

Turkey - on the move from individual initiatives to a national organic action plan

Atila Ertem

Turkey is one of the most suitable countries for organic farming due to the presence of a wide variety of agro-food products ranging from cold temperate to subtropical well adapted to different agro-ecosystems, rich biodiversity and traditions in agriculture. So to no surprise the country was soon chosen as a potential supplier for organic products and first projects were initiated already in 1984. At that time only a small range of products was available, there was no legislation and no functioning inspection and certification scheme in place: organic agriculture was a pure private initiative of certain personalities, mostly traders from European countries.

In 2004 Turkey enforced its own Organic Farming Law, which has been prepared according to the European Commission format. Since then, organic production expanded to all regions and various crops are being grown all over the country. According to the official data of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA), in 2006 14 256 producers occupying 192.789 ha land were under certified organic management in seven geographic regions of Turkey, summing up to approximately 0.8% of the total agricultural land. Parallel to that, the share of processed organic products has also increased significantly.

Regulatory and institutional structure of organic farming in Turkey can be divided in three periods. During the first decade (1984-1994) Turkey had neither a national legislation nor any competent authority or official organization. The production was done according to private standards, and two European inspection bodies had started inspection before the national or EU regulation was put into force. In 1992, as an NGO, The Association on Ecological (Organic) Agriculture (ETO) was established by all volunteers involved in various fields (trade, inspection and certification, production, extension, research) of organic agriculture in Izmir. There are 13 inspection and certification bodies authorized by the Ministry responsible for ensuring that certified operators comply with the rules of organic production. Inspection and certification bodies authorized by MARA are under the obligation to comply with the criteria mentioned in the Turkish Regulation and the principles of certification stated in EN 45011 and ISO 65.

Organic producers enjoy general sector-wide supports. Direct income support are paid (or so 50 Euro/ha), by their land size, to all producers including all organic producers who have officially applied to the Ministry, additionally an extra payment (or so 15 Euro/ha) for organic producers who are registered in organic farming data base is also being paid. In addition, low-interest credit (60% discount from current rate) support is extended through the banks to producers engaged in or wishing to engage in organic production.

With the growing interest of organic products in or resp. from Turkey the movement is demanding for an overall national organic action plan in order to meet the needs and requirements of the markets. The further proposed specific objectives are as follows:

- Use organic food and farming as a tool in achieving rural development objectives
- Enhance collaboration between MARA and all other relevant governmental departments to maximize organic production and processing
- Harmonize Turkish legislation with new EU Organic Regulation 834/07 through revision of Turkish Organic Law and Standards
- Increase capacity of MARA and other government departments to effectively implement appropriate policies
- Maximize the efficiency of stakeholder network to guide formulation and implementation of policy and practice to support organic food and farming in Turkey (production, processing and internal/export markets)
- Support development of organic farming
- Improve technical and economic performance of organic food and farming systems
- Harmonize organic standards and accreditation working with the Turkish Accreditation Institution (TURKAK)
- Promote Turkish organic products nationally for Turkish markets and internationally for export markets (awareness, common logo, slogans etc.).

The National Organic Action Plan is expected to contribute to the professionalization of the organic movement. Its focus is on the domestic market as well as on the export markets.