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Local Market Promotion for Organic Fruit and Vegetables

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Introduction

Certified organic agriculture started in Egypt years ago in a small one-hectare farm in the eastern desert. Its purpose was to produce medicinal herbs for the export market by Sekem. Expansion of this activity was quite slow until 1988. Thereafter, apart from the medicinal herbs a rapid growth occurred in the bio-dynamic production of vegetables, fruits, cereals, and cotton. This rapid growth was initiated mainly by Sekem and a few others. By the end of 1994 a new group of organic growers had established the Union of Growers and Exporters of Organic and Bio-dynamic Agriculture. Members of this union mainly produce and trade organic herbs, vegetables, fruits, potatoes, onion, and some cereals. Shortly after, in the summer of 1988, a new organic project was undertaken by Al-Hoda due to the market demands for organic fruits and vegetables. The expansion of organic agricultural activity in Egypt is growing very fast due to public awareness as well as the increasing demand for organic food and fibers in both local and export markets. The number of farms surpasses 300, with a total acreage of more than (4167 hectares). The total cultivated area in Egypt according to a survey by the Egyptian ministry of agriculture in the year 2000 is (3083333 hectares). Thus organically farmed areas represent about 0,14 % of the total area. Organic and bio-dynamic production in Egypt includes all kinds of vegetables such as salad onion, mangetot, sugarsnap, babycorn, medicinal herbs, potatoes, onions, citrus, grape etc.

Regulatory Aspects

Organic fruit and vegetable production started in Egypt in the early eighties. However, almost all production was aimed for the export market. Many technical and economical problems and constraints arose at the time. Percentages for marketable fruits and vegetables varied greatly. Sometimes more than 50% were not good enough for export. A significant loss in organic harvest of fruit and vegetables occurred. The local market at that time was completely non-existent. All the non exported organic fruits and vegetables were sold in the local market as conventional products at a very low price.

Therefore many trials for creating a local market were undertaken for organic fruits and vegetables.

An intensive programme for public awareness regarding organic agriculture in general and organic fruits and vegetables in particular was adopted by many organic producers and activists.

The aim of this programme was mainly to examine organic marketing at the local level. Meanwhile technical economical and social aspects of organic agriculture were elaborated upon to make the public aware of the advantages of organic agriculture.

At the start of the programme (1995), the following data were available for some fruits and vegetables.

Table 1. Total area for Fruit Production:

Fruit	Total area in hectares
Orange	100
Mandarins	50
Mango	100

Table 2. Total area for Vegetable Production:

Vegetables	Total area in hectares
Potatoes	250
Peas	200
Green beans	500
Green pepper	50 (plastic houses)
Cucumber	100+30 (plastic houses)

The above mentioned areas were distributed among many districts, but mostly in the Northern part of the country. Most of the organic production was distributed as depicted in Table 3:

Fertilization

Compost, fresh cow and chicken manures, rock phosphate and orthoclase and feldspars are themain sources of fertilizers for organic fruit and vegetable production.

Pest control

a-Disease control

Micronite sulfur, bentonite, *Trycoderma* sp, and other micro-organisms are the main agents for disease control.

b- Insect control

Potassium soap, yellow sticky sheets, pheromone traps, distribution perfumes and B. T. (*Bacillus therogenses*) and bovaria make up the main agents for insect control.

Encouraging natural predators are the main tools for insect control in addition to crop rotation.

Weed control

The methods used for weed control are mechanical weeding and cover crops and mulching.

Market approaches

- Few health shops and many super markets carry organic fruits and vegetables at relatively high prices for customers.
- Some home delivery projects were established through phone contacts.
- Some contacts with hotels, embassies and schools provided local markets with fresh organic fruit and vegetables.

- Through the above mentioned approaches, about 10% of the total organic fruits and vegetables were marketed in the local market.

The collection of data for this study took place during the 2000/2001 winter season

Table 3. Total Export of Organic Products from UGEOBA (Union of Growers and Exporters of Organic and Bio- DynamicAgriculture) farms during the in export season 1997/98

Product	Amount (ton)	Destination
Potatoes	1850	Germany, Italy, UK
Onion	632	Germany, Italy, UK
Garlic	492	Germany, Italy, UK
Peanuts	247	Belgium, UK
Green beans	11	UK
Eggplant	1	UK
Peas	2	UK
Tomatoes	3	UK
Green pepper	113	UK
Red pepper	17	UK
Squash	1	UK
Cucumber	6	UK
Chamomile	45	Germany, Italy, UK, USA, Australia
Baisl	20	Germany, USA, UK
Peppermint	2	Germany, USA, UK
Spearmint	8	Germany, USA, UK
Fennel	25	Germany, USA, UK
Hibiscus	10	Germany, USA, UK
Lemon grass	3,5	Germany
Majoram	6,5	Germany, USA, UK
Parsley	3,3	Germany, USA, UK
Calendula	5,5	Germany, Italy, UK
Dill	1,5	Germany
Corýander	4,5	Germany, USA, UK

Reference

[1] Survey of the Mediterranean Organic Agriculture Country Report for Egypt (prof. Dr. Ahmed El-Araby).