



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

Dear Readers,

The first issue of the New Year begins with Turkey, which, for more than 20 years, has brought a wide range of organic products to Western European markets.

The contributions that follow examine competition between producers (farmers) and processors including scientific and political debates related to demanding quality and safety standards for organic products in many EU countries.. To further develop the debate, we include the results of three research projects from Croatia, Poland and Switzerland.

The last article focuses on an exciting topic: the different interpretation of the new EU – Hygiene Legislation Nr. 852 – 854, in effect since January 2006, with a focus on the special situation of on-farm processors in the Czech Republic and recent discussions in Brussels on the subject.

We welcome comments or suggestions from all of our readers. If you would like to know more about EkoConnect be sure to come by and meet us in person at our stand at the BioFach 2008 in Nuremberg (exhibition hall 3, stand 210). Another opportunity to meet us will be at the 3rd Organic Marketing Forum in Warsaw May 26 - 27, 2008. We cordially invite you and any of your colleagues interested in organics.

We hope you enjoy this latest issue and send our best regards from Dresden,

Katrin Böttger & Stefan Simon & Christian Pein

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1. +++ TR: Organic Agriculture in Turkey +++

In the middle of the eighties, organic agriculture developed in Turkey as a response to increasing demand for organic products abroad. Nowadays, little by little a domestic market is developing, especially in larger cities.

Most organic farms and processors, as well as certification bodies, are situated in the region around Izmir (Aegean). Nuts, sultanas and, later, figs have been organically grown there since 1985. That is why it also could be called the cradle of Turkish organic agriculture. During the last years new farms in other regions such as central and east Anatolia or from along the Black Sea started to produce organically. In 2006, around 162,131 ha were organically managed by 8.654 farms. This comprises approximately 0.5% of all arable land.

Since 1994, organic agriculture has been state-regulated under the leadership of the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture MARA. Private certification bodies (at the moment there are seven, five of which are from the EU) have to be registered and accredited by the MARA. Because of the export focus, the Turkish organic legislation corresponds to EU standards. A state organic seal similar to the EU-logo has also been established.

Contract farming is an important part of the organic production in Turkey. At the beginning, dried fruits were the main export. By now nuts, herbs and spices, fresh and processed vegetable, legumes, cereals, industry and oil plants are produced in noteworthy amounts, too. Up until now only small quantities of organic meat and milk products have been produced.. However, national demand is increasing, especially in the cities. The majority– around 80 – 90% of the organic production – is still exported. Main export countries are EU Member States with Germany in the lead, followed by the Netherlands, Great Britain, Italy and France.

Independant organic retailers can be found in almost every Turkish town. Additionally, smaller producers have created cooperatives to take care of product marketing. Other than corner displays of organic products in supermarkets there are two chains of specialist organic shops, named Ecolife and City Farm. The first has eight shops in Istanbul and the latter five. Most organic retail products are cultivated domestically. However, depending on the shop, only from one- to two-thirds of all products are certified organic. the remaining products are still conventionally produced.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture (MARA) many locals are hesitant to buy organic products because they cost 50 – 300% more than conventional products. That is why organic food has only a 1% share of the market. Nevertheless, the price difference does not have to be that high. One example is the weekly organic farmers' market in the Istanbul's Sisli quarter, which takes place every Saturday since its inception back in the summer of 2006. – The Sisli market was the first of its kind in Turkey. Approximately 100 stands sell only completely organic certified products all at moderate prices. Most are no more than 20 % more expensive than conventional goods. The organizers have reported consistently positive results with around 3,000 visitors to the market each Saturday.

(sources: own inquiries, MARA, www.biomarkt.info)

Proofreading: Tom Reid

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2. +++ CR: Indigenous sheep breeds provide solid basis for organic livestock production in karst areas of Croatia +++

Organic sheep breeding in Croatia is, as it should be, based on indigenous breeds. As one would expect, native breeds are well adapted to their environment and have a natural resistance to common parasites. Karst areas, encompassing around 50% of Croatian land area, are the natural habitat for eight out of the nine indigenous sheep breeds. They are almost completely pollution-free, making them ideal for organic production.

At the moment, Croatia has around 10 organic flocks, with approximately 2,000 sheep producing 1,700 lambs produced yearly. Five of 10 flocks are located in karst areas. According to the newly prepared national program for the development of organic sheep production in the Croatian karst, the goal is to have 10% of the sheap reared in those areas to be done organically.

Starting in 2004, Professor Miljenko Šimpraga began a research project supported by the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Zagreb and the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education dedicated to Eco lamb production in Croatia.. In the course of three years, a team of veterinary experts monitored housing conditions, feeding regimes and general animal health status for five organic flocks. The goal of the project, to be completed in 2008, is to establish physiological standards for monitoring the health of indigenous Croatian sheep breeds, especially in realtino to organic production.

One of the objectives of the Association of Organic Sheep and Goat Producers, founded in 2007 by Professor Šimpraga and six pioneers in organic sheep production, is to promote the organic breeding of animals. The production of high-quality organic lamb meat should help to accelerate economic growth in the undeveloped karst regions, while preserving the traditional way of life and protecting the environment. At the moment, a spin-off company, *Eko janje*, which is to specialize in organic lamb meat retail, is already negotiating with several Croatian companies that would bring the organic meat directly to the Croatian market. EU-compliant production will assure high-quality organic products ready to be sold on the international market. At the same time, the higher standards will help to eradicate the illegal sale of sheep and lamb products on the black market.

For further information please contact: lada_radin@vef.hr or miljenko.simpraga@vef.hr.

(sources: research results from prof. dr. sc. Miljenko Šimpraga, DVM, Lada Radin, DVM; both Veterinary faculty Zagreb)

Proofreading: Tom Reid

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3. +++ Publication: Consulting on Organic Agriculture in Poland +++

Poland is considered to be destined for a organic-oriented agriculture. The long-standing low application of mineral fertilizers and pesticides offered optimal conditions for many farms to convert to organic practices. In the course of countries accession to the EU in 2004, the total area of organically managed arable land increased rapidly. However, many farmers who would like to convert are lacking the knowledge and experience necessary to implement organic farming methods. Consequently, a competent consultancy is essential for a successful, long-term conversion.

Henrike Rieken's new book provides an overview of the status quo of organic farming consultancy in Poland and shows both its strengths and weaknesses. Her empirical examination focuses on direct opinions and estimations from organic consultants and organic farmers. Central questions addressed are:

- How are consultancies organized?
- Which methods and approaches were pursued?
- Which topics are of greatest concern to farmers?
- Do farmers consider the consultancy services to be sufficient or is there still a lack of advice, and in what areas?

The author of the publication examines the Polish consultancy system on organic farming in the context of the "ecological knowledge system", and gives recommendations from the background of the experiences in the German organic sector.

Rieken, Henrike (2007): *Organic farming consultancy in Poland*, Margraf Verlag, 106 pages., ISBN 978-3-8236-1508-8, 25,60 €

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4. +++ Review: Code of Practice for Organic Food Processing +++

Quality of Low Input Food, an EU research project, carried out by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) has created a code of practice offering a detailed introduction to the most important requirements for organic food processors. Procurement of raw materials, storage, cleaning, packaging material requirements, documentation, as well as any processing steps performed externally supply chain issues are explained in detail to help orient newcomers to the complexities of organic food processing. An attached check list is an excellent tool for the internal evaluation of existing operations and the probable need to correct standard company procedures. The code of practice provides useful advice not only for newcomers but also for enterprises which have already started processing organic foods. Requirements for processors that producing an unconventional range of products, which happens quite frequently, are particularly well explained. For further information in English please look at: www.qlif.org (cp)

Alexander Beck et al (2006): *Code of Practice for Organic Food Processing*, FiBL, Frick, CH, 32 pages, ISBN-13 978-3-906081-85-4

Proofreading: Tom Reid

5. +++ CZ: Interpretation of the EU Hygiene Regulations for on-farm processors in the Czech Republic – Expert meeting in Brussels +++

The new package of EU-regulations on Food Hygiene (Nr. 852, 853, 854 and 882/2004), which came into force on 1st January 2006, offers, due to its flexibility, new opportunities for the conservation of traditional products even if there are major differences concerning production conditions in the particular EU states. However, contrary to the new regulations, especially in new Member States such as the Czech Republic, there is an opposite trend appearing. Small on-farm processors have enormous difficulties in meeting national regulations in order to comply with European legislation. Many of them have been forced to give up all on-farm processing. At the same time, these enterprises represent a huge potential for the entire country given that they safeguard employment in regions currently losing large numbers of inhabitants who continue to migrate to cities. By selling processed, value-added products instead of significantly cheaper raw materials they are able generate more income, enabling reinvestment into the rural areas instead of having to depend on external support.

The new European regulations intentionally grant broad margins to the Member States so that, while guaranteeing high food quality and safety, small family farms are still able to compete with larger industrial food processors. The interpretation of national governments, however, removes the flexibility of the European legislation putting strict regulations on on-farm processors. As a result, enterprises in some countries (e.g. France, Italy) are allowed to produce food under certain conditions that are prohibited in other countries (Czech Republic, Germany, a.s.o). At the same time, in all countries it is possible to buy imported products from countries with less restrictive regulations.

A meeting in Brussels on 7 November 2007 tried to bring together representatives of organisations, associations and authorities with the responsible members of the EU parliament and the EU commission to find a solution to the problem. According to the amended EU-legislation, as explained by EU Deputy Dr. Horst Schnellhardt, licences should be based upon an individual assessment of a particular enterprise's risk potential.. This would require larger enterprises, which supply a wider range of consumers, to be controlled more intensively in relation to the larger risk they assume.

Lenka Navratilova, from EkoConnect, highlighted the example of the Czech Republic which requires on-farm processors to meet the same regulations as industrial enterprises. Rarely does the Czech government differentiate according to risk potential. She revealed that all too often the on-farm processors cannot afford the necessary investments to comply with the health authorities' demands. Usually, smaller operations have to give up even though they could meet truly necessary hygienically demands (corresponding HACCP). Schnellhardt proposed that veterinary administration employees should shift from a command and control role which is only resulting in the closing of otherwise viable business to a positive consultant figure encouraging compliance and promoting beneficial small-scale economic activity. To do so, they would need special knowledge regarding on-farm processing. Most of the individuals working in the area have only been exposed to industrial settings, either through their studies or work experience. Consequently, it is difficult for them to imagine that on-farm processors could possible ensure the necessary level of hygiene and safety through different methods from those used by large firms. As a precaution, they refuse to license unfamiliar methods, using the argument that they themselves are controlled by Brussels and are unable to be flexible. In a meeting with Wilem Daelman from the DG Health and Consumer Protection of the EU Commission (SANCO), he promised that SANCO will offer special training for hygiene control authorities to improve the specialized knowledge of agents who will then be able to cooperate with the on-farm processors in a more constructive manner so that everyone wins.

For further information on that topic please contact: lenka.navratilova@ekoconnect.org

Proofreading: Tom Reid

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6. +++ Call for contributions: International Conference on the Organic Sector Development in Central/Eastern European and Central Asian countries, Kyiv, Ukraine +++

This international conference will take place in Kyiv, Ukraine on April 10 – 12, 2008. Organisers are the Organic Federation of Ukraine together with Organic Services GmbH and the National Agricultural University of Ukraine with presence of IFOAM. The Conference aims at collecting and presenting ideas, measures, recommendations and practical examples on how to develop the organic sector in Central and Eastern European and Central Asian countries. The conference languages will be English and Russian with simultaneous translation. Target groups are all stakeholders from Central, Eastern European and Central Asian countries like policy makers (regional and national government level), (organic) farmers, processors, traders, importers and exporters involved in international trade as well as certifiers, organic experts and multipliers.

Programme / Call for contributions:

Focus on the first day will be perspectives and experiences on government policy setting, political and regulatory framework for the development of the organic sector at national and international level. In addition, private stakeholder initiatives developing and implementing own strategies will be presented. The second day will focus on country cases and concrete examples for national organic market development as well as the export market. Experiences in certification development will be another focus. On the third day, an excursion to one of the pioneering organic farms in Poltava region, Ukraine will take place.

For the following sessions, proposals may be submitted until **March 5th, 2008** (in English or Russian):

- Different approaches to Organic Sector Development – Action Plans
- Development of the Organic Sector – Country Cases
- Development of the Organic Market – Local markets
- Development of the Organic Market – Processing and Exports
- Certification

Detailed information will be available at www.organic.com.ua . For more information please contact Eugene Milovanov, Phone ++380 (44) 234 00 54 or conference@organic.com.ua

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7. +++ 3rd Organic Marketing Forum – European Organic Food Processing Sector in Warsaw +++

EkoConnect and its cooperation partners Ekoland Poland, Organic Retailers Association (ORA) and the Polish Agricultural Advisory Service CDR invite you to the 3rd Organic Marketing Forum in Poland. The international conference on the processing and marketing of organic food will take place on the 26-27 May 2008 at the exhibition centre Expo 21 in Warsaw. This is the same location as last year.

For the first time, we will also be offering lectures on the production of raw materials and organic catering. The supply of raw materials, quality management and other import issues will also be discussed.

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

For further information, the programme and registration forms please visit www.organic-marketing-forum.org or contact Agnieszka.Bolek@ekoconnect.org Phone ++49 351 456 80 39

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8. +++ Dates and events +++

- BioFach 2008, February 21 – 24 2008, Nürnberg, DE (www.biofach.com)
- CODIS 2008 (International Congress on Compost and Digestate), February 27 – 29 2008, Solothurn, CH, (<http://www.codis2008.ch/>)

- Organic Food in Public Catering Conference at Salima – International Food Fairs, March 4 – 7 2008, Brno, CZ (www.bvv.cz/salima)
- Biol 2008 - International Organic Olive Oil Awards, April 30 - May 7 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 marketing of organic food, 26 – 27 May 2008, Warsaw, PL (www.organic-marketing-forum.org)
- 22nd European Grassland Association Meeting – “Biodiversity and fodder – future challenges for grassland management“, June 9 -12 2008, Uppsala, SE (<http://www-conference.slu.se/egf2008/>)
- 16th IFOAM Organic World Congress – Cultivate the Future, June 15- 24 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 18 -20 2008, Modena, IT, (<http://www.isofar.org/modena2008/>)
- 4th QLIF-Congress, June 18 -20 2008, Modena, IT (<http://www.qlif.org/Library/letter/july07.html>)

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Best regards,
Your Editorial Team

+++ 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