Constraints to Organic Vegetable Production in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

There are several vegetable production systems in Chiang Mai, including conventional, safe-use, pesticide-free, and organic. Recently the number of farmers who cultivate organic vegetables is increasing. The farming systems concerned with health and environmental quality are popularly called alternative farming systems. Nevertheless, this approach cannot be achieved for all farmers. Some of them switch back to chemical production because of pest and disease problems. The objectives of the research are to explore the current constraints to organic vegetable production and marketing, and to investigate the future opportunities for organic vegetable production in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The data was collected through farmer interviews with the questionnaire from farmers in the target areas. The data was analyzed by using descriptive analysis. The results showed that constraints to organic vegetable production consist of 1) bio-physical constraints, such as low soil fertility, water shortage, and pests, 2) economic constraints which include the high material cost, high labor cost, high transportation cost, and market access, 3) knowledge constraints which are lack of understanding and management skills about pest and disease management, crop-environment, added value from farm processing and postharvest management, and 4) social constraints, such as lack of experience or skill in group negotiation for marketing.

Key words: Organic vegetable production, Organic system constraints, Chiang Mai

INTRODUCTION

Conventional farming has helped Thailand not only to produce enough food for domestic consumption but also generate surpluses for exports. However, the increasing population and income will lead to further increases in demand for food and also for raw materials for industry. The modern system of farming, it is increasingly felt, is becoming unsustainable as evidenced by declining crop productivity, damage to environment, chemical contamination and danger the health of farmers and consumers. The necessity of having an alternative agriculture method which can function in a friendly eco-system while sustaining and increasing the crop productivity is realized now. Organic farming systems like a key to sustainable agriculture have captured the interest of many countries throughout the world in response to the need to sustain the health of soils, ecosystems and people. In Thailand, the rapid socio-economic development has been accompanied by a modernization and industrialization of the agro-food production. The Thai government has promoted an industrial, export-oriented agriculture, characterized by a heavy reliance on synthetic chemicals to promote production and to protect crops against weeds, pests and diseases and thus leading to improved productivity (UNDP, 2007). There are various groups of smallholder farmers transforming their practices from chemical farming to organic farming. However, some groups succeed in converting to organic farming but some remain in chemically based farming systems. Therefore, it is important to explore the production and marketing constraints in organic vegetable production systems.

This study aimed to explore production and marketing constraints in organic vegetable farming in Chiang Mai, Thailand and to investigate the opportunity for organic vegetable production.