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“Global food security and food safety:
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The Myth about Organic Farming in Africa and What it Could Be

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Abstract

The current debate about organic smallholder farming in tropical and subtropical environments includes more myths than facts about organic farming. One of the dominant misconceptions is that most African smallholder farmers already practice organic farming by default. Having a closer look what makes organic farming specific teaches us that the latter is not the case. What makes organic farming is the integrative approach of high organic matter input via forage legumes, alley cropping, hedges, farmyard manure and compost, the exclusion of non-natural pesticides and herbicides, and a limited and partial exclusion of mineral fertiliser. Eco-intensification, (comprehensive) conservation agriculture, low external input, integrated agriculture, traditional agriculture, climate smart / sustainable agriculture, agroforestry / alley cropping or agro-ecology - in all agricultural methods some of the techniques of organic farming can be found, but mixed up with non organic farming techniques and inputs. Even there are quite some organic smallholder farmers certified in Africa, many questions remain open about the organic approach that are e.g.: How sustainable is the current organic smallholder farmers practice? Are there ecological, technical, economic or cultural barriers to organic production? How to convert a smallholder farm toward organic? And finally how far organic smallholder farming is able to contribute to “feed the world” and to the SDGs? The presentation will offer some answers to these questions and critically discuss the potential of organic farming in Africa.

Keywords: Organic smallholder farming