

Factors constraining the expansion of organic olive growing in Andalusia (Spain): a qualitative analysis

Juan Carlos Rodríguez-Cohard
José Domingo Sánchez-Martínez

Antonio Garrido-Almonacid
University Institute of Research on Olive and Olive Oils (INUO)
Universidad de Jaén

Abstract

Statistics available estimate that the area of organic olive groves worldwide exceeds 850,000 hectares, almost 31% (262,379 ha) was located in Spain. As far as Andalusia is concerned, the figure given is 117,380 ha, of which only 15,659 are located in Jaén, which is the world's leading producer of olive groves and olive oils. Given the low participation of the province of Jaén in organic farming, which only represents 2.93% of the total, compared to 8.52% for Andalusia as a whole, we wondered whether there were objective reasons to explain the lower participation of the province of Jaén in the organic olive and olive oil business. However, we found no physical, productive, or technological reasons to explain the low participation of the province of Jaén. Furthermore, there are localities where, despite the importance of olive groves, the percentages of organic participation are less than 1%, and even some where organic farming is non-existent, despite being mountain municipalities, where organic production is usually more common. In contrast to these data, there are also mountainous areas in the provinces of Seville and Córdoba with percentages of organic production. Contrasting, there are also mountainous areas in the provinces of Seville and Cordoba with organic production rates of around 80%, such as Constantina, Cazalla de la Sierra, and Pozoblanco.

Given this situation, the objective of this research is to determine the institutional causes that maintain a low level of organic olive cultivation in the province of Jaén. The initial hypothesis is that these could be related to productive behaviors, informal institutions, myths, beliefs, and other elements that condition the strategic decision-making processes of producers.

The method used is qualitative, with in-depth interviews with farmers who produce organically, are in transition, or do not produce organically, as well as with technicians and cooperative managers. Twenty interviews were conducted in different provinces of Andalusia to compare information from municipalities with high levels of organic olive cultivation and others with very low rates of organic agriculture or even no plots dedicated to this type of production. The results show that the keys to understanding the limitations of the expansion of organic production in the province of Jaén are training, information, and the lack of participation in the final markets. Measures are proposed to improve the transmission of information among farmers in the province of Jaén and mechanisms for accessing niche markets that will enable to upgrading.