

**FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE (ERC)****Thirty-first Session****Voronezh, Russian Federation, 16-18 May 2018****Promoting quality: organic agriculture and geographical indications in the national food systems****Side Event 2****Wednesday, 16 May 2018****17.30 – 19.00 hours****DIAMOND meeting room (main plenary)****Background/objective**

The principles of sustainable food and agriculture are embedded in the FAO Strategic Objectives and include approaches such as climate-smart agriculture (CSA), Agroecology, Blue Growth, and Save and Grow. In the region of Europe and Central Asia, countries are adopting approaches and principles of sustainable agriculture, such as conservation agriculture, good agricultural practices, integrated pest management and organic production. The agriculture and rural development policies in many countries are already incorporating various “greening” elements. For example, farmers receiving area-based payments for applying practices that benefit the environment and helping to adapt to climate change. Countries are also supporting certification systems that give consumers trust in the quality of the products and in the sustainable practices applied. Today, consumers are becoming more and more interested in tasty, healthy and nutritious diets, resource efficiency, biodiversity conservation, production on demand, just-in-time deliveries, shorter shelf life, nutritional information, lower food losses and waste, and animal welfare.

In response to more sustainable and responsible consumer choices, it is necessary to refocus policy to adjust production systems, processing requirements and marketing practices. A comprehensive, integrated approach is required; among other items, it includes a) the introduction of international standards, mainly in food safety; b) ensuring availability of and access to nutritious food for the population; c) marketing standards; d) respect for geographic designations and traditions; e) environmentally friendly agriculture principles, eco-labelling, and organic production methods; f) new knowledge with guidance on practices and types of green, climate-smart investments; and g) guarantees provided to producers and consumers and related certifications. By incorporating ideas on sustainable and responsible production and consumption into their agricultural and other sectorial policies, countries can become more efficient by using fewer resources, including water and energy. They can also reduce food losses and waste and pollution, improve farm and non-farm incomes, contribute to lower carbon footprints, and improve the well-being of farmers, rural communities and the urban population.

Promoting high-value quality products through geographical indications and organic or eco-product certifications supports the sustainable development of rural areas. At the same time, it enables the producers of the short value chains to claim a price premium. Therefore, it contributes to on-farm income growth and job creation in rural areas. It also helps reduce rural poverty, unemployment and the depopulation of rural areas. Furthermore, it improves the long-term competitiveness of small-scale agriculture by focusing on the high-quality products that are in demand from the growing middle class and the younger generation. Sustainability is increasingly identified by consumers as a positive

characteristic of products, and it has every chance of becoming a dimension of local definitions of products, for example, when a product comes from an environmentally valuable geographic area or when a particular form of farm management appears as an essential element in the preservation of the landscape and of biodiversity. Overall, the system of protection and promotion of origin-linked, regional, organic and traditional products, of cultural heritage coupled with the development of agrotourism, substantively contributes to the attractiveness of rural areas and to their sustainable development.

While the benefits of the policy instruments for sustainable agricultural development are known, more experience in the application of these policies – along with the raising of awareness among stakeholders is required in the Europe and Central Asia region. In order to improve the knowledge and experience of stakeholders, it would be very beneficial to exchange the experience and positive results gained so far and to discuss the way forward for a balanced and sustainable agricultural sector that contributes to rural development. With the support of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU), some progress in this field has been observed.

The first objective of this side event is to acknowledge the work of the countries in the Europe and Central Asia region towards responsible and sustainable consumption and production. By supporting organic production and geographical indications, countries contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal priorities and their national targets, especially those set under SDG 2 and SDG 12. The second objective of this side event is to map areas of joint cooperation at regional level within FAO REU Regional Initiatives 1, 2 and 3, based on the notion of “leaving no one behind.”

Organized in round-table format, this side event will provide member states with a forum to learn about the progress made by countries in the implementation of policies to support geographical indications and organic production. The member states in which producers’ groups are interested in enhancing food exports to the European Union market will gain access to the examples of benchmarking experiences in the implementation of geographical indication and organic policies. Lessons learned in rural development and the promotion of geographical indications and organic food exports will be shared. The event will highlight the importance of public support in research and policy development through dialogue with direct and indirect stakeholders (local communities, institutions, academia, producer associations, processors, retailers and NGOs). The facilitated discussion will consult on the technical areas for joint regional cooperation among member states and FAO REU Regional Initiatives 1, 2 and 3.

#### **Key messages/expected outcomes**

- By supporting organic production and geographical indications (GIs), countries contribute to the achievement of national Sustainable Development Goal national targets, in particular SDG 2 and SDG 12.
- GIs and organic products contribute to rural development, tourism development (agro- and agro-ecological tourism) and job creation.
- Comprehensive legal systems and internal codes of practices are critical to guaranteeing higher quality for consumers.
- Consumers receive quality assurance, wellness value and environmental benefits value.
- Farmers can build stronger relations with consumers by linking GIs with “green” potential and organic products, based on sustainable production and local product identity, and by incorporating elements of sustainability in product specifications.
- Comprehensive legal systems and internal codes of practices are critical to guaranteeing a fair income distribution to farmers and actors in the short value chain.
- Public support is essential to progress. The sustainability of GIs and organic producers is built on wider synergies created among local administrations, farmers, producers, tourist operators, rural development associations and environmental NGOs.

**Language:** The Side Event will be interpreted in English and Russian language.