS). Within ICROFS are international research programs. ICROFS is also engaged in information dissemination at national and international levels. At the international level, it administers organic eprints, ([www.orgprints.org](http://www.orgprints.org)), the largest repository of organic research papers, which are publicly available in web-based, open-access format. The archive contains more than 13,000 publications from global sources and has more than 23,500 registered users.

**This Policy Summary was prepared by IFOAM - Organics International**  
[www.ifoam.bio/en/global-policy-toolkit-public-support-organic-agriculture](http://www.ifoam.bio/en/global-policy-toolkit-public-support-organic-agriculture)