



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

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EkoConnect Information Letter Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

Dear Readers,

Please find below the ninth issue of the “Ekoconnect Information Letter”.

We hope that once again many of the compiled information will be of interest to you. Of special importance in our eyes is the fact that the amendment of EU-Regulation No. 2092/91 will be postponed until 2007, so that there is a chance that the interests of eco-associations and eco-businesses will be considered more strongly and that the negotiations won't be so much pressed for time any more. In our opinion, the current developments in the Czech Republic, up to now one of the central European model states in regard to organic agriculture, are worth to be mentioned as well: The Czech policy to support organic agriculture is in danger to become more restrictive.

As always, you are most welcome to forward the Information Letter to friends and colleagues and we would be happy to receive your critical comments or feedback. In addition to that, we would like to thank our industrious translators for their voluntary work. They are now presented on their own website on the EkoConnect homepage: www.ekoconnect.org/ehrenamtliche.html.

If you did not receive this Information Letter directly from EkoConnect and 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.

On behalf of the whole EkoConnect team, we would like to wish you a wonderful summer!

Bernhard Jansen Stefan Simon

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1. +++ Country Report: Good starting conditions for organic agriculture in Macedonia +++

With 25,713 km² and a population of 2.02 Mio, Macedonia is the smallest state of former Yugoslavia. The agriculture is still a key factor of the Macedonian economy. The part that agriculture takes of the whole economy (GNP) amounts to around 11 percent; 20 percent of all jobs are to be found in agriculture. A special characteristic are the many small, extensively operating farms. Thus 86 percent of all businesses own less than 3 ha. The total agricultural area is 51 percent of the whole area of the state.

577,000 ha are arable farming land, 738,000 ha are grassland. It is of special interest that half of the arable farming land is equipped with irrigation systems. However, only one fourth of the crop land is watered regularly, because the markets for agricultural products have abated while the costs for irrigation are increasing.

Already since 1998, projects for the promotion of organic agriculture have been realised. Since 2003, there has been a joint project of the national consulting association PROBIO Corporation and the Swiss Research Institute for Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and local associations in Macedonia. The project is sponsored by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency SDC and works on six levels: legislation, the development of clear association structures, training, consultation, certification and marketing.

The Macedonian legislation and promotion concerning organic agriculture are already far advanced. The act on organic agriculture of 2004 comprises the production of vegetable and animal products as well as their processing. Regulations concerning the declaration of products, their certification and inspection are in preparation. The main problems of the Macedonian organic sector are the small structures and the up-to-now very small scale of production which hardly allow an economical processing. That is the reason why there are hardly any food producers yet that produce organic products. There is only a small organic farmers' market in the capital Skopje, but due to the low production there is hardly a possibility to guarantee a continual offer.

At the moment there are eight organic associations with 150 farms as members. They are planning to join to one single umbrella association in the course of the coming year. In September 2005, 50 farms with 192 ha were inspected by the Balkan Biocert control association and certified by the Swiss certification body IMO, which means that these farms follow the international rules for organic agriculture. For this year, some 100 farms have registered to be inspected. In 2005, the 50 certified businesses were funded with direct payments by the government amounting to 1 Mio Dinar, which corresponds to approx. 17,140 Euro. Products are, among others tropical fruits (figs, kakis, kiwi fruits, peaches, pomegranates), nuts, potatoes, cereal (rice, rye, sweet corn, barley), honey, sunflowers, cheese and vinegar.

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2. +++ Czech Republic: Growth of organically managed area is stagnating, sales are increasing +++

For the first time since 1995, the organically managed area of the Czech Republic has not grown. After an increased growth in the years 2000 to 2002, the rise in area has almost stagnated. At the end of 2005, the total organically managed area amounted to only 255,000 ha, 8,317 ha less than before. The number of organic farmers declined as well, from 836 in 2004 to 829 in 2005. The share of the organically managed area also slightly declined from 6.16% of the total agricultural area in 2004 to 5.98% at the end of 2005.

The positive side of the development of last year is the fact that, for the first time after four years, a rise in the share of organic arable land (5.4%) could be recorded, which now equals 1,072 ha. 20 new organic processing units have been registered in 2005, the total of processors now adds up to 125. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of organic trading companies – 107 new ones registered last year (the total is now 295); 88 of those are small retailers. Despite the new companies, the national food industry has only a little share in Czech organic agriculture.

There are three reasons for that: Firstly, in order to attract big conventional processors (with the exception of the bigger dairy company Olma in Olomouc), the market needs to increase. Secondly, small processors do not have the financial resources to make the necessary investments. And thirdly, hygienic requirements for on-farm processing are often too strict, a fact that limits traditional processing on the farms.

The export of organic products could be increased in 2005, especially to neighbouring countries with a high demand for organic raw material. On the one hand, export numbers could be increased because of lacking processing facilities in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, processed organic products are imported from Western European countries (for example refreshment drinks, pasta and dairy products). By importing, Czech companies have reacted to the increased demand from the side of the consumers. According to estimates by the agency Green Marketing, organic products worth 350

million Czech crowns (12.5 million Euro) have been imported to the Czech Republic in 2005. This makes a growth of 30% compared to 2004. Also crops like buckwheat are imported (65 tons in 2005), mainly from China, which could easily be cultivated in the Czech Republic as well. Source: Bioobchod (June 2006)

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3. +++ Less grants for organic agriculture in the Czech Republic +++

The Ministry of Agriculture in Prague has eliminated from the programme for rural development (for the granting period of 2007-2013) two segments that were promoting organic agriculture. The segments should have been implemented for the participation of organic farmers in quality management programs, in order to inform the public about their organic production and to promote organic agriculture. With the decision to eliminate them, a negative influence on the prospective development of the organic sector in the Czech Republic might have been initiated. "Pro-Bio", the Czech organic farmers' association, sees the main reasons for the stagnating growth of the organically managed area in the insufficient marketing of organic products, the modest opportunities for advertising and promotion, as well as in the not sufficiently informed consumers. Although the programme for rural development was planned to be the main tool for the expansion of organic agriculture, the ministry seems not to be very interested to take that chance, the association Pro-Bio stated in a recent press release.

Only in 2004, the government passed a document in which the increase of the organically managed area was regarded as the main objective. According to this document, a total of 10% of the whole agricultural area should have become organic by 2010. Pro-Bio further states that with the new programme this objective has been postponed by three years to the year 2013. By doing so, the Czech Ministry of Agriculture acts differently than other European countries which support marketing initiatives for organic products and give bonuses for organic area.

Other European countries have realised that direct compensation payments per hectare may motivate farmers to convert their farms to organic principles. But the focus should also be on the positioning of organic products in the food market and on an increased demand by consumers in order to achieve a stable and sustainable growth in organic farming. The two eliminated programme segments could have helped to bring the current stagnation of the growth of the organically managed area to an end and to strengthen the competitive position of smaller farms, Pro-Bio states. Additionally, they could increase the quality of their products. All in all, this would lead to a more sustainable production in rural areas.

Source: Pro-Bio, Czech Ministry of Agriculture.

4. +++ Poland: Soon growing demand for own organic products? +++

At the moment, the demand in Poland for national organic products is relatively low, which is meant to be changed by a promotional campaign initiated by the Polish ministry of agriculture. This is an information from the "Ökomarkt Forum (Eco-market Forum)" – the organ of the German Central Report Station (ZMP) for the Market and Prices of Agricultural, Forest and Food Products. According to the "Ökomarkt Forum", the Polish Ministry of Agriculture allotted an amount of about 3.1 Mio Euro to the promotional campaign that is starting this year.

In the course of last year, the number of organic farms (2005: 7,183 businesses) and the organically managed area (2005: 167,740 ha) has doubled. However, there are only a hundred, mostly smallish organic processing businesses in Poland. There is no information on their share of the national market.

Polish products are more successfully marketed abroad than in the state itself. The producers often lack the financial means in order to promote their eco-products more effectively and in order to sell them not only in specialised organic shops, but also in supermarkets, says the "Ökomarkt Forum". The shops offering eco-products often belonged to chains that are planning to decidedly raise the number of their branches this year. The "Ökomarkt Forum" furthermore states that there was also a restaurant chain offering organic meals alongside conventional food that wants to expand its engagement in this field.

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5. +++ Revision of the appendix VI of the EU-Council Regulation No. 2092/91 comes into effect +++

On 31/05/2006, the revised appendix VI of the EU-Council Regulation No. 2092/91 has come into effect. It will be valid from 01/12/2007 onward. The use of additives and auxiliary products – used for the processing of animal products – is now regulated in a new way. The application of curing salt for

meat products has not been regulated ultimately and restrictively yet and will be considered another time before 31/12/2007 with regard to its restriction or prohibition.

Sodium nitrite and potassium nitrite may only be used if there are demonstrably no technological alternatives which offer the same hygienic safety and/or preserve the special character of the product – which has to be proved to the responsible authority.

You can find the website with the text of the regulation on

<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/JOhtml.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:137:SOM:DE:HTML>.

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6. +++ Revision of the EU-Council Regulation for organic agriculture postponed +++

At the end of May, the Agricultural Ministers of the EU were informed about the revision of the EU-council regulation in Brussels. Meanwhile, it is clear that the revision will not be concluded until June 2006 as it was planned before. Now, negotiations will be finished until 2007. On 29 May, a completely amended version was discussed in the council working group. Still, there is no schedule for the detailed content of the appendix for production and processing.

There are still very conflicting opinions and discussions about the revision. Most of the member states refuse the presented draft. Criticised are the devaluation of the private labels, the missing integration of the private sectors, the increasing bureaucracy, the lack of certainty of the law, the weakening of the consumer protection by renouncing a comprehensive regulation in case of a misleading labelling (see information letter 7, March 2006). Some countries, e.g. Switzerland and Austria, share the criticism. However, they also appreciate the attempt of the commission to structure the regulation more clearly, to allow regional flexibility and to decrease trade barriers. Now, the future of the revision process depends on the plans of the Finnish EU-Presidency. (Source: FiBL)

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7. +++ IFOAM EU Group and BEO set up a European Organic Processor Group +++

In February the BEO (Bureau of organic processors) and the IFOAM EU Group (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) announced they will join hands on organic processing and trade issues at the EU level. Together they will establish an IFOAM EU “Organic Processing” sector group. This new cooperation will ensure that the specific concerns of the rapidly growing organic processing sector are given due attention. It will also strengthen the representation of the whole organic sector in Brussels by speaking with the “one organic voice” of the IFOAM EU Group flag.

The main aims of the new IFOAM EU “Organic Processing” sector group is to address important organic processing and trade issues and prepare common IFOAM EU Group positions on these topics which will be communicated to the European institutions. A kick-off meeting was held on the 29th of March in Slovenia, at the start of the regular IFOAM EU Group Board meeting. Joint meetings will allow the Board immediately to work with the processor group’s Advice.

In its start-up period, the core of the new sector group will be formed by the national processor umbrella organisations Aoel (D), Probila (B), Synabio (F), and VBP (NL) united in BEO. Together they represent about 400 organic processing and trading companies with a turnover about € 2bn. New membership will be actively sought amongst all IFOAM EU member organisations dealing with organic processing.

BEO and the IFOAM EU Group are convinced that this cooperation is an important step forward to a better representation of the “organic food chain” in Europe. That cooperation will bring benefits for organic manufacturers, retailers, farmers and consumers.

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8. +++ Annual species of legumes for mixed cropping +++

In mixed cropping with cover crops (main crops), specific annual legumes for soil covering could be of more advantage than the perennial legumes which are normally used. At the technical university of Munich (TU), many wild species and some cultivated breeds have been evaluated. The focus of the project “Screening of alternative legumes species in mixed cropping and for use as green manure in organic farming” (BÖL-Projekt Nr. 02OE240) was on living mulch systems, where legumes were sown as soil covering plants before or together with the main crop.

The currently used white clover and lucerne often have an immense growth potential and are too persistent, preventing the unhindered growth of the main crop. The use of legumes with a low growth height and with a short growing period may avoid the problematic technical and cost intensive suppression of the mulching plants.

In the evaluation, the plants' morphological characteristics, the duration of their development, their bio mass accumulation and input of nitrogen have been compared – next to the suitability of the species for the specific growing conditions in the south of Germany. Potentially suitable species for different requirements were determined.

The number of possibly suitable species could be limited, so that now a target-specific research and breeding can be carried out. In the ongoing project "Living mulch systems with annual legumes" (BÖL-Projekt 03OE399), field trials with these selected species will be continued. Further information may be obtained at: <http://orgprints.org/8353/> and at the website of the Technical University of Munich (TU-München): www.wzw.tum.de/oekolandbau

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9. +++ Mobile outdoor poultry keeping provides many advantages +++

Maybe it appears slightly unsuitable to write about outdoor poultry keeping systems in times of bird flue. But outdoor poultry keeping is the most appropriate keeping system for the animals and will also survive the bird flue, as Aaron Fürmetz from the University of Kassel-Witzenhausen states in his article in the Bioland Magazin 06/2006. Nevertheless, outdoor poultry keeping is also being criticized every now and then because of the pollution in the area close to the stable. In this area, the sod is destroyed and a big intake of nutrients is observed. For stationary stables, so far almost no practicable concepts are available that cope with that problem. Results from a two years survey of the University of Kassel-Witzenhausen show that the solution might be a mobile stable, the so called "Hühnermobil" (Chicken-wagon). That stable, which gives place to 1,000 laying hens, was developed by the Bioland-farmer Max Weiland. The chicken-wagon has a base plate and can be lifted hydraulically. This way, it can be shifted during the laying period. The low pressure in the tires should assure a shifting that reduces soil compaction. The results of the study show that the stable has a high mobility. In the first year of the study, the stable was shifted 13 times, in the second year 17 times. The regular movement, also in winter, could avoid destruction of the sod. Also the excreted nutrients were distributed evenly over the whole area and leaking could be avoided.

Having green open runs, limited flock sizes, lots of daylight and all year round free range, the mobile stable was seen as an organic keeping system for chicken by the customers. This possible image benefit could be used especially by farmers who do direct marketing, so Aaron Fürmetz. As a disadvantage of the mobile stable above all, the greater workload is mentioned. More labour is necessary to collect the eggs in the straw nests, to shift the stable with the tractor as well as to manage the animals and take out the straw. For more details on the mobile stable see: www.huehnermobil.de Results of the study in German language at:

<http://www.bio-land.de/erzeuger/download/gefluegeltagung%202005/8.3%20%20AK6-%20Gruenauslauf-Keppler.pdf>

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10. +++ New reference book on direct marketing +++

A new reference book in German language with the title "Direct Marketing" has recently been published. It is part of the line "Practice of Organic Agriculture" which is issued by the Bioland Publishing House Ltd. and the foundation Ecology & Farming. The marketing of agricultural products straight from the farm has increased in importance over the last few years. For farmers, shops on their own farms, stalls on the weekly farmers' market and delivery services are additional sources of income. But not always direct marketing is conducted in a cost-effective way. A systematic, microeconomic analysis detects strengths and weaknesses and shows where the full potential of the farm is not tapped yet. Without much of an effort, many farms can be optimized. The new reference book offers profound information on these topics as well as check lists that help to reorganise the direct marketing or to make it more efficient and economic. The basis for a professional planning and description of the direct marketing is created with nine components – for a business plan that will also convince the bank. The enclosed CD helps to scrutinize an already existing direct marketing method and to discover opportunities for its improvement by comparing one's farm to other businesses. The authors have been working as consultants for agricultural direct marketing for years and provide insight into 28 businesses.

The booklet (72 pages) can be ordered at: abo@bioland.de for 24.95 Euro.

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11. +++ ISOFAR publication: long term field experiments in organic farming +++

The first volume of the scientific series of the International Society of Organic Agriculture Research (ISOFAR) has now been published. The volume "Long Term Field Experiments in Organic Farming"

contains a selection of 12 long-term experiments conducted under different site conditions in Germany, the USA, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria and Israel.

Each experiment has a unique concept and scientific approach. But their common objective is to investigate characteristics of organic agriculture regarding key parameters of soil fertility, crop yield and quality. Many also examine environmental and economic parameters. The book also contains a chapter on the DOK long term trial that compares the consequences of bio-organic, bio-dynamic and conventional farming systems. FiBL started this long term trial 1978.

Further Information: Raupp, Joachim, Carola Pekrun, Meike Oltmanns, Ulrich Köpke (2006): Long Term Field Experiments in Organic Farming. ISOFAR Scientific Series No 1. Verlag Dr. Köster, Berlin, Germany. ISBN-Nr. 3-89574-590-1. Price: 25 Euro (ISOFAR members: 12 Euro)

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12. +++ Organic farming protects against flooding - it counteracts to soil compaction and serves as a natural flood protection +++

Organic farming may reduce the risks of flooding. This conclusion was made by scientists of the institute for plant nutrition and soil science <http://www.pb.fal.de> and of the institute for organic farming at the Federal Research Centre (FAL) in Brunswick. Mr. Ewald Schnug of the FAL has described the extreme effect which soil compaction has on the emergence of flooding.

“Not taking into account the damages which flooding creates in high mountains and in valleys, the great drainage areas of the rivers Rhine, Elbe and Oder in Germany are the most endangered areas. It is here that flooding has a devastating effect,” states Schnug in an interview with presstext.at.

The research team of E. Schnug and G. Rahmann has calculated that soil compaction and silting up will finally lead to a reduced ability for water to seep away, widely known as infiltration.

Trigger off factors for this “creeping soil compaction” of agriculturally used soils are sinking humus contents, sinking biological activity and increasing soil compaction through mechanical pressure on the soil. A high infiltration capacity of a healthy soil structure may reduce the intensity of flooding.

The infiltration capacity of an organic field is twice as high as the one of a conventional field. “Through more favourable conditions organic farming supports the building up of bio pores, created through the activity of soil organisms, especially earthworms. There are seven times more earthworms in organic fields than in conventional fields,” states Schnug.

“Through cultivation of perennial arable feed crops and catch crops as well as through optimal input of organic fertilisers the humus content in organically managed soils is higher than in conventional managed soils.”

All these factors lead to an increased ability for infiltration on organically managed fields. In case of heavy rain falls more water can seep away on the fields, and water masses will reach the rivers with a delay.

Keeping in mind the recent devastating floodings, the preservation of a high local infiltration rate could become a main output of organic agriculture.

These services for society are not covered by the final price of organic products, but the governmental subsidies should integrate these.

Shortened version of a text by Wolfgang Weitlaner/ presstext.at

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13. +++ Polish parliament passes act on the prohibition of GMO seeds +++

According to the ICPPC (International Coalition to Protect the Polish Countryside) on April the 27th the Polish parliament prohibited the trade with GMO seeds in the country. Additionally GMO seeds will not be listed in the national seed register.

The act was signed by the Polish President Lech Kaczynski on the 18th of May so that it is now legally binding. Poland has undertaken another major step to ensure a national GMO-free agriculture. The Polish Ministry of European Affairs is now claiming that the act severely violates European law. Also the WTO has been arguing that the prohibition of genetically modified plants in some countries creates barriers to free trade agreements, states Greenpeace in a recent press release.

Maciej Muskat, a Greenpeace activist and GMO expert says that the resolution of the Polish parliament – despite the threats of the European Commission and the WTO - shows that the MPs are aware of the risks emerging from the cultivation of GMO plants for agriculture.

Promises made during the last election campaign to make sure that genetic modified plants will not be released to the environment have been met by the politicians.

Greenpeace calls upon all other countries to follow the Polish example in order to protect the environment and a sustainable agriculture. This shall be the highest priority and be put above all efforts of big genetic engineering companies to make profits made by any means.

14. +++ Ekoconnect has become lead partner in two Interreg III A projects +++

For one year Ekoconnect has supported the development of organic farming through several measures and events in a two year project, financed by the EU in the German Polish border region. The project "Growing together organically - cross border co-operation in the Euro-region Neiße" has been carried out since 2005.

At project half-time Ekoconnect looks back at eleven finalised modules, such as seminars, workshops and study trips to organic enterprises with more than 300 participants. Another ten events will take place until summer 2007, covering topics like production and marketing of organic products and co-operation in the border region.

Study trips to farms within the Euro-region and a marketing conference held in Wroclaw as well as practical seminars for the production of cheese and sausages were some of the most popular events that were organised within the last twelve months.

Also many people participated in modules covering topics like intercultural competence, European agrarian policies and agricultural economy. Furthermore, an programme for the exchange of trainees is planned - the call for applications is still open. More information about the project may be obtained at http://www.ekoconnect.org/projekte_oekologisch_zusammen_wachsen.html

Mrs. Agnieszka Olkuszniak, phone: 0049-351-456 80 38, email: agnieszka.olkuszniak@ekoconnect.org will also be happy to answer your questions.

Since the 1st of June 2006, Ekoconnect is carrying out another Interreg III A project, called "Organic farming brings together" in the Western Saxonian-Czech border region. Information will soon be published on our website. The planned seminars and workshops will cover issues like agro-tourism and the usage of alternative energy resources.

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15. +++ Organic Marketing Forum" bursted at the seams – Good atmosphere among the participants of the organic business meeting in Warsaw +++

"Many new ideas and contacts" and "Poland may play a key role in the European organic market in the future" are the main conclusions stated by the participants of the Organic Marketing Forum. The Organic Marketing Forum is an international conference on processing, handling and marketing of organic products, which took place from May the 25th till the 26th 2006 in Warsaw. Almost 150 participants from 11 countries came to this first international conference on organic marketing with special focus on Central and Eastern Europe.

The popularity of this event exceeded all of EkoConnect's expectations. The forum with 150 participants was fully booked to the last seat. Further 50 applications received, could not be accepted because of the limited capacity of the venue.

Especially presentations regarding the prospects of the organic retail trade in Eastern and Western Europe, strategies of the conventional food trade for going organic and troubleshooting for young organic processing companies were greeted with big interest.

Examples like the German organic wholesaling structure „Die Regionalen“, in which 13 leading German organic wholesalers co-operate in supplying organic shops with products and marketing tools, as well as the Czech-Austrian co-operation to support the organic retail trade were considered as interesting. 19 expert presentations and reports from organic companies were presented at the conference all together.

23 companies showed their products and services during the forum. After the conference participants used the chance to join an excursion to three organic shops in Warsaw. The Organic Marketing Forum took place under the patronage of the Polish Minister for agriculture and rural development. The forum was organised by EkoConnect in co-operation with the Polish organic farmers association Ekoland, the Polish state advisory centre for agriculture and the Organic Retailers Association. For further information and pictures also see: www.ekoconnect.de/en_warschau.html

Translation: W. Toews (articles 1, 4, 5, 10), S. Krause (9), C. Pein, M. Kreutzfeldt

Organic-Marketing-Forum

International Meeting on Processing and Marketing of Organic Food

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