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EkoConnect Information Letter Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Herewith you are receiving the 7th edition of the EkoConnect Information Letter. For all organic farmers, companies and organisations, the discussion of the amended Regulation (EC) No 2092/91 (as discussed in this edition) might be of particular interest. A fundamentally amended law is planned including amendments with regard to the declaration and handling of residue of genetically manipulated organisms (GMO), which is viewed critically by the experts. Presently it is particularly important to transmit feedback and alternative suggestions from associations and stakeholders dealing with organic agriculture to Brussels, so that the new regulation really comes to mean an improvement for farmer and consumers the like.

Also we like to point your attention to one of our own events: in May 2006 EkoConnect will be jointly organising an "Ecological-Marketing Forum: An international symposium on the processing and marketing of organically grown food" with Ekoland (Poland) and "Organic Retailers Association"(abbr. ORA, Czech Republic) in Warsaw. Lines are now open for your registration! As always we welcome critical remarks and feedback from our readers; and the passing on of the info letter to your friends and colleagues. We want to pay tribute to our translators for their honorary work. Those who did not receive the info letter directly from EkoConnect but are interested in obtaining a free copy in the future may email us (info@ekoconnect.org); to unsubscribe you can also contact this address.

With best wishes, your EkoConnect team.

Bernhard Jansen Stefan Simon

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1. +++Country report: Organic agriculture in Croatia+++

Croatia is at 56,500 km² a little smaller than Lithuania and since June 2004 an official EU candidate country. The Adriatic state is a touristic success story since its independence.

The **average farm area** is 2.4 ha. Whereas the northern part of the country has bigger organic farms (up to 200 ha), in the southern part are very small farms (< 1 ha). About 8% of the GDP is allotted to agriculture, as well as 8% of the employed persons.

Organic agriculture is still in its beginnings. Because of the high **direct payments**, however, it is very likely that the sector will develop during the next years. In 2005, a **strategic plan** for organic farming was established. It aims to increase the organic share of the entire agricultural area to 10% by the end of 2010.

In 2001 and 2002, the state enacted the first guidelines for organic farming in accordance with Regulation (EC) 2092/91 and the IFAOAM standards. At the moment, there are **269 farms running 3,124 ha organically**. This is about 0.37% of the entire agricultural area. Grains (wheat and corn) make up the major part with 1,575 ha of the entire organic area, followed by grassland (740 ha), orchards (85 ha), vineyards (30 ha) and olive groves (27 ha). Wild harvesting is not included in this area, but it is of importance. 2002 was the first year in which registration of organic plants took place. The following table 1 shows the development within the last four years; table 2 is a selection of benefit payments.

Year	2003	2004	2005
Farm	130	189	269
Hectare	3506	2654	3.124*

*plus 11.791 ha bee pasture und 61 ha forests

arable crops	405,- €/ha
cow + calf	355,- €
Olive tree	2,8 €/piece

** for details please ask EkoConnect

The situation of **organic associations** is difficult to understand, even for insiders. More than 30 associations and sub-associations exist. Five of them are official members of IFOAM:

1. BIOS - Association for Organic Husbandry, Environment & Health Improvement of Croatia
2. Ecologica www.ecologica.hr
3. Eko Liburnia www.eko-liburnia.hr
4. EOL - Ekološka Organizacija "Lipa" www.eol.hr
5. Living Earth - Ziva Zemlja"-Drustvo ZA www.ziva-zemlja.hr (bio-dynamic)

Organic producers are certified by private **control bodies**, which are accredited to the Ministry. There are six inspection bodies (meeting the Croatian Standard HRN EN 45004) that check the production on farm and two certification bodies (HRN EN 45011) that have to issue the certification. These documents are forwarded to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management in Zagreb. It hands out the **organic logo** "Ecoproduct" for the product. The logo looks like a four-leaf clover and has the lettering "Ecological Product of Croatia" in Croatian and English.

Small-scale organic farmers produce for their own consumption, and they sell their surplus on the farmers' market or on farm as fresh or processed products (mostly pickled vegetables). Only a few products are sold via supermarket chains or health food shops. One example is pumpkin oil produced by a Croatian processor, who sells it to the Croatian shops of the 'dm' drugstore chain. Besides the **home processors**, there are 14 processors and 20 importers of organic products. Consumers have an increasing interest in organic products. However, only a few products can be manufactured in the country. Many foods have to be imported. The dm-chain offers, for example, Alnatura products from Germany in its shops. Herbs, berries and nuts are often exported.

Because of the small-scale agricultural areas, it is necessary for Croatian organic agriculture to develop alternative sources of income. Besides the production of crops that do not need big areas, labour-intensive products, such as herbs, vegetables and fruits, should be grown. These products have a high added value. But also agrotourism has the possibility to be a trendsetting alternative for the Croatian organic agriculture especially due to the important role of tourism in the country. The association Eko Liburnia wants to develop the agrotourism in the next two years. Their target is to connect 75 agrotouristic farms until 2007.

Sources: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management – Ministarstvo poljoprivrede, šumarstva i vodnoga gospodarstva (MSP), Ranko Tadic association Eko Liburnia, ZMP Europamarkt Ost 5/2005, IFOAM, own research;

2. +++ Organic farming project in Romania +++

Organically farmed roses are grown in Romania to produce rose-oil for the German company WALA Heilmittel GmbH. One of the focal points of the project is to develop employment in the area for the youth. A demonstration farm was established within the FCE (Foundation for Culture and Ecology) funded project, a second farm is currently being built. The education and employment opportunities of the organic rose production are focused especially on young people, because the job situation in Romania is quite bad at the moment.

The FCE foundation was founded in 2000 in Medias/Romania. The program of initiating and developing different economic projects was established according to the principle of aid for self-help. Special emphasis is laid on the promotion of ecology and farming as well as education in organic farming. Advice regarding organic farming is given to farmers within the project, but also to interested farmers of other regions and projects. Detailed information is given on the homepage <http://www.fcenet.com/> in Romanian, German and English language.

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3. +++ Certification body of the Balkan organic movement accepted +++

The Bulgarian organic certification body Balkan Biocert Ltd., was accredited by the Bulgarian accreditation body (BAS) according to the EN 45011/ISO 65 norms. Also, Balkan Biocert was licensed officially by the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture to implement their services as organic certification body. Balkan Biocert is active in Bulgaria since 2003 and was established out of a project between Bulgarian and Swiss organic-farming-institutions. The company is owned completely by Bulgarian NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations) and private enterprises that are closely linked to the organic movement.

The company is also open for partners from Macedonia and applied for accreditation at the relevant body in Macedonia. For more information, please see: www.balkanbiocert.com and <http://www.fibl.org/english/news/single-article06.php?id=532>

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4. +++ Second Control body has started in the Czech Republic +++

In the beginning of 2006, a second Czech control body has started its work. The German ABCERT had been building up an office in Brno since October 2005, and started its control work on 1st of January 2006. Besides controlling farms and processors the well-trained specialists are available for farmers' and processors' questions on special issues about organic agriculture. The website www.abcert.cz is under construction. In Germany ABCERT is, with about 6,000 controlled farms and 1,000 processors, the largest control body.

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5. +++ A new project in support of organic farming in the Czech Republic +++

From March 1, 2006 the Czech organic farmers association PRO-BIO launches a new project to coordinate the expansion of organic farming. The project includes measures to protect the environment and in support of biodiversity, and it intends to create new jobs in the countryside. Furthermore, it aims at creating a network of 36 new centres of information and consultation in the region of East Bohemia and Middle Moravia. In this context, five new locations are being built while 31 other centres will be incorporated in existing partner-organisations. The Czech Ministry for the Environment and the EU structural fund are providing financial assistance. The project is a cooperation of a total of 22 partners, players from the environmental sector, NGOs, agricultural departments and schools. For further information, see www.pro-bio.cz

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6. +++ Three new projects in organic farming in Azerbaijan +++

Since 2005 the Ganja Agribusiness Association (GABA, www.gaba-az.org) sets three new projects in organic farming into practice. GABA is an NGO to provide legal and economic support for the activities of various businesses. It is the intention of GABA to convey information and consultation to further environmentally friendly production. To name the three projects: 1) "Organic Chain Development" in the Southern Caucasus, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan; 2) Enforcement of organic farming in the Southern Caucasus; 3) Contributions to the development of organic farming in Azerbaijan.

The first of the projects named above is sponsored by the Dutch AVALON foundation, here a 'master plan' had been developed and information about organic farming, the creation of farmers'

associations, and governmental control in other countries gathered; through this, organic associations are being supported and the conversion of businesses to a more ecologically friendly way of production initiated. Also, empirical field studies are organised and the public relation side of things is taken care of. The second project aims at improving the income and livelihood of farmers in the Southern Caucasus through the manufacturing and marketing of organic products. Here the main focus is on the production technology, marketing, political dialogue, certification and education. The EPER-HEKS (Relief Organisation of the Evangelical Churches, Switzerland), the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), as well as the GTZ (Association for Technical Cooperation, Germany) are providing financial assistance for this project. The last of the three projects was launched only at the end of 2005 so that no further information is available at this early stage.

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7. +++ Complete amendment of the Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 – Critical remarks from the organic movement +++

The European Union has proposed an amendment of the EU Regulation for law. The amendment is published in all EU working languages, see http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/qual/organic/index_en.htm. The amendment aimed at achieving more transparency for consumers, organic businesses and farmers. The new guidelines are supposed to be less complicated, allow for more flexibility while cutting on bureaucracy. It is thought that this may be accomplished by considering regional differences, by changing existing declarations of organic produce and process controlling. With regard to imports, these new guidelines shall be introduced from January 1, 2007. It is planned that the law is implemented on January 1, 2009 and that all discussions on the amendment are concluded by July 1, 2006.

The organic sector voices a fundamental critique of the suggested amendment. The German lawyer Hanspeter Schmidt, who has been discussing the EU Regulation for years, advises the organic movement to “to fiercely protest against the attempt to make opaque, undefined formulations, [...] into the fundamental principle and central instrument for the amended law.” More specifically the criticism is that the suggested amendment leaves out many details, such as the allowed quantities of fertilisers and pesticides. Furthermore, it is suggested to strengthen the decision making powers of the EU Commission, who would be in turn able to allow for exceptions in the production which may be less strict. The German association Bioland fears the nationalisation of organic farming that alienates organic farming from the practical process of production. The improvement of the existing law makes sense, as it has loopholes and is partially over-regulated. However, the suggested amendment holds many more weak points as the existing law.

In BioFach Fair 2006 the IFOAM EU Group presented some critical points as their initial response:

- The aims and fundamental principles of organic production are not clearly defined, leaving room for interpretation which in turn weakens the principles of organic farming.
- The fact that the suggested amendment (of the EU Commission) puts the product and food control at centre stage and *not* the ecologically friendly system of production (as has been the case so far) is rejected.
- The use of private logos is supposed to be curtailed or even eliminated. According to that organic products shall be labelled with an EU logo or be declared as ‘EU-organic’. In case a private logo is used, detailed proof needs to be given that the entire product has been produced in accordance with the respective regulations (as declared by the private logo). The IFOAM EU Group understands this suggestion as a form of overregulation and asks to drop this article in its entirety.
- The attempts made to achieve an increased flexibility by allowing individual member states a less strictly regulated production (due to specific conditions such as climate, development, conditions of production) is not clearly confined and can result in an unevenness in the market.

The IFOAM EU Group supports the idea of more responsibility of private players and a well-structured framework which furthers the existing strong points of the green sector. Besides, more time (than until July 1, 2006) will be needed for discussion. In early March, the IFOAM EU Group will give a statement. Associations in EU member states should send their statements to their national governments, particularly to the Ministries of Agriculture; these will then have an opportunity to include criticisms and suggestions for improvement of the players in sessions of the special committee of agriculture in Brussels. Further information: www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/around_world/eu_group/3546.html

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8. +++ Research shows: It is important to provide cattle with trace minerals +++

The right feed with trace minerals is very important for the health of the herd. According to the German *bioland magazine 1/2006*, the content of trace minerals in the feed of (rearing) cattle on pastures is often too low. Notably, a lack of selenium and copper may reduce their growth. The lack of trace minerals can also be a reason for late fecundity; the cow could be up to 35-40 months old before being fertile due to the bad feed. Research from 2004 and 2006 at the University of Giessen and at the agricultural department of Nordrhein-Westfalen shows that animals on different locations were often badly supplied with minerals. At different locations the content of trace minerals in the soils as well as in the plants can vary. Moreover, differences between seasons have been measured. The growth in autumn contained, for example, fewer trace minerals than in spring and summer.

The authors recommend nearly every farm to give additional mineral feed, such as licking stones or bowls. In winter, salt enriched with trace minerals can be mixed into the feed. If the animals do not accept the licking stones, the farmer should change the product. Every herd has its own taste preferences, and it is important to find the right product for supplying trace minerals. Whereas copper supplements should not be used for sheep, cattle need it (1,200 mg/kg for low copper values in their blood). To conserve the health of the herd, the share of selenium, as well as zinc, manganese, iodine and cobalt in the fodder is especially important on sites with low natural values.

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9. +++ Model businesses as an option to support organic farming +++

To support organic farming in Germany a network of organic farms had been created in 2003 that provides access for ecological businesses and those colleagues willing to convert from conventional methods of production. This network consists of a total of 200 so-called "ecological model businesses" that have been selected by a jury of ecological experts. They are supposed to facilitate other farmers who are working under similar regional conditions, with practical documentation and with an initial meeting point for the exchange of information. Apart from this, these model farms provide those processing organic food, dealers, sales personnel, and others interested – such as pupils, apprentices, and students with an excellent insight into the ways in which organic farming is put into practice. Each of these model farms opens its gates at specified dates; which are advertised either on <http://demonstrationsbetriebe.oekolandbau.de>, in special journals or in regional papers. In sum, the network of these model farms can be highly effective in the consultation and education of organic farming.

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10. +++ "Terminator Technology" – Genetic modification method endangers safety of nutrition +++

Within a mutual campaign, 30 German organisations out of the environmental, developmental and agricultural background demand a ban on "Terminator Technology" all over the world. Terminator was developed by the multinational seed/agrochemical industry to prevent farmers from saving and re-planting harvested seed the next year. According to organisations participating in the campaign, the Terminator technology poses a threat to the environment and nutritional safety.

Further details about the campaign can be found at www.freie-saat.de. Moreover, there is an international campaign homepage: www.banterminator.org. On both websites, organisations and individuals can sign an online statement to support the movement.

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11. +++ Croatia: GMO is regulated by law +++

There are 12 Croatian counties out of a total of 20 that are aiming to produce GMO-free. The Croatian Parliament has adopted several laws regulating GMOs. These new laws, which are in some aspects stricter than EU law, are highly important since they can set a precedent for making GMO laws in the Balkans and in other (non-EU) parts of Central and Eastern Europe where the regulation of GMOs is currently incomplete or nonexistent. The Croatian laws entered into force in spite of pressure by the US, which in 2001 threatened Croatia with WTO action if it went ahead with its restrictive policies on GMOs.

A new law on GMOs came into force during 2005 that has, according to the NGO Zelena-Akcija „Green Action“ (www.zelena-akcija.hr/eng/index.html), many positive points, such as banning the release of GMOs in protected areas and their buffer zones, in areas of organic farming and in areas that are of importance to ecotourism. This provides a legal tool for counties to effectively declare themselves GMO-free. The law provides no labelling threshold, but this has been set at 0.9% for food

and 0% for seeds by means of a separate government regulation. The weak points of the law are the poorly-defined public participation provisions and the fact that the labelling threshold is not included in the law but could be changed at the whim of the health Minister with no public or parliamentary discussion. To date, in Croatia no permits have been granted for the deliberate release of GMOs - either for field trials or commercial cultivation, and no food or feed products containing GMOs have been approved.

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12. +++ Educational trips to Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Crete +++

As mentioned in the info letter 5 (November 2005), the association ProZept will continue to offer expert educational trips to selected European member states in order to delve into issues of ecological agriculture and sustainable tourism in 2006 and 2007. ProZept is addressing all who have a professional interest in organic agriculture or in the processing industry and trade in the above-mentioned countries. As the educational trips receive financing from the EU *Leonardo da Vinci* programme, the participation fees have been kept to a minimum. The actual trip dates are being published under http://www.prozept-ev.de/leonardo_aktuelles.htm. The organisation of the trips is handled in cooperation with ProZept, EkoConnect and the Competency Centre for Ecological Agriculture in Niedersachsen. Applications forms can be requested from ProZept e.V.; Claudia Rubart; Telephone: +49-4472/ 77910-21

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13. +++ 7th – 9th of April German-Polish workshop on organic farming in Iłów, close to Warsaw+++

For the third time the Polish association *Ziarno* is planning a German-Polish workshop on organic farming. It will take place from the 7th – 9th of April, 2006 in Iłów, in the district of Sochaczew, approx. 75km west from Warsaw. The topics will centre on: presentations and discussions of initiatives and on the possibilities to develop markets for organic produce, on the question of genetically manipulated food, and on an estimation of the overall state of organic farming in Central and Eastern Europe. Apart from different presentations by experts from Poland and Germany, farmers – just as in previous years – will be given the chance to exchange thoughts on their practical experiences. Those interested can register with *Ziarno*: ziarno@free.ngo.pl, or homepage: <http://ziarno.free.ngo.pl/EN/INDEX.HTML>

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14. +++ 25th – 26th of May 2006: international forum on organic marketing in Warsaw for the promotion of organic food +++

From the 25th – 26th of May, 2006, the “Organic Marketing Forum” takes place in Warsaw. „This is an international symposium to promote exchange of know how, information and experiences and a meeting point for decision makers in the organic food industry. The overall aim is the mutual transfer of knowledge and to prop the establishment of organic processing and the marketing of organic food in Central and Eastern Europe. The symposium is organised by *EkoConnect* in conjunction with the Polish association *Ekoland*, and *ORA* (Czech Republic). Working languages are English, German, and Polish. For further information and the registration form, please contact info@ekoconnect.org, or: www.ekoconnect.org

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15. +++ 29th of June – 1st of July 2006: Fifth European Summer Academy in Lednice – Bioacademy +++

The Bioacademy is an annual conference on organic farming, held in Lednice, Czech Republic, not far from the Austrian and Slovakian borders. The Bioacademy has become an important meeting place for people from Eastern and Western Europe, involved in organic agriculture, to exchange ideas and to socialise. This year's subjects are food quality and perennial grasslands as well as vegetables production and marketing. Practical parts of the conference are excursions to organic farms. The Bioacademy is organised by the organic farmers associations “PRO-BIO” (CZ) and “Bio Ernte” (A) in cooperation with the Czech Ministries of Agriculture and of Environment and the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. Further details about the Bioacademy can be found at: <http://www.pro-bio.cz>, Phone / Fax: +420-583 216 609, e-mail: pro-bio@pro-bio.cz

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16. +++ 3rd of June – 8th of July 2006: Second Pillnitz Summer Academy on Organic Animal Husbandry +++

For the second time, the Pillnitz Summer Academy on Organic Animal Husbandry will take place in Dresden/Germany. It is organised by EkoConnect in cooperation with the University of Applied Sciences (HTW) in Dresden, and the August Cieszkowski Agricultural University of Poznan, Poland. It is an international intensive one-week training course about organic animal husbandry. Students will be taught practice oriented knowledge about organic livestock breeding, nutrition and husbandry management. Further information and last year's report can be found at: www.ekoconnect.org.

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