

**VIETRADE** – Vietnam should encourage enterprises to further invest in organic agriculture, that would help not only farmers find output for their products but also consumers access fresh farm produce, officials have said.

Deputy Minister of Science and Technology Tran Quoc Khanh said food safety was a top concern for all of society, and organic agriculture played an important role in ensuring this.

Organic farming was an inevitable trend globally since it helped increase productivity and farmers' incomes and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and chemical contamination, Khanh said.

Nguyen Quoc Vong from Australia's RMIT University agreed. He said that domestic consumers have paid increasing attention to food hygiene and safety. Therefore, the development of organic agriculture was a necessary step for the country to move toward the mass production of clean farm produce in the future.

*According to The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics & Emerging Trends 2016*, global sales of organic food reached US\$80 billion in 2014, with the United States being the largest organic market.

The findings also revealed that a total of 43.7 million hectares were organically managed, including area in transition, at the end of 2014, up almost 0.5 million hectares from 2013. There were more than 2.3 million organic producers from 172 countries, with the most producers in India, Uganda and Mexico.

In Vietnam, organic agriculture was current cultivated on around 23,400ha or 0.2% of the country's total agricultural lands, Khanh said.

There were some successful organic models in the country such as Hoa Sua Foods organic rice brand, owned by Ca Mau-based Vien Phu Organic and Healthy Foods Joint Stock Corporation, vegetable production by Organik Da Lat, a unique thick-skinned orange in Ham Yen, Tuyen Quang province, and others.

However, enterprises specializing in organic farming said they had been encountering with many difficulties. For example, there was no domestic certification organization for organic products and growers had to depend on foreign organizations such as Control Union, IMO, and JAS.

Le Thanh, chairman of Organic Life Co, said the pioneering enterprises in the field in Vietnam had to build a whole supply chain from production to retail even though their financial capacities remained insufficient.

Meanwhile, Vo Minh Khai, president and CEO of Vien Phu Organic and Healthy Foods Joint Stock Corporation told *Viet Nam News* Newspaper that Government policies related to developing organic or climate-friendly agriculture were still not clear.

In order to develop sustainable organic agriculture, he petitioned the Government to draw up transparent, clear policies that persuaded farmers to switch gradually from chemicals-based farming to sustainable, climate-friendly agriculture to cope with international competition and safeguard the health of the community.

He also suggested the State agencies to clarify differences between several production standards like VietGap, GlobalGap, Organic, Natural and CFA, which was sometimes confused firms involved in the area.

Increasing public awareness about the production and use of organic products were also needed, other enterprises said.

Speaking at the recent conference in HCM City, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Tran Thanh Nam said his ministry would review and amend policies to boost organic agriculture.

Existing and proposed free trade agreements would open up opportunities for exports, especially of organic produce, he emphasized./.