

The Association of Organic Producer Organizations of Bolivia AOPEB, the umbrella organization supporting organic producers, plays a key role in this process. It actively accompanied the creation of a legal and normative framework, and it maintains an important presence in the institutionalization of Bolivian organic agriculture.

The Bolivian organic export market is worth around 25 million US-Dollars with more 12 thousand tons of certified products. Among them are quinoa, coffee, cacao, chestnut, amaranth and soya. The main markets are the European Union, the United States of America and Japan, but exports are on the increase to Colombia, Chile, Saudi Arabia and other new markets. Experts at AOPEB predict a market growth top the value of 450 million US-Dollars by 2016. Current production includes new products like onion, peas, broad beans, peanut and others, as well as Andean tubers, grains, fruits and other under exploited crops. The market for organic certified quinoa is growing with exports of 5'000 tons, with the perspective of reaching 30'000 tons in the next four years. The offer of processed organic products includes dehydrated llama meat, quinoa soups and ready to eat quinoa.

Background: The 'First Meeting of Organic Producers and Researchers' and the 'First Organic Producers Fair of Latin America and the Caribbean'

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Since 2003, various organizations have organized meetings of producers and researchers to exchange experiences in the Mesoamerican and the Caribbean region. The first meeting in 2003 was held in Costa Rica, followed by a meeting in Cuba (2004) and in Mexico (2005). In Mexico, at the end of the conference, participants voted to open the meeting to representatives from throughout Latin American and to launch the 'First Organic Producers Fair of Latin America'.

The 'First Meeting of Organic Producers and Researchers' and the 'First Organic Producers Fair of Latin America and the Caribbean' was held in September 2006 in Managua (Nicaragua) and hosted more than 19 Nicaraguan and Latin-American organizations, as well as international development organizations. The event took place with the collaborative support of FiBL, based in Switzerland.

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The First Meeting of Organic Producers and Researchers

The attendance was approximately 400 participants, including 50 percent from outside of Nicaragua. Participants came from Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Europe.

Focusing on the production and marketing of organic products, the meeting brought together organic producers and researchers from the region. The primary aim was to provide and promote the exchange of knowledge and to explore what solutions are available, what improvements are still needed as well as common concerns and hurdles. Eighty percent of the participants were practitioners and twenty percent were researchers. A specific objective of the meeting was to enhance the exchange between women – who represented one third of the participants.



Picture: Farmer family from Nicaragua, collecting seed

Picture by Comit  Nacional 1er Encuentro Latinoamericano y del Caribe

Throughout the meeting, a passion about organic agriculture could be felt, and important discussion points were how to nurture the soil, produce better food and provide a better life for all. Additional topics were how to promote and strengthen research and exchange of knowledge between farmers and researchers on production, processing and marketing, how to develop local organic markets and how to position organic products in the international market. In addition, the relation between organic and fair-trade products - not only for export but also for the local markets - was shown.

Certification was a hot issue during the meeting; on one hand, the certification system is needed in order to export organic products to the main markets; on the other hand, certification is seen as a big constraint for small farmers. Therefore, discussions about alternative guarantee systems were included in the meeting. The meeting consisted of a conference, round tables, panels as well as poster sessions, and covered topics such as organic crops, organic fertilization, agro ecology, organic animal production, processing organic products, organic market development, organic agriculture-climate change, biodiversity, agroecotourism, rural development through organic agriculture and women participation in the production, processing and marketing of organic products.

Five excursions were organized with the objective to show experiences of how organic agriculture promotes and enhances life quality of society, farmers' experiments and research on production, processing and marketing as well as women's' experiences with organic products.

The First Organic Producers Fair of Latin America

The First Organic Producers Fair of Latin America was launched as a platform for organic producers, not only to trade their organic and fair trade products to national, regional and export markets, but also to increase awareness of other producers, consumers and the public. Participation at the fair was possible at a very low cost for producers.

In addition, the Organic Producers Fair of Latin America may enhance and promote the exchange of experiences between producers on the commercialization of organic and fair trade products. This platform may also enable direct relationship between producers and traders and consumers to flourish, and will aid in raising awareness about diverse services and specific technologies for organic production. The idea is for farmers to have access to all the information necessary to develop and commercialize organic production.

This First Organic Producers Fair of Latin America was a big success, even though only a small number of booths were admitted. Of the exhibitors, 67 percent were producers, 18 percent were organizations offering services for organic agriculture and 15 percent were organizations involved in supporting the development of organic agriculture in Latin America. It is expected that the Organic Producer Fair of Latin America will have 200 exhibitors in 2007. In addition, for European, US and Canadian organizations the Organic Producers Fair of Latin America offers opportunities to increase their activities in the region.

The First Organic Producers-Researchers Meeting and First Organic Producers Fair of Latin America and the Caribbean also aimed at promoting the further development of organic agriculture in the host country Nicaragua. During the conference and the fair, 19 institutions from Nicaragua (from producer to governmental institution) worked together and came up with the following proposals:

- A law to promote organic agriculture should be drafted.
- An organic movement in Nicaragua should be created.
- A national organic producer researcher meeting and a national organic producers' fair should be carried out annually in Nicaragua.

At the close of the conference in Nicaragua, participants voted for the host country of the Second Organic Producers-Researchers Meeting and the Second Organic Producers Fair of Latin America and the Caribbean 2007, which will be held in Guatemala.

Further information is available from the author.

Further reading

Ochoa, Gregorio Varela; Garibay, Salvador und Weidmann, Gilles, (Eds.) (2006) 1er Encuentro latinoamericano y del caribe de productoras y productores experimentadores y de investigadores en agricultura orgánica, 26 al 29 de septiembre de 2006, Managua, Nicaragua. Memorias de resúmenes [First Latin American and Caribbean Meeting of Organic Producers and Researchers, held September 26-28, 2006 in Managua, Nicaragua. Proceedings.]. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL, Frick, Switzerland.
<http://orgprints.org/10373/>