

# The quest for organic certification

**O**rganic farming, a form of sustainable agriculture, is experiencing phenomenal growth worldwide because it reduces cultivation costs, its products have access to premium markets, and it contributes to human health and soil productivity, conserves the natural resource base, and reduces environmental pollution. Organic farming can be carried out in many countries regardless of their economic development stage.

Another reason for its explosive growth is expanding global demand for organic products. This is driven by consumer perceptions that organic products are safer, cleaner, and more ethical than conventionally grown products. Despite this, organic agrifood items remain niche products commanding premium prices. At the same time, those niche products rely on consumer confidence in their reliability and integrity. Therefore a credible system of standards, inspection, certification, and traceability should be established for organic farming products.

Given the enormous potential of organic farming to contribute to sustainable agriculture while enhancing small and medium-sized farm incomes in the region, the APO organized a training course on Organic Farming focusing on organic production and inspection in Islamabad, Pakistan, 21–25 April. The training course was jointly implemented by the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council and the National Productivity Organization.

The course improved the understanding of the 25 participants from 11 member countries of the necessary standards for organic certification. Training modules covered standards of inputs for organic farming, production and postharvest handling of organic produce, and the organic inspection and certification process. At each stage, the necessary tools, techniques, and approaches required to receive International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements certification were introduced. Special presentations were given on the global trends in and drivers of organic farming. Critical success factors in the marketing of organic products were also explained, including winning the core group; product differentiation; value addition; labeling and branding; focus on fast sellers; safe, reliable, transparent supply chains; in-store positioning and orientation of products; effective customer services; and overall business excellence.

The training course combined interactive lectures, group exercises, thought-provoking decision trees derived from successful examples, and site visits. Participants benefited from a visit to Qarshi Research International (Pvt.) Ltd., a facility with many international certifications/accreditations including organic certification, ISO9001, ISO14001, and HACCP. Its herbal garden, plant tissue culture laboratory, farm, and juice product laboratory elicited special interest from participants. Similarly, during a tour of the National Agricultural Research Center, the biofertilizer production research laboratory was the focus of attention. 