



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

Dear Readers,

We wish you a healthy and happy New Year 2006!

Please find below the sixth issue of the “EkoConnect Information Letter” which is also the first issue of this year. This time, the country report deals with the current situation of organic agriculture in Estonia. There, already 6% of the whole agricultural area are cultivated according to ecological standards. Just like last time, we are happy to be able to publish this letter in ten languages. The language versions you cannot receive via e-mail can be downloaded from our website. At this point we would like to thank our industrious translators!

We are happy to receive any ideas and suggestions for the information letter and are especially looking forward to receiving articles from you for the next issues. As an addressee you are heartily invited to use our information letter to distribute your news to more than 1.500 readers in Middle and Eastern Europe. Please send your articles directly to our editorial department.

If you did not receive this information letter directly from EkoConnect and/ or wish to subscribe it in future (for free), please send an e-mail to info@ekoconnect.org. The same address can be used to cancel your subscription.

Best wishes from the EkoConnect editorial staff

Bernhard Jansen Stefan Simon

Please visit us at the BioFach in Nürnberg from 16th to 19th February 2006 at hall 9, stand 311.

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1. +++Country Report: Organic Agriculture in Estonia+++

Organic agriculture in Estonia has developed strongly over the last few years. At the time of the Soviet Union, the northernmost of the three Baltic states was specialised above all on meat and dairy production. Today it has – after the Czech Republic – the highest share of organically cultivated area in Central and Eastern Europe. At the moment, considerable 6.0% of the whole agricultural area – more than 58,000 ha (incl. acreage that is in the process of being converted) – are cultivated according to organic standards.

There is a total agricultural area of 850,000 ha that benefits by subsidies from the state. In addition to that, some 300,000 to 500,000 ha lie fallow.

While in 1999 only 89 organic farms with a total acreage of 4,000 ha existed, there are today 1013 of them. The average size of each farm is 58 ha. 70% of the farms have less than 50 ha, 7% have more than 200 ha at their disposal. The two biggest organic farms in Estonia are specialised on dairy products; each of them cultivates about 850 ha.

60% of the organic farms have already been converted completely to organic agriculture; 16% of them are in their second or third year of conversion and 24% in their first one.

Most of the organic area can be found in the extensively cultivated regions in the South and the West of the state, above all on the island of Hiiu, where 117 organic farms cultivate about 70% of the whole agricultural area, followed by the regions Saare, Võru and Lääne.

Most of the organic farms have a mixed production (632). 376 of them are specialised on plant production and five on meat production. In spite of the high proportion of grassland (all in all 81.8%), less than two thirds of the organic farms keep animals (63%). Here you have to keep in mind that in Estonia, a cultivation of grass and legumes for one or more years is called “grassland” as well. A cultivation of grass and legumes for one or more years is thus not assigned to the arable farm land and takes 62.1% of the whole organic area. On just under 12% of the whole organic area cereals are cultivated, on 1.5% permanent crops (in most cases fruit and berries) are produced, while on 1.4% herbs, potatoes and vegetables are growing. The animals that are most often kept according to organic standards are cattle and sheep. Already one third of the Estonian sheep are produced organically. Most of the 1013 Estonian organic farms are members of the organisations *Estonian BioDynamic Association (EBA)* or *Estonian Organic Producers Union*. The EBA was founded already in 1989 and organized the first courses in organic farming together with Scandinavian and German colleagues. The Estonian Organic Producers Union exists since 2000. It strives above all to merge the offers of the larger organic farms for marketing.

After the growth of the organic sector was slowing down in the mid-1990s, in 1997/1998 a strong increase could be observed again when the state began to pay more attention to organic agriculture by supporting it with a special programme and introducing the governmental eco-emblem “*Mahemärk*”. In 2001, the eco-law (Estonian Organic Farming Act) of 1997 was adapted to the EC regulation 2092/91. In contrast to many other EU countries, the control of producers, processors, traders and caterers of organic products is carried out – just like in Denmark – by a public agency. The farms themselves are controlled by the *Estonian Plant Production Inspectorate (PPI)*. Small farms up to 10 ha pay 13 € per year. In addition to that, 0.32 € have to be paid for each ha that exceeds 10 ha. The maximum total fee amounts to about 510 €. Farms that produce according to organic standards and have also conventional areas (which is possible according to the EU-VO 2092/91), have to pay the fee for their conventional area as well.

In addition to associations, the training and consultation sector is also well-developed in Estonia: Two private organisations, the *Centre for Ecological Engineering (CEET, 1992)* and the *Estonian Organic Farming Foundation (EOFF, 2001)* support organic farming by providing information material. Besides, they offer information events and further education courses for organic farmers and those who are interested in converting their farms. The modern and well-equipped *Estonian Agricultural University* in Tartu and some agricultural colleges are engaged in organic farming as well.

The farms are supported financially by grants of the Estonian support programme for agricultural environment measures: In 2004, the payments for arable farming land amounted to 96.89 €/ha, to 73.88 €/ha for grassland and to 240.56 €/ha for horticulture and fruit production. Those farms that are in the process of converting to organic agriculture receive the same payments as those that have already completely converted. Up to now there are hardly any investment grants for organic producers, which makes the modernization of their farms more difficult. Furthermore, it is often the reason why organic farming is carried out only in an extensive way.

Sources: Ader, E. and Palts, E. (2005); Mansberg, M. (personal information, 2005); Vetemaa, A. et al. (2005), EkoConnect research

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2. +++Organic soy beans from Ukraine+++

Within the context of a project Ukrainian farmers are advised to grow organic soy. The project activities are carried out by ECOLAND Grains & Legumes plc in co-operation with the Ukrainian partner UKRAGROFIN. The project is supported by the German Investment and Development Company (Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH (DEG)). The goal of the public-private-partnership project is to establish the cultivation and processing of organic soy beans as well as its marketing. In 2005 organic soy was grown in Ukraine on about 200 ha according to organic guidelines, supported by the project. The harvest was pleasantly high with more than 2 tons/ha so that about 44 t of organic soy beans will reach Germany in January 2006. In 2006 the growing area will be extended considerably. The next training for farmers and management staff of farms in conversion to organic production will take place in Ukraine at the end of January 2006. Contact: s.krause@organic-services.com

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3. +++Agrosophie – a non-profit-making association to develop organic and biodynamic agriculture in Russia+++

So far, organic agriculture in Russia is not very developed. There are about 40 organic farms that farm c. 40,000 ha of organic land and 30 processors for organic food. In addition some 70,000 to 100,000 ha are used as wild harvesting areas. This area is still extending.

The association Agrosophie is involved in the development of biodynamic agriculture in Russia. The 40 members of the association are private persons as well as organisations. Their major responsibility is consultation of farmers, processors and retailers, but also research and education.

Besides members support and consultation, also lobbywork for organic agriculture is carried out, for example by recommendatory letters addressed to the government.

Due to the increasing demand for consultation Agrosophie established a consulting company called "EKONS" in 2004.

One of Agrosophie's main tasks is to create and develop a legal foundation according to the EU regulation 2092/91 for organic agriculture in Russia, especially for certification. One year ago the association handed in a draft about technical standards at the certification authority "Gosstandart", concerning the question how to regulate the production and certification of organic products. In the middle of 2005 a bill was handed in to the Duma; it was supposed to be passed at the end of last year. There was no information about an adoption at editorial deadline. Since there is no legal base for organic production, 48 % of the producers use the labelling "organic", "biologic" or "natural" without certification, according to the marketing agency CVS Consulting. With this labelling, prices can be increased by 20-30 %.

Until the standards are passed, Agrosophie endues proved products with the own labelling „Tschistyje Rossy“ ("pure dew").

(Sources: Agrosophie's annual report 2004; Reuter, K. (2005); Moskauer Deutsche Zeitung 28.10.2005)

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4. +++ The German organisation APOLLO e.V. has become very active in the field of training for the agrarian sector in Russia and the Ukraine +++

Against the background of the transformation process in the CEE countries, Apollo (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Projekte in Oekologie, Landwirtschaft und Landesentwicklung in Osteuropa) was founded back in 1991. The organisation's main objective is to support the development of the agrarian sector and of rural areas in those countries. Agriculture and rural areas often plays a significant role in political and social development. Today the organisation has 70 members and their activities are co-ordinated through the Berlin head office and a programme office in Pensa (Russia).

For the fifteenth time in a row, Apollo has organised a 4-months work experience training opportunity for Russian agricultural science students, in Germany.

A similar training program was introduced in 1996 for students from Belarus and the Ukraine. These training programs offered by Apollo have enabled some 1490 students to participated in a verity of work place training courses on German farms.

The most qualified participants of both training programmes will additionally have the chance to participate in a further and even more specified training programme. Apollo also offers support for grant applications regarding scholarships. More details about Apollo's activities, provided in four languages, are to be found at: <http://apollo-online.de>.

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5. +++EU-Project: „Exchange of experiences and further training in organic farming“+++

Under the roof of the EU launched Leonardo da Vinci „Education and culture ” scheme the „*Exchange of experiences and further training in organic farming*“ project is carried out by partners from the College for Environmental Protection in Bydgoszcz./Poland, the Bioland Ranch Zempow in Germany, the University of Höxter/Paderborn in Germany and the Fattoria Biologica Patrice in Italy.

In 2005, two one-week workshops were carried out on the Bioland Ranch Zempow in the north of the German province Brandenburg. Among the participants were Polish and German agricultural consultants, scientists and teachers from agricultural schools. During the two workshops new approaches and innovative practical measures regarding organic farming, processing and marketing of organic products were introduced and discussed.

The main objective of the project is, to create a European network of institutions and organisations engaged in training, research and consultancy for organic farming. At the end of the project several training manuals and moduls for lectures will also be made available to students, teachers, consultants and farmers.

These training manuals will enable all interested parties to get an overview of innovative approaches to organic farming on a European scale.

Further information may be obtained at www.wsos.edu.pl/leonardo from January 2006 on.

All compiled presentations, contributions and best-practice reports will then be available in German and Polish.

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6. +++Strategies to support domestic organic markets in countries with emerging organic sectors+++

A new study of the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) presents the current state and prospects of domestic organic market development in The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Mexico and India. All of these countries have emerging organic markets: while governmental support for organic farming varies across all countries studied, the organic sector is focused mainly on export markets in every country represented. The results of a two-step expert consultation indicate that development of the domestic market is mainly hampered by a lack of processing and distribution infrastructure. Furthermore there exists relatively low purchasing power of domestic consumers. Experts recommend that political support should prioritise national market development programmes for organic food (above all regional producer initiatives, vertical networks, establishment of a national organic logo). In addition, distribution should not focus exclusively on conventional retail chains. More information can be found at <http://orgprints.org/4455/>.

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7. +++Revised manual animal health+++

The FiBL- manual *Animal health- guidelines for prevention and natural treatment of diseases* has been revised and published. Following a short introduction in basics of animal health, homeopathy and phytotherapy for animals, the book describes preventive measures to maintain animal health.

The manual also gives specific recommendations for treatments which are listed according to species and treatment complexes.

Apart from explanations regarding non species-specific diseases the manual also includes explanations regarding diseases of cattle and small ruminants. The manual with 345 pages can be obtained in German for 36.60€ in specialised book shops. More information and ways to order can be found at <https://www.fibl.org/shop/show.php?sprache=DE&art=1113>

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8. +++Alternatives to the use of copper against fungal disease in ecological viticulture+++

The use of copper against fungal diseases like mildew in Organic viticulture is a controversial issue. It is criticised that the application of the heavy metal leads to ecological problems like accumulation in soil and water. Therefore scientists have been searching for alternatives for a few years.

Experiments on commercial and research organic vineyards coordinated by Eco-Consult showed the effectiveness of plant protection and plant strengthening products, which are available at the moment.

The project named “On field trials to optimize the downy and powdery mildew control in organic

viticulture – alternative strategies to copper and sulfur use” produced new results that could be introduced to farming practices. The use of plant strengthening products can support the regulation of powdery and downy mildew effectively under low and normal infection pressure. But under humid conditions, early and strong primary infection and high infection pressure the abandonment of copper leads to high losses.

In the authors opinion at the moment it is necessary to still use 3 kg/ha a year of copper yet in the future it is foreseeable that the use of copper will decrease even greater. To achieve a further reduction of copper they suggest additional experiments with plant strengthening products. Further information you will find here: <http://orgprints.org/6168/>

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9. +++Control of perennial weeds in organic farming systems+++

The regulation of creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and dock (*Rumex* spp.) is often difficult in organic farming systems. That's why a common project of the German Federal Biological Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry (BBA) and the German Federal Agricultural Research Centre (FAL) tested present control measures. Both, field trials and a survey of farmers, confirm the significance of crop rotation for controlling *C. arvense* in organic farming. Due to current economic conditions there might even be an increasing force for reducing soil tillage or more simplified crop rotations. This possible development of organic farming systems does not comply with the needs of preventive weed control. Therefore farms with a cereal-based crop rotation should also use other options to increase crop competition, e.g. cultivar choice, sowing methods or fertilizing practice. A detailed report in English you will find here: <http://orgprints.org/5015/>.

A survey showed that 80% of the interviewed organic farms have problems with dock. Direct control measures against the weed are rarely undertaken for labour and cost reasons. In experiments on field trials the spreading of dock could be reduced by about 75 % with manual weeding, by about 57 % with mechanical weeding by a self-driven dock rooting machine (“WUZI”), but by only 4 % with burning. The experiment included also indirect dock control measures (pasture management and grazing systems): So the weed could be reduced by 42% after sheep used the pasture for two years, while after goats used the pasture, the level of dock was reduced by 71%. Further information: <http://orgprints.org/6167/>.

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10. +++In organic farming the topic of multiple stress through plant protection agents is not looked at well+++

Experts followed an invitation of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) in order to discuss “Multiple residues from plant protection agents in food”, and met on November the 9th, 2005 in Berlin, states a press release from the Bundesverbandes Naturkost Naturwaren (BNN) e.V..

According to the BfR “during a simultaneous exposure to several chemical substances a multitude of harmful interaction is possible”. In conventional fruit and vegetables chemical thresholds are often exceeded and the majority of the contaminated fruits contain residues from different pesticide sources, “consumers buying organic products will be on the safe side” says the BNN.

This is underlined by research results of a Germanwide program monitoring fruits and vegetables in the organic retail trade, which has been carried out for two years under supervision of the BNN. Among the 900 organic samples were taken, from which only 2.3% showed multiple contamination. According to the EU-Commission 20.5 % of all plant origin samples taken showed multiple contamination. Conventionally produced fruit is at a higher risk of multiple contamination. The food safety agency of Baden Württemberg in Germany, after having performed residue testings in 2004/2005 found out that in the case of green pepper 88% showed multiple contamination. Present-day research results verify that single substances may well be harmless, but combined with other substances in the same concentration maybe dangerous to the health of humans, states the BNN. When defining thresholds for food the impact of multiple contaminants are not yet examined. Further information at: www.bnn-monitoring.de

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11. +++Switzerland: Plebiscite votes against gentechology+++

On 27. of November 2005 the Swiss voted against GMO crops on their fields in a plebiscite. The homeland of the global food company Nestlé and the multinational corporation for agricultural chemistry Syngenta, decided that more research into the risks of this technology must be conducted before they start to introduce it into their agriculture. According to current surveys, the Swiss referendum

corresponds with the opinion of the most European citizens in other states. The Swiss farmers (supported by their farmers union), NGOs working with environmental issues and the biggest consumers organisation as well as 55 % of the people voted against GMO and in favor of the proposal of the 'Genfrei-Initiative'. The Swiss are not afraid of an economical disadvantage, rather the opposite. Further Information: www.gentechfrei.ch

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12. +++ New Polish Prime Minister wants to keep Poland GM-free+++

The new Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz has pledged to the Polish Parliament in a crucial policy speech, seeking parliamentary backing, that he will keep Poland GM-free. On 31. of October Marcinkiewicz was inaugurated as the head of a minority government. Source: <http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/news.html> und <http://www.gmwatch.org/archive2.asp?arcid=5957> Fourteen of the sixteen Polish regions are declared as GMO-free. They cover more than 80% of Poland's territory and represent more than 90 % of the population. The first GM-free zones were established by farmers in the Stryzow and Podkarpace regions in South Poland. As well as in Chmielnik community. For further information please see: http://icppc.pl/pl/gmo/eng_index.php

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13. +++Conference on GMO application in agriculture on 2. – 4. of April 2006 in Vienna intended+++

After the Swiss referendum the European discussion on gentechology flares up again, especially in Austria.

The GMO Conference to be held during the Austrian EU-presidency (1. of January – 30. of June 2006) will take place in light of the events of the Swiss referendum. The Austrian Minister of Agriculture had already announced the conference on 20. of September 2005. This will be the first conference where experts will have an opportunity to exchange opinions on the issue of co-existence. An important question is, if coexistence of GM-crops and conventional agriculture is a possibility especially for countries with small-scale agriculture. In Austria is the contamination of organic products by GMOs very likely, because of the high percentage of organic farms.

One day after the Swiss Referendum Upper Austria announced to appeal against the sentence of the European Court of Justice within the statutory two-month period. The sentence at first instance overturned a law in which Upper Austria wanted to forbid the cultivation of GMO-plants all over the province.

The "Alliance of GMO-free regions" which was initiated by Upper Austria grew to 36 members in November 2005. At a meeting of the alliance at Rennes in France six further regions joined the group: Tyrol, Lower Austria, Abruzzi, Basse-Normandie, Pays de la Loire and Piemont.

An EU-regulation for the co-existence of GMO-seeds and organic farming does not exist yet, but negotiations are planned under the Austrian EU-presidency.

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14. +++„Day of organic farming“ at the International Green week at Berlin 2006+++

This year the day of organic farming is themed: "Organic instead of cheap – ways to a new prosperity. The organisers say in their announcement: Economy needs more than growth and prosperity is more than money. To economise in cycles, to create jobs through development, to preserve resources and protect the nature – on this things a qualitative growth is based, which will lead us from crisis to new prosperity. More and more costumers ask for products, which are not cheap but make sense for their health and the health of the earth. With its contributions the conference on 20/01/2006 wants to provide some answers to this challenge. From 12:45 to 2 pm the award to support organic production "Förderpreis Ökologischer Landbau" will be presented by the Federal Minister for food, agriculture and consumer protection Horst Seehofer. More information: http://boelw.de/fachkolloquium_2006.html.

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15. +++Poland is land of the year at BioFach 2006+++

The world fair on organic products takes place on February 16. to 19. 2006 at Nürnberg exhibition centre. According to the organizers more than 2000 exhibitors and around 33 000 visitors are expected from all over the world. In the years 2004 and 2005 an attractive and interesting booth was

presented by several Polish organic exhibitors. Organic products such as cheese, sausages, fruits, vegetables and herbs from Poland are already in high demand. At the 2006 fair, Poland as the feature country of the year will present and showcase 40 exhibitors in Nürnberg.

The BioFach congress takes place parallel to the fair and attracts around 4800 visitors with about 100 presentations and workshops, which are mostly free of charge. The presentations cover current issues for the stakeholders in organic industry such as organic food products and natural cosmetic. Also events and presentations highlighting organic farming in Eastern Europe will take place. For more information, please see: www.biofach.de.

EkoConnect organises an excursion for polish and german participants from the Niederschlesien/Oberlausitz region to 3 organic farms in the region of Nürnberg from the BioFach. For more information, please see: www.ekoconnect.org.

Detailed information about organic farming in Poland, you can find in the EkoConnect-info letter No. 4 September 2005.

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16. +++IFOAM conference on organic wild production+++

(soel) The first international conference on organic wild production will take place in May 2006 in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The conference is organised by the International Foundation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM) in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Berries, mushrooms and all sort of herb varieties often derive from wild harvesting. Currently there is very few data about this area available. The conference will focus on harvesting of wild vegetable from forests, „natural“ lands, pastures and fallow land. It will concentrate on production that enters the organic market stream, but will also extend to other concepts such as Fair Trade and sustainable forest management certification.

Main objectives of the conference are to show the current state of organic wild production, the volume of trade, the participating countries and communities as well as to support the information exchange and networking between actors in the sector, including the development of commercial links. Another target of the event is to contribute to the improvement of quality management and sustainability in wild harvesting.

Furthermore it is planned to advance the standards and clarification of terms and definitions. For further information please consult:

http://www.ifoam.org/events/ifoam_conferences/IFOAM_Wild_Conference.html