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## Organic Farming in Iran: Opportunities and Challenges of Certification, Education and Development

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### Abstract

Organic farming is a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances health of agroecosystem related to biodiversity, nutrient biocycle and soil biological and microbial activity. Organic agriculture is defined worldwide as “farming without the addition of artificial chemicals”. Organic certification focuses on the methods and materials used in agricultural production. There are Three main requirements for certifying these products: a) the methods and materials used in production must meet organic standards, b) there must be clear and ongoing documentation of these methods and materials, and c) there must be a paper trail tracing a product back to its production site, in order to verify the methods and materials used in its production. Farmland area in Iran is 11–13 million ha in which most of it can be classified as traditional farming systems which smallholder farmers are involved in subsistence agriculture. As many farmers in their small farms and gardens never use agrochemicals and use sustainable approaches for crop production during land preparation, crop nutrition, soil fertility as well as pest, disease and weed management, their agroecosystems are potentially organic or can be easily converted to organic. These farmers grow a wide range of crops (including cereals, root crops and medicinal plants), fruits (nuts, apple, pomegranate, citrus, fig and grapes) and vegetables that all have an expanding organic market worldwide. There are, however, some obstacles in certifying these products as organic. According to the EU rules, each farmer has to be inspected annually. In Iran as a developing country where many farmers have small farms, such a system is unpractical and excessively expensive. Group certification can be considered as an alternative for these farmers in which farmers’ groups that may consist of a hundred to several thousands small scale producers will be co-certified as a unit. Farmers’ education about principles and objectives of organic farming and short- and long- term benefits of organic certification also should be considered.

**Keywords:** Education, group certification, Iran, organic certification