

ORGANIC FARMING, A CHANCE FOR ROMANIAN AGRICULTURE

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Abstract: Organic farming is an industry emerging economies around the world, a trend due to the general public awareness of the negative effects as a result of to intensive agriculture performing, both upon human health and continuous environmental degradation. Organic farming, which does not mean the way back to traditional subsistence farming, is emerging today as a great hope for post-industrial progress of mankind. In a world where agriculture has become rather a source of income than a food resource, repairing the serious imbalance caused by super intensive agricultural systems based on excessive chemicalization mandates the adoption of new strategies to protect natural resources, land, plants and humans against pollution and continuous degradation. The mirage of super industrialized agriculture, reflected in the impressive incredibly large crop yields, is about to collapse as life proves that this type of farming does not guarantee food safety and human welfare over time. As a result of growing a small number of varieties, of abandoning crop rotation systems, of excessive or uncontrolled irrigation, of the abuse of chemicals that have polluted soil and waters and employing biological stimulators, today we are witnessing a process of soil degradation threatening human capacity of ensuring food for future generations. This danger, highlighted decades ago, today is expressed by the depletion of natural fertility of soil, by the rapid advance of desertification process, with chronic social consequences, especially on the long run. It is important that by the advanced chemicalization new diseases and pests have appeared, resistant to treatments applied. In turn, biotechnology or genetic engineering could only temporarily solve the great problems of mankind, for nature has produced new more resistant and more destructive varieties. Organic farming fully meets sustainability objectives, it contributes to sustainable development and to the production of high quality and healthy products, and implements sustainable production methods in terms of environment. Contribution of organic agriculture sector is growing in most Member States of the European Union and worldwide. In this context, it is necessary for organic production to play an increasingly greater role in agricultural policy and to be closely related to development of agricultural markets as well as to the protection and conservation of lands meant for agricultural activities. Organic farming plays an important role in implementing the Community's sustainable development policy. Organic farming can contribute to the ultimate goal of sustainability.

Key words: Organic farming, sustainability, natural resources, pollution and continuous degradation

INTRODUCTION

In our country there are opportunities for practicing organic farming, due to favorable natural conditions we have: a large area occupied by pastures and natural meadows, use of a quantity of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides significantly lower than in other countries, a high less pollution of soil and water compared with other countries.

Agricultural potential of Romania cannot be neglected, and the great opportunity of our country lies in the fact that in recent years we have used small quantities of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, providing an obvious advantage when converting to organic farming.

Organic farming is a possible solution for two problems: meeting the demand for natural products, obtained by methods which do not use chemicals, and secondly the diversification of the agricultural sector in the overall context of environmental protection.

Organic agriculture can successfully contribute to a sustainable development of the Romania's rural areas. There are extremely favorable conditions in Romania for large-scale organic production, particularly in the mountain areas.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Organic agriculture is developing rapidly, in many countries in the world.

As of the end of 2007, 7.8 million hectares in Europe were managed organically by more than 200'000 farms. In the European Union, 7.2 million hectares were under organic management, with more than 180'000 organic farms. 1.9 percent of the European agricultural area and four percent of the agricultural area in the European Union is organic. Twenty-four percent of the world's organic land is in Europe. The countries with the largest organic area are Italy (1'150'253 hectares), Spain (988'323 hectares) and Germany (865'336 hectares). The highest percentages are in Liechtenstein (29 percent), Austria (13 percent) and Switzerland (11 percent). Compared to 2006, organic land increased by more than 0.3 million hectares. Sales of organic products were approximately 16 billion Euros in 2007. The largest market for organic products in 2007 was Germany with a turnover of 5.3 billion Euros (2008: 5.8 billion Euros), followed by the UK (2.6 billion Euros), France and Italy (both 1.9 billion Euros). As a portion of the total market share, the highest levels have been reached in Austria, Denmark and Switzerland, with around five percent for organic products. The highest per capita spending is also in these countries. (Source: FiBL/IFAOM survey 2009).

The support for organic farming in the European Union and the neighboring countries includes grants under rural development programs, legal protection and a European as well as national action plans. One of the key instruments of the European Action Plan on organic food and farming, an information campaign, was launched during 2008, with the aim of increasing awareness of organic farming throughout the European Union. Furthermore, most EU member states have national action plans. In order to boost organic farming research, a technology platform joining the efforts of industry and civil society in defining organic research priorities and defending them vis-à-vis the policy-makers was launched in December 2008. The platform's vision paper reveals the potential of organic food production to mitigate some of the major global problems from climate change and food security, to the whole range of socio-economic challenges in the rural areas. (Source: FiBL/IFAOM survey 2009). The main objective of agricultural policy on rural development is to promote and develop environmentally friendly farming.

The major objectives of organic farming in Romania are:

Quality objective: organic placement in the center of the Romanian agriculture as an engine of sustainable development, which is justified by :

- a viable response to the request of a growing market;
- a guarantee of the production process that respects the agricultural environment and animals wellbeing;
- actual means for selling the products at prices 20-60% higher than conventional products;
- a real opportunity to revitalize the countryside and increase quality of life;

The quantitative targets aim at increasing the area cultivated in organic farming.

The national legislation concerning organic agriculture is harmonized with EU legislation. National and Community provisions on the method of organic production, processing, marketing, storage and labeling of organic food are:

Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91

Regulation (EC) NO. 889/2008 laying down detailed rules for implementing Regulation (EC) no. 834/2007

Regulation (EC) NO. 1254/2008 of 15 December 2008 amending Regulation (EC) no. 889/2008 laying down detailed rules for implementing Regulation (EC) no. 834/2007

Regulation (EC) NO. 967/2008 amending Regulation (EC) no. 834/2007 on organic production and labeling of organic products

Regulation (EC) NO. 710/2009 amending Commission Regulation (EC) no. 889/2008 laying down detailed rules for implementing Regulation (EC) no. 834/2007 of the Council regarding the establishment of detailed rules for organic livestock aquaculture and seaweed

Commission Regulation (EC) No 1235/2008 laying down detailed rules for implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 as regards the arrangements for imports of organic products from third countries

Regulation (EC) NO. 537/2009 amending Commission Regulation (EC) no. 1235/2008, regarding the list of third countries from which must come some agricultural products produced by organic farming methods can be marketed in the Community

Regulation (EC) NO. 765/2008 of the European Parliament and Council laying down requirements for accreditation and market surveillance relating to the marketing of products and repealing Regulation (EEC) no. 339/93

Regulation (EC) NO. 3 / 2008 of the Council on information and promotion actions for agricultural products domestically and in third countries

Regulation (EC) NO. 501/2008 laying down detailed rules for implementing Regulation (EC) no. 3 / 2008 of the Council on information and promotion actions for agricultural products domestically and in third countries

Governmental Emergency Ordinances (GEO) no. 34/2000 concerning organic food approved by Law no. 38/2001, as amended and supplemented;

Order no. 688/2007 approving the Rules on the organization of inspection and certification system, approving the inspection and certification bodies and inspection bodies Supervision

Joint Order no. 317/190/2006 amending and supplementing the Annex to the Order of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the President of the National Authority for Consumer Protection no. 417/110/2002 approving the specific rules on labeling of organic food.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Considering acquisition and implementation of legislation, now we can say that it has been created a legislative environment favorable for the development of organic agriculture in Romania. Organic farming is a dynamic sector in Romania. In the following table we present the evolution of farming areas in the period 2006-2008.

Table I

Indicator	2006	2007	2008
The total area certified for organic farming (ha)	143194	190129	221.411
Area certified for organic farming on arable land (ha)	45605	65112	86454
Certified organic farming area with permanent crops (ha) grassland and meadow	51200	57600	46006,559
Certified organic farming area with permanent crops (ha) orchards and vineyards	294	954	1518
Collection of spontaneous flora (ha)	38700	58728	81279
Other certified organic farming areas (ha)	7395	7735	6154

Source: M.A.P.D.R - 2009 -

The share of total certified areas out of total agricultural area in 2008 is 2%, up from 2006, when the share was 1% of total agricultural area.

Area under organic estimated for 2009 amounts to 240,000 hectares, up 9% compared to 2008, when it was around 220.000 ha for 2010, being expected an increase of up to 250.000 hectares.

In late 2008, in Romania operated a total of 36 organizations in the field of organic agriculture, rural development, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Inspection and certification is carried out by national bodies / companies and representative offices of foreign certified companies. Organization of the national control system for organic agriculture provides affordable organic certification fees for producers, thus contributing to growth of Romanian organic food products market at affordable prices for consumers .

Table 2

Dynamic of operators in organic farming

Indicator	2006	2007	2008
Number of registered organic operators	3409	3834	4191
of which: number of processors	39	48	85

Source: M.A.P.D.R in 2009

The number of organic operators (producers, processors, traders) registered with MADR, in 2007, was the 3834 that is almost twice the operators registered in 2004 and 12% of operators registered in 2006 (Table 2) and in 2008 there were a total of 4191 operators, out of which 85 processors.

Out of the certified organic products produced in Romania the most important are: cereal and industrial crops (wheat, maize, barley, soybean, sunflower), honey and other bee products, berries, herbs, mushrooms, processed products (wine from organic grapes, sunflower oil, soy and hemp).

In 2007, there were exported around 80,000 tonnes of organic products with a value of almost 65 million euros, representing an increase of about 20% over 2006.

Romanian organic products were sold in EU countries, notably Germany, Italy, Greece and France.

Domestic consumption of organic products is extremely low due to lack of information on the benefit of consumption of organic products, but also because of high prices.

In 2007, Romania imported organic produce of around 3 million euros, with one million euros more than in 2006, mainly brown sugar cane, coffee, chocolate and fruit juices.

Actions to support and promote the export of organic products in Romania include:

- export promotion program, administered by the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Business, which will bear part or all of funding from the state budget expenditure on:

- Participation in international fairs;

- Organizing of trade missions and events in order to promote exports abroad;

- Market studies and products;

- Branding Sector

- Development of advertising and advertising activities of general interest markets for Romanian exports;

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- financial sustaining of promotional actions organized in the residence countries of the offices of the Ministry of Economic adviser;

- organization in Romania of export promotion activities, involving foreign companies, potentially Romanian importers of goods and services.

- Seminars and trainings in cooperation with ITC Geneva

- Support program for small to medium export development, managed by the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Business, the ministry of Commerce and Business Environment.
- Program for improving the competitiveness of industrial products administered by the Ministry of Economy.
- The program for increasing the competitiveness of food products, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

This year, the International Trade Fair BioFach 2010, Nuremberg in Germany, Romania was represented by 14 companies that have exhibited local organic products. The 14 Romanian companies present have exhibited their certified organic products, representative for the intra-and extra community exchanges of the sector, including: grain and industrial crops, honey and other bee products, berries, herbs, mushrooms, processed products. Romania's participation in BioFach 2010 was included in the program for the participation of companies in international fairs, with support from the state budget of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Business and it is one of the support measures of the organic farming sector included within the National Export Strategy - 2010-2014 organic products component, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

This promotional action creates premises for a long lasting and significant presence of Romanian organic food products, both on the German and on the European market.

Such action by the state are not sufficient to support organic farming.

CONCLUSION

Organic agriculture in Romania has, mainly, a subsistence character, being also less technologically intensive. The efficiency is low, compared to western countries, but the sector has a strong growing tendency.

Export is an engine for development of organic farming.

The majority of organic production is currently sold to the EU because of:

- Higher prices charged for these products and low local incomes;
- Lack of consumer information and education concerning the quality and advantages of organic products
- Lack of indigenous markets for organic products.

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