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Assessment of Factors Constraining Organic Farming Expansion in Lis Valley, Portugal

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Abstract: Organic farming can play an important role in rural development and food production, by reinforcing the trend toward sustainable agriculture and its purpose of ecosystem conservation. The agribusiness of organic farming is particularly relevant in family farming, given the labor availability and the short marketing circuits. The innovative techniques of organic farming, namely with soil fertility, weed and pest control, opens a wide range of possibilities in its development and extension. The expectation of organic farming profitability in small-scale family farming, supported by known successful examples, were the theme of a field study on Lis Valley Irrigation District to assess the constraints to its expansion in order to outline the procedures for the acquisition of technical knowledge, the adaptation of technologies, the support for the conversion of production models, and the specialized training of farmers for action. Results revealed that the: (i) farmer's land structure, (ii) their mature age, (iii) low education level, and (iv) markets, are the main constrains for organic farming development. Furthermore, other uncertainties were identified, namely: (i) the certification process, (ii) the knowledge of new technologies, especially of crop protection, and (iii) the marketing problems to guaranteeing profitability. This study concludes that organic farming has significant potential for development in the Lis Valley and that the efforts and resources of the various stakeholders, namely the state, need to be harmonized to deliver effective support to farmers to promote organic farming that prioritizes: (i) rural development policies, (ii) supporting land restructuring, (iii) modernization of irrigation, (iv) stimulation of young farmers, (v) conversion and implementation of innovative technologies, (vi) the organization of farmers for better productive efficiency, and (vii) to facilitate market access.

Keywords: irrigation; Operational Groups; organic agriculture; rural development; rural reparcelling; land tenure

1. Introduction

Organic farming (OF) is an agricultural production system that sustains the demands of production of healthy and safe food, with no significant dependence on chemical fertilizers, using organic matter and bio-fertilizers, cultivating with reduced tillage, environmentally safe pest management and the