

Organic Agriculture and Rural Development

Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.



Rural development aims to improve the quality of life of rural communities, by satisfying their socio-economic and cultural aspirations and strengthening their social organization, while protecting natural resources.

Organic Agriculture, thanks to its holistic approach, contributes to rural development in the following ways:



Enhances governance. It puts the farmer at the center of the farming strategy restoring a decision-making role to local communities, guaranteeing their right to control their own resources and engaging their active participation in a value-added food chain.

Creates a vibrant economic space. Reduced mechanization and avoiding use of agrochemicals create employment and increase returns to labor. Diversified production of quality products decreases the impacts of crop failures and increases marketing opportunities. Income and food security is achieved through diversity.

Maintains a healthy environment. Through its ecological approach, it maintains the integrity of the ecosystem and the productivity of natural resources. It preserves natural landscapes and wild species, restores life to soils and maintains agro-biodiversity by using and developing local seeds. In reducing the use of chemical inputs, organic agriculture provides a healthier working environment to farmers.

Builds the social capital of rural areas. Being knowledge-intensive, rather than capital and resource-intensive, it utilizes traditional knowledge and promotes farmer-to-farmer exchange. It provides tools for inspection and control, like Internal Control and Participatory Guarantee Systems that strengthen social organization and empower rural communities.

Current agricultural practices force people to abandon rural areas

Unsustainable food systems. More and more farmers are depending on only a few crops that demand substantial investments and create dependence on sometimes unavailable and ineffective agricultural inputs. Input costs are high and market prices continue to decrease forcing farmers and workers to abandon their fields. Millennia of traditional and indigenous knowledge are being lost.

Loss of natural resources. Monocultures using large quantities of chemical fertilizers and pesticides provoke desertification, salinization and contamination of land and water, resulting in the loss of productive lands, ecosystem biodiversity and the extinction of species.

Poverty. In search for livelihoods, farmers and workers migrate to cities, increasing substandard housing and impoverishment of marginal urban communities. There they have a reduced ability to purchase quality food. The diversity of their diet is decreasing and therewith their chances of adequate nutritional health.



Organic Agriculture is a model for rural development

Organic Agriculture is demonstrating with real-life examples how to enhance economic, social and environmental sustainability. Not only rural populations enjoy the fruits of Organic Agriculture, urban citizens are better off as well.

Therefore:

Governments at local and national levels should use Organic Agriculture as a strategy for rural development, involving rural communities and consumers in their decisions. Local authorities can create positive conditions for developing Organic Agriculture in their region. This can be achieved by:

- Organizing daily and weekly farmers' markets in cities
- Providing local and organic food in public canteens (schools, hospitals, etc.)
- Promoting the establishment of eco-agrotourism
- Educating younger generations on the close links between agriculture, ecology and their daily food

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IFOAM'S MISSION IS LEADING, UNITING AND ASSISTING THE ORGANIC MOVEMENT IN ITS FULL DIVERSITY.

OUR GOAL IS THE WORLDWIDE ADOPTION OF ECOLOGICALLY, SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY SOUND SYSTEMS THAT ARE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE.