

Trade fairs are a good place to let buyers know that you are in the market: to show yourself, to see what others are offering, to compare yourself with the competition. It is a good place to meet your (prospective) buyers, and to understand their requirements. It is an excellent place to see and discuss how the market moves so that you can adapt yourself in time. Very often important orders are agreed on. Some of your buyers may invite you to visit their premises before or after a trade show. It can be a very worthwhile investment. A few weeks after the trade fair you should use all this information to evaluate your business and - if necessary - to adapt your marketing strategy.

The main organic trade fairs

- The oldest and biggest organic trade show is Biofach^[7] in Nuremberg, Germany, in February each year. Biofach is so successful that it has spread to other countries like the US, Japan, China, India and Brazil.
- The All Things Organic show^[8] in Chicago is the main event for the US and Canada. It is organised by the Organic Trade Association^[9], the organic business association in North America.
- In the UK, the main show is the Natural and Organic Food Expo^[10]. As the name indicates it is both for certified organic products and for natural products. It includes food supplements.
- In Dubai there is the Middle East Natural and Organic Products Expo (MENOPE)^[11], which would give you a glimpse of the Middle East market.
- The European Fair Trade Fair is a new exhibition specifically for Fair Trade products, so far held in France^[12]. This is interesting if your organic products are also certified Fair Trade.

There are many more national shows where local producers and buyers meet, but also buyers come from abroad looking for goods to import. These are not usually as interesting for exporters from developing countries to visit or exhibit at. For the local or regional market you should look for local or national trade shows. Quite often the organic associations will have a booth there. This may help you in developing your national or regional business. Do not forget: you can export your product as certified organic but it may be a lot easier to sell volumes of good quality product as conventional in the local market.

How to get to international trade fairs

You can choose to go as a visitor, or you can have your own stall. There is quite a difference. The first is sufficient if you just want to look around, or you already know your buyers. If you are not yet known you may have to make the investment of exhibiting. That is, for many, fairly expensive but it is also a hassle to organise. There are a number of agencies that have programmes to

- Prepare yourself for interaction with clients in a professional way. Present your business and offer in a suitable way (e.g. brochure, web site), and make sure that the provided information is up to date.
- In order to get in touch with potential buyers and to get to know the market, participate in international trade fairs specialising in organic products - either as a visitor or an exhibitor. Good preparation and follow-up are crucial for making a successful trade fair visit.
- Ensure prompt and reliable communication with your clients. Get their feedback, and try to find solutions in case they have complaints.

Footnotes

1. E.g. EPOPA, 2006. Organic Exporter Guide. Hands-on help for exports from Africa. www.grolink.se/epopa/Publications/EPOPA%20Organic%20Exporter%20Guide%2006.pdf; FiBL, 2004. A Guide to successful organic marketing initiatives. <https://www.fibl-shop.org/shop/show.php?sprache=EN&art=1338>
2. For a detailed description, see <http://www.netmba.com/marketing/mix>
3. One example is <http://www.greentrade.net>
4. For examples of brochures, see <http://www.grolink.se/epopa/Publications/index.htm#Brochures>
5. SIPPO/CBI, 2003. Your Image Builder. http://www.sippo.ch/internet/osec/en/home/import/publications/sippo_and_partner.html
6. <http://www.greentrade.net>
7. <http://www.biofach.de>
8. <http://www.organicexpo.com>
9. <http://www.ota.com>
10. <http://www.naturalproducts.co.uk>
11. <http://10times.com/natural-organic-expo>
12. <http://www.salon-europeen-commerce-equitable.org/en>
13. <http://www.cbi.eu>
14. <http://www.sippo.ch>
15. <http://www.cde.eu>
16. <http://www.organicafricapavilion.com>