



EkoConnect - International Centre for Organic
Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe e.V.

Phone: +49 (0) 351-20 66 172

Fax: +49 (0) 351-20 66 174

E-Mail: info@ekoconnect.org

Internet: www.ekoconnect.org

September 2008

EkoConnect Information Letter for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

Dear readers,

Similarly as in most Central and East European countries the certified organic area in Bulgaria has grown rapidly during the last few years. The number of only 650 ha of organic agricultural land in 2003 increased to 3.061 ha in 2006 and in 2007 this figure climbed up to 166.741 ha of organic land. The area of certified organic land increased faster also due to the more completed registration of organic land done by the Bulgarian Ministry. Nevertheless 155.790 of these 166.741 ha were said to be grassland and pastures. In 2006, the annually updated statistic „World of organic agriculture“ (by Research Institute of Organic Agriculture/ FiBL and IFOAM) also listed areas of certified organic wild collection. In 2006, the statistical item for wild collection started at 110.143 ha, but only one year later there have been registered already 242.677 ha of wild collection. So, in terms of organic area, Bulgaria shows one of the highest growth rates in Europe. In the first article of this issue, you can read which products are grown for which markets and how the commercialization of organic food currently looks like in Bulgaria.

As you can see in the second article the long tradition of growing and collecting aromatic and medicinal plants in Bulgaria has been the basis for an initiative which has raised a lot of interest throughout the country since it started in 2001. This initiative has been fostering especially the development of organic production of aromatic and medicinal plants.

In the further reading of this issue we offer you a short view into the education of Central and East European offspring in the domain of organic animal breeding and animal husbandry. At the beginning of September, 39 students and 13 lecturers from Central and East European countries came to Dresden to exchange their experiences and enrich their knowledge about organic animal production. You can read in article 3 why this seems to be worthwhile for both young people and teachers.

In addition, we want to report some news from the Czech organic market and from the new European campaign for organic food. Last but not least we invite you to read something about how the flavour of organic roses can make a contribution to peace development in the Hindu Kush region in Afghanistan.

We hope you enjoy the reading,

Your Editorial Team,

Anja Nowack & Bernhard Jansen

Contents:

1. **Bulgaria: Mainly export-oriented organic production**
2. **Bulgaria: The organic production of medicinal and aromatic plants gains in importance due to the increasing demand**
3. **Germany: Offspring of organic farming from Eastern and Central Europe met in Dresden from September 1 - 14**
4. **Afghanistan: Organic roses instead of opium**
5. **European Commission started new campaign for organic food and organic farming in July**
6. **Czech Republic: The high growth in the Czech organic food market is estimated to rise**
7. **Organic Marketing Forum 2009 - European Meeting on Organic Food in Warsaw**
8. **Dates and Events**

* * * * *

1. +++ Bulgaria: Mainly export-oriented organic production +++

Although Bulgaria is a member of the European Union only since 2007 the national regulation for organic farming already came into force in 2001. Since then, also certification, consulting and commercialisation have been built up, partially also supported by the Swiss Development Aid (DEZA). Following the statistics of the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and IFOAM, the organic managed area of Bulgaria has an amount of 166,741 ha which makes a 3.1 % of total domestic agricultural area. To comparison: the pan-European average of organic agricultural area is only a bit higher and it counts 4 %. A big part of the organic area of Bulgaria is grassland and pastures (155,793 ha). However the proportion of organic animal husbandry is still very low due to the prohibition of at-farm-production and at-farm-selling, which is still law of the land. Rest of the organic area of almost 11,000 ha is covered by fruit orchards (3,566 ha), medicinal and aromatic plants (1,428 ha), cereals (1,362 ha) and textile crops (1,285 ha). Another 1,577 ha have currently not been used at time of census. And at the rest of 1,729 ha organic producers have been growing organic fodder plants, wine and potatoes. Beside the agricultural used land many areas are certified as organic wild collection, e.g. for collecting herbs, mushrooms and berries. Wild collection adds up to 242,677 ha, but the area is probably smaller in reality due to overlapping certified areas.

The volume of entire organic food market in Bulgaria is estimated to be 800,000 Euros, which makes a 0.023 % of total domestic food market. Organic products are available in specialised organic food stores, supermarkets and health food shops. However, the offer is only available in bigger cities. In the rural areas, certified organic products can barely be found. In Sofia, there are two specialised organic food shops. One of them offers home-delivery service and online-shopping and runs also an organic restaurant. The specialised organic food shops offer the biggest variety of organic products. The 300 organic products of the store 'Sun and Moon' in Sofia make up about 15 % of the total turnover. The shop's owner Kalin Klasonov strives towards widening the product variety and wants to offer more domestic products. Klasonov family's bakery also produces organic bread to offer it in the shop. The biggest part of the product range is still imported. The health food shops generally offer 20 to 50 organic products. And the biggest turnover of organic food products can be observed in regular supermarkets. Primarily Bulgarian supermarkets like Piccadilly, Fantastico and Elemag offer organic products, but also the German enterprise Metro and the Austrian supermarket chain Billa offer a small product range of organic products.

Most of the Bulgarian organic food is produced for export. The most important products are fruits, nuts, infusions, aromatic oils and some vegetables such as tomatoes and cucumbers. Organic yogurt, white cheese, bread and medicinal herbs are also produced for the domestic market. Organic chocolate, noodles, olive oil, pulses, granola and baby food are mainly imported from countries like Greece, Italy and Germany. Generally, people are more and more interested in buying healthy food even though most people are not acquainted with the European Standards for organic food products.

The Bulgarian Ministry for Agriculture developed a national label for organic food products, which is however not obligatory for producers. Therefore, stakeholders of the organic sector try to put more effort into informing the consumers, e.g. via the internet and on an annual organic festival which takes place in Sofia and has a wide coverage in the newspapers, television and other media. The potential consumer group of organic food includes mainly health-conscious people with a superior education, who belong to a well-off middle class. In comparison with other European countries upper middle class is proportionally small in Bulgaria. The gap between the rich and poor is quite wide. Therefore, there are other important consumer

groups such as tourists and Bulgarians who come back from abroad where they got to know organic products as well as rich Bulgarians who buy organic products as a kind of status symbol.

Within the national development plan of 2006, the Bulgarian government has written down ambitious aims for the organic agriculture: until 2013, 3 % of total food should be organic, and 8 % of the agricultural area should be managed organically. Even though this requires big efforts – most of organic stakeholders see the future with optimism and pin their hopes on a steady economic increase.

Autoren: Dagmar Diener und Oskar Wendt

Übersetzung: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fašalek

* * * * *

2. +++ Bulgaria: The organic production of medicinal and aromatic plants gains in importance due to the increasing demand +++

Bulgaria looks back at a hundred year old tradition of wild collection and cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants. Also breeding and research in the sector started many decades ago. Since fifteen years farms with cultivation according to the EU regulation on organic agriculture ((EEC) No. 2091/92) have been built up.

The organic cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants is also a part of a government programme. In 2001 the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) started with JOBS project, which has raised interest throughout the country. A net of eight so-called business centres have been built up. This net includes fifteen organic farms and 627 producers; 3,845 new jobs have been created.

The centres are being managed by experts of the former phyto pharmaceutical centre, the research centre for roses and aromatic and medicinal plants and the Bulgarian academy of sciences. Within the project demonstration fields have been planted, the seedling production has been enlarged and the experts are holding classes about Good Agricultural Practice. Mainly Bulgarian varieties and several foreign varieties of balm, peppermint, savory, thyme, sage, clary sage, chamomile, lavender, rose hip, valerian, calendula, corn flower, hyssop, basil, mountain tea, marshmallow, chokeberry and echinacea pupurea are grown organically.

Besides, the wild collection of blue berries, raspberries, black berries, currants and wild strawberries is certified organic according to the EU regulation on organic agriculture ((EEC) No. 2091/92). The Swiss IMO Institute, The English Soil Association and the national certification body Balkan Biocert are responsible for certification. During the JOBS project, the participants developed modern drying and packaging machines. Since the biggest part of the production is being exported, further processing and distillation systems are constructed according to quality standards of the destination countries. 60-70 % of the merchandise is still sold abroad and 30-40 % is sold at the domestic market, while the overall demand is steadily increasing.

Author: Dr. Romyana Todorova, Bulgarian Herb Association, R.Todorova@gmx.net

Translation: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fasalek

* * * * *

3. +++ Germany: Offspring of organic farming from Eastern and Central Europe met in Dresden from September 1 - 14 +++

Species-appropriate husbandry and organic farming are two of the most important growing sectors of agriculture and food production. A big part of the growing organic managed area is located in Central and Eastern European countries (CEE). Therefore, it's obvious, that there is a big need of young executives.

Since 2005, the Summer Academy on Organic Animal Breeding and Organic Animal Husbandry contributes to the education of young executives by giving students of agriculture and animal husbandry from different CEE countries the possibility to complete their knowledge about alternatives to conventional animal husbandry. In this year, the Summer Academy has been organised by the Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences at the University of Kassel together with EkoConnect - International Centre for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe e.V. in Dresden and nine partner universities from seven European countries. Prof. Dr. Ute Knierim of the organization team at the Summer Academy at the University of Kassel tells

enthusiastically: 'It's a pleasure to organize the Summer Academy together with EkoConnect. I am impressed of the high motivation of the students, of such constructive discussions and of the participative learning concept.'

This year, the students came from Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Kosovo, Poland, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine. Research and practice experts introduced the prospective agricultural engineers to the challenges and possibilities of organic animal husbandry, whereas lessons are generally taught in English.

This multi-nationality is not common even for the speakers. Dr. Ragnar Leming, teacher at the University of Tartu in Estonia is excited by the different backgrounds of the students: 'That means a real challenge for me as a teacher, but of course, for the students between each other, too!' During the fourteen days, lessons, exercises and excursions to organic farms nearby showed and explained how organic husbandry of dairy cows, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and poultry may be realised and which are the minimum requirements of the EU regulation on Organic Farming ((EEC) no. 1991/92). Moreover, there were also exemplified important breeding aims for organic cattle and pig breeding. Further important subjects have been animal health, animal feeding and nutrition and meat quality. Beside the technical contents, the Summer Academy gave enough room for network development and intercultural communication, because these skills will gain more and more importance in the course of the enlargement of the European Union.

A student from the University of Applied Sciences (Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft) in Dresden concluded: 'The Summer Academy is just the perfect mix of lessons and excursions!' Another two students from the University in Maribor in Slovenia agreed: 'We learned so many new contents and at the same time we could refresh our former knowledge...Furthermore, it's a wonderful group of people. With them, we really enjoy learning and the joint trips.'

More information about 'Summer Academy on Organic Animal Breeding and Organic Animal Husbandry' you can find at the homepage of EkoConnect - International Centre for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe e.V.: www.ekoconnect.org.

Translation: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fasalek

* * * * *

4. +++ Afghanistan: Organic roses instead of opium +++

During the last twenty years, Afghanistan emerged to the biggest opium producing country in the world. In 2007, the land at the Hindu Kush produced 8,200 tons of opium (the production has more than doubled since 2003). Export value is worth US-\$ 4 billion and it presents more than 50 % of the country's (legal) gross domestic product. By now, almost 100 % of the global opium market is supplied by Afghanistan.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international development agencies are desperately looking for alternative income possibilities for smallholders. But due to the higher value-added opium, it is hard to build up competitive crops. Still the farmers do not choose voluntarily the cultivation of opium. They neither consume the drug themselves nor does the Islam, the predominant religion in the region, accept the opium production. But twenty years of civil war importuned the population severely and destroyed entire family biographies. The payment of credits for the drug dealers and the pressure of the Taliban make the situation even worse. Since farmers are almost permanent indebted with the dealers, it is nearly impossible to quit the opium production. Furthermore poppy cultivation requires a lot of hard work. During seven months of the year the whole family has to work in the field to weed, to separate seedlings and to gain the milky juice, the raw opium, from the capsules. So, there is not very much time left for other activities.

The International Security Assistance Force and the Afghanistan army exert pressure on the farmers to 'clean' their fields from opium. But this does barely succeed because it destroys the farmers' income, if no real alternatives are available.

Since 2004, the German Agro Action (Deutsche Welthungerhilfe) carries out the project 'roses for Nangarhar', which is located in the Nangarhar region in East Afghanistan. The aim of the project is to offer the farmers an alternative to the opium poppy cultivation. The oil rose (*Rosa damascena*) may help at least in parts to crowd out the poppy cultivation. From the oil rose is extracted the valuable rose oil which is used e.g. in production of superior perfumes.

At present, about 300 farmer families grow roses on a small part of their land. In total, roses are grown on 42 ha, and more areas are planned. From one hectare can be harvested 4 to 5 tons of rose flowers. That is

right enough to produce one litre of rose oil. Since spring of 2007, the first areas and the obtained products are certified organic according to the European regulation on organic farming ((EEC) No. 1992/91).

The production of rose oil is carried out by participants of the project with help of distillation machines which have been constructed locally. During the season, also the farmers can work at the machines to have an additional income. Beside the rose oil which is being exported to Europe, there is a second product resulting from distillation which is being sold locally. So called 'rose water' is mainly used in the kitchen for pastries but serves also as refreshing drink. In the export sector *Wala Heilmittel* (means Wala Remedies) buys the produced rose oil. It was also *Wala* who originally had the idea to realize a rose project with help of the German Agro Action. As soon as the required drying machines are ready more products such as dried flowers and rose buds will be exported.

For this year (2008) transformation of the project into a private Afghan enterprise is planned. For some time, the German Agro Action will still be a consulting partner. The production capacity as well as the number of farmers is planned to augment over the next few years.

Due to the project, participating farmers now achieve an income which is at least half as much of the opium earnings per acreage. No other agricultural crop could accomplish this yet. Another advantage of the rose production is its relatively low amount of work. Flower harvest lasts four to six weeks a year and cutting has to be done only every one and a half year. However, the long time spread of two years between planting and the first harvest means a real drawback. During the first year, farmers can grow vegetables or fodder plants under the roses. But a certain gain loss in the starting period has to be taken into account.

The future production of oil roses in Afghanistan will significantly depend on the production of opium. At present (2008), the army's pressure is high therefore many farmers quit poppy cultivation and get more and more interested in rose cultivation. In the land which is oppressed so severely by war, the rose stands for peace and shows that there exist realistic and encouraging alternatives to the cultivation of opium poppy – even though the circumstances are rather difficult.

Author: Ulrich Helberg (www.helberg-consult.com)

Translation: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fasalek

* * * * *

5. +++ European Commission started new campaign for organic food and organic farming in July +++

At the end of July, the European Commission presented a new EU campaign for organic farming at the agricultural fair „Foire de Libramont“ in Belgium. According to the slogan 'Organic farming. Good for nature, good for you!' the campaign is aimed to provide information about the essentials and benefits of organic farming and production of organic food. The aim of the campaign is to foster consumers' sensibility and acceptance with special regard to organic products. It especially targets children, teenagers and young people, since they are the ones to carry the organic philosophy ahead.

Over last years, the number of organic market actors such as farmers, producers, processors and importers has significantly increased. In 2005 the number of actors influencing organic market was up to 182,305 in EU-25 which means an increase by 13.4 % compared to 2004. During the past years a fast growth of organic food selling European food retailers (5 to 30 % depending on the country) could also be observed. The growing consumer demand consolidates the market for organic food and offers new possibilities to farmers and processors. Therefore, the organic campaign was developed with help of a multi-purpose concept in order to meet the market actors' interests and to enable them to fostering the organic agriculture.

As declared by the Commission, the core part of the campaign consists of a new multilingual website for organic farming: www.organic-farming.europa.eu. At the given website you can find basic contents about organic agriculture such as species-appropriate animal husbandry, consumers' trust, European policy. Furthermore, the site provides a tool box with marketing collaterals in 22 different languages, which may be used by food and market experts in order to support organic farming.

Source: "Agriculture News Digest" No. 189, European Commission, edited by: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development Communication Unit

Translation: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fasalek

* * * * *

6. +++ Czech Republic: The high growth in the Czech organic food market is estimated to rise +++

The demand for organic food in the Czech Republic could grow annually by an average of 70 % within the next three years. The organic market could reach an estimated turnover of 260 million € by 2010. In comparison to the turnover of 51.6 million € in 2007, the market volume is estimated to quintuple by 2010. This optimistic development is stated by the yearbook 'Organic food market in the Czech Republic', which has been published at the end of June by the Green marketing Agency.

According to the stated high growth rates, the trend of the last years will continue in the Czech Republic: In 2007, the growth rate of the turnover of organic food market was already about 70 %. Over the last three years, it summed up to 153 %. In 2007, organic food made a 0.55 % of total sold food and beverages.

This prospective highly growing consumer demand is boosted by an information campaign of the state agricultural intervention fund: 'organic agriculture and organic food'. The campaign is scheduled with an amount of 1 million Euros. 'More information leads to changes in consumer behaviour. Today people in the Czech Republic have more money and look for quality and 'new luxury'. The change includes also a higher interest in health subjects and healthy lifestyle and likewise higher life quality', says the book author Tom Vaclavik. The good state of economy and the growing family incomes allow more and more people to buy higher quality products at least from time to time.

During the last year significantly more organic products were offered to the consumers. The most important product group consists of processed food products. In 2007 processed food products made up a 47 % of total organic food market. The second category in terms of value was milk including dairy products (21%). However, the highest growth could be observed in the organic fruit and vegetable sector. Their turnover tripled from 2006 to 2007. According to this observation, Tom Vaclavik estimates: 'Organic fruit and vegetables have great growth potential, no matter if fresh or processed.' The product group with the highest content of Czech organic ingredients were meat, sausages and cold meat (98 %). Bread and pastries achieved a proportion of 91 %.

The biggest company in terms of turnover gained by organic food is HiPP Czech GmbH, which imports organic baby and child food to the Czech Republic. Last year, the biggest Czech manufacturer of organic food was Olma a.g., producer of organic milk and yogurt.

Furthermore, according to the yearbook, the percentage of Czech people, who regularly buy organic food, grew from 3 % in 2005 to 4.8 % in 2007. About 28 % of the population is familiar with the organic food and most of them buy organic food irregularly. Regular consumers of organic food are mostly university graduates, people who are younger than 49 years and households with one child younger than 14 years. This group mostly disposes on an above-average income. The expenses for organic food were about 5 € per capita in 2007 (126 Kronas).

The yearbook aims at providing a better understanding of specific requirements of organic food for farmers, processors and shop owners. Furthermore, the book is a recommendable tool in terms of feasibility-studies and of development and planning of new products and communication strategies in the organic food market.

The Yearbook Organic food market in the Czech Republic 2008 may be ordered at the following e-mail: Czech tom@greenmarketing.cz.

Translation: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fasalek

* * * * *

7. +++ Organic Marketing Forum 2009 - European Meeting on Organic Food in Warsaw +++

The 4th Organic Marketing Forum will take place 25th and 26th of May 2009 in Warsaw. Please, mark the date already now! The event programme including speeches, workshops, excursions and evening programme is being compiled at the moment. Companies and experts are invited to provide ideas and proposals for the programme. We also welcome companies which are interested in a sponsorship.

In 2009, the attendant company exhibition will take place in the big Exhibition hall next to the congress centre for the first time. Companies interested in exhibiting their products can rent either information desk or a booth or they can rent only exhibition surface and bring along their own booth. The registration period will probably begin at the end of September 2008. We suggest you to apply earlier to be able to benefit from the early bird discount!

The Organic Marketing Forum in Warsaw is a central meeting for the organic food chain in Central and Eastern Europe. It brings together producing, processing and trading companies throughout Europe. The Forum is organized by EkoConnect e. V. and its partners at the Expo21 exhibition centre located in the Polish capital. At the latest Forum in May 2008 nearly 330 participants from 30 countries attended the exhibition.

If you would like to know more about Organic Marketing Forum you we invite you to visit our website www.organic-marketing-forum.org where you can find event programmes, different possibilities for companies and activities of the former forums.

For questions and other issues regarding the Organic Marketing Forum please contact Mrs. Monika Swigon. Phone: ++49 351- 456 80 39; monika.swigon@ekoconnect.org

Translation: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fasalek

* * * * *

8. +++ Dates and Events +++

- BioNord, October 12, 2008, Hamburg Messe, (www.bionord.de)
- Asia Organic & Lohas Expo 2008 - Taipei, Taiwan, October 24 – 26, 2008 (www.lohas-city.com)
- CVP Agro Expo 2008, October 28 -30, 2008, Florist, fruit, vegetable growers and organic farming production exhibition and congress (<http://www.expoctrues.co.yu/client/index.aspx?page=33>)
- Natural Ingredients 2008 - Villepinte, France, November 4 – 6, 2008 (www.fi-events.com)
- FiBL training course: 'GMO residues in organic produce – assessment and interpretation', November 4 – 6, 2008 (<http://www.fibl.org/english/training/course/2008/gmo.php>)
- The 5th International Scientific Conference on Sustainable Farming Systems, November 5 – 7, 2008, Piešťany, Slovakia (www.ecomit.vurv.sk)
- Middle East Natural & Organic Products Expo MENOPE 2008, Dubai, November 16-18, 2008, (www.globallinksdubai.com/)
- Organic China Expo 2008, November 27 -29, 2008, Beijing, (www.ocex.com.cn/english/index.htm)
- Arab Naturals 2008 - Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, November 28 – 30, 2008 (www.arabnaturalsexpo.com)
- 10th Scientific Conference on Organic Agriculture, February 11 – 13, 2009, (http://www.wissenschaftstagung.de/index_en.html)
- Organic Marketing Forum in Warsaw, May 25 - 26, 2009 (www.organic-marketing-forum.org/index.php?lang=english)

Translation: Anja Nowack

Proofreading: Irena Fasalek

* * * * *

