

In the last hundred years, the Earth has undergone an extremely important population growth, we'll soon be 9,5 billion human beings walking on its surface. This phenomenon raises a new issue: how to feed all those people. In the aftermath of World War II, an ultramodern farming method was developed: industrial agriculture. This technique resorts to the use of fertilizers or pesticides, which are later found in the ecosystem, destroying the latter by damaging the soil, contaminating the water, corrupting the nature. Thereupon, the need of promoting organic agriculture becomes increasingly necessary to preserve the environment, therefore our planet, for future generations. With the practice of eco-farming, the world would be a step closer to achieve sustainable development.

In order to ensure Qatar's sustainable development, the government launched a plan in 2008, the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030). Its aim is to "transform Qatar into an advanced society capable of achieving sustainable development" by 2030. The goals that this program expects to achieve are divided into four central pillars: economic, social, human and environmental development. The installation of agriculture, and recently ecologic agriculture, enters these goals, especially the first and fourth pillars, which are economic and environmental development.

As Vice President of the FAO Council, Qatar is strongly aware of the world's dietary requirements, as well as the crucial role that ecologic agriculture plays nowadays. However, although Qatar's energy resources have given it one of the world's highest per capita incomes, the State of Qatar is unable to eventually be self-sufficient in food. Like the five other wealthy Gulf states, Qatar imports up to 90% of its food needs. This is due to Qatar's hostile environment, characterized by extreme heat, water scarcity and high oil salinity, which especially restrains agriculture. According to the FAO, only about 1% of Qatar's total land area (11,590 square kilometers) is arable. But, unlike Saudi Arabia, whose plans were to become 100% reliant on imports of wheat by 2016, the State of Qatar desires to reach food self-reliance. The Qatar National Food Security Program (QNFSP) was created for this purpose. In 2010, QNFSP director, Mahendra Shah, stated that the project "hoped to provide Qatar with 80 to 90 percent of its vegetable and livestock needs". Thanks to the QNFSP, the number of farms in Qatar was heavily increased.

Within Qatar's farming methods we can identify open-field agriculture, greenhouse production and hydroponics, which uses less water and land and can yield up to 10 times the crop grown in an open field. Lately, the government has intended to boost organic agriculture. For many centuries, Qatari farmers practiced a natural organic way of bringing up livestock and growing various crops, before industrial agriculture took the lead. A survey carried out by Mr Charbel Akiki (of Akiki Organics, here in Qatar) and Professor William Scott-Jackson, found out that there is indeed a market for organic farming and that Qatar could lead the world in the application of organic farming in arid environments. According to this survey, 99% of Qatar residents, including Qataris and other nationalities (almost 80% of the inhabitants of Qatar are foreigners), would prefer to buy organic food over industrial produced food. Organic food is healthier, which could contribute to decrease obesity among the youth, and the not so young. There are more benefits to organic food other than health. A study made by Cornell University in 2005 showed that organic farming generates the same crops as conventional farming but consumes 30% less energy and water. Considering that water conservation is crucial on arid environments such as Qatar, the practice of eco-farming would be a great way of increasing the national agriculture production without exhausting water resources before time. This survey demonstrated that it would be quite feasible for organic food to be grown in Qatar's farm environments.

Hence, Qatar's ministry is in favor of organic farming because of its positive impact on man, animals and the environment. There is a long-term project being realized in Qatar's land to increase the number of organic farms. Two organic farms, Al-Safwah and Al-Sedra, are already in operation, achieving great results. However, the transition from traditional farming to organic farming could take up to a few years. For the moment, the government is trying to promote organic agriculture among the population by organizing festivals, which aim to introduce locally effectuated organic products. Furthermore, the Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME) was keen to encourage farmers to adopt organic farming and officers are sent on regular field tours to introduce farmers to the benefits and advantages of this method.

Altogether, the State of Qatar is greatly involved in the practice of organic food, not only in behalf of its benefits towards the environment and beings, but because of its potential to help the country to become more self-sufficient in food. However, the State of Qatar is aware that the implantation of this farming method would take time and will be quite expensive. Consequently, Qatar calls upon a collaboration between nations to promote this farming method in agricultural areas, all around the world. The State of Qatar also believes that the creation of an international association, which could report to the FAO, becomes increasingly necessary, considering that this organization would be able to ensure and control the practice of eco-farming, among other responsibilities.