

Tunisia: Country Report

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The year 2009 was a historical year for organic agriculture in Tunisia: The European Commission approved Tunisia for the Third country list. This means that the system in Tunisia complies with rules equivalent to the EU's production and inspection provisions. The year 2010 was another historical year: In May 2010, the Ministry of Agriculture launched the organic label "Bio Tunisia." The launch of this label is part of a strategy to develop organic agriculture in Tunisia as decided by the government of Tunisia in 2010.

Organic agriculture in Tunisia started in the 1980s with private initiatives. The years after 1997 were characterized by a high increase in area, number of farmers, and crop diversification. This important development is the result of policies supporting this sector underlined in a clear national strategy and action plan. Looking at the impressive growth, the Tunisian interventions on the level of research, advisory, legislation, and market development are consistently positive and convincing.

Production data and operators

Tunisia is the leading Maghreb country in terms of organic agricultural development.

Table 17: Tunisia: Land use 2009

Crops	Area (ha)
Olives	115'000
Dates	1'100
Cereals	1'216
Vegetables	210.5
Fruit trees	4'313
Aromatic and medicinal plants	408.5
Fallow land	20'975
Pasture	24'079
Organic agricultural area	167'302
Alfa	95
Forest	168'500
Wild collection total	168'595
Total	335'897

Source: General Direction of Organic Agriculture

Below are some key performance figures:

- In 2009, nearly 336'000 hectares were certified organic. This is 16 times more certified land compared to the 16'500 hectares in 2001.
- Organic vegetable production rose from 4000 metric tons in 2001 to more than 240'000 metric tons in 2009.
- The number of actors in organic business increased from 294 in 2001 to 1'911 in 2009.
- Tunisia is the country with the second largest organic agricultural area in Africa.

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- It has the third largest organic olive oil area in the world.

Key institutions/organizations

The governmental institutions are leading the organic sector in Tunisia. So far, there is no national private organic producer association. However, the Tunisian union of Agriculture and Fishing UTAP functions as the federation of organic producers, representing their interest. Further, there are more than 30 agricultural development groups (groupements de développement agricole) for organic farmers and more than ten mutual companies (sociétés mutuelles) for organic products created in 2010 in the frame of the Interprofessional Groupings for vegetables, fruits, legumes, bee-keeping, poultry and rabbit products, meat and milk.

The General Direction of Organic Agriculture

In April 2010, the General Direction of Organic Agriculture (DGAB) was created by a presidential decision. This new department of the Ministry of Agriculture has become the competent authority of the organic sector in Tunisia and has the following tasks: Elaborate strategies, concepts, and action plans for the development of organic agriculture; supervise the organic guarantee system, especially the certification bodies; implement development plans and contracts with the stakeholders of the organic chain; support investment projects and facilitate their follow up; facilitate international cooperation and represent the Ministry at the competent international organizations and institutions; host the permanent secretary of the national commission for organic agriculture.

DGAB is structured in two directions, five sub-directions, services, and local divisions in each of the 24 regional commissariats of Tunisia in order to facilitate and assure: Information, dissemination, and a promotion plan for organic production; payment of subsidies for certification, training and extension programs; market development strategies, grant the use of the organic label "Bio Tunisia"; the development of organic standards and legislation.

The National Commission for Organic Agriculture

This commission is implemented by law and in charge of: Proposing development plans and support for capacity building in the organic sector; advising the Ministry concerning the efficiency and the accreditation of certification bodies; obtaining statistical data from the organic sector.

APIA, the Promotion Agency of Agricultural Investments

APIA is promoting the organic sector through participation at international trade fairs and supporting investments for all new projects up to 30 percent of the value.

Domestic market

The domestic market for organic products has been emerging over the last couple of years. The market started with vegetables, fruits, pasta, olives, and olive products. In 2010, the government of Tunisia set the goal of improving the availability of organic products in the domestic market by reaching a domestic market share of one percent for organic products by 2014 and assuring continuous supply.

This is an ambitious target and all stakeholders are mobilized to work on it. Organic products are available in Tunisia in supermarkets, farmers' markets, hotels, and restaurants, duty free-shops, etc. The main challenges for developing the domestic market are continuous availability of organic products, diversity of products on the market, and affordable certification in order to guarantee moderate price premiums. A number of promotional activities have been implemented in order to promote the domestic market, such as domestic trade fairs, TV promotion, and pilot market projects in supermarkets, hotels, and other sales channels.

In 2010, a unique promotional campaign began in Tunisia with the launch of eight stamps dedicated to organic agriculture. The goal of this campaign is to convey the richness and diversity of organic products from Tunisia as well as to demonstrate the importance of the organic sector on the national policy level, performing development benefits for the whole country.

Trade: export, import

By far the largest part of organic production in Tunisia is destined for the European Market. The most important export products are olive oil, dates, fruits, and vegetables. The national strategy is to double the export to 120 million TDN¹ in 2014 through a better positioning of classical Tunisian products with high added value on the market.

Table 18: Production and export of main organic products

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total production in tons (incl. olives)	9'077	39'364	30'030	100'000	120'000	150'000	170'000	246'688
Total production in tons (incl. olive oil)	5'566	12'116	16'430	40'000	80'000	70'000	94'000	165'888
Total Export (tons)	1'110	1'015	3'018	2'615	5'600	8'960	13'330	12'255
Olive oil (metric tons)						6'061	9'656	8'200
Dates (metric tons)						2'300	3'025	3'055
Others (metric tons)						600	650	1'000
Export Value (Million TDN)	No figures	No figures	12	11	44	57	64	55

Source: General Direction of Organic Agriculture

Legislation

A national regulation was issued in April 5, 1999. Since then, several additional laws, decrees, and orders appeared related to organic agriculture (web information: www.ctab.nat.tn).

The complete national regulatory framework was ready by the end of the year 2005. In 2009, the European Commission approved Tunisia on the Third country list. In order to be added to this list, Tunisia had to develop and put in place an organic farming legislation and

¹ 1 Tunisian Dinar (TDN) = 0.52190 Euros or 0.67739 US Dollars, exchange rate January 7, 2011, /www.oanda.com

a fully implemented system of inspection and monitoring. The organic legislation of Tunisia is equivalent to the EU requirements and the Codex Alimentarius. The European Commission decides on the basis of an assessment conducted by EU experts in the last couple of years. Organic imports from Tunisia are now subject to simpler procedures for approval. Tunisia is also in process to be accepted on the Swiss Country List, approval is expected by July 2011.

The new “Bio Tunisia” label allows the value and benefits of all organic products from Tunisia to be communicated to consumers both nationally and abroad. The launch of this label is part of the strategy for developing organic agriculture in Tunisia, as decided by the government of Tunisia in 2010, which aims to promote organic agriculture within the agricultural system of Tunisia and give its preference due to the environmental and health benefits.

Government support / development cooperation

A comprehensive strategy and action plan for the development of organic agriculture in Tunisia was set into force by the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in 2005, a project funded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

Since then, the Tunisian government has been supporting organic agriculture with a comprehensive set of actions on the level of research and extension, production and trade, legislation and guarantee system.

In 2010, a new governmental program and strategy 2010-2014 was launched with the following objectives:

- Expanding the organic area to 500'000 hectares by 2014;
- Diversifying organic production, based on the demand and looking for products with high added value;
- Reaching an organic market share of one percent in the domestic market and assuring its continuous supply;
- Doubling organic exports by 2014 through a better positioning of classical Tunisian products with high added value on the market;
- Guaranteeing through research, advisory, and certification the quality and productivity of organic agriculture, as well as conformity to international regulations in order to create a national commission for planning and evaluation of organic research;
- Increasing financial support to producers, organized in cooperatives and professional groups from 5'000 to 10'000 Tunisian Dinar per year for the subsidies on control and certification costs;
- Promoting organic production and markets with the following activities (i) the annual fair “organic week” in Tunis, (ii) participating at international trade fairs, (iii) promotion of activities in Tunisia and abroad, (iv) promoting the development of the domestic organic market including tourism;



Figure 21: The Tunisian organic logo

- Developing regional organic advisory services, to develop more farmer field schools in the country, and to set up organic pilot farms in each region of the country;
- Developing organic research, supervised by the horticulture and organic research centre CRHAB;
- Developing regional development studies for organic agriculture (e.g., îles Kerkennah).

Research, advice, and training

The Technical Centre for Organic Agriculture

The Technical Centre of Organic Agriculture (Centre Technique de l'agriculture biologique CTAB (www.ctab.nat.tn) in Sousse was created in 1999 and has as its mission to promote and develop organic agriculture in Tunisia by undertaking various activities in the fields of applied research, training, information, technical publications, and international cooperation.

Horticulture and organic regional research centre CRRHAB

Since 2006, the horticulture and organic research centre "Centre Régional de Recherche en Horticulture et Agriculture Biologique de Chott Mariem" in Sousse (CRRHAB) is developing research and dissemination. Its specific mission in organic horticulture research is breeding plant varieties, developing organic horticulture production systems and methods, studying processing and conservation methods, socio-economic research, monitoring the national organic research laboratory, disseminating horticultural research results (advisory, trainings, technical education, national and international cooperation and partnerships).

Other training and university services

Further activities related to organic farming research, advice, and training are:

- Activities of regional advisors;
- Farmer field schools (since 2004);
- Training advisors;
- Master theses at universities (Institut National Agronomique de Tunis (INAT), Ecole Supérieure d'Agriculture Mograne (ESA Mograne), Ecole Supérieure d'Agriculture du Kef (ESA Kef), Institut Supérieur Agronomique de Chott Meriem (ISA-CM);
- Diploma for organic agriculture (since 2010; by APIA, and the Agricultural Training and Extension Agency). This diploma targets all stakeholders of the organic sector (producers, processors, traders, etc.);
- In academic training, some modules in organic agriculture are offered to students in all superior agronomic institutes of the country;
- Two Masters of Sciences (DEA) are offered in Sustainable Agriculture.

Outlook

The outlook for organic agriculture is very positive, as there is an important growth policy and support mechanisms in place.

Links/Further reading

- Website of Tunisian Agriculture: www.agriportail.tn
- ONAGRI, the National Observatory of Agriculture: www.onagri.tn
- APIA, the Promotion Agency of Agricultural Investments: www.apia.com.tn

- CTAB, the Technical Centre for Organic Agriculture: www.ctab.agrinet.tn
- UTAP, Tunisian union of Agriculture and Fishing: www.utap.org.tn
- IRESA, the Institution of Agricultural Research and Higher Education: www.iresa.agrinet.tn
- Tunisian Olive Oil Office (ONH): www.onh.com.tn
- Interprofessional Grouping for Poultry and Rabbit Products (GIPAC): www.gipaweb.com.tn
- Agricultural Training and Extension Agency (AVFA): www.avfa.agrinet.tn
- Interprofessional Grouping for Fruit (GIFruits): www.gifruit.nat.tn
- Interprofessional Grouping for Vegetables (GIL): www.gil.com.tn
- Office of Livestock and Pasture (OEP): www.oep.nat.tn