



**FORTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS**
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 28–30 June 2016)

**AGENDA ITEM 5: UPDATE ON THE PACIFIC ORGANIC AND ETHICAL TRADE COMMUNITY (POETCom) AND
ORGANIC AGRICULTURE**

(Paper presented by the secretariat)

Summary

1. This paper is presented by the secretariat following the decision of CRGA 45 that SPC's submission to the Framework for Pacific Regionalism on development of the organic sector (*Organic Islands: Growing our future through organic and ethical trade*) should be further analysed and presented to CRGA 46 for its consideration.
2. The paper describes the background of the development of organic agriculture in SPC through its hosting of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom), and presents a brief analysis of the potential role of organic agriculture in achieving development outcomes for Pacific Island countries and territories, including the objectives of the Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2016–2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The paper also highlights the benefits and opportunities that organic agriculture offers Pacific Community members and proposes its integration into existing SPC programmes.

Recommendations

4. CRGA is invited to:
 - i. acknowledge SPC's hosting and support of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) since 2012;
 - ii. acknowledge the complementary roles of SPC and POETCom in the development of organic agriculture for improved environmental, cultural, social and economic development outcomes;
 - iii. urge the secretariat to fully integrate organic agriculture into relevant strategies, including the business plan for the Land Resources Division;
 - iv. consider options for sustainable financing of an organic agriculture programme in SPC.
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UPDATE ON POETCOM AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Purpose

5. This paper provides an analysis of the submission, *Organic Islands: Growing our future through organic and ethical trade*, which POETCom made in 2015 to the Specialist Subcommittee on Regionalism (SSCR) as part of the process for implementing the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. The subcommittee decided to refer the submission to SPC's CRGA for consideration. The paper further explores the benefits of organic agriculture and its contribution to food security and livelihoods.

Background

6. POETCom developed from the Regional Organic Task Force, a technical committee of organic practitioners convened by the Pacific Community to draft the Pacific Organic Standard in 2008. Task Force members established POETCom as the region's peak body for organic agriculture and requested SPC to host POETCom in its Land Resources Division. Since 2012, the European Union-funded project, *Increasing Agricultural Commodities Trade*, has supported the position of the POETCom Coordinator. POETCom has 40 member organisations, reaching over 5000 organic producers and processors, and is governed by an Advisory Board elected every two years from the membership.
7. POETCom's submission to the SSCR was based on the Samoa Pathway¹ Partnership, 'Organic Islands – growing our future'. The partnership's objective is to raise awareness of the potential for organic agriculture to contribute to addressing development issues for small island developing states (SIDS).
8. The public-private partnership between POETCom and SPC has resulted in positioning the Pacific Island region as a thought leader in the organic world. The Pacific Organic Standard is the first organic standard to include requirements relating to climate change and to recognise and include culture and traditional practice. The establishment of the regional 'Organic Pasifika' mark, and the regionally aligned certification system, are recognised as important innovations enable SIDS producers to access organic markets. POETCom's current work on a Toolkit for Developing Supportive Organic Policy is now being used as a model for developing an international toolkit.
9. There has been rapid growth in demand for services by the region's organic industry and Ministries of Agriculture, and recognition of the potential of organic agriculture to contribute to food security and livelihoods. Therefore, it is timely for the secretariat to meet these needs.

Potential contribution of organic agriculture to meeting regional and international development goals

10. **Food and nutritional security (SDG 2 and 3, Pacific Community Goal 3):** Organic agriculture can increase and stabilise yields, particularly from less productive or marginal land, and protect coastal fisheries from run-off and siltation.
11. **Climate change (SDG 13, Pacific Community Goal 2):** Organic farming methods offer a practical model for climate-resilient food production through establishing farming systems that are drought resistant, support conservation of water resources, mitigate strong wind and flooding, and encourage biodiversity.

¹ Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action – SAMOA Pathway.

12. **Disaster risk management (Pacific Community Goal 2):** Organic systems are more resilient to extreme weather events. For example, organic farms have been shown to better withstand cyclone damage, retaining 20–40% more topsoil and sustaining smaller economic losses than neighbouring conventional farms,² while a 2003 study found that in an extreme climate year, some organic farming systems produced significantly higher yields than conventional systems.³
13. **Livelihood opportunities and inclusive economic growth (SDG 1 and 8, Pacific Community Goal 1):** Growing consumer demand for organic products provides a viable opportunity for Pacific farmers and processors to benefit from an expanding international and regional market. Growers can also benefit from organic premiums; for example, organic copra producers in Vanuatu receive an additional premium of USD 60.00 per tonne and work is underway to certify 10,000 growers in the next 3 years.

Benefits and opportunities

14. Integrating organic agriculture into SPC's strategy for agriculture is likely to have significant benefits for development outcomes aligned with SPC's strategic objectives, including by:
 - facilitating mainstreaming of climate-resilient production systems and enhancing food security by ensuring sustainable production under climate change scenarios such as extended dry spells;
 - protecting biodiversity, which is an important factor in the stability of agro-ecosystems and a stable and diverse food supply;
 - protecting coastal resources – a critical contributor to Pacific food security – through reducing run-off and siltation;
 - strengthening sustainable management of natural resources at community level, and safeguarding the diversity of food cultures and traditional knowledge;
 - contributing to improved health outcomes through reducing the exposure of agricultural producers and consumers to hazardous agrochemicals, and increasing the variety of foods grown and available for local consumption;
 - creating livelihood opportunities by improving market access through recognised organic certification;
 - integrating smallholders into markets through innovations such as organic participatory guarantee systems;
 - supporting development of local value chains, such as 'farm to tourism industry' linkages, under the Pacific organic brand.
15. Some of the core functions required, such as managing certification and value chain/market development, are market based. However, these functions complement and add value to SPC's scientific and technical services. Sustainability of services to the organic industry could also be better assured through integration with SPC.
16. Integration of organic agriculture in SPC's programmes would add value to the scientific programme by providing direct linkages with the private sector and civil society and increasing the reach and impact of its scientific and technical advice. It could provide an avenue for innovative application of SPC's technical capacity, particularly of its Land Resources Division, and would facilitate the

² Holt-Gimenez, E. 2000. A study of 1,804 organic farms in Central America hit by Hurricane Mitch.

³ Lotter, D. W., Seidel, R. & Liebhardt W. (2003). The performance of organic and conventional cropping systems in an extreme climate year. *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture* 18 (3): 146–154.

achievement of economic development outcomes through linking scientific agricultural services with market-based requirements.

Implications for SPC

17. Priority actions for integrating organics into SPC programming would be to:

- develop an organic agriculture programme for inclusion in the Land Resources Division (LRD) business plan;
- strengthen and resource LRD's capacity in organic systems management and research;
- evaluate options for structures, established internally or externally, for managing the regional organic certification scheme;
- identify resources to support programme development and implementation.

Recommendations

18. CRGA is invited to:

- i. acknowledge SPC's hosting and support of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) since 2012;
 - ii. acknowledge the complementary roles of SPC and POETCom in the development of organic agriculture for improved environmental, cultural, social and economic development outcomes;
 - iii. urge the secretariat to fully integrate organic agriculture into relevant strategies, including the business plan for the Land Resources Division;
 - iv. consider options for sustainable financing of an organic agriculture programme in SPC.
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