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## Organic farming and commercialisation of fruits and vegetables in Makueni county, Kenya

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### Abstract

Background: Kenya, like many countries in the world is grappling with the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, unsustainable food systems, and the triple burden of malnutrition. To counter these challenges, the Alliance of Bioversity and CIAT collaborates with Feedback to the Future (FttF), and the Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT) to develop an alternative healthy, inclusive, and regenerative food system. This initiative aims to bridge the gap between smallholder producers and vulnerable urban consumers by promoting regenerative agriculture among farmers through training and the sensitisation of vulnerable urban consumers on the consumption of safe, organic foods.

A diagnostic survey was conducted in November 2023, to comprehensively assess farming practices, existing markets, and market integration. From a pool of farmers trained by FttF, 172 were randomly selected for participation. Data collection employed a structured questionnaire covering socio-economic and demographic characteristics, production and marketing practices, storage, food safety measures, labour practices, and value chain governance.

The results show that 90% of respondents were aware of organic farming practices, with 96% of them practicing at the time of the survey. Notably, among those practicing, 88% and 65% engaged in fruit and vegetable farming respectively. Fruit production is relatively more commercialised, with 59.5% of farmers selling their produce compared to 36.2% of vegetable farmers. The most preferred vegetables cultivated are kale, spinach, cowpea, amaranth, and African nightshade, whereas mango, avocado, pawpaw, banana, and orange are the preferred fruit species. Only 8% of fruit farmers cite readily available markets as the reason for their production decisions, while none of the vegetable farmers considered this. Consumption preference by family members is the primary reason behind fruits and vegetables produced as indicated by 19% and 17% of respondents respectively.

While awareness and implementation of organic farming practices among fruit and vegetable farmers in Makueni is widespread, commercialisation of such products, particularly vegetables is still lagging. It is imperative to understand the functioning of existing market networks and collaborate to establish linkages that empower rural smallholders to supply safe, nutritious, fruits and vegetables to vulnerable urban consumers at affordable prices.

**Keywords:** Commercialisation, food systems, fruits, market linkages, organic farming, smallholder farmers, vegetables, vulnerable consumers