

Turkey's Organic Agriculture Potential: An opportunity for the Mediterranean region

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Abstract

Until the 1950s, agricultural activity in Turkey was carried out with methods identical to organic methods. Due to the negative effects that the wide use of chemical input has had on the environment, a search for alternative systems has started throughout the world. Organic agriculture has appeared as an alternative agricultural method, and has been used for years in Turkey. Turkey holds an important position among Mediterranean as well as European Union countries, due to its favorable geographical location and climate, its uncontaminated soil and water sources, its abundant biological diversity and genetic sources, and relatively cheap labor.

As a result of Turkey's characteristics, organic agricultural production and product variety has developed since mid-1980s. While total organic agricultural production was 10.304 tons in 1996, this figure was 458.095 tons in 2006. While there were eight product varieties in 1985, this figure reached 206 in 2006. Besides organic production, the export of organic agricultural products has shown improvement since the mid-1980s. While Turkey's export was only dried figs, apricots, and grapes at first, at the present time companies have produced market oriented dried foods including: grapes, figs, and apricot; concentrated products such as organic apple, pear, pomegranate, and grape juice; canned products ranging from sour cherry, pepper, tomatoes, and apricot; and frozen products including strawberry, sour cherry, apricot, pepper, and cherry.

EU countries play an important role for Turkey's exportation. A major portion of organic agricultural products in Turkey has gone to EU countries, with an 80% share of total exports. Germany ranks first with a 60% share in EU countries. In terms of product type, raisin exports go to Germany, Holland, England, Austria, and France.,

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which dried apricots go to Germany, England, Switzerland, and Austria. Dried figs for export go to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy, and hazelnuts are exported to Germany, Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, and France.

Control and certification processes for organic agriculture in Turkey have shown important developments. There are 13 control and certification bodies that have international acceptance in Turkey. In the Mediterranean, only Tunisia, Turkey, Israel, and Slovenia have national regulations on organic farming. The presence of a national regulatory framework on organic farming is important not only for export, but also to reinforce consumers' culture and trust, and as a result for the development of domestic markets.

In summary, these are Turkey's main advantages in organic agriculture for Mediterranean region and EU:

- Many agricultural producers in Turkey have not used chemical fertilizers and pesticides. For this reason, it is said that Turkey's land for agriculture is unpolluted.*
- Turkey is well placed to develop organic agriculture, due to the great diversity of growing conditions, proximity to Europe, and highly developed transport systems.*
- Almost all of Turkish organic production is destined for export markets, primarily in Europe.*
- Centered in the Aegean region, in and around Izmir, the fastest growing city in Turkey, the organics industry has developed almost exclusively without government support, catering to the export market from the beginning of organic production in Turkey.*
- Turkey's organic regulations are modeled on the EU's, and there is harmony between Turkey and EU.*