



EkoConnect – International Centre for Organic
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EkoConnect Information Letter for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

Dear readers,

This issue of the EkoConnect Information Letter for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe marks the 15th edition of this online info leaflet, which has now almost 4.000 readers in approx. 50 countries.

Our aim in 2005, the year it was first published, was to offer decision-makers, multipliers and enterprises in the field of organic agriculture in CEE practical information, ideas and know-how in a succinct and accessible format written in languages they could understand. We also wanted to keep inform organic enthusiasts in the old EU-member states about new developments in Central and Eastern Europe with the intent of contributing to networking within the European organic agriculture.

After 15 issues of the information letter we are glad to have achieved the greater part of these aims. We received a lot of positive feedback concerning the info letter and are pleased that it has become an important source of information in the new EU member states and neighbouring countries.

We are grateful to all who sent us information, articles and comments. In particular, we would like to thank, with all our heart, our translators without whose assistance this work would be impossible.

We invite all readers to forward this info letter to colleagues and partners. They can download it at www.ekoconnect.de/informationsbrief.html or subscribe for free at info@ekoconnect.org. To those who would like to offer financial support we also offer supporting memberships to EkoConnect or an earmarked donation (please see the last page for further details).

In this issue Croatia takes centre stage. The holiday country at the Adriatic Sea also has a growing organic agriculture sector with significant export potential.

Furthermore we present practicable methods for the successful treatment of organic seeds, resulting from the STOVE research project.

After her year as a trainee, Hedwig Emmerig is, unfortunately, leaving our editorial team. We would like to thank her for her commitment and assistance and wish her a good start into her new assignment.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter and we send our best regards from Dresden.

Christian Pein, Katrin Böttger, Stefan Simon

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1 +++ HR: Organic agriculture in Croatia +++

Processors and traders from Western and Eastern Europe are increasingly looking for organic raw materials abroad. Croatia – an official candidate for EU membership since June 2004 – is considered a potential supplier of organic raw material in the medium term.

In 2006, 5.000 hectares in total were being organically managed by 340 registered farms. This accounts for approximately 0.6% of the arable land in Croatia. The most important crops are cereals (wheat and corn), followed by grasses, herbs, fruits, vine and olives. In addition, there are some 17.000 hectares of so-called organic bee pasture whose certification is unique throughout the world. These areas do not include the collection of wild plants such as herbs, wild berries and mushrooms which plays a relatively big role in all Balkan states.

In 2002 organic enterprises were registrated at the national level for the first time. In the same year, the first national organic regulations were enacted following the EU Organic Regulation 2092/91 and international standards from the IFOAM. There is also now a national logo for organic products.

Six certification bodies are accredited by the ministry. They inspect production according to the Croatian standard HRN EN 45004. The system, however, does not correspond completely with EU regulations meaning that Croatia is not listed on the so-called third country list. As a result, all products imported into an EU country have to be controlled both by a Croatia and an EU-accredited certification body. Subsequently, traders wanting to export organic products from Croatia have to start the planning process early.

The majority of small Croatian organic farms are semi-subsistence farms. They produce for their own needs and sell whatever surplus remains – mainly fresh or little processed goods (e.g. pickled vegetables) – directly on the farm or at weekly markets. In addition to cucumbers and paprika processing enterprises there are two vineyards producing organic wines, several organic olive oil producers and a few farms producing goat milk. Furthermore, raw products from organic agriculture are used to make healthy baby food. Six years have passed since German baby food producer Hipp established a production site in Croatia.

Because of the more difficult export conditions and small production quantities, only a few Croatian organic products have made their way onto the EU market, mainly herbs, berries and nuts. On the other hand, Croatian shops sell a lot of organic products from other European countries. Croatia consumers can already find a wide range of organic products from other countries in local health food shops and some supermarkets but only a few locally produced items. According to the local food sector, Croatian consumers are increasingly interested in organic products. Therefore, they represent an growing market similar to Slovenia and the Czech Republic that is probably going to develop quickly.

So what can stores do to get the requested organic raw products and thus be able to satisfy the increasing demand?

Supporting the development of cooperative agricultural production in certain regions, especially by means of an intensive counselling concerning production techniques and quality management would be one economically sensible but long-term and work intensive investment solution for processing companies.. Such projects are not only socially sustainable and contribute to an improved standard of living in rural areas but are economically promising, too. The processor and the involved farmers start a long-term cooperation with attractive raw material prices for both partners.

But the protagonists need staying power and continuity and there are additional costs coming up due to expenditures on educating farmers. However, these projects have already proven to be sound, as shown by the example of organic feta cheese from Romania as well as countless fair trade projects. Products to be focused on for the export could be, for example, wine, herbs and speciality cheeses. Of special interest for the EU market would be organic honey production and certified wild berries, mushrooms and herbs, as is already the case in Romania.

Enterprises with interest in investing in Croatia are possibly given the opportunity of up to 50% cofinancing through SAPARD development funds, which is designed to finance structural support for EU accession countries. Besides the expansion of infrastructure, they can, in the future, support the construction of processing plants in rural areas, thus creating new jobs. (sts)

(source: *Ost-West-Contact, Kroatien Spezial 10. 2006*)

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2. +++ EU-Project “STOVE“: Successful biologic seed treatment +++

Pathogens for most of the vegetable diseases caused by bacteria and fungi often lie dormant, hidden in seeds. Therefore, in conventional seed growing agriculture it is common to treat seeds preventively with chemicals. This is called seed dressing. Since 2004, only the use of organically produced seeds for which chemical dressing is not permitted is allowed in organic agriculture. As a result, seed producers are facing a challenge to find alternatives. As in the case of organically-grown vegetables where very few disease-controlling agents are available to farmers, the high quality of the seeds used is a decisive factor.

In the EU project "STOVE" ("Seed Treatments for Organic Vegetable Production") coordinated by the Federal Biological Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry (BBA, Germany), alternative seed treatment methods were tested. The project partners from Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Germany examined altogether six different vegetable crops and their most important pathogens.

host	Pest
carrots	<i>Alternaria dauci/radicina</i> and <i>Xanthomonas hortorum</i>
cabbage	<i>Alternaria brassicicola</i> and <i>A. Campestris</i>
beans	<i>Colletotrichum lindemuthianum</i>
peas	<i>Ascochyta pisi</i>
Lamb´s- lettuce	<i>Phoma valerianellae</i>
parsley	<i>Septoria petroselini</i>

In addition to three physical methods (electron seed treatment, hot water treatment and aerated steam treatment), biological agents (microbial, plant extracts) and resistance inducers customary in trade were also tested. Chemical standard were each time with Thiram chemically treated seed lots. The encouraging results in greenhouse and field tests demonstrate that for most seed-borne vegetable diseases there are environmentally compatible seed treatment methods. According to Dr. Eckhard Koch from the Institute for Biological pest management of the BBA, they work as efficiently as chemical treatments. Especially with fungal pathogens, the number of infested plants could be significantly decreased, tells his colleague Dr. Annegret Schmitt. Bacterial diseases are a bit more difficult.

According to the coordinators, the best results are achieved using physical techniques such as aerated steam, hot water resp. electron seed treatment. In the last technique, electrons diffuse equally in all parts of the seed into the outer seed-coat. In that way, physical, chemical and biological processes are stimulated which eliminate pathogens living at or directly under the seed-coat. "But during this treatment, it is important that the parameters like atmospheric humidity, temperature or electron intensity have to be optimised for the different cultures." reports Dr. Koch.

Biological agents have not proved themselves under experimental conditions to the same degree as the physical techniques. These are agents such as antagonistic micro-organisms and natural substances (thyme oil). But Dr. Schmitt tells us to consider " that very infested seed lots were used. A seed growing enterprise would never trade such lots." The seed lots used had greater infestation levels than usually encountered under practical conditions. That is why it is highly probably that, under normal conditions, biological agents contribute to the protection of the plant.

Another possibility with synergistic effects is the combination of biologic agents with physical treatments. Coupling the technologies could achieve better results than the respective treatments alone. In the interest of protecting the integrity of the seed, a lower intensity treatment is recommendable because the seed is stressed by hot water treatment, etc. At the same time, physical treatments could provide additional protection to the plants from soil-borne pathogens, explains Dr. Annegret Schmitt.

"All in all, the results are very encouraging and seem to be interesting not only to organic farmers" but others as well states Dr. Koch in his prognosis. The STOVE project has shown that for most seed-born vegetable diseases there does exist effective non-chemical methods of seed treatment which partly are already practicable for the practice. (kb)

(sources: <http://www.idw-online.de/pages/de/news176731>, <http://www.stove-project.net/>)

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3. +++ Dates and events +++

- Congress „Use land – Form regions: Visions 2030“ (Agri-Culture in tomorrow`s Europe), October 26th – 27th 2007, Frankfurt/M., DE, (http://www.ifls.de/download/ifls_journal_nr11.pdf)
- EUCARPIA Symposium on organic plant breeding, November 7th – 9th 2007, Wageningen, NL (<http://www.eucarpia.org/>)
- ECOFESTIVAL 2007: The 10th Organic Products & Services Exhibition, November 8th – 11th 2007, Exhibition Center Helexpo Palace in Athens, GR (www.ecofestival.gr/)
- Agritechnica 2007, November 13th -17th 2007, Hannover, DE (www.agritechnica.com)
- "Food in Future Climate - Conference on Organic Food Systems" - conference on climate change and organic agriculture, November 19th - 21st, Norrköping, SE (<http://www.cul.slu.se/english/conference/index.html>)
- European Organic Congress, December 4th – 5th 2007, Brussels, BE (<http://www.organic-congress-ifoameu.org/>)
- BioFach 2008, February 21st – 24th 2008, Nürnberg, DE (www.biofach.com)
- CODIS 2008 (International Congress on compost and digestate), February 27th – 29th 2008, Solothurn, CH, (<http://www.codis2008.ch/>)
- Salima – International Food Fairs, March 4th – 7th 2008, Brno, CZ (www.bvv.cz/salima)
- Biol 2008 - International Organic Olive Oil Awards, April 30th - May 7th 2008, Bari, IT (www.premiobiol.it/)
- World Summit on GMO-Free Diversity – May 2008, Bonn, DE (http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/Call_for_Bonn_2008_e_d_f.pdf)
- 3rd Organic Marketing Forum – International meeting for the processing and the marketing of organic food, 26th – 27th May 2008, Warsaw, PL (www.ekoconnect.org)
- 22nd European Grassland Association Meeting – "Biodiversity and fodder – future challenges for grassland management", June 9th -12th 2008, Uppsala, SE (<http://www-conference.slu.se/egf2008/>)
- 16th IFOAM Organic World Congress – Cultivate the Future, June 15th - 24th 2008, Modena, IT (http://www.ifoam.org/events/ifoam_conferences/owc/Organic_World_Congress.html)
- 2nd ISOFAR - Conference (International Society of Organic Agriculture Research), June 18th -20th 2008, Modena, IT, (<http://www.isofar.org/modena2008/>)
- 4th QLIF-Congress, June 18th -20th 2008, Modena, IT (<http://www qlif.org/Library/letter/july07.html>)

Organic Marketing Forum – European Organic Food Processing Sector in Warsaw

Next year for the third time EkoConnect and its cooperation partners Ekoland Poland, Organic Retailers Association (ORA) and the Polish Agricultural Advisory Service CDR invite to the Organic Marketing Forum in Poland. The international conference on the processing and marketing of organic food takes place on 26th and 27th May 2008, at the exhibition centre Expo 21 in Warsaw as in the previous year.

For the first time also lectures concerning the production of raw materials and organic catering will be offered. The supply of raw material, quality management and import issues will be further topics.

About 350 participants from 20 countries will be expected. The Organic Marketing Forum is the central meeting of the organic food sector in CEE and brings together each year trade visitors and exhibitors from all over Europe.

Participants who register until 25th January 2008 pay a reduced participation fee. Further information, the programme and registration forms please find at www.organic-marketing-forum.org and www.ekoconnect.org.

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Best regards,
Your Editorial Team

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+++ 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-Address:	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