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UN forum seeks to improve access to organic products from developing world



Organic cabbage. Photo: FAO

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A United Nations-backed conference addressing the future of access to markets for organic products began today with delegates and experts gathered to examine the impact that trade standards are having on organic farmers in the developing world.

The two-day [forum](#), held in the German city of Nuremberg, will examine issues related to organic agriculture in emerging economies as well as the possible barriers that international organic standards pose to their development.

In 2002, a partnership between the UN Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) first established a joint effort to promote access to the global organic market. According to UNCTAD, there are currently an estimated two million certified organic farmers worldwide, 80 per cent of which are in developing countries.

Over the next two days, delegates will discuss the progress made in helping developing-country farmers expand their international market reach and the practical means for overcoming technical barriers to the marketing of organic products.

Once products are certified as organic, they can typically fetch higher prices than their conventional counterparts and be traded internationally in robust markets. Already, the organic product sector accounts for sales of \$60 billion annually.

Minor differences in organic standards, however, can often hinder this trade.

According to UNCTAD, there are currently an estimated two million certified organic farmers worldwide, 80 per cent of which are in developing countries. In addition, developing countries account for 73 per cent of land certified for organic beekeeping and the collection of plant products grown in the wild.

In a nod to sustainable agriculture, organic farming relies on healthy soils and active agro-ecological management rather than the use of artificial pesticides and fertilizers, which can often have adverse effects on the environment, agricultural workers, and consumers.

The benefits include higher incomes for agricultural workers, more stable and nutritious diets for consumers, and environmental improvements such as higher soil fertility, reduced soil erosion, and better resilience to climate extremes such as drought and heavy rainfall.

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