

ORGANIC FARMING, GOOD MARKET PERSPECTIVES AND A CLEANER ENVIRONMENT

AGRICULTURA ECOLOGICĂ, PERSPECTIVE BUNE PE PIAȚĂ ȘI UN MEDIU ÎNCONJURĂTOR MAI CURAT

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Abstract. *Organic agriculture represent a sustainable alternative to the traditional agriculture system. This system is enforced by the consumers demand for food that is produced in a natural way, excluding as much as possible synthetic substances, and in the same time minimizing the negative impact upon the environment. The demand of such products on the market is continuously increasing, and in the same time the surfaces dedicated to this type of culture. In Romania organic agriculture is advantage by the fact that are not consumed fertilizers in large quantities comparative with European Union countries.*

Rezumat. *Agricultura ecologica reprezinta o alternativa sustenabila la sistemul traditional de agricultura. Acest sistem pune mai mult accentul pe cerintele consumatorilor pentru alimente produse in mod natural, excluzand pe cat posibil folosirea de substante sintetice, si in acelasi timp minimizand pe cat posibil efectele negative asupra mediului inconjurator. Cererea de astfel de produse pe piata comunitara este in continua crestere, la fel si suprafetele alocate pentru aceste culturi. Practicarea agriculturii ecologice in Romania este favorizata de existenta sistemelor agricole traditionale, majoritar extensive. Acest lucru se datoreaza in mare masura si faptului ca in Romania se consuma mai putine ingrasaminte chimice decat in tarile Uniunii Europene.*

INTRODUCTION

Organic farming can be defined as a method of production which places the highest emphasis on environmental protection and, with regard to livestock production, animal welfare considerations. It avoids or largely reduces the use of synthetic chemical inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, additives and medicinal products (1c. European Communities, 2005). Instead, organic production methods utilize agronomic techniques founded on the rational use of natural resources, such as crop rotations and intercropping with nitrogenfixing legumes, animal manures, green composts, biological pest control, pest- and disease-resistant plant varieties and other techniques.

What is removed from the earth must be returned to ensure that farming is sustainable. The methods used in organic agriculture are focused on maintaining soil fertility and minimizing the environmental impact. The aim is to produce food of high nutritional quality while minimizing all forms of pollution.

European co-operation on organic food and farming was kick-started at a

conference in Denmark in May 2001 which resulted in the Copenhagen Declaration. Ministers from governments all around Europe signed this declaration where all agreed on:

- Organic farming is a highly relevant tool which contains the potential to participate in solving simultaneously a range of problems relating to food production, environment, animal welfare, and rural development;
- Organic food and farming is becoming a major opportunity for food producers in Europe, due to a higher consumer interest in certified organic products;
- Organic food and farming should be further developed in Europe.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the EU, organic food and farming is defined under Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91. It differentiates between organic and non-organic production on the grounds that the former is aimed at a specific market; and has its own standards, controls, certification procedures and labeling schemes. Regulation 2092/91 (Council Regulation, 1991) sets out rules governing organic farming practices, food processing, inspection requirements and food labeling. Each Member State is obliged to ensure that the organic food it produces meets baseline standards set within the EU for on-farm production, post-harvest handling, food processing and packaging. The Regulation requires producers of organic food, for instance, to be registered with an approved certification body.

Regulation 2092/91 clarifying that products labeled as containing GMOs cannot also be labeled as organic. Furthermore, the general labeling thresholds agreed for the unintentional presence of GMOs in food products should be used for organic products

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A stable and growing market for organic food in Europe is essential for the continuous development of the organic farming sector. Organic production has steadily grown over the past 20 years.

Nevertheless, the growth of the organic food market has generally been rapid and steady over the past decade, with predictions that could further increase by an annual rate of up to 20% in the coming years.

In terms of CAP objectives, organic farming can be used to improve land management in environmentally sensitive areas, to help implementation rural development schemes, to promote animal welfare, and to enhance water quality. Member States will be allowed to top-up EU aid to support producers of organic fruit and vegetables (1a European Commission, 2005).

A number of benefits arising from organic farming have been demonstrated in research programs. These are predominantly environmental benefits due to reductions in pesticide usage.

Scientific evidence to demonstrate the nutritional and health-promoting benefits of organic farming, however, has been inconclusive and often controversial.

Experiments with apples, for example, have shown organic apples to be firmer and sweeter than equivalent apples from non-organic orchards, with marked differences in biochemistry (e.g. phenolic compounds). Other recent studies have reported higher levels of beneficial vitamins and minerals in organic food (e.g. tomatoes and milk), but overall the available data has been variable and inconsistent. Consequently, no scientific consensus has emerged on whether organic food tastes better or is nutritionally better than food produced through other methods (1a European Commission, 2005).

The European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming, whose objective is to facilitate the ongoing development of organic farming in the EU with 21 concrete policy measures to be implemented and were generally focused on (Commission of the European Communities, 2004):

- an information-led development of the organic food market,
- public support for organic farming more effective
- improving and reinforcing of the Community's organic farming standards, import and inspection requirements

In 2001 the EU certified organic farms account as average size at 3.2%, an seven Member States being above this number, i.e. Austria 11,3%, Finland 6.7%, Denmark 6.5%, Sweden 6.2%, United Kingdom 4% and Germany 3.7% (Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries, 2004).

Comparative with these numbers the latest states that acceded to EU structures are just slightly beginners in this area.

In Romania the administrative structures for organic farming are in place but in lack of manpower. The inspection system needs further strengthening, especially at regional level where supervision by the authorities is insufficient (1b European Commission, 2005).

Table 1

Organic farms structures

Countries	Year of data	Number of farms	Average size (ha)	Total cultivated land		Trend in organic area
				(ha)	(% of total ag. area)	
Estonia	2002	167	53	8710	3,2	increasing
Latvia	2002	300	50	17000	0.7	increasing
Lithuania	2002	393	21	8780	0,3	increasing
Poland	2001	669	19	12862	0.1	increasing
Czech Republic	202	473	328	15544	3.6	Slow increasing
Slovakia	2002	84	595	49999	2.0	Very slight growing
Hungary	2002	538	101	54497	0.9	increasing
Slovenia	2002	412	13	5521	1.1	
Romania	2001	610	47	28800	0.2	increasing
Bulgaria	2000	50	3	175	0.003	increasing
Total		3696	92	341488	0.6	

Source: European Commission, 2005, Romania Comprehensive Monitoring Report

The area that is designated to organic farming is increasing rapidly after 1990. This action is promoted through many programs, for a period of time even through SAPARD action, that are designated to encourage organic farming. The regalement Romania legislation is covering the certification methodology and the organisms that are certifying the organic agriculture (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2003).

CONCLUSIONS

Organic farming systems help on fulfilling the consumer demand for quality food, are recognized as one way to achieve sustainable development, and may help in delivering a range of other benefits. In terms of EU policy, for example, organic agriculture can or could deliver:

- High-quality food;
- Potentially healthier food;
- Reduced pollution from pesticides and artificial fertilizers;
- Gains in terms of sustainable agriculture;
- Improvements in water quality;
- Increased biodiversity;
- Efficient resource management;
- Reduced dependence on (non-renewable) fossil fuel imports;
- A multifunctional and diversified agriculture to aid rural development;
- Fewer problems arising from food overproduction;
- Improvements in animal health and welfare;
- Possible benefits in terms of alleviating the impacts of climate change.

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