

1. Introduction

Organic agriculture is relatively new in Tunisia. It started in the eighties (80's) with private initiatives. It had a slow evolution until 1997. The last four years which were characterized by a high increase in area, number of farmers, and crop diversification. This important development was the result of policies supporting this sector underlined in a national strategy supervised by the National Commission for Organic Agriculture.

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN TUNISIA

2.2. Research:

- 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. National strategy

2.1. National legislation:

The reference legislation in Tunisia is IFOAM Basic Guidelines, EEC and Tunisian regulations. A national regulation started to be issued in April 5, 1999. The complete national regulatory framework will be ready by the end of the year 2001.

■ Professional Training:

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

2.3. Training:

■ Academic Training:

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

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.

2.4. Subsidies for equipment and certification:

30% of subsidies for all equipments used in organic agriculture and 70% of subsidies for certification fees during the coming five years with a maximum of 3500 US\$.

3. Characteristics of Organic Agriculture

3.1. Crops:

The main crops are olives, date palms, almonds, jojoba, vegetables, fruit trees, aromatic plants and honey. The animal production just started. The organic area is about 15 000 ha grown by about 200 farmers.

- 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

3.3. Soil fertility:

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

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. The trees of olives and date palms were planted long time ago.

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.

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.

3.6. Inspection and certification:

The inspection and certification bodies are:

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

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

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

Table 1. Evolution of the organic area

years	1999	September 2001
Area (Ha)		

Table 3. Production and exportation of the main crops

Organic products	Production (Ton)		Exportation (Ton)	
	Season	Season	Season	Season
Olive oil	3000 T	1000 T	400 T	600 T
Date palms	400 T	2500 T	400 T	670 T
Vegetables	200 T	400 T	200 T	-

CROPS	AREA (Ha)	
Aromatic plants and jojoba	289	1.7
Vegetables	93	0.6
Cereals	495	2.9
Fodder	233	1.4
Course	1475	8.8
Total	16818	100

4. Conclusion

- Many agricultural areas and crops can be converted easily to organic agriculture because the conditions are very favorable: unfavorable climatic conditions to pests and diseases, mostly traditional techniques and practices and biodiversity.

Organic products	Production (Ton)		Exportation (Ton)	
	Season	Season	Season	Season
Almonds	20 T	25 T	20 T	-
Aromatic and medicinal plants	20 T	30 T	20 T	-
Jojoba	6,5 T	-	6,5 T	-
Vine (wine)	400 hl	400 hl	400 hl	-

- The main difficulties 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 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.