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## Going Organic: Understanding the Organic Vegetables Production Environment in Central Luzon, Philippines

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**Abstract** Organic vegetable production is a system based on the principle of taking care of nature accounting all life forms. It is a progressing industry in the Philippines given the increasing need for healthy and safe food and in effort to contribute in protecting the environment. The research aimed to characterize organic vegetables production environment in Central Luzon, Philippines. Survey, key informants interview and focus group discussion were used in generating data from 72 organic vegetable farmers and 32 conventional vegetable growers from the provinces of Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, and Zambales. Descriptive statistics, cost and return, input utilization, technology attributes, and extent of technology utilization were used in data analysis. Results indicate that despite the noted inadequacies, the bio-physical, socio-economic and institutional environment of organic vegetable production in Central Luzon can provide a good opportunity that can be tapped in the promotion and adoption of organic vegetable production in the region. His major organic vegetables raised across sites were eggplant, tomato, ampalaya and stringbeans. The common organic vegetable production technologies being adopted were the use of organic fertilizers, use of bio-pesticides, crop rotation, compost application, green manuring, use of biological control and mulching. As to farm management practices, the vegetable growers generally relied on their long years of experience in vegetable farming, infusing knowledge learned from the trainings in the use of organic inputs particularly in land preparation, nutrient management and control of pest and diseases. The returns in organic vegetable production in all sites is promising given the acceptable, at par and even better yield per 1000 sq m, net income, and return to total operating expenses compared to conventional vegetable production. There are generally very few organic farmers in Central Luzon at the time of survey with evident low utilization of organic vegetable production technologies. While they have a good understanding of the concept of organic farming, the capacity of the farmers to adopt organic farming standards including labelling and certification is generally low. The expanding vegetable organic vegetable industry in the country, the potential area for expansion, potential market and value adding activities, GOs and NGOs support and the evolving legislation on organic agriculture were the cited opportunities that can be taken into advantage in an effort to push for a vigorous organic vegetable production in the region. The risk, problems and constraints in organic vegetable production are many, but can be addressed through an integrated organic vegetable production program in the region. This calls for a holistic organic consciousness campaign, prioritization and localization of organic vegetable production, intensifying capability building,

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