

Training in Organic Agriculture

Lebi A. Perez

Training Department-OCIA International, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Lebi A. Perez, Training Department-OCIA International, USA.

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Training is a diverse and important activity aimed to provide direction, guidance and continuous improvement, to those involved in organic certified agriculture. Over time, an activity that seemed forbidden, is gaining momentum every day due to the complexity of the different certification systems established in each of the countries where the demand for organic products is important in the formal trade with organic products of different origin.

In our effort to provide accurate guidance, we have been developing various strategies to instruct and train operators and inspectors about certification programs from different countries. Training has a special meaning in operators where there is not background or experience on certification, which are many and every day become more complex due to the extent that countries adopt their own policies and requirements with notable differences from among programs. Interesting also, is the area of input and materials use. The current advance of commercial manufacturers brings whole new challenges for training and orientation of farmers, auditors and certifiers. This is an area where you find many differences of criteria to approve and allow inputs and materials to be used in organic agriculture. This difference is also expressed in the variances that occur in each country standards. Another factor that influences the ability to learn and guide about a particular material or input is the lack of knowledge coming from research. It seems that we learn as we move on or as we use the material. Manufacturers sometimes focus more on the marketing of certain input or material than showing the real benefit or essence of its components. I believe that all the knowledge gained throughout these years by farmers it is an important tool and reference when training and education is planned. The practical application of their knowledge has allowed the organic community to remain strong and more sustainable. It is vital to use this practical knowledge during training and education in organic agriculture.

Generally, to fill out the gaps in knowledge, several strategies are used to pursue training, activities such as field days, workshops, in person classes, teleconferencing, use of the cyber network, etc. To develop these strategies, a variety of resources are required, including human support, transportation, teaching resources, building facilities, office supplies and financial resources, which help greatly to achieve the objectives planned.

After more than 25 years dedicated to the education of youth, adults, farmers, technicians and professionals, I still maintain that to make progress and be successful in the development of organic agriculture a symbiosis of education, training and research must be considered and implemented to such an extent that becomes essential for further development. I believe that training and education begins with a basic induction to the interested party and slowly making progress to gain the necessary knowledge.

Still there are a great number of operators and technicians seeking training in various areas of organic agriculture, all with high interest in learning. OCIA International as an organization that supports organic farming makes immeasurable efforts to publicize all those general aspects on organic production and certification. At the chapter level, the producers strive to gain an understanding of the basic needs of certification, supported with materials developed by themselves and the material obtained from different existing resources available for education and training.

Also, we welcome the initiative of countries with higher consumption of organic products making great efforts to train and provide guidance to producers, technicians, certification bodies, inspectors and general public. These initiatives are beginning to take off, allowing

a harmonious orientation which includes technical information and certification tools as well. This type of information somehow meets the public requirements and is in token with existing regulation aspects needs.

After all, part of the success of the certified organic agriculture depends heavily on continuous improvement and the degree of knowledge with stakeholders to implement and maintain their organic production systems.

Training in certified organic agriculture, remains a challenge due to many factors, which give rise to further research and development strategies in accordance with the needs of producers and operators interested in this area of agriculture.

For some organic production projects, success and sustainability levels depend largely on their ability to get education and training in various areas. This is the case of certification of community grower groups, where OCIA has a vast and rich experience. This is mainly due to the type of requirements which demand additional skills and training for staff responsible to carry out internal control and management of the organic system to be implemented. With great pleasure, we can say that the group certification has been very forward and part of this is due to education and training obtained by the group leaders and the generation of relief, which have been taking the reins of crop production and to maintain organic certification of their groups. Now days, it is much easier to conduct trainings to community grower groups due to the more education you find in leaders and administrators involved in organics. I believe the groups have become more proactive towards organic and sustainable agriculture, probably as a result on their internal economic conditions and the increasing demand of organic commodities over the years. There is also more support from government and private entities than in the past.

On this side, we can say that the training activities provided over the years has allowed us to understand better and learn from the groups about their culture, ability to organize, idiosyncrasy, real needs and especially their character as human beings seeking an additional route to improve their wellbeing through organic production. From the social point of view, the groups are making progress through the various options on the certification market. To all, my sincere gratitude for allowing me on OCIA behalf know their training needs that I gladly have tried to accomplish since I started this path in organic agriculture. Thank you all for your support and for the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge through training.

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