



Report

Development of organic products in Kyrgyzstan

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Women prepare fruits from solar dryer. (Photo by Ms. B. Raimkulova, RSP in Kyrgyzstan from IFOAM)

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous and landlocked Central Asian country, one of five former Soviet Republics in the region. Agriculture is the main economic sector employing around 20% of population and contributing roughly 20% to the country's GDP. Due to its climatic conditions, the Central Asian region was considered as a space for growing cotton, wheat, fruits and vegetables and tobacco and other cultures during Soviet times. Owing to its nomadic culture, Kyrgyzstan has been active predominantly in the animal husbandry sector.

The Soviet mono-cropping approach devastated soil productivity and caused environmental pollution. Excessive cotton production exhausted water resources leading to the human induced catastrophe of the Aral Sea for our generations. Moreover, overuse of chemical fertilizers over the last 20 years led to soil degradation destroying 50% of arable land's productivity (Sagynalieva, 2018). In light of such historical developments, growing awareness of the advantages of organic agriculture is plausible.

Starting December 2018, Kyrgyzstan plans to shift to 100% organic farming within the next ten years, following Bhutan's way of development. It was ordered that "farmers should not use agrochemicals, pesticides (toxic chemicals), synthetic substances, hormones, growth regulators, feed additives, GMOs, antibiotics and additives other than biological preparations for plant protection and organic fertilizers" (Podolskaya, 2018). This announcement of the



speaker of parliament caused positive reaction among organic producers, bio farmers' associations and consumers. Genetically Modified Organisms, in short GMOs, are the ones whose genes have been artificially amended in order to increase food production, resist severe climatic conditions and diseases. However, apparently GMOs are not the solution for securing sufficient food of good quality. Taking into account one billion people who go hungry every day, it is evident that the problem of hunger does not derive from food production. It is rather a structural issue of food commodification. Therefore, it is quite important to provide incentives to small-scale organic farmers through the introduction of new support policies. Currently cheap and suspicious food products imported from China are widespread in Kyrgyzstan. Locally grown fruits and vegetables are exported to Kazakhstan and Russia.

The recent trend demonstrates that organic farming is growing in the country. In fact, in 2014 Kyrgyzstan took serious steps in controlling GMO products by banning cultivation, import and sale of GM products, although this rule was later changed setting a low level of GMO contamination (0.9%) in imports (Sustainable Pulse, 2018). In addition, the number of organic farmers increased from 647 to 1300 during the period 2007-2015. Simultaneously, 257 ha of land used for organic cotton cultivation increased to 740 ha for the same period. More than 1,279 farmers managing 15,000 ha of land received organic certification in 2013 (Sagynalieva, 2018). It is a good start, but it is crucial to keep up the pace and to continue on this path of development.

In January 2016 Kyrgyzstan received the status of special support for stimulation of sustainable development within the framework of the EU Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP). This gives Kyrgyzstan new opportunities for diversification of goods production and their export to the European markets. It opens up the possibility to export products without tariffs for more than six thousand goods. Before introduction of the GSP, Kyrgyzstani exporters had to pay 14,5% for several types of fruits and vegetables and 5-9% for clothing. Kyrgyzstan exports mostly agricultural products to the EU, fresh and processed fruits, tobacco and etc. Since the development of its textile industry, Kyrgyzstan additionally exports clothes, leather and felt products and carpets. It already exports walnut, honey, medical herbs, apricot, beans, plums and other agricultural products.

Kyrgyzstan has a strong potential for export of organic products to the countries of EU. Basic prerequisites for developing organic agriculture exists including expertise and laboratory capacity at Kyrgyz Turkish Manas University, production of biological agents by Agro Bio Center, research for creation of bio fertilizers by the National Academy of Sciences and support of international organizations through various projects for farmers, business sector and government (Doolotkeldieva, 2014). So far, based on local materials, bio fungicide and bio preperade for bacterial protection of plants have been certified and are available for purchase.

However, further developments require a number of serious steps from different stakeholders. Current challenges for organic agriculture development include lack of legal framework, shortage of local study programs and thus specialists in organic agriculture, lack of certification knowledge among farmers, and low consumer awareness. Moreover, shortage of expertise and financial costs of certification hinder small scale farmers in getting recognition for their organic products for export. It is challenging for an individual farmer to promote their bio products, since several active bio associations do not cover all farmers in the country.

In conclusion, initial measures for organic agriculture development have been taken in Kyrgyzstan and its promotion depends on numerous factors. Being part of the Eurasian Economic Union might put Kyrgyz bio farmers in a disadvantaged position because Russian producers of chemical fertilizers have vested interest in expanding its market. The majority of agricultural products are exported to Kazakhstan and Russia and for wholesale exporters price prevails over quality. Therefore, creation of favorable conditions for bio farmers, improving legal framework, support in obtaining EU bio certification, support in value chain development and raising awareness among consumers should be prioritized.

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The picture is taken from <https://www.ifoam.bio/en/meet-alisher-yuldashev-rural-service-provider-kyrgyzstan-building-solar-dryers>