

Organic Agriculture Act Towards a Greener Philippines¹

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Introduction

Organic agriculture started long before the promulgation of a state policy relating to it. But it was in 2005 that was considered a milestone year for the government in stimulating organic agriculture through Executive Order (EO) 481 calling for the “Promotion and Development of Organic Agriculture in the Philippines”. It aims to promote and develop organic agriculture as a farming scheme that would enhance global competitiveness, forge effective networking and collaboration among stakeholders, and guarantee food and environmental safety. Furthermore, it covers the integrity of organic products through the approved organic certification procedures and organic production, handling and processing standards.

Five years later, the Presidential Directive was expanded to intensify the promotion and development of organic agriculture in the country through Republic Act (RA) 10068. The law, popularly known as the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010, was approved and signed on April 6, 2010. This is to ensure prioritization and appropriation of funds to support programs, projects and activities for its operation and sustainability.

Organic agriculture, as defined in the Act, includes all agricultural systems that promote the ecologically sound, socially acceptable, economically viable and technically feasible production of food and fibers. It covers soil fertility management, varietal breeding and selection under chemical-free conditions, and the use of biotechnology and other cultural practices that are consistent with the principles and policies of RA 10068. It excludes the use of modified organisms or GMOs.

Organic Agriculture Act of 2010

The salient provisions of the Organic Agriculture Act include, but not limited to: (1) the establishment of National Organic Agricultural Program; (2) protection of the environment; (3) accreditation, registration, labeling and certification of organic products; and (4) provisions of incentives to adoptors of organic agriculture.

¹ A short policy paper submitted to the Food and Fertilizer Technology Center (FFTC) for the project titled “Asia-Pacific Information Platform in Agricultural Policy”. Short policy papers, as corollary outputs of the project, describe pertinent Philippine laws and regulations on agriculture, fisheries and natural resources.

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National Organic Agricultural Program. Under Section 5 of RA 10068 is the establishment of the National Organic Agricultural Program which calls for the formulation of strategic plans to promote, commercialize and cultivate organic farming methods in the country. Continuing research, upgrading relevant technologies, capacity building of farmers and educating consumers are seen as essential factors in the institutionalization of a comprehensive organic agricultural program. A multi-sectoral Organic Agriculture Research, Development and Extension (RDE) Network is further mandated composed of representatives from research and educational institutions, LGUs, NGOs and recognized association of organic fertilizer manufacturers and distributors, agricultural engineers, agriculturists, soil technologists and farmers group and/or associations as well as establishment of organic RDE Centers throughout the country.

The National Organic Agriculture Board (NOAB), a policy making body headed by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and composed of executive agencies, NGOs, private sector and academic institutions, is created to formulate policies, plans, programs and projects and oversee the successful implementation of the National Organic Agricultural Program. Furthermore, NOAB is mandated to: (1) identify sources of financing to expand organic agriculture; (2) undertake measures for international recognition of locally certified organic products; (3) collaborate with other government agencies, private sectors, POs, NGOs and academe to implement programs and projects including capability-building initiatives; and (4) submit annual and other periodic reports to the President.

Organic Agriculture and Protection of the Environment. Aside from dramatically reducing external inputs by refraining from the use of chemicals, practice of organic agriculture can help alleviate the problems of industrial waste and community garbage through proper methods of sorting, collecting and composting that would provide the needed raw materials for the production of organic fertilizers and other farm inputs. NOAB is directed to provide the direction and guidelines needed to implement this.

Accreditation, Registration, Labeling and Certification. The DA's Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards (BAFPS) is authorized to grant official accreditation to an organic certifying body or entity and to formulate the necessary rules and procedures in the accreditation.

All organic food and input establishments are required to register with BAFPS with the following information: (1) name, address and emergency contact information; (2) primary purpose and business activity; (3) list of organic food or input produced and corresponding brand names; (4) name, address and emergency contact information of certifying body for organic food establishment; (5) assurance that the registrant will notify BAFPS of any change in the products, function or legal status of the domestic food establishment not later than 30 days after such change; and (6) list of materials in the production of each particular input for organic input producers.

As for labels, they should contain the name, logo or seal of the certifying body and the accreditation number issued by BAFPS. Only third party certification is allowed to be labeled as organically produced. When selling, organic products require a separate display area to avoid mixing it with non-organic products. In addition, at least one trading post or small settlement for trading for organic inputs is

required to be installed by local chief executives in their area of jurisdiction. Trading post is a center for buying and selling local goods and services³

Incentives to Adoptors of Organic Agriculture. The law provides for incentives to farmers whose farms have been duly certified as compliant to the Philippine National Standards (PNS). Moreover, the DA is given the authority to give cash reward in recognition of the best organic farm in the country. Executive agencies of the government like Agriculture, Agrarian Reform, Science and Technology, Interior and Local Government, Trade and Industry, Education, Finance and the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and other government lending and non-lending institutions are mandated to assist organic input producers and farmers in the provision of adequate financial, technical, marketing and other services and resources. Among them is a seven-year income tax holiday to purely organic agriculture farmer/producer starting from the date of registration. Additionally, it allows subsidies for certification fees and duty-free importation of agricultural equipment, machinery and implements as defined under RA 8435 or the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA).

Conclusion

The Philippines is looking at a competitive organic agriculture industry with the government's deeper commitment to organic farming support especially in terms of organic certification and research, development and extension. With about 80% of the poor populace in rural areas dependent on subsistence agriculture, the proper implementation of the Organic Agriculture Act could help answer affordability issues in food production as well as issues of food security, environmental concerns and climate mitigation.

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³ Definition adopted from Merriam Webster.