



F A I R   A N D   E T H I C A L   A G R I - C U L T U R E

In the midst of a globalized economy, small farmers tend to get lost. With the advent of free trade, with wealthy countries subsidizing their farmers so their exports undercut local farmers' prices, with agricultural lands in the hands of a few powerful owners and multinational corporations controlling most of the world's food supply, with the emergence of patents for biotechnology and seeds, and with the existence of policies that favour imports over domestic production, small-scale agriculture itself is facing degradation.

In their struggle against seemingly helpless poverty, small farmers out of desperation become agents of their own destruction, overexploiting natural resources because of land scarcity and lack of economic opportunities. Some abandon their land altogether and go to the cities looking for other ways to earn money, leaving behind the only way of life they understand.

developed because small farmers experimented, innovated, adapted and worked together. They shared their seeds and new ideas about how to improve production. Today's organic agriculture has the same evolution, recognizing there is no one way to address a problem, every case has a specific response, and the concerned farmer is the one who knows best. Farming methods evolve to match local environments, responding to unique biophysical and socio-economic constraints and opportunities.

Increased trade, with its exchange of goods, capital and labour, has also meant the erosion of small farmers' knowledge and collapse of rural institutions. Too often,



**The organic agriculture movement offers farmers new possibilities for helping themselves.** Although considered modern, organic agriculture actually is based on traditional agriculture knowledge and culture. Over the centuries, traditional agriculture



Farmers and extensionists in a diversified taro field, Samoa





decisions on what to grow or how to farm have been decided by outside "experts".

**Organic agriculture, with its emphasis on local resources and local ecological knowledge, brings farmers together in their communities.**

The market demand for organic products, as well as the opportunity to develop agri-tourism for city dwellers who appreciate a healthy,

diversified rural landscape, have created new income opportunities for organic farmers.

**Organic farmers' and consumers' groups work to support markets, cut out monopolies and increase farm incomes.**

Organic farmers, both in developed and developing nations, recognize the need to join with their neighbours, set up support

networks, share what they know, pool their resources, establish themselves as an organized force and, of course, provide quality products.



Organic boxes manufactured by disabled persons, Canada

Consumers increasingly demand both environmentally friendly and socially just products which means that organic certification also requires proof of fair wages, healthy working conditions and the workers' right of association.



Organic edibles in urban backyards, Victoria, Canada

With the organic movement, it is more important than ever for farmers to be connected. Organic farmers cannot operate in isolation because in order to maintain the integrity of their air, water and soil, they depend on their neighbours' farming practices.



Organic gardens for poor urban dwellers

**The deep roots of the organic agriculture movement connect farmers, consumers and their markets, improving economic conditions and creating a vibrant rural community.**



Photos: FAO / R. Chidwell and M. Scialabba

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