



**CELEBRATING TRADITIONAL VARIETIES, ADAPTED BREEDS AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS**

Organic agriculture requires an enormous commitment from farmers – commitment to a form of agriculture that is knowledge and labour intensive, requiring understanding of local varieties and breeds and of local environmental conditions. However, it is also economically advantageous for farmers to use these local products that are resistant to disease and extreme conditions, and thus more likely to survive, to make it to market.

Many of today’s so-called modern farmers have turned to monocropping systems that require store-bought improved seeds and breeds and massive amounts of synthetic inputs and veterinary products meant to increase yields and supply markets. Tragically, many of the varieties that represent an important gene pool for resource-poor farmers are vanishing, replaced by high-yielding, chemically dependent hybrids, and more recently genetically modified organisms, developed by large seed companies.

Valuing and improving farmers’ indigenous knowledge is a very important part of today’s organic agriculture movement. Traditional farming, fishing and forest communities not only understand and can apply good ecological theory in decision-making, they understand global environmental threats and their potential impact on their livelihoods. Farmers are not trained scientists, but they are ecologically literate. Their knowledge has been acquired through on-farm experimenting, observation of natural processes, and sharing.

Throughout the centuries, farmers have developed local breeds and species of plants and animals, nurtured them and adapted them to local conditions. They saved their own seeds for



The organic agriculture movement, with its focus on quality, nutrition, resistance to stress factors such as poor soils, harsh climates or diseases, its reliance on locally adapted plants and animals, and its goal of increasing yields, stands as an oasis in the midst of that world. **Organic farmers must commit to establish a minimum level of biodiversity to compensate for the restriction on synthetic input usage.**



Potato varieties, Lima, Peru





planting from year to year. When their crops were inundated by pests or there were harsh weather conditions, they saved the seeds of the most resistant plants so that their resistance would be manifest

in future generations. In difficult climatic conditions and in the absence of veterinary services, farmers bred local animals to survive adversity and resist diseases. **The primary production strategy of organic farmers is to maintain traditional plants and animals that may yield less in the short run but will be more resilient and better able to survive in the long run.**



Diversified organic farming systems have built-in insurance policies – if one crop fails, others will provide sufficient food for the family. Wild species also provide services within organic systems such as pollination, pest control and maintenance of soil fertility, all of which increase biodiversity and, in turn, support agricultural production.

Consumer demand for traditional and specialty products creates new market opportunities and ensures the



economic viability of traditional products. For example, the commercial revival of organic quinoa and naturally coloured cotton from Peru, of organic chocolate processed according to an ancient Mayan recipe in Mexico, of local rice varieties in Indonesia, and of native poultry in South Africa has created connections between marginalized producers and the market. **Organic agriculture's economic valorization of endangered genetic resources is key to the survival of poor rural communities in marginal areas as well as of under-utilized species and varieties.** An organic market can add value to both the local area's economy and its biodiversity.

