

**Becoming an Organic Producer:  
A Research Study on Barriers and Challenges Faced by Producers in Mexico  
During the Transition to Organic Production.**

**Research and Innovation Fellowship for Agriculture (RIFA)**

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## **PREFACE**

This project was made possible through the Research and Innovation Fellowship for Agriculture (RIFA) program, which I received for the time period of April 2016 to April 2017. RIFA connects UC Davis graduate students with organizations conducting development projects all over the world. Based on my interests I partnered up with OregonTilth which is a non-profit organic certifier based in Corvallis, Oregon. With the support of OregonTilth, I applied for RIFA and was awarded this fellowship to conduct my development project in Mexico during the 2016 summer. OregonTilth supported me by providing me their office space in Queretaro, Mexico to use as the main location for my project in addition to access to their vast network of individuals in the organic sector in Mexico. I was based in Mexico to conduct this project from June 15, 2016 to September 3, 2016. Upon arrival to Queretaro I was introduced to OregonTilth's staff who offered their full support. They helped me structure, edit, and finalize the questionnaires for the interviews that I conducted based on the current environment of the Mexican organic sector. Most importantly, they introduced me to different organic certifiers, government officials, and some producers who I interviewed for this project. Their recommendations and introduction to these individuals was based on those they believe to be the most important key players in the Mexican Organic Sector. A total of 25 interviews were conducted from June 15, 2016 to August 15, 2016, which included 14 producers, 6 representatives from certification agencies, and 5 other key stakeholders in the organic sector. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and the results were later translated into English for the report and analysis. My Spanish proficiency was an important asset to this project as I was able to communicate efficiently with all

interviewees and also conduct all necessary translations. What follows is a focused research report of this pilot project on the barriers and challenges faced by producers in Mexico during the transition process to organic production. The field research data results presented in this project were collected through the previously mentioned interviews in addition to field observations. For a detailed report including analysis and discussion of every question please refer to the report generated for OregonTilth (Bonilla, 2016).

## **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

Organic production has many benefits for producers, consumers, the environment and many more. The idea of taking organic production into developing countries could result in a new and improved market (Bello, 2008). Recent reports highlight the need for organic markets to meet the rising demands in the United States. Between the years 1997 and 2008 sales of organic foods increased at an annual rate that ranged from 12 to 21% (Bello, 2008). Sales in organic food production increased by 11.4% from 2013 to 2014 hitting a total of \$35.9 billion, which indicates a supply need for the growing market (Bello, 2008). Additionally, Salcido reports that the demand for organic products continues to grow about 20-30% annually worldwide (2011). Producers worldwide, including those in Mexico, could benefit from this increase in demand. The overall transition or engagement in organics will support healthier communities, environments, and farmers (Tilth.Org, 2016).

The current state of the organic sector in Mexico is faced with various issues preventing its development and growth. One of the issues is the organic certification agencies that are currently operating in Mexico. Most of the certification processes are

carried out by foreign certification agencies (Gonzales and Nigh, 2005). The majority of the certification agencies come from the United States with the rest being from Mexico and other countries. This poses a problem because most of these certification agencies have to process the certification paperwork at their country of origin, which in most cases is the United States. In addition, the resources, forms, and documents are not always available to Mexican producers in their native Spanish language. Another issue that has been highlighted in the literature is the increase in social inequalities among small and large producers (Tovar et al, 2005). These inequalities have led to many barriers associated with various reinforced economic disadvantages faced by small producers. Despite the growing inequalities Mexico has still managed to be one of the leading exporters of organic products in Latin America (Reynolds, 2004). However less than 1% (.013%) of their cultivated land is certified organic, indicating that they still have a lot of growing to do in the organic sector (Reynolds, 2004). It is important to note that there is a large amount of land being cultivated through organic production methods by indigenous communities, which are not being accounted for. This poses another issue since these small producers are already producing organic products yet they cannot sell their products as organic to any market because they cannot afford the certification costs (Tovar et al, 2005). Among many other issues, the transition process of a producer contributes to the overall understanding of the current state of the organic sector in Mexico and to many other barriers and challenges faced by producers.

However in analyzing this opportunity that Mexico has in organic production to improve their economy, it is also important to understand why producers are not already partaking on this opportunity given that they benefit from a price premium among many

other environmental benefits (Gonzales and Nigh, 2005). The focus of the analysis in this project was the transition process of any producer, which highlights their journey to produce, get certified, and export organic products.

The transition to organic production requires an understanding of the contribution and opportunities that different stakeholders have in the organic sector. This information can inform partnerships, resources, and services to support producers during the transition period. This project contributes to the understanding of the transition experience for producers in Mexico by identifying the barriers and challenges they face. This pilot project also serves as an initial step to a continuous project for OregonTilth or other interested stakeholders by identifying the areas of focus and research that can improve their services for producers. To conduct this analysis a series of questionnaires was developed for producers, certification agencies, and other stakeholders in the organic Mexican sector.

OregonTilth's Mexico staff contributed to the structure and development of the questionnaires, based on the current environment of the organic sector. They also facilitated connections between key stakeholders interviewed for this project that they believe to be some of the most influential in the Mexican organic sector. Their contribution also extended to provide an office space in Queretaro, Mexico where a lot of the work for the project took place. OregonTilth's assistance and contribution to this project came from their primary interest to improve their resources and services for producers. Through the resources and networking opportunities provided by OregonTilth this project was able to achieve an understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by producers during the transition period. The information was collected through a series of

25 interviews from individuals all over Mexico that included 14 producers, 6 certification agencies, 5 government agencies, and other national organizations specific to helping the development of the Mexican organic sector. A key element of this was that the interviews gave producers the opportunity to express issues, challenges, and barriers they felt strongly about given the support currently available to them.

## **METHODS**

A total of 25 interviews were conducted in person, by Skype, or over the phone in the course of 8 weeks (June 15, 2016- August 15, 2016). These in person interviews (n=16) were conducted at the following locations: Mexico City; San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato; Celaya, Guanajuato; and Morelia, Michoacán. The Skype (n=6) and phone interviews (n=3) were conducted from the Queretaro office provided by OregonTilth. The first phase before conducting the interviews involved creating three different questionnaires for the different types of individuals answering the questions, which consisted of producers, representatives from certification agencies, and other stakeholders involved in the organic sector (*please refer to Table 1 for a summary*). The “other stakeholders” interviewed were representatives from government agencies involved in the organic sector, academic institutions, and national organizations that focused on developing the organic sector and supporting organic producers. These three categories were chosen because they represent the key players in the Mexican organic sector.

OregonTilth facilitated the connection to the government agencies, academic institutions, and organic certification agencies based on their significant presence and influence in the organic sector. The selection process for the producers was primarily based on the producer having completed the transition process so they could talk about

their transition experience. After interviewing each representative from their respective certification agency, they were asked for information and permission to connect with two of their producers to interview for this project. The questions in the producer questionnaire focused on understanding the transition process, services they received, and on the barriers and challenges faced during the transition period. OregonTilth staff provided some insight in terms of how to phrase the questions to put them in context that Mexican producers would understand. They also suggested questions relevant to production, paperwork, and overall transition process based on their experience and interaction with producers. Similarly, the questionnaire for certification agency representatives and other stakeholders involved in the organic sector consisted of understanding the resources and services they provide for producers and understanding what they believe to be the challenges and barriers that producers face during the transition.

The focus of this research project and the interviews was to answer following questions: what are the needs of the producer? What are the lacking resources available to producers? What are the main issues, concerns, or questions that producers have in the transition to organic production? Why is there a lack of producer engagement in organic production? How can one facilitate the transition to organic production? The answers to these questions were facilitated by these questionnaires and they also identified the most reoccurring barriers and challenges faced by producers during their transition to organic production.

After the questionnaires were developed, they were translated into Spanish. All interviews were audio recorded for the purpose of being able to reference and code them.

Nearly half of the interviews (n=12) were conducted at the World Trade Center in Mexico City during the Organic Expo from June 21<sup>st</sup> – June 24, 2016. The remaining interviews were conducted in the month of July and half of August. The process to connect with remaining individuals consisted of contact via e-mail or phone to schedule interview times. After interviews were scheduled they were conducted either through phone, Skype, or in person. Most of the interviews conducted through phone or Skype occurred because there was no alternative due to their geographic location (too far away in distance from Queretaro which was home base for the project) or because the person was not available due to traveling, or other work commitments.

At the completion of all interviews Survey Monkey was used as a data analysis tool where the questionnaires and data collection from the spreadsheet were replicated. One of the main purposes for the use of Survey Monkey was to collect statistical information and compare similar questions asked across the three different types of interviewees. A summary of all individual interviews can be found in *Table 1* below.

**Table 1:**

| <b>Interviewee <sup>1</sup></b> | <b>Geographic Location</b> | <b>Interview Type</b> | <b>Type of Production</b> |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Producer #1                     | Irapuato, Guanajuato       | In-Person             | Vegetables                |
| Producer #2                     | Oaxaca                     | In-Person             | Arnica                    |
| Producer #3                     | Oaxaca                     | In-Person             | Grain/Legumes/Vegetables  |
| Producer #4                     | Unknown                    | In-Person             | Processed Goods           |
| Producer #5                     | Unknown                    | In-Person             | Vegetables                |
| Producer #6                     | Sonora                     | Skype                 | Fruits                    |
| Producer #7                     | Guanajuato                 | In-Person             | Vegetables                |
| Producer #8                     | Sinaloa                    | Phone                 | Vegetables                |
| Producer #9                     | Tamaulipas                 | Phone                 | Vegetables                |
| Producer #10                    | Baja California            | Skype                 | Vegetables                |
| Producer #11                    | Baja California            | Skype                 | Fruits                    |
| Producer #12                    | Tamaulipas                 | Skype                 | Vegetables                |

<sup>1</sup> The names of the individuals and the different organizations are not reported to protect their privacy and to comply with standard research protocol.



|                         |  |           |            |
|-------------------------|--|-----------|------------|
| Producer #13            | Guanajuato                                   | In-Person | Vegetables |
| Producer #14            | Michoacán                                    | In-Person | Vegetables |
| Certification Agency #1 | Stationed in Oaxaca                          | In-Person | N/A        |
| Certification Agency #2 | Stationed in Michoacán                       | In-Person |            |
| Certification Agency #3 | Stationed in Oaxaca                          | In-Person |            |
| Certification Agency #4 | Stationed in Oaxaca                          | In-Person |            |
| Certification Agency #5 | Stationed in Michoacán                       | In-Person |            |
| Certification Agency #6 | Stationed in Queretaro                       | Phone     |            |
| Stakeholder #1          | Covers all of Mexico (National Organization) | In-Person |            |
| Stakeholder #2          | Covers all of Mexico (Government Agency)     | In-Person |            |
| Stakeholder #3          | Covers all of Mexico (National Organization) | In-Person |            |
| Stakeholder #4          | Covers all of Mexico (Academic Institution)  | Skype     |            |
| Stakeholder #5          | Covers all of Mexico (Academic Institution)  | Skype     |            |

**Figure 1:**



*Figure 1<sup>2</sup>: Geographic locations represented by individuals interviewed*

<sup>2</sup> The stars in Baja California, Guanajuato, Michoacán, and Oaxaca represent more than one producer. Similarly, the circles in Michoacán and Oaxaca represent more than one certification agency.

## RESULTS<sup>3</sup>

Analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data produced from the surveys indicate five barriers across all interview categories, which inhibit transition to organic production. The following barriers identified also include the three different types of perspectives from each of the type of interviewees (Producer, Certification Agency, and Stakeholder).

The barriers are:

1. Poor distribution and efficiency of resources and services available to producers
2. Lack of timely updates on regulations and standards
3. Lack of coordination between producers, certification agencies, and other stakeholders in the organic sector
4. Lack of public investment in the form of certification cost-share and research and grant funding on topics related to organic and transition
5. Corruption and fraud in the Mexican organic sector.

These factors seem to create barriers and challenges not only for producers when engaging in organic production, but also for everyone involved in the organic sector, preventing its growth and development.

### *1. Poor distribution and efficiency of resources and services*

Producers in particular seem to be directly affected by the poor distribution of resources and services. After the basic questions producers had the opportunity at the end of the interview to make additional comments. 8 out of 14 producers (57%) emphasized the lack of efficient communication between them and the certification agencies as a

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<sup>3</sup> A full analysis of each question is available in the report by Bonilla, 2016.

primary issue (QUESTION 23<sup>4</sup>). Other main concerns consisted of the way in which the rules, regulations, protocols, and requirements for the certification were delivered to them. In most cases they reported to receive the information through e-mail or to be referred to websites where they can access information on rules and regulations.

Producers felt overwhelmed and discouraged because they are not given any direction on how to interpret the information. Many producers reported they do not receive guidance or explanation on how to fill out the required paperwork and forms during the certification process. When producers were asked about who helped them through the transition process 10 out of 14 (71%) identified to have received help from another farmer (QUESTION 13). Additionally, producers felt most of these documents contain technical language and jargon that they don't understand and find confusing. While some producers (2 out of the 14) self-identified themselves as agronomists and have academic experience that allows them to interpret the information on these documents, many of them do not have this level of academic literacy.

Certification agencies and stakeholders confirmed the need to find different alternatives to distribute their information and resources (QUESTIONS 46&47). While some of respondents identified that there is lack of resources, others identify that there are resources but they are not distributed using the appropriate methods. Another issue identified by certifiers was the constant trouble they have getting back paperwork from the producers. This issue stems from the difficulty producers have filling out technical paperwork, something producers themselves recognize and report as a problem.

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<sup>4</sup> Please see the report by Bonilla, 2016 for all of the questions referenced in this analysis section.

This particular barrier and challenge for producers could be very problematic when trying to engage producers in organic production. Producers report that sometimes the poor distribution of resources and services drives them to think about quitting or for other producers to actually quit the process of becoming certified organic.

## *2. Lack of timely updates on regulations and standards*

A main issue of concern identified by producers is a general lack of information and timely updates on recordkeeping/paperwork, pest/disease management, rules/regulations, certification process, and approved organic inputs (QUESTION 3). This lack of information (and timely updates on the topics mentioned above), affects the producer's ability to become organically certified. Producers want to receive workshops, trainings, and educational programs but this need is not being met. Additionally, producers noted repeated concerns with certification agencies regarding the availability of workshops and trainings since some of them are only available upon request by the producer (QUESTION 21). One of the producers gave an example of where another producer he knew personally applied an organic input that had just been cut off from the list of approved products. Because this producer was not notified of the update, he ended up having to start the 3-year certification process all over again because he now had applied a substance that was no longer approved. This same situation can potentially happen to any transitioning producer and, most importantly, this situation also supports what previous producers had mentioned in terms of timely regulatory updates.

Based on the interviews conducted with the certification agencies and other stakeholders neither identified this as an issue that they would like to improve in.

Because this is an issue derived from the services that certifiers and stakeholders provide, this issue was only mentioned in the producer interviews. Including the perspective of the certification agencies and stakeholders on this issue would be hard to inform since this issue is a direct evaluation of the services they provide to producers.

### *3. Lack of coordination between producers, certification agencies, and other stakeholders in the organic sector*

A lack of partnerships and collaboration across the sectors exacerbates the problems associated with insufficient and poorly distributed information. Based on the results shown from Question 34 on the type of communication that certification agencies have with producers, producers report that the majority of the interaction between producers and certification agencies happens on an “as-needed basis”. Producers feel that customer service is not a priority for many of the certification agencies. Customer service is especially crucial with grower groups who have one representative that speaks on their behalf and is considered the middleman between the growers of that group and the certification agencies. The relationship between this middleman and the certification agencies is very important because if the relationship collapses they lose all of the growers that this middleman is representing. Needless to say, there is a need for certifiers to strengthen the relationship between their certification agency and producers to focus on building the quality of customer service.

Other lacking relationships observed were collaborations between certifiers and stakeholders. There are national organizations working towards providing additional support for producers who would greatly benefit from collaborations with certifiers to

create conferences, events, and forums for producers. Additionally, no relationships between certifiers or national organizations with research institutions were identified. Many of the ways to find alternative methods to support producers is through research however there were no institutions or certifiers who reported to be collaborating on research projects.

Stakeholders involving national organizations such as SOMEXPRO mentioned to be working towards building relationships between producers and certifiers. Their goal is to be able to create a network of marketers, researchers, buyers, technicians, and others so that producers could access during their transition to organic production. Similarly, organic certification agencies mentioned they are interested in collaboration with different academic institutions to improve research and education in the organic sector.

#### *4. Lack of public investment in the form of certification cost-share and research and grant funding on topics related to organic and transition*

One of the consistent issues that kept coming up throughout the interviews was the stakeholder's inability to provide more services, resources, and support to producers due to the lack of funding (QUESTION 61&62). The results also indicate that these national organizations are providing some of the most accessible, targeted, and relevant programming to help producers and the greater organic sector. These organizations are working with small rural farmers and are training them to best manage their finances, educating them on agronomic organic practices, and are providing them with technical assistance. Unfortunately, even though these organizations are making the best efforts their impact is limited by lack of financial resources, which was reported by 2 of the

stakeholders both of which were research institutions. The lack of financial resources limits them in providing technical assistance to producers because they don't have enough staff and resources working on these projects in addition to restricting their traveling distances.

Another issue related to financial assistance reported by producers and stakeholders is the lack of federal financial assistance and cost-share for producers. As explained in QUESTION 17, the process to receive financial assistance is practically inaccessible by the producers that need it. Producers report that this inability to access financial support is discouraging because the transition process is expensive and sometimes they do not have the economic resources to make the transition without any financial assistance.

##### *5. Corruption and fraud in the Mexican organic sector*

Two producers reported that there are certification agencies that engage in dishonest certification processes allowing producers to enter the organic market with products that are not truly organic (QUESTION 19). Producers interviewed believed that this fraudulent 'organic' produce (or non-organic produce sold as organic) sets an unachievable high aesthetic standard and creates an unfair marketplace. This is the result of certification agencies being bribed by producers who typically offer money to the inspectors on the field to approve their produce as organic when it does not meet organic standards.

This issue also affects certification agencies because, as one of the certifiers reported, they can't compete with those that offer "faster" certification services.

Stakeholders who are engaged in research projects also reported fraudulent activity. Two of the stakeholders reported that the systematic way in which the money is filtered down from the government to the actual research projects or programs that help producers creates a barrier for both the producers and the organizations helping them (Refer to QUESTION 65 for details on this systematic corruption system). This results in lack of financial assistance to carry out their project and it also limits the ability of the stakeholder to help a larger group of producers.

## **DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The current certification process for producers looking to certify their production as organic sometimes varies depending on the type of certification agency the producer partner's up with. Generally a producer looking to get certified has to follow the following steps:

1. **Submit application:** this application should include a detailed organic system plan and various records indicating any pest-disease management, previous chemical applications, and other land management practices.
2. **Inspection:** an inspector goes out to the production practice for an inspection to verify that the production practice meets all certification regulations.
3. **Review:** The certification reviews the application and the inspection report to see if the compliance with certification standards is met. In case that the standards are not met, suggestions on adjustments or clarifications are requested by the certification agency before the certification can be granted.



4. Organic Certification: Producer receives certification allowing them to operate as an organic certified production.
5. Annual Update: The certification must keep complying with organic regulations to prevent losing their organic certification. This includes paying annual inspections performed by the certification agencies, which verify their production as an organic operation.

The certification process requires the producers to have knowledge in various areas including recordkeeping, pest/disease management, production, organic standards, and various rules and regulations. This suggests that producers need various resources including trainings, technical assistance, financial support, and many others. However this is only possible when the producer knows where and how to access these resources to have a successful transition. The major barriers identified in the previous section indicate that a lot of the challenges being faced by producers are derived from this lack of knowledge on where and how to access these resources. Additionally, these resources must be distributed and provided to them in ways that they can understand to achieve their efficiency.

The most frequent barrier faced by producers during and after the transition is the lack of education, services, information and support received. There are various issues that could be addressed in the form of workshops, trainings, and educational programs. Producers themselves identified this as being one of the best methods to receive assistance on issues such as recordkeeping/paperwork, understanding of rules and regulations, updates on any changes that affect their certification process, pest/disease management, and organic inputs. The creation of these educational programs allows

producers to be more informed and feel assertive during the transition period because they have all of the information they need. One of the recommended workshops or trainings should focus on the understanding of rules and regulations and how they affect producers. Through this workshop the goal would be to help the producer interpret these rules and regulations and how they take part in the certification process. Additionally, this workshop would also entail a detailed description of the requirements that they must comply with to be certified with their respective certification agency. Another aspect to include is an explanation of the organic inputs currently approved by the certification agency and what their purpose or use is for. Lastly, walking through an example with the producers on how to fill out all of the forms and paperwork would give them a much better understanding. Conducting such workshops or trainings would build the confidence of the producer during the transition and make them feel supported. Preparing the producer in this aspect could also eliminate a lot of the confusion and endless amounts of emails with questions on how to fill out forms and paperwork.

One of the recommended tools to develop is the creation of a map where certification agencies have a record of where each of their producers is located. This map would have more than one purpose, with the first and most important being creating a farmer-to-farmer network program. There is no one else that a transitioning producer trusts more than another producer who has gone through a similar experience. This allows certification agencies to connect producers to one another and create a support system within their geographic location. Due to conflict of interest, certification agencies cannot provide the consulting or technical support that producers really need. However that does not mean that they cannot create a mentorship program where producers are

free to support one another in agronomic problems or any other issue and this could be a way for certification agencies to approach the problem. By doing so, the certification agencies would also be establishing and building a reputation that separates them from the rest of the other certifiers. Another excellent use of this tool would be to connect potential new producers looking to transition to current existing certified producers. With this map, certification agencies can easily look up an operation that is close to the location of the new potential producer and offer them to visit the operation to hear about their experience with the transition process. There is no better promotion and encouragement for producers to start producing organics than to hear the experience of another producer.

Relationship building is another recommendation that is vital. It seems as if there is a lot of disconnect between producers, stakeholders, and organic certifications. As stated by one of the producers, certification agencies are focused on growing and getting more and more clients but in the process, they are forgetting about maintaining a relationship with their current producers. However a simple call goes further than what they might think and it's worth investing their time in. By calling their producers once in awhile to check on them, producers will feel supported and cared for and this can make a huge difference when it comes to who new producers choose to certify with. Keeping a consistent relationship would also allow the producer to feel more comfortable and reach out to stakeholders and certification agencies when they have an issue or need support. I believe they particularly need to focus on establishing a strong relationship with producers during the transition period, as this is a crucial time period where they perhaps need the most amount of support. From the experience while conducting the interviews

and talking to everyone involved in the organic sector there is very little, if any, collaboration across organizations to conduct research or educational programs to support producers in the organic sector. Both stakeholders and certification agencies have the same goal of engaging more producers in organic production. If they collaborated with one another this would promote the growth and development of the organic sector.

Possible ideas to include on enhanced collaborations include:

- Reaching out to small producers and improving production practices. This can be done through research projects and trainings that academic institutions or certification agencies can facilitate. These trainings would help producers become knowledgeable on many of the technical issues they face during their production. Improving the amount of resources available during the transition for small producers such as access to financial assistance and trainings on recordkeeping would encourage more small producers to become certified organic.
- Collaboration of organic certification agencies with the government to promote the financial assistance that the government has for producers. Certification agencies can get informed on the process required by the government to receive this financial assistance and inform their producers about it. Certification agencies can also use this a promotional tool to encourage producers to make the transition. Additionally, producers would feel supported and feel comfortable to make the commitment to organic production.
- Certification agencies collaborating with academic institutions that are already doing research with transitioning organic producers and supporting their projects. Their support with such projects would allow them to offer their certification

services to the producers involved in these projects. It would also help the academic institutions to structure their research projects and assistant in a way that prepares producers to meet the organic certification standards.

The last relationship building recommendation is specific to the certification agencies. They must not forget about current clients and they need to improve their relationships with them through constant communication. Making phone calls, sending them updates, and even making personal visits to their operations are the basics to client retention. It is important to remember that producers have the ability to change certification agencies at any time and they will not think about it twice if they find another certification agency that is more attentive to their needs.

Producers face many challenges during the transition period but their basic need and where most of their obstacles originate from is the lack of information. This support needs to come from certification agencies and stakeholders in the organic sector who encourage and promote organic production. Mexico is still building the structure to their organic sector and everyone is still learning but it's important to remember and focus on the producer because without them, the organic sector would not exist.

## **CONCLUSION**

The outcome of this project highlights five main barriers and challenges that producers face during the transition process. It is important to note that many other barriers and challenges were also identified in full analysis of the interviews. However these five were the most common. The results of this project indicate areas of improvement in the certification process and transition process where stakeholders and

certification agencies can improve services and support they have available to producers. The recommendations presented would have to be generated and implemented differently across all the different organizations depending on logistical information such as budgets, available staff, geographic location and others. However some of these recommendations require low budgets and a type of approach that would benefit many certification agencies since it would build their customer base.

This project has also identified many different areas for future research. Next steps might include further research on each of the five identified barriers identified in this paper on the topics of distribution and efficiency of resources, updates on regulations and standards, collaboration between the key players, funding, and corruption. These topics could be further researched in order to understand the different aspects of the organic sector and how they function. By doing so, different key players will be able to promote and encourage more producers to transition to organic production. Given that the sample size for this project was relatively small, this is only a small representation of the entire organic sector, which highlights the most obvious issues. There are many more issues that have yet to be identified that could potentially contribute to the lack of producer involvement in organic production and this project provides a sense of direction to future research. Many stakeholders, organic certification agencies, producers, marketers, government officials, and others are pushing to grow the organic sector in Mexico because they see its great potential. The time, resources, and money that is going to the promotion and marketing of organic production in Mexico should perhaps take a second look and instead invest in the producers who are the anchors of the Mexican organic sector.

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