

A CHINA ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROJECT RESEARCH BRIEF

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Going Organic: Certification and Projects Promoting Safer Agriculture and Organics in China

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Organic food is a promising, but still nascent market in China. Central to the expansion of this market is not simply consumer demand (See “The Spread of Organic Food in China” Research Brief), but the creation of certification institutions and the growth in projects run by Chinese governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies to strengthen the capacity of organic farmers and certifiers in China.

PUSH FOR A CERTIFICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Initially, the few organic food producers in China depended on international certification agencies, but in 1994 the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) set up the Organic Food Development Center as the country's first organic regulator and certification entity.¹ In October 2002, the Ministry of Agriculture's China Green Food Development Center established the China Organic Food Certification Center (OFCC), which became the first organic certification body registered under the China's Certification and Accreditation Administration (CNCA), which is part of China's main law enforcement and inspection agency for food and plant products—the Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection & Quarantine (AQSIQ). As a signal of the central government raising the priority of organic certification, the administration of organic inspection and certification was shifted from SEPA to the CNCA in 2004. CNCA's lead role in licensing organic certification entities and the China National Auditor and Training Accreditation Board's responsibilities in accrediting such entities was codified in the 2005 Regulations on Certification and Accreditation.

Today CNCA oversees the licensing and inspection of nearly 30 organic certification companies/centers (re-licensing is required every two years). Approximately 80 percent of organic certification in China is done by four licensed companies/centers: (1) the Organic Food Development Center; (2) Green Food Development Center, which issues the OFCC organic label; (3) WIT Assessment Company, Ltd. Product Certification Center; and (4) the Organic Tea Research Center. There are also seven international certifying companies active in China. Another key change in organic certification was made in 2005 when standards for organic products and organic product certification administrative methods were released, requiring a uniform national logo for certified organic products and products under conversion.² Besides these certification entities, a number of Chinese and international organizations have facilitated the development of the organic foods market in China.

ORGANIC INITIATIVES BY CHINESE NGOS, RESEARCH INSTITUTES, COMPANIES, AND FARMERS

While not exhaustive, the list below illustrates a growing bottom-up movement by Chinese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), research institutes, companies and farmers to push organic agriculture. There are notably many produce export businesses that are running their own organic farms, an issue that will be discussed in a later CEF China Environmental Health Research Brief.

Pesticide Eco-Alternatives Center (PEAC): Founded in 2002, PEAC, based in Yunnan Province, is China's first—and still only—environmental NGO focusing exclusively on pesticide problems. The mission of PEAC is to protect human and ecological health from farm chemicals by lowering the use of harmful pesticides and promoting alternative forms of pest control. PEAC carries out research and outreach projects that use consumer and farmer participatory approaches.

The Global Environment Institute (GEI): As part of its Sustainable Rural Development Program, this Beijing-based NGO has been carrying out a Biogas and Organic Agriculture Project in China's southwest since 2004. Many small farms in China struggle to compete with the increasingly corporate and government-dominated agricultural market, which is why in Yunnan, Guangxi, and Tibet, GEI has helped to form organic farmer cooperatives that aid small farmers to enter into the organic niche market. In Lijiang (western Yunnan), GEI recently set up groundwork for the sale of local organic produce to fund its local development program.

Greenpeace China: One of Greenpeace China's core campaign areas is sustainable agriculture, which includes promoting awareness on the dangers of excessive pesticide use and genetically modified food products, and carrying out activities to encourage organic food. For example, Greenpeace has helped co-organize some organic farmer's markets in Hong Kong with the Hong Kong Organic Farming Association and the Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Garden. In 2007 Greenpeace China launched new sustainable agriculture programs in Guangdong and Yunnan that include a strong organic component.

Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden (KFBG): This Hong Kong-based NGO was established in the 1950s to bring agricultural aid to poor farmers. Today, KFBG plays an active role in promoting conservation, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture in Hong Kong and South China. Since 1999, KFBG has cooperated with seven other local organic farms to form the Hong Kong Organic Farming Association (HOFA), which coordinates networking between organic producers and supporters within the region. HOFA also is working to promote and develop the market for organic produce through the establishment of a local standard and certification program that will encourage education, information exchange, and marketing of reliable and sustainable organic produce. HOFA also researches organic farming methods and offers technical support to farmers making the conversion to organic.

China Environment and Sustainable Development Reference and Research Center: CESDRRC is the largest public library and information centre in China focusing on issues concerning the country's environmental problems and sustainable development. CESDRRC is part of the Center for Environmental Education and Communication, a research and information dissemination entity under China's State Environmental Protection Administration. In 2002, CESDRRC published the first *Consumer Guide for Organic Food in Beijing*. Since 2005, CESDRRC publishes a bimonthly electronic newsletter called *Organic Trends* (in Chinese and English) and carries out other projects to promote information dissemination on organics, such as the compilation of the *Organic Food Directory for China*—an online publication with the addresses of more than 300 organic supermarkets, farms, and home delivery services. From 2005 to 2006 CESDRRC cooperated with the Nürnberg Global Fairs BioFach China in an information campaign on organic farming and food.

Guangdong Provincial Committee on Science and Technology and the Guangdong National Science Foundation: In the face of growing land degradation in Guangdong and inspired by new market opportunities under WTO, this group is conducting long-term research on more sustainable agricultural models for Guangdong Province. These researchers have started organic pilot projects, including organic, high-quality lychee orchards at state farms, with farmer groups, and on lands leased by outside entrepreneurs.³

The Jiangsu Ruikang Organic Food Trade: Established in 1995, JROFT was one of the first organizations working to promote organic farming in China. Recently, the organization has been involved in cultivating organic tea, licorice and star anise.⁴ JROFT works to interest farmers in organic farming, improve the farming environment, share organic farming experiences, and trade with others interested in the organic market.⁵

Intercontinental Center for Agroecological Industry Research & Development: Established in 1998 in Nanjing, ICAIRD promotes development of agroecological industry and organic agriculture through research and training activities.

Liu Min Ying Ecological Farm (北京大兴县长子营镇留民营生态农场): This farm is located in Daxing county, 25 kilometers southeast of Beijing. It was founded in 1982 as the first ecological village in China and the United Nations selected it one of the 500 environmental models for the world in 1987. The farm is an OFDC-certified organic farm with grain crops, greenhouses for vegetables, an orchard, a nursery, and animal husbandry. The farm notably uses organic waste, biogas and solar energy to improve the sustainability of its agricultural development

Beijing Crab Island Natural Resort (北京蟹岛绿色生态度假村)⁶: As an organic education initiative, SEPA, the Chinese Academy of Science, and the Chinese Environmental Science Foundation set up this organic vegetable model project north of Beijing in 1998. The resort combines organic agriculture with recreational activities. Visitors can test organic vegetables in the resort's restaurant, go fishing, and stay overnight. Visitors also can contract a plot of land and, under guidance of the Crab Island staff, grow their own organic vegetables.

Beijing Huabang Food Co., Ltd. (北京华邦食品有限公司): This company is overseeing the conversion to organic in some of its peach and grape farms. The first is Huabang Organic Peach Cultivation Base located in Pinggu District of Beijing, which includes two farms with a total area of about 150 hectares growing about 20 different kinds of peaches. One of these farms has the OFDC certificate "Organic to Conversion Farm." Its grape farm in Beijing has already received OFDC organic certification.

Le Zhiwan Organic Ranch (乐之万有积纪念农场之): The ranch is located in Miyun country, which has a very progressive local government pushing organic farming as one means for protecting Miyun Reservoir, the main drinking water source for Beijing.⁷ The ranch covers 1,500 hectares of a National Forestry Reserve located near the Great Wall. Besides selling its vegetables to markets in Beijing, the ranch promotes organic education by offering guided one-day family tours including visits to organic vegetable planting areas, a lunch made of homemade organic food, hiking, and horseback riding.

Agrilandia Organic Farm. Established in 1999 on 13 uncertified hectares, this farm grows organic Italian food, wines, cheeses, and preserves. In addition to growing organic fruit, vegetables, and herbs, the farm promotes Italian-style agrotourism for Chinese visitors. Agrilandia aims to eventually provide training on organic agriculture, company management, and team building to promote this industry more widely in China.⁸

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES PROMOTING ORGANICS

BioFach: BioFach is public-private partnership between the Nürnberg Global Fair and the German Development and Investment Society that aims to promote the development of organic food globally through food expos and tradeshow. In 2007, BioFach China chapter was successfully developed in partnership with the China Green Food Development Center and SEPA. Its organic foods expos have taken place in Japan, Germany, Brazil, and for the first time in May 2007, Shanghai.⁹

The World Resources Institute: WRI is involved in a project called New Ventures, which provides funds for Chinese businesses focused on organic agriculture, clean technology, and renewable energy. One organic produce company that benefited from this WRI program includes the Tianjin Local Biological Technology Co., Ltd., which has the capacity to produce 50 tons of organic fertilizer a year and distributes to almost 20 provinces and cities around the country. Application of this fertilizer leads to a 15 to 60 percent increase in yield and thus the productivity of the farm.

Rockefeller Brothers Fund: This foundation has supported organic certification and research in southern China for a number of years. A 2007 grant to Greenpeace China is supporting a project to carry out a campaign promoting sustainable agriculture in China by building consumer interest in food safety in Guangdong and Yunnan provinces and to highlight successful organic agriculture in these two provinces.”¹⁰ RBF also supports the Pesticide Eco-Alternatives Center in a project to assess and raise awareness on the health impact of herbicide use in rural communities in Yunnan Province.

International Fund for Agricultural Development: A specialized agency of the United Nations, IFAD has an Asia and Pacific division, which is investigating the role organics could play in poverty reduction. The organization works “to clarify how organics can serve or hinder small farmers and rural communities—especially poor ones.”¹¹

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): The China sector of the USDA works to ameliorate trade and is interested in the development of organic food in China. USDA China has published papers on development of the organic foods market. One recent publication is the *South China Organic Food Market Brief* (2006) that highlights developments in the organic foods market sector.¹²

Conclusion

There are a growing number and variety of organizations working in China to carry out pilot projects and research to improve the organic market and educate producers and consumers. The activities and information these groups provide are an important step in developing sustainable organic farming practices in China, particularly as the government strengthens its regulatory regime around organic certification.

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¹ “Introduction.” *Organic Food Development Center*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.ofdc.org.cn/english/about/about.asp>

² Information in this paragraph drawn from e-mail interview with Eva Sternfeld, December 18, 2007.

³ Peter Riggs. (2005). “A different growing season south of the mountains: Guangdong Province rethinks its agricultural development model. China Environment Series, Issue 7, 47-54.

⁴ “Country Profile: China.” (2007) *International Trade Centre*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.intracen.org/organics/Country-Profile-China.htm>

⁵ Dharmananda, Subhuti, (2004) “The movement toward organic food cultivation in China.” [Online]. Available: <http://www.itmonline.org/arts/organics.htm>

⁶ For more information see the resort’s webpage: <http://www.xiedao.com>

⁷ Christopher Peisert & Eva Sternfeld. (2005). “Quenching Beijing’s Thirst: The Need for Integrated Management for the Endangered Minyun Reservoir.” China Environment Series, Issue 7, 33-45.

⁸ Lila Buckley. (September 28, 2007). "Agrilandia Farm: Italy's Slow Food Culture Comes to Beijing. [Online]. Available: <http://www.enn.com/lifestyle/article/23475>.

⁹ <http://www.intracen.org/organics/Country-Profile-China.htm>; "Welcome to BioFach America - Organic Products Expo 2008" (2007) [Online]. Available: <http://www.biofach-america.com/main/eqxrljnr/page.html>.

¹⁰ "Greenpeace Fund," *Rockefeller Brothers Fund* Available:

http://www.rbf.org/grantsdatabase/grantsdatabase_show.htm?doc_id=513834.

¹¹ "Organic Agriculture and Poverty Reduction in Asia: China and India Focus." *IFAD*. [Online]. Available: http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public_html/eksyst/doc/thematic/organic/execsum.htm.

¹² "2006 ATO Guangzhou Reports." (2006). *USDA*. [Online]. Available: http://www.usdachina.org/info_details1.asp?id=989.