

The Organic Farming Sector of the United Arab Emirates

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Organic farming in the United Arab Emirates

The organic farming sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has developed rapidly in terms of producers, area, number of crops grown, market, and regulation. The latest figures (2012) show that UAE has 34 organic farms with a total certified area of 3'905 hectares (page 186).

Table 43: United Arab Emirates: Organic farming statistics

Certified farms	34
Total area (ha)	3905
Number of certified crops	More than 62 varieties
Certified livestock farms	3
Certified organic food processing units	1
Organic fertilisers production plants	1
Number of the national certifying bodies	1

Moreover, organic livestock farming is developing, and three livestock farms are certified as organic farms. In addition, there is one organic food processing plant.



Organic farm in the United Arab Emirates

More than 62 crop varieties are grown and sold as organic. Vegetables grown include beans, beetroot, broccoli, cabbage, chillies, cucumbers, eggplant, fennel, carrots, green peas, a number of lettuce varieties, marrows, onion, okra, potatoes, strawberries, sweet

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corn, and tomatoes. Another important issue to be mentioned is that the UAE is considered one of the main producers of organic palm dates. It is estimated that the average volume of organic dates produced yearly is about 1'000 tons.

The UAE organic food market

The organic food market of the United Arab Emirates is booming, and supply cannot meet demand. This creates opportunities for the organic food industry. The growing demand for organic food is due to a number of reasons: one of them being that the Ministry of Environment and Water has launched awareness programs addressing organic farming, health issues, environmental issues, and affordability. Moreover, the ministry launched a number of organic farmers' markets to not only help farmers sell their products but also to increase awareness among consumers about organic food. In these markets, consumers meet organic farmers and buy locally grown organic products. This helps build the markets and establish social networks: an important factor for local organic market development.

To meet the growing demand, the United Arab Emirates imports many products, which include a number of vegetables, fruit-like oranges, bananas, apples, kiwis, dairy products, and other processed products. Currently, no statistics are available about the organic food market, but a study conducted by the Ministry of Environment and Water (2013) showed that one retail store alone sold 300 tons of locally produced organic vegetables in four months.



Organic farmers' market: Locally produced organic vegetables

Regulation and standards

The UAE has produced regulations and standards equivalent to those used globally, to ensure that organic products (imported or produced locally) meet the international organic farming standards. It can be said that the UAE has fully implemented its organic farming regulations. In this regard, the MOEW is responsible for developing the regulation and standards while the Emirates Authority for Standardization & Metrology (ESMA) is responsible for inspection and certification. It is also important to mention that the UAE regulations aim to not hamper the development of the UAE organic farming sector but to regulate it.

The organic farming regulation and standards of the United Arab Emirates include:

- The UAE organic farming law / The Federal Law No (5) of the year 2009 on organic inputs and products. The law regulates the general principles of organic farming (definitions, role of the MOEW, inputs, products).
- The Ministerial Decision No. 84 of the year 2012 on the Executive By-Law of the Federal Law No. 5 of the year 2009 concerning organic inputs and products. This by-law identifies the practical principles that operators/operations shall take to convert to organic farming.
- Emirates Organic Foods Certification Scheme: Resolution Number (6) / Year 2012, Date 27/02/2012 on the Emirates Organic Foods Certification Scheme by Emirates Authority for Standardization & Metrology (ESMA). According to this resolution, ESMA is the national certifying body, and its certification scheme covers the following six categories:
 - Fresh/chilled/frozen fruits and vegetables
 - Canned food products
 - Fresh and canned juices
 - Meats and fish
 - Eggs
 - Milk, dairy products, and cheese.
 - Honey
- The Ministerial Decision No. 103 of the year 2012 on the UAE 'organic logo'. The logo is a distinctive mark for organic inputs and products. It was registered at the Ministry of Economy under number (82214) on 15/2/2012, category number 42. The organic logo shall be used according to the 'Federal Law No. 5 of the year 2009 and its executive by-law' on organic inputs and products.



The UAE organic farming logo

Capacity building and support programmes

The Ministry of Environment and Water runs an integrated training program on the basics of organic farming and organic farming techniques for farmers and agricultural extension workers. The programme includes different training topics: laws and regulations, soil fertility management, pest management, marketing, livestock production, and many other related topics. The Ministry of Environment and Water capacity building programmes also include training on vegetable packaging and labelling, public awareness, opening of farmers' organic markets, and helping farmers to participate in food exhibition events.