

Organic Agriculture & Healthy Soils



Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE HELPS:

- Improve soil fertility by maintaining and building a fertile living soil through frequent organic matter inputs in the form of green manures, compost and farmyard manure, sustained soil cover, crop rotations and intercropping. Organic Agriculture farming systems integrate crops and animals and can thus reduce overgrazing and facilitate nutrient recycling on the farm.
- Prevent wind and water erosion of soils through a better, more stable soil structure and texture, through persistent and diversified soil cover and agro-forestry.
- Improve water infiltration and retention capacity through high levels of organic matter and permanent soil cover, such as cover crops or mulch, which substantially reduce the amount of water needed for irrigation.
- Reduce surface and ground water consumption and subsequent soil salinization through increased water retention capacity, reduction of water evaporation, and the creation of suitable microclimates in dry areas through diversified organic agro-forestry systems that can attract and retain atmospheric humidity.
- Reduce ground and surface water contamination by refraining from the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, thereby protecting the little water available in dry areas from pesticide contamination and nitrate and phosphate leaching.



Organic agriculture contributes to mitigating the greenhouse effect and global warming through its ability to sequester carbon in the soil. Many management practices used by organic agriculture (e.g. minimum tillage, returning crop residues to the soil, the use of cover crops and rotations, and the greater integration of nitrogen-fixing legumes), increase the return of carbon to the soil, raising productivity and favouring carbon storage.

Organic Agriculture stores carbon in soil and plant biomass also by encouraging agro-forestry and forbidding the clearance of primary ecosystems.

Organic Agriculture helps farmers adapt to climate change because it prevents nutrient and water loss through high organic matter content and soil covers, thus making soils more resilient to floods, droughts and land degradation processes.

SUPPORTING ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MEANS SUPPORTING HEALTHY SOILS.

- **Governments** should develop programs aimed at stopping land degradation processes and bringing degraded lands back into production, of which Organic Agriculture should be a key component.
- **Donor and development agencies**, such as the FAO, UNEP, IFAD, GEF, the World Bank and the Green Climate Fund should develop Organic Agriculture programs based on outreach, awareness and best practices, especially in regions sensitive to climate



change. Organic farming should be adequately rewarded for climate and other ecosystem services including soil protection and improvement.

- In accordance with the proposed Sustainable Development Goal 2.4 and 3.9, **UN bodies** should encourage governments to adopt sustainable land management techniques including those used in Organic Agriculture to combat and reverse land degradation.
- **Researcher institutes and networks** should collect and process data on soil organic carbon especially for developing countries, including on farm system comparisons from Africa and Latin America, and on soil organic carbon stocks, which is crucial for determining carbon sequestration rates for farming practices.

IFOAM IS THE INTERNATIONAL UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS WORLDWIDE.

IFOAM'S MISSION IS LEADING, UNITING AND ASSISTING THE ORGANIC MOVEMENT IN ITS FULL DIVERSITY. OUR GOAL IS THE WORLDWIDE ADOPTION OF ECOLOGICALLY, SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY SOUND SYSTEMS THAT ARE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE.