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Strategy of Organic Market in Tunisia

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Abstract: Organic agriculture started in the eighties (80's) and had a slow evolution until 1997. The last four years have been characterized by a high increase in area, number of farmers, and crop diversification. This important development was the result of national strategy policies supporting this sector. These are : subsidies for equipment and certification, national legislation, research and training, farm association, marketing .

The main organic crops are olives, date palms, almonds, jojoba, vegetables, fruit trees, and aromatic plants. Animal production is still in its initial stage. Most of the production is directed to the export market. A small quantity of organic products is sold in the local market.

Many agricultural areas and crops can be converted easily to organic agriculture because the conditions are very favorable. That is, there are no unfavorable climatic conditions, and pests and diseases are controlled mostly through traditional techniques, practices and biodiversity. The main difficulties encountered in order to convert farms to organic agriculture in some areas are: the lack of products for use in fertilization and soil amendments, the lack of products for plant, pest and disease control, the lack of unrestricted veterinary medicines and the lack of experience in marketing organic products.

1. Introduction

Organic agriculture is relatively new in Tunisia. It started in the eighties (80's) and evolved slowly until 1997. Policies supporting this sector, underlined in a national strategy and supervised by the National Commission for Organic Agriculture, led to an increase in area of Organic Agriculture, an influx of farmers practicing it, and to a diversification of crops.

2. National strategy

2.1. National legislation

The reference legislation in Tunisia is IFOAM Basic Guidelines, EEC and Tunisian regulations. A national regulation was issued on April 5th,1999. The complete national regulatory framework will be ready by the end of 2002.

2.2. Research

Besides certain research topics in conventional agriculture which can be applied to organic agriculture, there are eight research projects in this field :

- Disease control in honey production
- Use of olive byproducts in fertilization (2 topics)
- Organic fertilization in sustainable agriculture
- Rabbit husbandry with local races
- Cattle husbandry with local races

- Control of Botrytis and Sclerotinia in greenhouse tomato
- Biological control in olive crop

2.3. Training

Academic Training:

Some modules in organic agriculture are being offered to students in agronomic institutes. A sort of specialization in organic agriculture will be offered next year. Two Masters of Science Degrees (DEA) are being offered in Sustainable Agriculture and Protection in Organic Agriculture.

Professional Training:

Many training days, short sessions and short courses in various topics of organic agriculture were offered to technicians and farmers.

2.4. Subsidies for equipment and certification

- Thirty per-cent (30%) of all equipment used in organic agriculture is subsidized.
- Seventy per-cent (70%) of certification fees during the coming five years, and maximum subsidization is 3500 US$.

2.5. Structures involved in organic agriculture

The National Commission for Organic Agriculture

The Bureau of Organic Agriculture in the Ministry of Agriculture

The Technical Center for Organic Agriculture

The Regional Agricultural services

The National Federation of Organic Farmers

The Tunisian Association for Mediterranean Environmental Agriculture

The National Agency for Investment promotion in Agriculture

The research, training and extension organizations

3. Characteristics of Organic Agriculture

3.1. Crops

The main crops include olives, date palms, almonds, jojoba, vegetables, fruit trees and aromatic plants and honey. Animal production has recently been undertaken. The organic area is about 16 818 ha cultivated by about 245 farmers.

3.2. Propagating material

The seeds, seedlings and other propagating material used in organic agriculture are local and foreign, even certified "organic"or not treated by chemical products. Olives trees and date palms were planted a long time ago.

3.3. Soil fertility

Many farms have poor soil fertility (low organic matter content, low biological activity and poor structure). The main problems related to the improvement of soil fertility are in introducing green manure for rotation, training farmers for the management of different organic matter sources and finding authorized organic and mineral fertilizers (in sufficient quantity) in the country. Import of organic matter is still prohibited.

3.4. Control of pests and weeds

The control of some pests and diseases is not efficient because many authorized products cannot be found in the country and are not yet registered. In this respect, a preparation of a list of registered products is underway.

3.5. Market

There is not yet a real local market for organic products. A strategy is being prepared to encourage local consumption and marketing of organic products. Most of the production is directed to the export market.

Most of the farmers are producers and exporters and thus are exporting their production by themselves. Efforts are underway to better organize the marketing of organic oil.

3.6. Inspection and certification

The inspection and certification bodies are:

- INNORPI (Tunisian) – BIOAGRICOOP (Italian)
- ECOCERT International
- LACON, BCS and AIAB

3.7. Crops, production and Area grown under Organic agriculture

The following tables (1, 2 and 3) show the evolution of the area grown under organic agriculture, the area distribution among the various crops and the production and export of the main crops, respectively.

Table 1. Evolution of the organic area

Year	1997	1999	September 2001
Area (Ha)	300.0	15035.7	16818.0

Table 2. Organic area distribution upon the crops (September 2001)

CROPS	AREA (Ha)	%
Olives	12430	74
Almonds	1292	7.6
Date palms	262	1.5
Citrus fruit	17	0.1
Vine	78	0.5
Fruit trees	154	0.9
Aromatic plants and jojoba	289	1.7
Vegetables	93	0.6
Cereals	495	2.9
Fodder	233	1.4
Grazing land	1475	8.8
Total	16818	100

Table 3. Production and exportation of the main crops

Organic products	Production (Ton)		Exportation (Ton)	
	Season 1999/2000	Season 2000/2001	Season 1999/2000	Season 2000/2001
Olive oil	3000 T Oil (15000 T Olives)	1000 T Oil (5000 T Olives)	400 T	600 T
Date palms	400 T	2500 T	400 T	670 T
Vegetables (potato, artichoke, tomato, cucumber, aubergine)	200 T	400 T	200 T	-
Almonds	20 T	25 T	20 T	-
Aromatic and medicinal plants	20 T (3 T of Dry Matter)	30 T (5 T of Dry Matter)	20 T (3 T of Dry Matter)	-
Jojoba	6,5 T	-	6,5 T	-
Vine (wine)	400 hl	400 hl	400 hl	-

4.Conclusion

Many agricultural areas and crops can be converted easily to organic agriculture because the conditions are very favorable. The main difficulties in converting farms to organic agriculture in some areas are: the lack of products for use in fertilization and soil amendments, the lack of products for plant pest and disease control, the lack of equipment used in organic agriculture (i.e, for compost and weed management), the lack of unrestricted veterinary medicines and the lack of experience in marketing organic products.

Young Consumers' Perception of Food Quality: An Illustration from Greece

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Abstract: Food quality is becoming an increasing important factor in consumer's buying decision making, especially after serious safety issues appeared recently in the European Union. The need of standards to assure food quality and safety is evident from literature. The present study explores young consumers' perceptions of food quality. It presents the outcome of a field research undertaken from October 2002 to January 2003. A convenience sample of 582 higher education students aged between 18-23, living away from their homes, in Greece, was employed. Statistical analysis included frequencies, percentages, means, factor analysis, reliability and cluster analysis. The findings from this study are discussed, which are considered to be relevant to marketing practitioners and policy makers for designing appropriate marketing strategies in order to attract and satisfy these segments of young consumers. Lastly, suggestions for further research are presented.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, food quality, public policy, marketing, field research

1. Introduction

Food products come in an unlimited variety and are described by a large number of characteristics or attributes. These attributes are associated with food choice, which is a major component of the purchasing decisions made by consumers [17], [24]. Quality of a food is a characteristic wanted by a consumer in order to purchase it [21], but little is known about consumers' definition of food quality since it is a multi-faceted issue [6], [33] and is considered one of the most problematic areas in the study of consumer behaviour [17].

The definition of food quality is a subjective matter, differing from person to person. There are some standard definitions of food quality, i.e. from the International Organization of Standardization, or the German Association for Quality [32], which are rather similar and state that quality is the features and characteristics of a product, which is able to satisfy, stated or implied consumer needs. In reality though, on an individual basis there will be many different definitions of the term. These definitions depend upon the predictions of the individual consumer, as well as on the background of the person using this term, and it may also differ even for the same person in different circumstances [32], [4].

In order to understand food quality, consumers' use of the word quality must be investigated, both as a concept and as characteristics of a product [6], [32]. Food quality is related to terms of perceived food quality, a perception process that has a different content for various persons [35]. Perceived quality is related to the product's ability to provide satisfaction [31] as well as a consistent level of the properties of the product [36], [34].