

## Mexican Organic Market and *Tianguis* Network A.C. (REDAC) and Participatory Certification

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In Mexico, the internal market for organic products is at an incipient stage. Although 35% of the total produce is sold inside the country, only 10% is displayed as organic (the rest is offered as regular produce). Nonetheless, unlike the 90's of last century, there is now a greater amount of initiatives for sale through different channels, such as specialized stores, health food stores and cafés, located mostly in the country's most important cities and tourist centers. Also, some supermarkets (for example, Sumesa, Comercial Mexicana and Gigante) have started offering organic products such as dairy products, apple juice and some vegetables (imported).

### ***Mexican Organic Market and Tianguis Network***

Since 2003, an increasing number of organic *tianguis*<sup>4</sup> and markets has been setting up in several locations, especially from central to southern Mexico. This means that in areas with the most important poverty and economic setback in the country, organic production and consumption is becoming an alternative for small-scale farmers and their families. These markets have arisen as initiatives by consumers who are engaged with and interested in a better diet and in environmental protection; in many cases, there are connections with universities, the Church and Nongovernmental Organizations. More recently, there have also been farmers that organize in a scheme of supportive economy in order to offer organic products and to bring consumers (adults and children) closer to a philosophy of sustainable development.

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<sup>4</sup> **Tianguis** (from náhuatl *tianquiztli* market) is the traditional market that has existed in Mesoamerica since prehispanic times, and that has evolved in form and social context throughout the centuries.

In 2004, 4 *tianguis* joined the **Mexican Organic Market and Tianguis Network (REDAC)**<sup>5</sup>, which by 2009 was made up of 18 consolidated initiatives, one honorary one and 10 in development. In its brief lifetime, REDAC has created a networking system to benefit its members. Within this system is the collaboration with the Falls Brook Centre in Canada<sup>6</sup>, that supports the network with funds from the Canadian International Development Agency and through interns that perform their practice experiences in the Mexican markets and *tianguis*. Other connections were made with the organic store chains “Green Corner” in Mexico City and “Vía Orgánica” in the state of Guanajuato, which helps to obtain a greater diversity of products and access to other markets.



Photo 1: Members during the writing of chapter 8.2. of the Mexican Organic Guidelines, in reference to Participatory Certification, 20.10.2009 in Oaxaca, Oaxaca (Photo: Rita Schwentesius)

From the start, REDAC has participated in the creation and development of policies towards the organic sector in Mexico as a whole. An example of this is the active participation in the process of the creation of the Organic Products Law (passed in February, 2006), and particularly in Section 24 that refers to Participatory Certification. Between September and December 2009, many members of the network, along with academics and farmers, participate in the writing of the Technical Organic Production Guidelines (National Regulation)

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mercadosorganicos.org.mx>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fallsbrookcentre.ca/>

within the agreement signed by the SENASICA<sup>7</sup> and the Chapingo Autonomous University (see Photo1).<sup>8</sup>



Photo 2: Farmers and promoters of the Chapingo Organic Tianguis tend to 5,000 youths during the Science and Technology week, 26-30.10.2009 (Photo: Rita Schwentesius)

Another essential function of REDAC is to educate future organic producers and consumers in Mexico. Since 2002, children and youths, ranging from Kindergarten to High School have been introduced to a philosophy of a healthy and environmentally-friendly lifestyle (see Photo 2).

Another important network are the connections that can be made as a member with IFOAM and GALCI (Latin America group of IFOAM). Documents available through IFOAM and the exchange of experiences in different events offered at an international level have been particularly useful.

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<sup>7</sup> *Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria* (National Agrifood Health, Safety and Quality Service) of the Secretariat of Agriculture.

<sup>8</sup> <http://portal.chapingo.mx/contenidos/content/view/103/2>

## **Guarantee System**

The REDAC has 3 schemes to guarantee organic quality of their products to consumers, namely:

1. Agency Certification (third part)
2. Participatory Certification
3. Market-to-market Guided Visit

The agency Certification was carried out in the state of Oaxaca in two markets that are members of REDAC, through the only national certifier, CERTIMEX. This scheme was possible thanks to the supportive collaboration of the state agency of certification and subsidies, who covered part of the costs. However, due to the difficulty for small farmers to undergo a procedure that was created in developed countries and the absence of democratic elements of participation, these markets have joined the Participatory Certification of the network.

The Participatory Certification (PC) is fully developed in 6 markets and in the others, it is in the process of being built. The most consolidated markets have Certification Committees, formed by farmers, consumers and students. For the *tianguis* in which the PC is not in functioning at its fullest, guided visits are being carried out by the most advanced markets. Also, the REDAC organizes training workshops and provides support with information material.

The organic participatory certification is orchestrated as follows:

1. **Initial Request:** that the people interested make to markets, verbally, but mostly through the Internet.
2. **Initial Questionnaire:** There are 3 different types of questionnaires for plant, meat and processed products. However, it is worth noting that the analysis and revision is carried out on the production unit as a whole, and not on a particular product or crop.
3. **Revision of documents by the participatory certification committee:** composed of farmers, consumers, researchers, etc. In general, revision may help determine if the interested party

complies with the principles of organic production (REDAC is based on the CERTIMEX and Naturland norms) or not. In case the farmer does not comply, he/she will be given information and recommendations; whoever does comply will move on to the next stage.

4. **Guided Visit:** for this process, checklists and forms have been created (less extensive as those documented by an agency, but that consider the detection of all the organic control points) that must be filled in by members of the visiting committee.



Photo 3: Greenhouse tomato farmers in a Guided Visit. People with notepads belong to the Certification Committee (Photo: Rita Schwentesius)

5. **Report to the committee and committee decision:** the written report is channeled to the participatory certification committee, so that, abiding by the norms, it passes a judgment, which is to be passed on to the farmer in a written form:
  - a. *certification granted without requirements;*
  - b. *certification granted with requirements;*
  - c. *certification denied for non-compliance of regulations, and recommendations were made.*

6. **Incorporation into the *tianguis*:** If the farmer gets a positive judgement, he/she can sell their products in the respective *tianguis* after having signed an agreement.



Photo 4: A farmer hands in a sketch of his production unit (Photo: Vanessa Ramírez)

In addition, farmers give consumers free access to their farms, and especially to students. The information of the questionnaires is available to anyone who is interested.

### ***Future Perspectives***

The REDAC in Mexico is not yet 100% organic, therefore a series of actions and measures are being taken to achieve this goal. The network has its own Participational Certification Committee, composed of 3 organic farmers, all experienced leaders. During the Assembly of Local Committees in March 2009, it was possible to create the basic document for certification, which is now being incorporated in the National Technical Guidelines.

Amongst the actions is the training of farmers by farmers, which will be organized in February 2010. During the second half of 2009, national workshops, supported by the Secretariat of Agriculture, were attended by members of REDAC.

Organic farming attracts more and more attention from farmers in Mexico. For this reason, many training requests have come into the network from groups and organizations of farmers, who area attending.

Finally, members of the network participate in the different *Exporganicos* regionally and nationwide to spread the philosophy of organic production and to explain Participatory Certification as an alternative for small local farmers.



Photo 5. Public meeting of the Participatory Certification Committee of the Chapingo Organic *Tianguis* Chapingo (Photo. Rita Schwentesius)