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Organic Vegetables: Regional and Domestic Marketing Constraints and Opportunities for Small-Scale Farmers in East Africa

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Abstract

Though certified and non-certified organic farming are being practised in East Africa by small-scale farmers, most of their products are geared at the export markets of Europe and the US. The certified cash crops include cotton, coffee, tea, spices and fruits. Fresh non-certified and certified organic vegetables, latter also for export, are produced in Kenya and Uganda. As vegetables in general are important for nutrition due to their vitamin, mineral and iron content, the importance here is placed on this food crop.

The local markets for organic vegetable produce have hardly been developed, as price premiums for extra quality cannot necessarily be paid by most of the population. Lack of awareness concerning the availability of organic products, and consumers' perception of certain African vegetables of being of low value are other main factors for organic products being only a niche market in East Africa. On the supply side, poor infrastructure, lack of market information and products quality are further constraints for bringing organic vegetables adequately on the regional and domestic market.

Currently, there is a shift of organic vegetable production from developed to developing countries, as demand outdoes supply in the former and increases the demand for organic vegetables from developing countries. But the world market is very volatile. Once demand in the richer countries diminishes, it will have a strong effect on the producer side, if small-scale farmers only target export cash crops without building a domestic market. Hence, organic vegetable production in (East) Africa can only be sustainable, if the regional and domestic market can be successfully targeted as well.

Besides the increase of international demand for organic vegetable produce, there is a growing demand in Africa. In East Africa there are specialised outlets mostly in capital cities. Sales are also increasingly conducted through non-specialised outlets (supermarkets). The clientele consists of expatriates and some richer nationals. These local consumers would be willing to pay reasonable price premiums (range: 30—50 %). However, production and marketing costs (certification) are very high for organic vegetables. This has to be taken into account by assessing the regional and domestic market opportunities.

Keywords: Domestic & regional market, East Africa, organic vegetables

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