

Organic Agriculture and Gender Equality

Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.



Organic Agriculture supports gender equality because it:

Creates meaningful work. Due to diverse working tasks, specialized skills, and specific knowledge, women in organic farming often have a more diversified role in the household economy and access to education which increases self-esteem and decision making power.

Offers economic opportunities. Low start-up and production costs and stabilized yields makes organic farming less risky, more affordable and accessible to women, while high-value end products increase their income earning potential.

Supports health. Due to the prohibition of synthetic chemicals, the health of agricultural workers, and thus their ability to participate in income-generating activities and in the community, is not compromised.

Encourages biodiversity and traditional knowledge. Women often held empowering roles as keepers of seeds and traditional knowledge. Control over these resources is strengthened in Organic Agriculture due to its encouragement of biodiversity and traditional knowledge.

Ensures equitable work standards. Organic standards require that employees have equal opportunity and wages, and access to education and health services. The higher level of social awareness associated with Organic Agriculture also reduces exploitation of women.



Conventional Farming is a men's world

Conventional agriculture contributes to the problem of gender bias in agriculture because it:

- Creates obstacles for women to own farms due to high initial investments for machinery and external inputs such as pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically modified seeds.
- Compromises the health of workers through exposure to chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Pesticides are particularly damaging to women's reproductive health, causing increased incidences of miscarriages and birth defects.
- Weakens control over seeds and traditional knowledge through corporatization.
- Causes environmental degradation and displacement that often disproportionately affects women and children.

Although women are responsible for over half of the world's agricultural production, only 2% of women in developing countries and 20% in developed countries own land. Their work is often overlooked in agricultural and rural development initiatives.



Organic Agriculture can play an important role in increasing gender equality. In order to enhance its role, more action is needed.

Governments should mainstream gender into their rural development and agricultural programs, and support organic agriculture as a means to improve gender equity through research, training, and funding opportunities. They should encourage the participation of women in the making of these policies and programs, as well as in agricultural and rural development organizations.

Development and Donor Agencies, such as the FAO, UNEP, UNCTAD, and IFAD, should fund programs that encourage equal opportunities in organic agriculture, and increase women's access to land, credit, training and extension services.

Researchers should study Organic Agriculture and gender equality in order to enhance its positive effect and disseminate findings.

Farmers should grow organically to promote gender equality by providing healthy working environments, fair labor practices, and equal opportunities.

Consumers should support organic in order to ensure their food is grown in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.

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