

Imposing Organic Standards or Rekindling Local Values? Encouraging local ownership of the organic concept for raisin exports from Kandahar, Afghanistan

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Abstract

The global principles of organic agriculture were designed to represent the overarching values of organic groups around the world. Similarly, basic organic standards were intended to provide a common language for cross-cultural agreement on the production of organic products. In practice, however, the widespread promotion of organic export trade has created a situation whereby organic agriculture continues to be perceived by many in the development sector as a Western, industrialized concept and one which is not compatible with the realities of many of the exporter, less-industrialized countries. This paper argues that to reverse this trend and perception, attention must be paid to encourage debate and tease out local and national concepts of organic agriculture and of healthy food—concepts which do exist within every nation—and to demonstrate their compatibility, or resonance, with internationally agreed principles. A case study from Afghanistan is provided, which highlights the measures taken to encourage this and the specific challenges encountered. The paper concludes by suggesting that much may be gained by sharing lessons with organic export initiatives from other countries and regions, and developing “best practice” guidelines for linking local values with organic principles within organic export initiatives.

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