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Barriers to the progress of the organic agriculture system in Iran: A thematic hierarchical mapping

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Abstract

Despite the fact that organic agriculture in Iran has many potentials in both production and consumption sides to improve the sustainability in food sector, the trend of progress of this sector in terms of the area and share of total agricultural land has been negative and up to the point that the most recent report from FiBL & IFOAM (Willer et al, 2023) indicates that it is now zero. Currently (in 2021), 7053 ha of the entire country are under organic farming practices, compared to 11916 ha or 0.03 percent of all agricultural areas during the previous year (2020). The low development of organic products in Iran is due to a number of factors and barriers, including lack of willingness of agricultural policy makers due to food security concerns, low consumers' awareness and purchasing power, insufficient financial, educational, and informational support for organic farmers from the government, conflicts between responsible organisations, lack of certification system and producers' lack of knowledge of the product's characteristics and production processes as a result of lack of market demand and extension education. Because of sanctions and political issues, some of these challenges are unsolvable, but others can be overcome with the help of supportive strategies and policies. By performing a systematic literature review and thematic analysis of articles that have been published over the past two decades (from 2000 to 2023) in both English and Persian and in the major Iranian and international scientific databases and drawing a thematic hierarchical map in MAXQDA, the current study has examined the barriers and challenges of organic agriculture in Iran and identified the reasons for its failure. The study's findings indicate that there are three primary categories of obstacles in this regard: political, demand, and supply sides. The policy side encounters the most challenges, with 18 major barriers, followed by the supply and demand sides, with 17 and 11 barriers, respectively. It reveals how political changes in organic farming play a crucial role in making it easier for Iran's agricultural and food system to convert to organic farming.

Keywords: Organic agriculture obstacles, organic farming in Iran, thematic analysis