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## EkoConnect Information Letter Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

Dear Readers,

Please find below the eighth issue of the "EkoConnect Information Letter".

Organic agriculture is developing at a fast pace. In Poland, the area cultivated according to organic standards has more than doubled during the last year. In Germany, the sales of organic products have risen by 15%. This positive trend shows that we are on the right track and that we are able to build up together a sustainable and healthy agriculture and food production in Europe. We would like to contribute to this with the EkoConnect Information Letter, as well as with our "Organic Marketing Forum", an international meeting taking place from 25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of May in Warsaw for everybody who produces and markets organic food. With more than 100 registered participants the Forum is almost booked out. The meeting is organised by EkoConnect in cooperation with partners from Poland and the Czech Republic.

In order to be able to provide you, dear readers, with the most up-to-date news and practically based information, we are always happy to receive your feedback and suggestions for future topics for our Information Letter. If you are working on a new project or would like to publish an important piece of news, please let us know via e-mail ([stefan.simon@ekoconnect.org](mailto:stefan.simon@ekoconnect.org)).

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Best wishes from the EkoConnect editorial staff

Bernhard Jansen            Stefan Simon

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1. Country report: Organic agriculture in the Republic of Moldova
2. Dynamic Development of the Polish organic agriculture – 103 percent growth of the organic area in 2005
3. Promotion of organic agriculture with the 'Ecological Food Valley' project in Poland
4. Great deal of organic products awarded at Czech food fair
5. Ten years organic shops in the Czech Republic
6. Russians would buy organic products
7. More than 31 millions of organic hectares worldwide
8. Humus management in vegetable growing
9. New Master Course "International Food Business and Consumer Studies (IFBC)"
10. Foundation of the European Consortiums for organic animal breeding
11. 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> May 2006: international forum on organic marketing in Warsaw for the promotion of organic food
12. 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> July: Conference for the international cooperation of universities and the industry at the academy of agriculture Ulyanovsk (Russia)
13. 3<sup>rd</sup> September – 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006: Second Pillnitz Summer Academy on Organic Animal Husbandry

## **1. +++ Country report: Organic agriculture in the Republic of Moldova +++**

Moldova enjoys a favourable climate and good farmland – about 80% is black soil – but has no major mineral deposits. As a result, the economy depends heavily on agriculture, on fruits, vegetables, Moldavian wine and tobacco.

At the moment, the Republic of Moldova has about 2.2 millions ha of agriculturally used land. Some 70 % are arable crops. The average farm has about 1.8 ha. During the Soviet times Moldova was specialised on fruit and wine production, and Russia is still a major export market. Today approx. 25% of the agricultural area are still vineyards and orchards.

Organic farming has a small but recently pretty fast growing importance in the agriculture of Moldova. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry considers organic production as an important future sector for its farmers, first of all as a way for a better rural development and for the protection of the environment.

Already in August 2001, the government approved a national concept of ecological agriculture and started different means of supporting organic farming. On February 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 the parliament passed the bill concerning organic food production. This law protects the words "organic" as well as "ecological" and "biological" for organic farming and is very similar to the CEE Regulation 2092/91. With the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 each organic farm and processor has to be registered by the Moldovan authorities. Before April, the farms were only inspected and certified by private organisations from Western Europe and not registered by the government. There are no domestic certification and control bodies at the moment.

According to the data from the three foreign certification bodies – Ecocert/France, BSC/Germany and SGS/Switzerland – at the end of 2005 there were 87 organic farms with 10,755 ha certified as organic and 320 ha in conversion. In 2003 there were 577 ha certified area (7144 ha in conversion) and in 2001 just 168 ha. In a forecast the Ministry predicts for the year 2016 about 31.000 ha of organic farmland.

In 2005 about 80 % of this area are vineyards. About 13 % are oleaginous and protean plants. The following main organic products were exported in 2005: wine (250,000 litres), sunflower oil (1500 tons), walnuts (1450 tons), lavender oil (3.5 tons), honey (3 tons) and dried (357 tons) and frozen (322 tons) fruits. Companies from Western Europe as well as from the new EU countries are importing fruits, wine and other organic products from Moldova. Besides some wine bottlers there are so far no organic processors in the country.

To enhance the organic production, the farmers union 'EcoProbus', which is member of IFOAM, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, carries out training courses with specialists from other European countries. In March and April this year, for example, specialists from EkoConnect trained farmers and advisors in production methods, marketing and quality management in different courses.

Because of the good natural conditions and a growing group of very committed organic farmers and dedicated advisors, researchers and governmental people, the organic agriculture in Moldova seems to make big progress in the future.

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## **2. +++ Dynamic Development of the Polish organic agriculture – 103 percent growth of the organic area in 2005 +++**

The development of the Polish organic sector was very dynamic in 2005. According to the Polish Inspection Body for Commercial Quality of Agricultural and Comestible Articles (IJHARS) the number of organic producers (farmers) raised from some 3,423 to 7183 in 2005. This is an increase of 91 percent of organic farms compared to the year before. Moreover, 44 new organic processors were certified during the last year, which makes 99 organic processors in Poland by the end of 2005.

Polish organic farmers were running 167,740 ha at all in 2005, which is an increase of 103 percent in comparison to the year before. At all about one percent of the Polish agricultural area is certified according to organic standards.

The newly converted organic entities own mostly a small area of land. 25 percent of the Polish organic farms had less than 5 ha in 2005. Small and medium organic farms – up to 20 ha – take, with about 70 percent, the bulk of the organic businesses. 170 new organic farms own more than 100 ha; with them some 345 entities were in this size range. By the end of last year the Polish average organic farm had 23 ha of land and was about 18 percent smaller than 2004 (28 ha).

### **3. +++ Promotion of organic agriculture with the 'Ecological Food Valley' project in Poland +++**

In 2005 started the EU-funded project 'Ecological Food Valley', which will promote organic agriculture and food supply in the Lubelskie region. This region is one of the 16 Polish voivodships and is located in the East of the country.

The appellation of the project does not, as it may seem, refer to the geographical shape of the region. The name is deduced from the all over the world used appellation 'Valley' for economic clusters. The most well-known of such formation is Silicon Valley in California. The founder of the 'Ecological Food Valley' wants it to be as famous as the Silicon one.

The Project has a pilot character and is led by the College of Enterprise and Administration in Lublin as part of the Integrated Operational Program of Regional Development (EU), co-financed by the European Social Fund.

The aim of the organisers is to develop an economic cluster, a net of cooperating producers, companies, local authorities and knowledge centres, as well as social institutions and organisations, to support organic farming, sales of organic products, and to keep people in the rural regions. The main focus of the project will be on technological and intellectual support, granted by the participation in social consultations and involvement in creating the 'Valley'.

The Lubelskie voivodship has a high potential for the development of organic agriculture, especially because of the low environmental pollution and its agricultural character. According to the latest data, 380 new organic farms were registered in Lubelskie in 2005. It is an increase of 97% in comparison to 2004.

Within the project there are actions planned to promote the idea. This will be accomplished amongst other things, by five meetings, where new possibilities of financial support for organic food producers and processors in the region will be discussed as well.

Up to now, there have been two such meetings. The results are published on the project's official web-page ([www.dolinaeko.wspa.lublin.pl](http://www.dolinaeko.wspa.lublin.pl)).

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### **4. +++Great deal of organic products awarded at Czech food fair +++**

On SALIMA, the biggest Czech food fair taking place in Brno at the beginning of March 2006, seven prizes were awarded to organic products. Only two years ago, organic products were still something exotic at the SALIMA fair. Back then, all organic producers and wholesale traders presented themselves at the common booth of the association PRO-BIO. While in 2004 the products were not taken seriously yet, this year they were awarded seven of the 34 popular prizes.

All in all, 13 food products were awarded the prize "GOLDEN SALIMA" and 21 the prize "TRENDY". The latter is given to especially healthy products.

Five of the seven organic products that were awarded are from abroad. Among them are three fruit juices (two of the Swiss company Biotta and one of the German company Voelkel), the "Provamel Soy-Bananamilk" of the Belgian producer Alpro and the vegetable broth "Würzel" of the German producer Primavita. All products are imported to the Czech Republic by different wholesale traders.

However, the national production itself is growing as well. The best examples for this are the two Czech products that were awarded at SALIMA: The rice cakes topped with milk chocolate of the company Racio and a bread mix of the bakery Jizerské Pekárny spol. s. r. o.

Source: Mgr. Tom Vaclavik, Green Marketing.

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### **5. +++ Ten years organic shops in the Czech Republic +++**

This year, the independent section for organic shops of the Czech organic association PRO-BIO celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. One decade ago, Mrs. Jarmila Chladová, owner of an organic food store in Litomyšl in the Eastern part of the Czech Republic, established the section. Her aim was to help setting up other shops which are specialised in organic foodstuff. Moreover, she wanted to exchange further information between organic shops and to initiate training possibilities for the staff to give good advice on organic farming and healthy diet to consumers.

After a little while, some shops started to join the association, such as Country Life in Prague and Bazalka in Hradce Králové. Today, the independent section has 50 members spread all over the republic. PRO-BIO member food stores have a share of 20% in the entire turnover of organic products sold in the Czech Republic. Especially customers, who seek advice, will consult any of the PRO-BIO shops. For regional organic farmers the shops are a sales prospect. The sale of organic products from regional farmers is a major aspect for the development of organic agriculture in the Czech Republic. Consumers can be sure that the PRO-BIO shops have at least 30%, and at no time less than 150

certified organic products on sale. In larger cities, such as Prague and Brno, organic shops offer about 60 – 80% of certified organic products, mostly more than 1000 articles. The PRO-BIO member shops are actively taking care of promoting ecological products. This takes place during special events, such as the "Day of the Earth" and "September - Month of organic products".

#### **6. +++ Russians would buy organic products +++**

About half of the Russian consumers would be willing to pay higher prices for products of controlled organic agriculture. This information was the result of a survey of the information service AgrarEurope in 75 Russian cities. The questionnaire showed as well that people in Russia do not know a lot about organic products yet. Now the Russian food industry wants to extend its range of organic goods on offer. The main problem, however, is that until now legal regulation for the production and labelling of ecologically produced goods is lacking. If the market for organic products becomes more profitable, the risk of abuse will rise as well. To have their products labelled as organically correct has been a marketing strategy for companies before.

Source: BioWelt 1/2005

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#### **7. +++ More than 31 Million organic hectares worldwide +++**

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), the Swiss Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), and the Foundation Ecology & Farming (SOEL), Germany, presented the latest global data on organic farming at the BioFach fair in February 2006 in Nuremberg, the world leading fair for organic food. The study was supported by the fair organisers NuernbergMesse.

According to the survey, currently more than 31 million hectares of farmland are under organic management worldwide (state: February 2006).

In terms of organic land, excluding wild collection, Australia is leading with 12.1 million hectares, followed by China (3.5 million hectares) and Argentina (2.8 million hectares). Most of the world's organic land is in Australia / Oceania (39 %), followed by Europe (21 %), Latin America (20 %), Asia (13 %), North America (4 %) and Africa (3 %). Regarding the share of organic farmland in comparison with the total agricultural area, Austria, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries lead the way. In Switzerland, for example, more than ten percent of the agricultural land is managed organically. The editors of the study Minou Youssefi (SOEL) and Helga Willer (FiBL) note that the continued increase in the organic land area over the last years is not just due to the ever greater interest in organic farming, but is also a result of improved access to information and data collection each time the study is updated.

According to the marketing research company Organic Monitor, the market value of organic products worldwide reached 27.8 billion US\$, (23.5 billion EUR) in 2004. The largest share of organic products was marketed in Europe and North America. Ongoing growth of the market and organic land area is expected for the foreseeable future, in part due to an increased support of governments and development organisations. Angela B. Caudle, IFOAM Executive Director, emphasizes: "As markets for organic products continue to develop throughout the world, including in key markets outside of Europe and North America, such as Brazil and the Middle East, the benefits of organic agricultural systems on a large scale will become increasingly evident."

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#### **8. +++ Humus management in vegetable growing +++**

The soil in intensive vegetable farms is poor and in many cases contaminated. Regular intensive soil cultivation reduces the humus layer and declines the soil structure. In organic vegetable growing there are various measures to preserve a healthy soil.

##### *Clover grass leys*

"The meadow is the mother of the field", pioneers of organic farming already used to say this a long time ago. The crop rotation area should therefore be paused every 5 years and clover grass ley should be cultivated for 1 or up to 2 years. By doing so, one has to keep in mind: The longer the clover grass ley is cultivated, the better it is for the soil. Humus will be built up from organic matter, which is arrived at the soil through cultivation of clover grass ley. Humus, which has been decomposed through mineralization, will be built up again and the humus balance will be compensated.

##### *Application of compost*

Constant application of compost will also enrich soil with organic matter. Green compost can be applied every third year with an amount of up to 90 m<sup>3</sup> per ha. In order to protect the soil structure,

machinery for compost application should be equipped with broad tires. Application should only be carried out when the soil is dry in summer or slightly frozen in winter.

#### *Gentle soil management*

For soil management measures the following is essential: only as often as necessary with machinery that preserves the soil as much as possible. One should take special care with equipments that are driven by power take-off, such as rotary cultivators and rotary harrows. But without this equipment, soil is barely suitable for young plants. A possible chronology for soil management measures could be: basic soil management – rotary harrow – one-time or several times use of curry comb for weed control.

#### **Comparison of humus enrichment and humus consumption in vegetable crops, green manure and compost application** (according to Leithold and Hülshagen, 1998)

| <b>crop/measure</b>                                | <b>humus units (HE*)</b> |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>crops that feed on humus (decline of humus)</b> |                          |
| potatoes, leek, asparagus, pumpkins                | -2.75                    |
| chicory, carrots, swedes, tomatoes                 | -2.05                    |
| kohlrabi, green salad, red beet, spinach           | -1.05                    |
| <b>crops that built up humus (enrichment)</b>      |                          |
| 1. year of clover grass ley                        | +2.1                     |
| green manure with 'Landsberger Gemenge' **         | +0.5                     |
| freezing off green manure                          | +0.2                     |
| compost 8,3 t dry matter / year                    | +2.0                     |
| manure 30 t  | +0.3                     |

\*) 1 HE equals 1 t humus with 50 kg N and 580 kg C; \*\*) Landsberger Gemenge' is a mixture of: (*Vicia villosa* Roth.), (*Trifolium incarnatum* L.) (*Lolium multiflorum* Lam.) Source: [www.oekolandbau.de](http://www.oekolandbau.de)

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#### **9. +++ New Master Course “International Food Business and Consumer Studies (IFBC)” +++**

“Organic is in”, also when it comes to the career. The agricultural sector and the sectors of food production and trade have a high demand on qualified professionals. The Master course “International Food Business and Consumer Studies” in English language, focuses on these fields of competence for the education of the students. The academic disciplines of economic sciences and politics of food in society are brought together with agriculture and human nutrition. According to the organizers, after four years the students have good job opportunities in the fields of trade, processing and quality management and are qualified for responsible jobs in national and international companies and organisations.

The accredited MSc course is a joint venture of the Faculty of Nutritional, Food and Consumer Sciences of the University of Applied Sciences Fulda and the Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences of the University of Kassel. The main location where the course is held is Witzenhausen; only a few classes take place in Fulda. Emphasised is a study course that is closely linked to practice. During their studies, the students work on complex projects along the food chain and come in contact with potential future employers in the organic sector. Study contents are above others food quality, product development and product innovation – particularly regarding organic products. The Master course IFBC is being offered in cooperation with other European partner universities. Therefore, students are able to do project work or research work for their theses abroad. Of special interest are the growing economies of Middle and Eastern Europe. More information at:

<http://www.fh-fulda.de/index.php?id=810&L=1&F=0>

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#### **10. +++ Foundation of the European Consortiums for organic animal breeding +++**

Animal breeding in organic agriculture so far only receives little attention. There are only a few appropriate research projects on a European level. Not many breeds are adapted to organic management conditions.

Respective breeding programmes have to be developed. Breeds used in organic agriculture are derived from conventional breeding programmes, where technologies are applied which are not 100% in line with the principles of organic farming. In order to tackle these problems on a European level, the European Consortium for organic animal breeding will be founded prior to the “Joint Organic Congress” (in Odense/Denmark, <http://www.organic-congress.org>), on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2006. Following the

“European Consortium for Organic Plant Breeding” – (Eco-PB) it is called Eco-AB. The main objective of the Eco-AB is to foster organic farming by developing organic animal breeding according to the special needs of organic farming. The single objectives of the Eco-AB are:

- to initiate animal breeding programmes;
- to support organisations and people who will make specific information available to organic farmers in Europe;
- to develop concepts and to create a scientific basis for organic animal breeding;
- to develop standards and legal basics for organic animal breeding.

Further information about Eco-AB can be obtained in the near future from the homepage of the organisation (yet not known). Source: [www.oekolandbau.de](http://www.oekolandbau.de) und <http://www.darcof.dk>

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**11. +++ 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2006: International forum on organic marketing in Warsaw for the promotion of organic food +++**

From 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2006, the “Organic Marketing Forum” is taking place in Warsaw. This is an international meeting 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*, the “Polish consulting service for agriculture” (CDR), and the Organic Retailers Association (ORA, Czech Republic). Working languages are English, German, and Polish. For further information and the registration form, please contact [info@ekoconnect.org](mailto:info@ekoconnect.org) or: [www.ekoconnect.org](http://www.ekoconnect.org)

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**12. +++ 12 to 16 July: Conference for the international cooperation of universities and the industry at the academy of agriculture Ulyanovsk (Russia) +++**

The charitable, registered association Logo has been working since 1995 for ecological agriculture and the protection of the environment in the whole of Europe with emphasis on the eastern countries. Moreover, it strives to enhance the international understanding between the east and the west of Europe. Among other things, Logo every year organizes an exchange of interns for students of the field of agriculture. In July, the association is staging a conference for the international cooperation of the industry and universities in Ulyanovsk. This city is situated in the central part of the European Russia. The target group of the meeting are former interns, companies of the agrarian sector, universities of agriculture and farmers. To former interns, it will offer good opportunities to gather further qualification and to enter the job market. Companies will be able to spot qualified future employees among the over 150 participants of the conference. To universities of agriculture, information on the international cooperation of universities will be provided. Anybody who is interested is welcome to take part in scientific excursions to Russian farms directly after the conference. For further information, consult [www.logoev.de](http://www.logoev.de)

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**13. +++ 3<sup>rd</sup> September – 8<sup>th</sup> September 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. The application form and information on the last year’s academy can be found at: [http://www.ekoconnect.org/projekte\\_pillnitzer\\_sommerakademie.html](http://www.ekoconnect.org/projekte_pillnitzer_sommerakademie.html).

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