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*in*

Al Bitar L. (ed.).

Report on organic agriculture in the Mediterranean area: Mediterranean Organic Agriculture Network

**Bari : CIHEAM**

**Options Méditerranéennes : Série B. Etudes et Recherches; n. 50**

**2004**

pages 53-57

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=5002153>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Calleja E. **Malta**. In : Al Bitar L. (ed.). *Report on organic agriculture in the Mediterranean area: Mediterranean Organic Agriculture Network*. Bari : CIHEAM, 2004. p. 53-57 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série B. Etudes et Recherches; n. 50)



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# MALTA

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## INTRODUCTION

Up until October 2003, the Organic Farming sector in Malta consisted of a group of farmers that claimed to be using methods of organic production. No certification was available. National legislation was also absent, and few people knew what Organic Farming meant. There was no institutional framework that enabled the backing of the sector. Organic farmers were pretty much on their own, and most did not know the details and methods of production laid down in the EC Reg 2092/91. Nevertheless, a few shops did sell organic products, which were mostly of foreign origin. Most products were found in supermarkets. However, even the supermarkets themselves did not understand what organic products were, and mostly marketed them in the health sections as diet products.

In October 2003, an Organic Farming Unit was set up within the Agricultural Services and Rural Development Division upon recommendations of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari. Being a governmental entity, the unit was to become the National Competent Authority for Malta upon entry into the EU. It was charged with organizing and promoting the sector, and setting up the infrastructure which would make Organic Farming in the Maltese Islands feasible.

Since then, the Organic Farming Unit has written and published the National Legislation for Organic Farming which also transposed the EU Reg 2092/91 upon Malta's entry into the EU. The unit has also been working on promoting Organic Farming, in particular with farmers and producers. Several farmers who produce vegetables according to the organic principles were contacted and a register was drawn up with details on their methods of production, land surface and date of conversion. The Unit also promoted Organic Farming through the organization of a seminar aimed at importers, and through several radio interviews, TV news clips, newspaper articles and press releases in both traditional and on-line newspapers. An exhibition of organic products was also organized at the annual horticultural Fair at San Anton, Attard, in May, and a competition of organic products organized for the first time to give the farmers a playground where they could exhibit their products.

## REGULATORY ASPECTS

A new legal notice (LN237/2004), also known as the Organic Farming Regulations, was published on 30 April 2004 in order to transpose the EU Regulation on Organic Farming (2092/91). Maltese legislation declares the Agricultural Services and Rural Development Division to be the competent authority on Organic Farming, within the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment. The Legal Notice will also have an annex which lists the Inspection Bodies which can operate in Malta.

The National Statistics Office house statistics of various sectors including the agricultural sector; however, no statistics have as yet been collected for organic products since there is no differentiation. This will become available upon certification, since the farmers will be required to retain records of products they used, produced, and sold.

### Inspection and Certification

Certification is currently being undertaken by the Malta Standards Authority (MSA), which is a para-statal organization. However, they are not yet operative. They have just applied with the Competent Authority to be recognised as a local certification body.

The MSA will operate on a commercial fare basis to keep costs as low as possible. Their inspectors will most probably be trained abroad where such training would possibly be funded through a European Union project.

## **Policies encouraging the development of the sector**

The government is backing the sector both through financial aid and through high level consultations with farmers and NGOs concerning Organic Farming. Farmers are given € 600 per Ha of land certified as being cultivated according to organic methods of production. These funds are part of the aid given to farmers through the Rural Development Plan. However, subsidy is given only for crop husbandry. It is not available for animal husbandry and beekeeping.

The Government also set up an Organic Farming Committee whose aim is the setting up of a strategy for Organic Farming in the Maltese Islands. The committee is made up of various NGOs involved in Organic Farming in Malta, the Consumer Affairs Division which represents the consumers' rights, the Malta Standards Authority which represents the body responsible for certification of organic products, and the Agricultural Services and Rural Development Division which will act as the authority responsible for regulating the EU legislation on Organic Farming. The committee is chaired by the Hon. Dr Frans Agius, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture and Fisheries.

After several meetings, the Committee presented a report with various comments on ways of pushing the sector forward, and highlighted deficiencies in the sector which need to be attended to. These comments now serve as the basis for the setting up of a Strategy for the Promotion of Organic Farming in Malta.

Various NGOs are also working to develop Organic Farming in Malta. One in particular, the Maltese Organic Agriculture Movement (MOAM), is trying to set up a producers' organization that will be dedicated to Organic Farming. This will make them eligible to EU funds which would help them in marketing and promoting their products.

## **Quality and Typical products**

Legislation also exists for local products, through the Geographical Indications and Designations Regulations, 2004 (Legal Notice 182/2004). These regulations deal with designations of origin and products of geographical indication. They also discuss the rules relating to marketing of these products, as well as inspection. These again are being certified and controlled by the Malta Standards Authority.

## **STRUCTURAL ASPECTS**

Up to May 2004, there were 20 farms registered with the Organic Farming Unit using organic methods of production. 15 of them are located in Malta, four in Gozo and one in Comino. 19 of these farms are producing crops and crop derived products, while one is for beekeeping and honey production. No animal production units were yet registered until the end of May, 2004.

The total land surface has increased from the 3.2 Ha recorded in October 2003 (Petruzzella & Verrastro, 2003) to 14.45 Ha of land, not yet certified since certification is still absent in Malta. More farmers are interested in this sector, but they are waiting to evaluate the success or failure of the existing organic farmers.

Out of the 19 existing crop production farms, nine were mixed, having both organic and conventional productions. This meant that a considerable number of farmers are afraid to completely rely on organic production, just in case something "went wrong". These farmers usually choose easier crops for organic production.

The total surface area of these farms is around 25 ha, 14 ha of which were being used for organic production, the remaining 11 ha were used for conventional methods of agriculture. Once certification of organic products gets going, and price differentiation becomes a reality, the successful marketing of organic products might convince these farmers to switch to organic production on the rest of their land. This will lead to an increase in the surface area of land under organic production, while the number of farms remains the same.

The most common agricultural practice within organic farms is vegetable production. This is followed by fallow land and grassland, however, more of this will be converted to vegetable production now that certification is in motion. The realization of a differentiation in price through certification has given existing farmers an increased impetus in producing agricultural products which will see an

increase in sales. Their main drawback, up until today, has been that their products were not recognized as organic since certification didn't exist, and this meant that they would get the same price for their products as for conventionally grown fruits and vegetables.

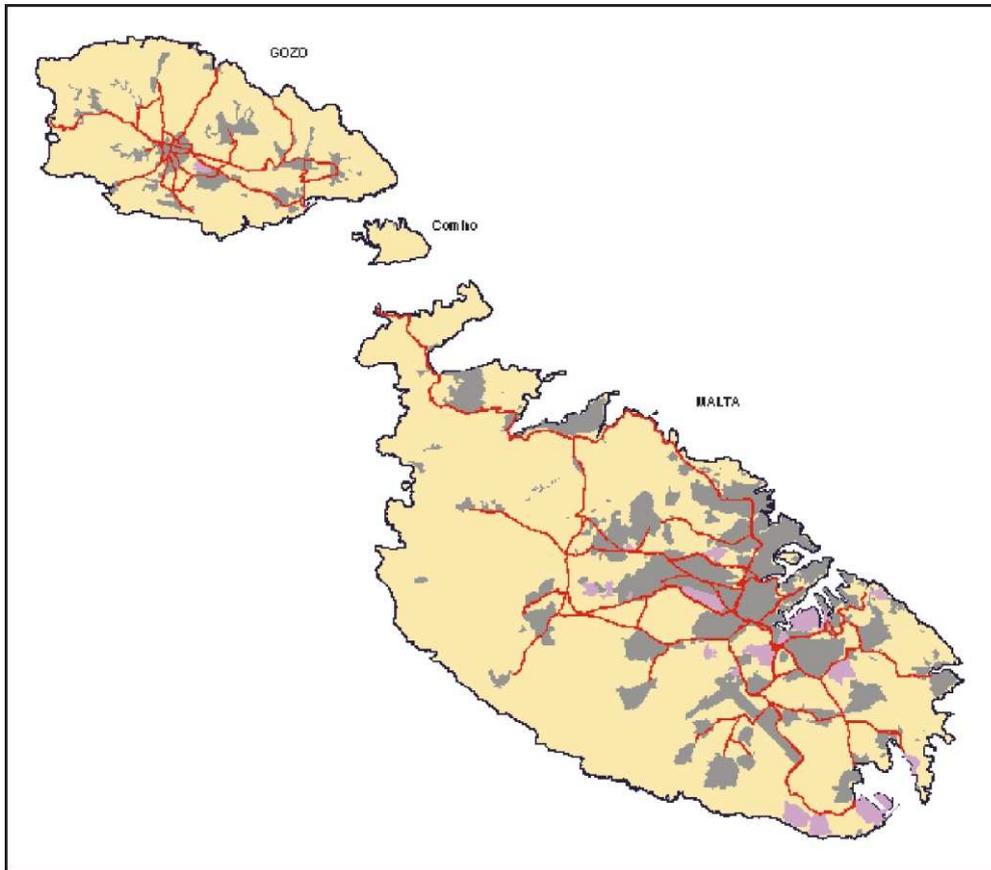


Figure 1. Map of Malta

Five out of these nineteen farmers have converted to organic methods of production within the last 3 months, since the government information campaign got into full swing. More farmers are interested, but they are waiting to see how certification will work, and to see if the other farmers are successful.

The majority of organic farms are located in the Centre of the Island, while the largest farms are found in the north of Malta. The south is still slow to progress in this field, with only one farm existing in the whole of the south eastern part of the island.

As yet there are no processing units except for an olive oil processor. The other processed products that exist are processed at the homes of the individual farmers. Moreover, only four farms are known to collect wild products such as wild fruit and capers.

Apiculture is an interesting sector for Organic Farming in Malta; however, the rules of production laid down in the European regulation make it difficult for production under our climatic conditions, particularly during the winter season. The EU regulation disallows feeding with sugars during winter; bees have to be fed with their own honey. Since few flowers are available in the winter season, bees do not find enough nectar and pollen to forage on, and end up spending considerable periods of time relying on artificial feeding. Nevertheless, one large production unit exists in Comino with around 200 boxes. Comino is an ideal site for bee keeping since the majority of the island is covered with garrigue, and because all of Comino is pesticide-free.

All the farms in the Maltese Islands are owned and run by Maltese farmers, most being part-timers. Three of them are also run by NGOs.

Table 1. Basic statistics on the number of organic farmers in Malta, and the surface area used for organic agriculture for each region of Malta

|  |                                     |              |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Number of Organic Farms  | 20                                  |              |
| Converted  | 0                                   |              |
| In conversion to organic   | 20                                  |              |
| Mixed (organic and conventional)   | 9                                   |              |
| Overall surface within organic farms                                       | 25.27 Ha (278 Tumoli)               |              |
| In conversion to organic   | 14.45 Ha (159 Tumoli)               |              |
| Conventional   | 10.8 Ha (119 Tumoli)                |              |
| Productions in conversion to organic                                       | Vegetables ~ 35%                    |              |
| Percentages depict the amount of land being used for the respective crops. | Fallow and grassland ~ 16%          |              |
|  | Viticulture ~ 13%                   |              |
|  | Citrus trees ~ 12%                  |              |
|  | Oliviculture ~ 11%                  |              |
|  | Stone fruit ~ 7%                    |              |
|  | Other fruit ~ 6%                    |              |
|  | Apiculture                          |              |
| Location of Farms  |                                     |              |
| Malta South (Siggiewi, Żebbug, southwards)                                 | 3                                   |              |
| Malta Centre (Till Mgarr)  | 7                                   |              |
| Malta North (St Paul's Bay upward)   | 5                                   |              |
| Gozo   | 4                                   |              |
| Comino (apiculture ~ 200 boxes)  | 1                                   |              |
| Surface area of Farms / tumoli   | in conversion                       | conventional |
| Malta South (Siggiewi, Żebbug, southwards)                                 | 18                                  | 20           |
| Malta Centre (Till Mgarr)  | 52                                  | 37           |
| Malta North (St Paul's Bay upward)   | 59                                  | 38           |
| Gozo   | 28                                  | 24           |
| Comino   | Not known                           |              |
| Processing units   | none                                |              |
| Collection of wild products  | 4 farms                             |              |
| Main types of processed products   | ?ulep (carob syrup)                 |              |
|  | Capers                              |              |
|  | Honey                               |              |
|  | Sun-dried tomatoes - Tadam imqaddad |              |
|  | Preserved olives                    |              |
|  | Olive oil                           |              |
| Incidence of farms owned or run by foreign companies                       | None                                |              |

## MARKET ASPECTS

About half of the organic producers sell their products at the vegetable market in Pitkalija. The other half sell them door to door or directly to a store or shop. This is done to avoid selling through a third person and losing profits. However once certification is applied they will be able to sell their products at a better price, as long as they have a certificate from a recognized inspection body. There is still no price differentiation as yet, since certification is not yet fully operational.

Supermarkets currently carry few organic products, one of which is a local processed product. No fresh products are available except at one supermarket, which imports them from abroad. Some of the larger supermarkets are interested in selling organic products, however they do not have a regular supply of vegetables. The problem is that farmers prefer to sell their products individually rather than grouping together and supplying one location. There are plans to set up a Producers' Organization, but things are still in the initial stages.

Several hotels are also interested in the idea of marketing some organic products and dishes; however, since not enough produce is available, few are willing to embark on selling a dish of organic origin. However they are waiting for organic products to become more available on the market.

Exportation of local organic products is as yet non-existent. The closest we've come to this is through selling organic olive oil at the duty free section at the Malta International Airport. Interest was shown by a German company to export organic products, however negotiations are still in the early stages.

Data on domestic consumption is still not available, both for local and imported organic products. Notwithstanding the fact that imported organic products are available at supermarkets, statistics for that particular sector are not being kept. The main countries of import are Italy, the UK and Germany. Organic products from other European countries such as Greece, Spain, Ireland, Netherlands and Sweden can also be found.

## **RESEARCH AND TRAINING**

Some Theses and Dissertations on Organic Farming have been done in the past few years as part of fulfilment of diplomas and degrees pertaining consecutively to the Institute of Agriculture and the Department of Geography. Other research has been done through the Agricultural Research and Development Centre belonging to the Government. The latter has done several experiments and trials on organic products, few of which have been published.

Training is also being organized by MOAM through the AgriBusiness Institute as part of a Leonardo project. Courses will be given to farmers and inspectors on various aspects of Organic Farming. Government staff are also being trained through overseas courses and seminars funded by the EU and other International organizations such as CIHEAM.

The Genista Foundation is also collecting information on methods of production and cultivation used in Malta as part of an EU funded project. The other participating countries are doing the same and this information will eventually be compiled into a training manual.

The Organic Farming Unit has also organized a seminar aimed at disseminating information to importers of organic products. A web-site has also been set up which provides valuable information on Organic Farming and various aspects of production. A seminar will also be held for farmers with the aim of teaching them the methods of production allowed by the EU Regulation (2092/91).

## **SOURCES AND REFERENCES**

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