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Exportation of organic products to Europe

Armelle de Saint Sauveur, Moringanews

Exporting certified organic products to Europe is an important issue for African food supplements producers, because most of their competitors in this market sell organic products (spirulina, wheat grass, noni juice). The text below is a summary from a FAO document entitled “World Markets for Organic Fruit and Vegetables - Opportunities for Developing Countries in the Production and Export of Organic Horticultural Products”. You can access the complete report at :

http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/DOCREP/004/Y1669E/Y1669E00.HTM

a. Definition of organic farming

Products labelled as "organic" are those certified as having been produced through clearly defined organic production methods. In other words, **"organic" is a claim on the production process rather than a claim on the product itself.**

Organic agriculture is best known as a farming method where no synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are used.

Several national governments and a multitude of private certification and farmer organizations have defined organic agriculture. In the past, differences in these definitions were significant, but the demand for consistency by the trade has led to greater uniformity.

b. Basic criteria for the production, storage and transport of organic fruit and vegetables

One of the essential elements distinguishing organic farming from other forms of sustainable agriculture is the existence of **production standards and certification procedures.**

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), a non-governmental organization promoting organic agriculture internationally, has established guidelines that have been widely adopted for organic production and processing. These guidelines are commonly considered as "minimum standards", leaving room for more detailed requirements, depending on regional or local situations.

In general, the use of methods that contribute to maintaining or enhancing soil fertility is mandatory. Another common feature is that generally natural inputs are approved and synthetic inputs are prohibited.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions in both cases. Certain natural inputs which various certification programmes determine to be harmful to human health or the environment are prohibited. In addition, certain synthetic inputs are allowed. All certification programmes maintain lists of specific approved synthetic inputs and prohibited natural inputs.

Many certification programmes require additional environmental protection measures beyond the above prerequisites. For example, specific measures are generally applied in the areas of soil and water conservation, pollution control or the use of biological control agents.

While many farmers in the developing world do not use synthetic inputs, this alone is not sufficient to classify their products as organic. Farmers who produce organic crops for export and at the same time grow basic foodstuffs on other areas of the farm using conventional methods with fertilizers and pesticides, inadmissible to the organic system, are at high risk of violating the standards, unless effective measures are taken to prevent prohibited substances from passing to the organic plots.

c. Certification: a necessary step for exporting fruit and vegetables as organic

c.1 Basic definition

Producers and exporters of organic fruit and vegetables seeking to sell their products in developed countries which have adopted organic standards and regulations will have to meet the rules established by the importing country concerned. **There are detailed regulations governing the production, importing, marketing and labelling of organic products.**

Producers and exporters wishing to export fruit and vegetables with the organic label will have to obtain organic certification. Organic certification is a procedure for verifying that the production process conforms to certain standards.

The basic role of a certification body is to confirm that these adhere to a specific organic standard (usually the one established by the importing country or by the certification body itself). Once certified, organic products are marketed, usually carrying a certification label, indicating that the products are certified as organic.

The certification label attests to conformity with certain standards and is itself not a trade mark. However, in most countries the certification label is also registered as a trade mark. Producers wishing to enter a specific market for organic products may find it useful to be certified by a certification body with a certification label that is well known in that market.

The cost of certification can be high, although it varies in relation to farm size, volume of production and which certification body is chosen. Relatively few developing countries have certification bodies within their borders (although the situation is changing), and even when sufficient resources are available to pay for certification, farmers often lack the information to find credible inspectors.

c.2 Import requirements of European Community (EC)

In the EC, Regulation EEC 2092/91 determines the minimum requirements for organic farming in all the member states and is a directly applicable law. **Organic food products originating from non-EC countries may be imported and marketed in the EC with an**

organic label if it is accepted that the products are produced and certified according to procedures equivalent to those of the EC.

Under Regulation EEC 2092/91, there are, in practice, two options to gain authorization to export organic products to the EC:

1) When a third country has established and implemented organic standards, it may apply to the European Commission for inclusion into the EC List of Article 11. Known as the **Article 11 list**, countries on this list can export products certified by an approved domestic certification body to the EC without the need for additional certification or accreditation. As of June 2001, only 6 countries were on this list (Argentina, Australia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel and Switzerland).

2) If the exporting country is not on the Article 11 list, the exporter should ask its importer in the EC country to apply for **an individual permit for import**. Import permits are issued for a certain amount of specific products from specified countries. They are valid for defined periods.

c.3 How to obtain certification of organic fruit and vegetables in developing countries

Currently, certification for export in developing countries is often carried out by the certification bodies of the importing countries, even though there are some notable exceptions (e.g. Argentina). The advantage for the exporter is that the logos of these bodies are well known and trusted by consumers in their countries, thus giving the product a better visibility and commercial advantage.

The major drawback is that this type of certification can be very expensive, especially when inspectors need to come from the country of the certification body. In order to reduce costs to producers and exporters, international certification bodies tend to use local organic inspectors. Many international certification bodies, such as Ecocert, OCIA or BCS-Öko, have established local branches in developing countries. These branches tend to recruit local staff, which reduces costs. When no local branch exists in a given country, there might be a regional branch in a nearby country that may send a team to carry out inspections and even certification.

d. Other requirements for exporting organic fruit and vegetables

In addition to the above requirements, which are specific to organic products, **organic fruit and vegetables destined for export should meet the usual requirements concerning all fresh fruit and vegetables, whether organic or conventional.** It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with these requirements, as several publications explain them and provide much detailed and practical information. The following is just a brief summary of the most frequent categories of requirements. **This list is not comprehensive; for more detailed information contact importers and customs services in the importing country.**

d.1. Phytosanitary certification

Import requirements depend on both the product and the country of origin. In general, a phytosanitary certificate issued by an official of the exporting country must accompany all fruit and vegetable shipments. This official will be able to determine if the particular fruit or vegetable can be exported to the country of destination and what phytosanitary requirements must be met.

d.2. Grade and quality standards

Fruits and vegetables exported to the EC, Japan or the United States must meet import requirements relating to size, grade, quality and maturity. A certificate based on an inspection must be issued by the country's relevant authority to indicate compliance with standards.

d.3. Pesticide and other contaminants

Most developed countries have established standards for tolerances for pesticides, herbicide and fungicides used in the production and treatment (e.g. fumigation) of agricultural products. These countries have established Maximum Residues Levels, often referred to as MRLs. As organic agriculture prohibits the use of most synthetic pesticides, producers of fresh organic fruit and vegetables are very unlikely to exceed these MRLs. However, those producers who use some of the few synthetic inputs permitted by organic standards should be aware of these requirements (for more information on this topic see: www.coleacp.org).

d.4. Import clearance

In general, the customs services of the importing country are responsible for the final approval and authorization for the importing of all products. Customs services review all documentation for the shipment against requirements and will not release goods from the port of entry until all requirements are met. They are also responsible for the collection of any import duties.

e. Additional sources of information

- Introducing a novel food supplement in Europe :

<http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/herbal/>: British Food Standard Agency page on herbal products.

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/supplmnt.html> : Food and Drug Administration (USA) page on food supplements.

http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/nda/catindex_en.html: page on novel food products on the European Sanitary Security Agency Website.

<http://www.afssa.fr/>: Website of the Fench Agency for Food Sanitary Security

- Statutory conditions for production and export of organic products

<http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/labellingterms/organic/>

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/default.htm>

http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/DOCREP/004/Y1669F/y1669f04.htm

<http://biogassendi.ifrance.com/biogassendi/reglesbio.htm>

<http://www.ecocert.fr/dyn/?Mlval=PageAccueil&lg=fr>

- Advice and information on production and export of fruit and vegetables

http://www.coleacp.org/FO_Internet/en/welcome.html

The COLEACP is an inter-professional association of exporters, importers and other stakeholders of the EU-ACP horticultural trade.

