

Organic food in Kenya

Digital Future

Access to healthy and nutritious food is a growing concern worldwide. A pilot project in Kenya shows how influencer marketing and e-commerce ventures can play a key role in accelerating organic market development to benefit both consumers and smallholder producers alike.

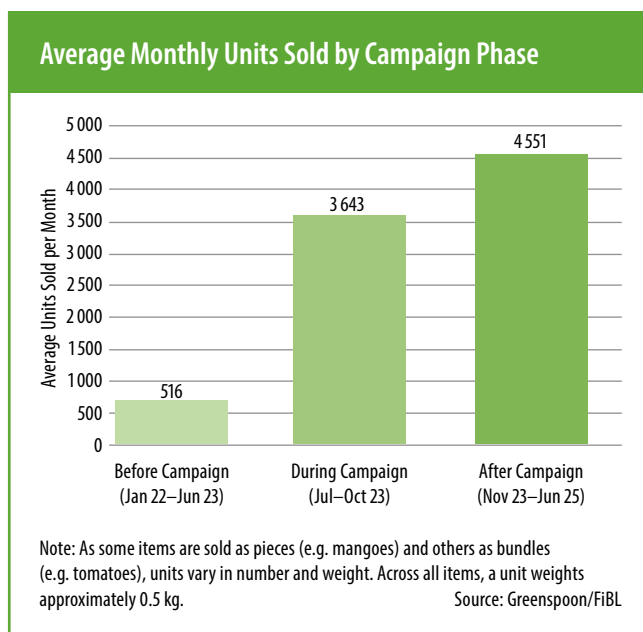
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Africa's organic sector has traditionally been export-oriented centered on high-value crops including coffee, cocoa, tropical fruits, and horticultural off-season crops. In Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, an important starting point for developing also a domestic organic market dates to 2007, when these countries jointly developed the East African Organic Products Standards (EAOPS) to enable organized smallholder farmer groups to sell their organic produce in the local market under the shared Kilimohai mark.¹ Yet, the endeavor to develop organic supply and demand jointly, at the same pace, has proven very challenging. Here, digital innovations provide new promising opportunities to better connect organic producers and consumers and drive organic growth with good product quality at reasonable prices.

A new lifestyle approach

In the context of the Accelerating Organic Market Development (AOMD) project in Kenya (2022–2025), implemented by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) together with the Kenya Organic Agriculture Network (KOAN), a new approach was developed and tested: The Organic Lifestyle Influencer Approach (OLIA), boosting consumer awareness for organic produce and the Kilimohai label and thus stimulate demand—so to complement the project's supply-oriented activities.

OLIA combines different on-the-ground events with digital influencer campaigns to convey cohesive, positive organic messaging to a broad and diverse consumer base. Thereby, the involvement of highly motivated lifestyle influencers is key to position Kilimohai organic as lifestyle products through well-implemented social media posts that at the same time stimulate interest and demand for Kilimohai labelled pro-



duce. For this OLIA campaign work, FiBL and KOAN partnered up with WOWZI, an African-based influencer marketing company hosting a platform to monitor social media posts of digital creators and measure the impact of digital campaigns. From 2021 to 2024, the following campaigns were implemented:

Organic Caravan Campaign: Hip, high-energy city-to-farm event with influencer-led entertainment as part of an exhibition and organic market promoting organic food as part of a modern, healthy lifestyle.

Retailer Campaign: Special in-store activities with organic shelf space combined with organic recipes, tips, and fun facts shared by digital influencers to create awareness and boost demand for organic produce.

Good posts on social media, such as this one from the Gatanga Organic Farmers Market (GOFAM) producer group, are the basis for successful digital organic campaigns.

Farmfluencer Campaign: Social media trainings and posting sessions of organic lead farmers to become digital influencers and engage in direct sales to consumers. **Cheffluencer Campaign:** Live-streamed cooking sessions with well-known chefs and nutritionists to share key messages about the benefits of organic produce and where to buy them.

Altogether, these campaigns triggered 7.8 million shared social media posts. The positive sentiment score across all campaigns of around 90% plus the average engagement rate of 5.2% (relating to clicks, likes, shares, comments) revealed a very positive and emotional response to the shared 'organic content'.

The potential of e-commerce

With successful consumer awareness creation, it becomes even more critical to effectively link consumers with accessible and suitable sales points offering good-quality organic products at a fair price. Here, the collaboration of the AOMD project with Greenspoon, an online retail platform based in Kenya, has shown great potential. Greenspoon operates solely through its web platform², through which customers place their orders and Greenspoon ensures prompt delivery to upper- and middle-class households within and near Nairobi. With its sourcing and delivery structures, working both with individual farmers and aggregators acting as traders, Greenspoon is in a good position to overcome the logistical constraints that organic smallholder groups face with collection, sorting, grading and transportation. Compared to conventional retail, Greenspoon can also better cope with supply shortages, for instance, by labelling out-of-stock products as 'sold out' on their website—making organic products even more exclusive from a consumer's point of view. Greenspoon has been selling organic products since its foundation in 2018, yet always at relatively low volumes. With Greenspoon, project interventions focused on a 3-month campaign in 2023 mainly involving social media posts to create awareness for organic produce and stimulate sales through a time-bound voucher system involving a 10% discount for Kilimohai organic products. Sales data for fresh organic produce shared by Greenspoon prior, during and after the campaign (see Figure) shows an impressive growth. Impressive is not just the spike during the campaign, but the sustained growth long after. This means that customers didn't just try organic because of the offered discount, but they kept buying—while most likely sharing the positive experience with others—as Greenspoon's organic sales volume increased sustainably by nearly 9 times compared to the pre-campaign baseline. Greenspoon reports that a large share of this growth



comes from younger customers aged 25–34, who are eager to buy organic despite prices being between 25% and 100% higher than similar, non-organic produce. Many of these clients first encountered Kilimohai products through the OLIA campaign.

To meet the growing demand for organic produce, Greenspoon has partnered up with new Kilimohai-certified farmer groups and trusted traders to support organic sourcing. At the same time, adjustments were implemented within Greenspoon's storehouse to improve internal logistics and product stocking to speed up the flow of organic produce to shoppers.

The AOMD experience illustrates well how the fast-growing 'digital world' should increasingly be seen and used as an opportunity to drive sustainable food system transformation to promote environmentally friendly farming systems that benefit both farmers and consumers. To enable smallholders to further expand their organic production, consumer awareness creation is essential. Here, the OLIA approach—which strongly targets the fast-growing social media and techsavvy youth—is highly promising, as younger generations are showing growing concern for their food, from both a health and sustainability perspective. □

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1 <https://kilimohaikenya.org>

2 www.greenspoon.co.ke