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UN agency explores potential benefits of organic agriculture in Eastern Europe



Healthy potato field

12 April 2010 – The United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) **said** today it is partnering with an organic farming organization to examine the potential economic, employment and environmental benefits of greater investment in sustainable agriculture in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia region.

The study by UNEP, in partnership with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), will build on the findings of a 2007 report by UNEP and the European Environment Agency which concluded that the region's low use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and its availability of workers presented good prospects for the growth and export of organic food products to Western Europe.

"Organic agriculture can trigger sharply polarized views, sometimes presented as the anti-dote to modern, intensive agriculture systems or cast as a niche, luxury market for the few and the rich," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director.

"But there is increasing evidence from Africa and elsewhere that organic agriculture can play its part in feeding the world and in meeting various sustainability goals, from water and improved soil quality to delivering higher levels of employment and conservation of biodiversity."

"Several countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia are already producing organic produce and are part of one of the world's growth industries. This

new initiative aims to assist in catalyzing more countries to take part and to increase the hectares of organic production in a region keenly looking for sustainable, 'Green Economy' choices," Mr. Steiner added.

The study was requested by the environment ministers of the UN Economic Commission for Europe and will include a sub-regional analysis and national studies in Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova. National workshops will be organized in the three countries to consult a broad range of stakeholders, and the first forum in Armenia will be held tomorrow. The project is funded by the Swedish Government.

According to IFOAM, organic agriculture worldwide is developing rapidly with 35 million hectares of agricultural land managed organically by almost 1.4 million producers in over 150 countries, and the European Union is one of the world's largest and fastest growing markets for organic products.

Yet the share of organic farmland in Ukraine and Moldova is less than one per cent, while sustainable farming is just beginning in Armenia.

Each national project in the three countries will develop a package of policy reforms, investments and capacity building measures for fostering a transition to a green economy dominated by investment in, and consumption of, sustainable goods and services from the agriculture sector.

A final report is due to be issued later this year.

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