The Organic Tea and the Coffee Market — A Comparison of their Development

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Abstract

When the first teagarden in Sri Lanka was converted to organic agriculture in 1986, simultaneously in Mexico the first smallholder organisation started the production of organic coffee. Comparing the development of the two perennial crops in the market, the organic coffee production is much more developed worldwide. In 2005 18.9% of the coffee production in Mexico has been organic. In Sri Lanka the total organic area (including tea) doesn’t achieve 1%. In Darjeeling the organic production of tea is more common and started in 1988. Today 30% of the 87 Darjeeling tea gardens are converted to organic agriculture, but the total organic production in India is less than 0.5%.

The main challenges in the organic tea production to comply with the organic principles are the nutrition of tea bushes with organic fertilisers (mainly compost) and the prevention of diseases and pests, which is only possible if the ecosystem in the garden is well established. In addition the different requirements for certification depending on the export country about documentation and traceability have to be fulfilled.

From the beginning organic coffee was mainly produced by small holders and exported by cooperatives. There is a new trend in the tea production, which supports small holder organisations producing their own organic tea. In comparison with coffee tea is finally processed in the country of origin. Special ‘know how’ and machinery is hardly available for small holders. Small holders pick their tea and sell it as “fresh leaves “ to the factories. In 2000 the EU supported, together with European NGOs and a local organisation the construction of the first tea factory for small farmers in Kerala, South India. In November 2003 the factory was inaugurated and belongs now to the Sayhadri Farmers consortium, producing their own smallholder organic tea.

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