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Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe e.V.

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## EkoConnect Information Letter for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

Dear readers,

In this issue we take a look far towards the east, into the Southern Caucasus: Armenia, with its about 3 million inhabitants, is a mountainous country with a great climatic, natural and cultural diversity. Agriculture is wringing a variety of fruits from the often dry and stony soil – for some time past in organic quality as well. Learn more in our report about the challenges and achievements of organic producers in this country.

A totally different, but regularly recurring topic is found at the end of this Infoletter – genetic engineering. The European Parliament has spoken a clear word: organic food and genetic engineering cannot go together, not even in exceptional cases. Now, the question remains how seriously this objection is taken by the European Commission and their lawyers.

Last but not least, we would like to thank those readers amongst you who returned our questionnaire or submitted own contributions. The invitation to join the International Organic Fair in Poland is such a reader contribution – and the organisers are looking forward to welcoming further readers of the Infoletter as participants.

Our new intern, Katrin Böttger, has actively supported the preparation of this issue. A big thank-you to her!

Would you like to present your organisation or business, describe the organic movement in your region, or announce an event? Write to [redaktion@ekoconnect.org](mailto:redaktion@ekoconnect.org) – we are grateful for your input!

Christian Pein                      &                      Hedwig Emmerig                      &                      Katrin Böttger

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### 1. +++ Armenia: Organic farming gets international support +++

Organic farming is not yet widely known in Armenia. In 2006, about 500 ha were managed organically. With the aim to promote the further spread of organic farming methods, several non-government organisations (NGOs) could win the support of several foreign, western institutions – and eventually also convince their own government to act in favour of organic farming. The government is planning to decide about the first Armenian organic legislation (which already exists as a draft version) within this year and has ensured the organic movement to stand behind their ideas and efforts. Organic farming is expected to improve the income of smallholders in disadvantaged areas, such as the mountainous regions of Armenia, and open up new export opportunities. It is an asset in these terms that much of the agricultural land has not been treated with chemicals any more since 1991, due to a lack in resources.

Honey, fruits, vegetables, grains, cow's and goat's milk are currently produced and manufactured in the country. Vine is also grown, although not yet organically. Organic animal farming is still in its first beginnings. Many farmers have just started conversion or think about it at the moment. The costs of certification mean a considerable, often unaffordable constraint, especially to small producers. The domestic certification body EcoGlobe ([www.ecoglobe.am](http://www.ecoglobe.am)) inspects 35 farmers and food manufacturers at present and shall be internationally accredited soon.

The NGO Green Lane organised an international cooperative project last year, together with the Romanian organic farmers' association "Bioterra" and guests from Bulgaria, Moldavia, and Hungary. The aim was to exchange ideas and experiences on how to implement effective structures for organic farming. The project report as well as the second Green Lane newsletter can be downloaded from the AVALON Network news page. The AVALON Foundation has been funding for a couple of years now the development of organic production, processing and marketing in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kirgizia, and Moldavia.

(<http://www.avalon.nl/network/data/asp/pagina.asp?subject=nieuws&volgnr=219>)

The Women's Local Extension Research Group (LERG) in Gargar village is implementing applied research projects, based on the needs in their community. Main topics are the cultivation of medicinal herbs and vegetables as well as controlled wild collection of herbs and berries. Although most of the members have been working organically since many years, certification is not affordable to them for the moment. By the way, it is not only here that women were first to accept and spread the organic idea of holistic land management. The entire organic farming movement in Armenia has mostly been initiated and carried forward by women. ([arm.agrowebcac.org/wfg.pdf](http://arm.agrowebcac.org/wfg.pdf))

The Farmer Field School on Organic Agriculture in Gandzakar village is another local project, which was developed with help of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is now supported by the humanitarian organisation "World Vision" ([www.wvarmenia.am](http://www.wvarmenia.am)). The female director of the school, who is currently converting her own farm to organic production, and many other farmers are planning to expand the crop area and get involved in organic animal breeding in order to satisfy the growing demand from the capital Yerevan and from abroad.

The NGO Shen ([www.organic.am](http://www.organic.am)) started a project in 2002 to promote organic agriculture in the Southern Caucasus, supported by the Swiss government and a Christian aid organisation. Initially, the first Armenian organic production standard was developed, followed by the establishment of a demonstration project which could be realised with the help of several foreign institutions: 120 ha fruit orchards (apricots, peaches, plums etc.) are now managed organically. In autumn 2006, Shen, together with the Association of Organic Food Consumers and Producers, opened the first organic shop in Yerevan, which also offers home delivery.

The Armenian Organic Agriculture Foundation AOAF, founded in 2003, tries to represent as an umbrella organisation the interests of the Armenian organic agriculture movement – and is establishing a further demonstration farm at the moment.

The problems in Armenia are similar to those in the neighbouring countries: poor infrastructure, long distances, high input costs – and likely also corruption. However, the motivation of all stakeholders to advance organic farming in Armenia and use the fallow land in a sustainable way is exceptionally high and very promising. Internationally accredited certification will facilitate export activities and thus bring in important foreign exchange – which again could be invested in improving domestic infrastructure and food processing facilities, for the benefit of the rural communities.

(Source: Green Lane, [office@greenlane.am](mailto:office@greenlane.am))

## 2. +++ Baltic States: Organic area rapidly growing +++

According to Merit Mikk (Estonian Organic Farmers Foundation), the organically farmed area in the Baltic States is rapidly growing. While Estonia and Latvia developed in line with the trend, Lithuania managed to catch up on the positive development of the neighbouring countries. This confirms that high area payments, governmental support (also with marketing) and the commitment of food processors and supermarkets could produce the envisaged effects on the organic market. In Estonia and Latvia, however, direct marketing is staying the main sales channel for organic products for the time being, complemented by small health food stores, farmers' markets, box schemes and internet shops. Milk and meat are almost always sold as conventional since hardly any organic manufacturing facilities are available. In addition, other products are rarely on offer in organic quality as most of the organic area in both countries is grassland.

Key figures of organic agriculture in the Baltic States				
	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Germany
Area 2005 (ha)	59,862	118,612	69,430	807,000
Area 2006 (ha)	75,000	150,000	110,000	
No. of farms 2005	1,013	2,873	1,811	17,020
No. of farms 2006	1,100	3,700		
Share of total agricultural area 2005	7.2 %	4.8 %	2.7 %	4.7 %

(Source: ZMP ÖKOMARKT Forum Nr. 16)

## 3. +++ Poland: Number of organic farmers and food manufacturers further increasing +++

The national agricultural inspection agency IJHARS has published new data on organic farming in Poland. There was a strong increase in the number of farmers and food processors in 2006. Most organic enterprises are still situated in the districts Lubelskie, Małopolskie, Podkarpackie and Mazowieckie. However, other regions are catching up: the Zachodnio-Pomorskie district, for instance, has had an 66% growth in organic farmers compared to 2005. Altogether though, the number of farmers who are prepared to convert to organic seems to be on the decline. Nevertheless, the Polish Ministry of Agriculture expects the number of organic farms to double again until 2010.

On the other hand, organic food processing is just starting to boom. Today, there are already three times more manufacturing plants than in 2004. These plants are distributed all over Poland, with some concentration around Warsaw. The positive trend is likely to continue – and to reduce the export orientation of the Polish organic agriculture sector. In addition, it should thus be possible to process and sell more and more organic produce actually as “organic”. The growing interest of some major food retail chains is certainly an asset in this regard.

Key figures of organic agriculture in Poland			
	2004	2005	2006
Farmers	3,760	7,182 (+91%)	9,194 (+21%)
Manufacturers	55	90 (+64%)	163 (+81%)
Importers			2
Area (ha)	82,730	167,740	

## 4. +++ Poland: International Organic Fair “with Princess Anna” +++

The fair will take place in front of the castle in Brodnica (Kujawsko-Pomorskie district) on Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> of July. Producers of organic foods, cosmetics and textiles as well as providers of renewable energy techniques will present their goods and services. Craftsmen, musicians, dancers, artists and many others will entertain the visitors. The exhibition “Nature – Man – Art” and workshops on natural medicine complement the programme. At the same time, a conference will be held on “Organic Agriculture – a chance for Humanity and the Environment”. The German, Lithuanian and Swedish twin towns of Brodnica will also be present.

**Further participants are warmly welcome!** Booths (1.5 x 3 m) are available to exhibitors from abroad – who are also invited to join the visitors programme on Saturday (sightseeing tour, get together with organic farmers and activists).

Organisers: City of Brodnica, Agricultural University Warsaw (SGGW) – IRENE project, Ekoland, and others. The President of Poland and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development have been asked to take patronage. The television broadcaster TVP, Radio BIS, Radio PIK and the “Gazeta Pomorska” will report on the event.

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### **5. +++ Romania: Ministry corrects prognosis on organic farming growth +++**

The importance of organic farming is growing in Romania. Nevertheless, the Bucharest Ministry of Agriculture (MADR) had to correct its very optimistic estimations for 2006. According to new data published in May, altogether 3092 organic farmers and food traders were registered in 2006 (estimation: 3400). The organically farmed area increased from 110,400 ha to 143,000 ha during the last year (estimation for 2006: 170,000 ha). However, actual numbers are likely to be higher and thus closer to the previous estimations since some certified organic farmers are not registered with the government.

According to the ministry, organic farmers produced 166,574 tons organic vegetable raw material last year of which 48,441 tons were grains, 73,082 tons oil seeds and legumes, and 24,962 tons wild collection products. In addition, 127,500 hectolitres organic cow's, sheep, and goat's milk was produced. Compared to 55 million hectolitres total raw milk production, this is, however, not too much. From the organic milk, more than 1,700 tons of cheese was manufactured. Moreover, grains, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables, and wild berries are available in organic quality in Romania. These products are processed to bread and pastries, vegetable oils, soy drinks, apple juice, and herbal teas. According to the ministry, marketing is the main issue since there is a lack of knowledge among Romanian consumers about the quality of organic foods and their production.

Subject to approval from the European Commission in Brussels, organically managed fields will be supported with 205 €/ ha (233 €/ ha during conversion) and grassland with 81 €/ ha (101 €/ ha during conversion) in the future. There shall be higher subsidies for special crops.

(Sources: fruchtportal.de; maap.ro/pages/page.php?self=01&sub=0107&tz=010710&lang=2)

### **6. +++ Turkey: Organic Olives Project +++**

In 2004, four villages in Buca, Izmir, joined their forces to farm their land organically, which is part of the environmentally protected Tahtali Dam basin. The villages have united as the Buca Villages Organic Olive and Olive Oil Project, covering nearly 650 hectares operated by 260 farmers. This means the largest connected area in Turkey for organic farming.

There are now plans for a large expansion in order to secure the community's livelihood for the future. Production centres are set up, for example an olive oil factory with 40 tons daily capacity. The four villages together have the capacity to produce 100 to 150 tons of oils. Alongside, showrooms and sales counters will be set up. In addition, an olive packaging and a soap production facility are planned.

Furthermore, the region shall be developed into a centre for eco-tourism, implementing the Organic Market Project as a meeting place for producers and consumers. Organic products of the region have already been displayed at several domestic fairs – where consumers showed great interest in buying the products directly on the site of production. This interest means an excellent starting point for the eco-tourism activities. Now, a multi-purpose amphitheatre, an open cinema, cafes, open stands, and shops with organic products shall be set up in the Buca villages to attract the public.

(Sources: turkishdailynews.com.tr; organic-market.info)

### **7. +++ Organic viticulture meeting of the German Bioland association with focus on Eastern Europe +++**

This year's organic viticulture meeting of the German organic growers' association Bioland was focused on Central and Eastern Europe. Key figures for about 20 countries showed the great potential of the region. The meeting started with pictures from a professional excursion to Georgia where high

quality wines are produced – favoured by fertile soils and the Mediterranean climate. The country, famous for its beautiful landscape, is also called “the cradle of viticulture” as vineyards were already cultivated there thousands of years ago. Since for some time, Russia has been boycotting Georgian wine, the wine growers are looking for new markets in Western Europe.

Dr. Edit Hajdu from the research institute for viticulture and wine-cellarage in Keskemet gave an account of the situation in Hungary. About 800 ha of Hungarian vineyards are certified organic. Especially the breeding of robust grape cultivars has tradition in the country and could be of great use to organic viticulture. The control, marketing and advisory system for organic wine was reported to be well developed.

Goran Soster, chairman of the organic farmers’ association in East Slovenia, reported on this genuine viticulture country with about 24,000 ha of grape acreage. 41 % of the farms own one or more vineyards. And organic farmers receive generous support from the government: 800,- euros are paid per hectare vineyard. Therefore it is likely that the currently 160 organic wine makers will soon get more colleagues.

(Source: bioland 3/07)

### **8. +++ Second Organic Marketing Forum in Warsaw with 60 % more participants +++**

On 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> of May, the Second Organic Marketing Forum took place in Warsaw, an international meeting on processing and trade of organic produce in Central and Eastern Europe. The participants used the opportunity to exchange experiences among like-minded people, to make new business contacts, and to gain new ideas for their own companies.

Altogether, 15 expert talks and first-hand reports from organic entrepreneurs were presented. The conference topics “marketing strategies of organic food traders”, “market development in different parts of Eastern and Western Europe”, “organics in the conventional food trade” and “solutions for problems of young organic processors” were of special interest to the participants. In addition, organic enterprises presented themselves on 35 booths. With an excursion to an organic wholesaler and two health food shops in Warsaw the Organic Marketing Forum drew to a close.

About 230 participants from 15 countries attended the meeting, 60% more than in 2006. “The increased number of participants and the busy atmosphere reflected the positive development of organic agriculture in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe”, says Bernhard Jansen, chairman of organiser EkoConnect – International Centre for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe. “A sense of the beginning of a new era was tangible throughout the conference rooms.”

The Organic Marketing Forum took place under the patronage of the Polish Ministry of Agriculture und began with an opening speech by vice minister Marek Chrapek. The Forum was organised by EkoConnect in cooperation with the Polish organic farmers’ association Ekoland, the national Polish counselling service for agriculture (CDR) and the Organic Retailers Association and funded by the Foundation for German-Polish Cooperation. ([www.ekoconnect.org](http://www.ekoconnect.org))

### **9. +++ Third Pillnitz Summer Academy on Organic Animal Husbandry +++**

From 25<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August, 30 students from Central and Eastern Europe are again invited to Dresden (Germany) to study for one week the various aspects of organic livestock farming under the guidance of highly qualified lecturers. A field trip will complement the academic knowledge gained during the course. Networking meetings, group work, and discussion rounds shall support the exchange among the participants. The language of instruction is English. Thanks to financial assistance from the Foundation for German-Polish cooperation and the Schweisfurth-Foundation, students in need can apply for scholarships and travel grants.

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### 10. +++ Genetic Engineering: Fish proteins in ice cream, bacteria in maize, GMO in organic products? +++

Genetically modified organisms (GMO) are quickly entering more and more of our daily foods. Just recently, the consumer goods firm Unilever applied to the UK's Food Standards Agency for novel food approval to use ice-structuring proteins, derived from a fermented genetically modified bakers's yeast. These proteins make low-fat ice cream creamy - and scientists nervous. The genes coding for the ice-structuring proteins come from the cold water fish ocean pout. They were transferred into yeast cells which now produce the protein for commercial use. The protein itself does not contain any genetic material – and thus the ice cream does not either. Does the final product have to be labelled according to European GMO-law? And is it necessary to show that there is no risk involved in the use of this protein for human consumption?

The transgenic protein has already been authorised in Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Indonesia, Mexico, the United States and the Philippines. Can so many countries fail to detect a hidden risk? Independent experts say, yes. Adverse health effects cannot be excluded to date – and consumers have to be informed on the packaging what they are about to eat. However, voluntary declaration is quite unlikely: Given that European public opinion remains largely opposed to GMOs, such information could potentially turn some consumers off the products.

The Moscow regional government recently decided to take a stand against this trend. Starting in July, products sold in the region that are approved through tests at one of 16 designated laboratories will be allowed to use the new “No GMO!” certification and label. Major retailers have already strongly encouraged food producers to apply for “No GMO!” certification. It is expected that “No GMO!” food will be sold for 0.5 and 15 per cent more than their uncertified counterparts.

The scandal surrounding the European Union's continued approval of Monsanto's GM maize (MON810) has resurfaced and stirred up public opinion in recent weeks. After Greece, Austria, Poland and Hungary's decision to deny approval of the GM crop, the European Union finds itself in a double conflict: the World Trade Organisation (WTO) seeks approval in order to avoid trade distortions – the European citizens, including farmers and beekeepers, do not want to have anything to do with the “toxic maize”, which contains the genes of an insect-damaging bacterium. After publication of two studies addressing health and environmental risks, the German government finally reacted: the sale of MON810 was stopped and Monsanto was obliged to develop a monitoring plan. Bulgaria has recently announced that it will follow this ban as soon as possible.

Shortly beforehand, the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Conference of the “GMO Free Regions” movement was held in Brussels. 300 representatives from GMO-free regions from across Europe gathered in the European Parliament to celebrate the growth of their movement. The number of GMO-free regions in Europe increased from 174 to 236 over the past year and from around 3000 to over 4200 municipalities and communities. Participants declared publicly how the genetic engineering industry, with its focus on patents and maximal economic gains, is a severe threat to agricultural diversity and independence. ([www.gmo-free-regions.org](http://www.gmo-free-regions.org))

Recent developments have influenced the Members of the European Parliament in their decision to reject a proposal from the Commission to allow traces of genetically modified organisms in organic food. In their statement on the draft of the new organic regulation they ask the Commission to remove “any exemptions that may allow the use of GMO and synthetic chemicals”.

(Sources: [cee-foodindustry.com](http://cee-foodindustry.com); [bioland.de](http://bioland.de) 2/07; Informationsdienst Gentechnik; Die Grünen/EFA im Europäischen Parlament; [gmo-free-regions.org](http://gmo-free-regions.org))

Study on the health effects of MON810:

[www.greenpeace.de/fileadmin/gpd/user\\_upload/themen/gentechnik/greenpeace\\_bt\\_maize\\_engl.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.de/fileadmin/gpd/user_upload/themen/gentechnik/greenpeace_bt_maize_engl.pdf)

Study on the environmental effects of MON810:

[www.greenpeace.de/fileadmin/gpd/user\\_upload/themen/gentechnik/greenpeace\\_bt\\_maize\\_engl.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.de/fileadmin/gpd/user_upload/themen/gentechnik/greenpeace_bt_maize_engl.pdf)

## 11. +++ Dates and events +++

- International Organic „Fair with Princess Anna“, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2007, Brodnica, PL
- 1<sup>st</sup> International Research Day at the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), 17<sup>th</sup> August 2007, Frick, CH  
(<http://www.fibl.org/forschung/forschungskommunikation/konferenzen/2007-research-day.php>)
- 1<sup>st</sup> IFOAM Conference on the Marketing of Organic and Regional Values, 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> August 2007, Schwäbisch Hall, D ([http://www.ifoam.org/events/ifoam\\_conferences/regional\\_values\\_2007.html](http://www.ifoam.org/events/ifoam_conferences/regional_values_2007.html))
- 3<sup>rd</sup> International Pillnitz Summer Academy Organic Animal Husbandry – for students from Central and Eastern Europe, 25<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August 2007, Dresden, D (<http://www.ekoconnect.org>)
- EurSafe 2007 – Sustainable Food Production and Ethics, 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> September 2007, Wien, AT  
(<http://www.nas.boku.ac.at/eursafe2007.html>)
- 21<sup>st</sup> IGN-meeting "Animal Suffering and Well-being - International Symposium on the State of Science", 20<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> September 2007, Gießen, D (<http://www.uni-giessen.de/vet-tierschutz>)
- Anuga Organic – new Organic Fair, 13<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> October 2007, Köln, D ([www.anuga.com](http://www.anuga.com))
- World Food Day 2007 - topic: "The right to food", 16<sup>th</sup> October 2007
- Natural Ingredients 2007, 30<sup>th</sup> October – 1<sup>st</sup> November 2007, London, UK ([www.fi-events.com](http://www.fi-events.com))
- EUCARPIA Symposium on organic plant breeding, 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> November 2007, Wageningen, NL  
(<http://www.dpw.wau.nl/peenrc/index.php?item=EUCARPIA>)
- Agritechnica 2007, 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007, Hannover, D ([www.agritechnica.com](http://www.agritechnica.com))
- "Food in Future Climate - Conference on Organic Food Systems" – Conference on climate change and organic agriculture, 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007, Norrköping, S  
(<http://www.cul.slu.se/english/conference/index.html>)
- BioFach 2008, 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> February 2008, Nürnberg, D ([www.biofach.com](http://www.biofach.com))
- Salima – International Food Fairs, 04<sup>th</sup> – 07<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Brno, CZ ([www.bvv.cz/salima](http://www.bvv.cz/salima))
- World Summit on GMO-Free Diversity – May 2008, Bonn, D  
([http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/Call\\_for\\_Bonn\\_2008\\_e\\_d\\_f.pdf](http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/Call_for_Bonn_2008_e_d_f.pdf))
- 22<sup>nd</sup> General Meeting of the European Grassland Federation - "Biodiversity and animal feed – future challenges for grassland production", 09<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> June 2008, Uppsala, S  
(<http://www-conference.slu.se/egf2008/>)
- 16<sup>th</sup> IFOAM Organic World Congress – Cultivate the Future, 15<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> June 2008, Modena, IT  
([http://www.ifoam.org/events/ifoam\\_conferences/owc/Organic\\_World\\_Congress.html](http://www.ifoam.org/events/ifoam_conferences/owc/Organic_World_Congress.html))

### +++ EkoConnect e.V.: Our goals, our work – and you! (membership information) +++

EkoConnect is a not-for-profit organisation that enforces and supports the exchange of information, knowledge and experience in the field of organic agriculture. It was founded in 2003 and is based in Dresden, Germany. The organisation serves as a network for people and organisations involved with the organic sector in Western and Eastern Europe to meet and interact with each other.

Our primary focus is to **support activities and actors involved with sustainable development and organic agriculture within the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries**. EkoConnect also promotes rural development and the availability of organic products and foods in those markets. Activities include: being a centralized source of information, knowledge transfer between actors and organizations, networking opportunities and continuing education opportunities such as seminars and field trips and supports private and public facilities implementing structures for the organic agriculture. EkoConnect and its activities are overseen by an Advisory Board that guides the organization in terms of technical and strategic issues.

EkoConnect members include experts and organisations from all over Europe with years of experience in implementing organic agricultural structures. You can help support our work by becoming a “**supporting member**” or as an “**ordinary member**”. Supporting members pay an annual fee of at least 60 € for individuals and 600 € for organisations, institutions and enterprises. Ordinary members are expected to contribute actively to our work. Annual fees for ordinary members is at least 20 € for individuals and 200 € for organizations, institutions and enterprises.

**We warmly welcome all new members!** Please fill in the following application form and send it back to us:

#### Membership application at EkoConnect e.V.

I / We would like to support the work of EkoConnect and become a:  supporting member  
 ordinary member.

Surname:	Name:
In case of organisation, institution or enterprise, please name of the responsible representative:	
Zipcode and City:	Street and Number:
Country:	County:
Phone:	Mobile:
E-Mail-Adress:	Activity (farmer, processor, retailer, association,...)

I / We agree to pay an annual membership fee of ..... € and will pay this amount via:

cash (enclosed)       cheque (enclosed)

\_\_\_\_\_

place, date, signature