Information Letter for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

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EkoConnect

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Dear readers,

We are now facing important decisions about which direction the future of our food supply system is going to go. Climate change is no more a debate between scientists but a reality. A drought period lasting weeks in the USA during summer and too much rain in Argentina in October have affected the yields of cereals and soya beans very significantly, resulting in a rise of up to 60% in grain prices in the world market and famine developing in the Sahel region of west Africa. This was another alarm signal that we should not be converting our grain into fuel when the poorest can no longer afford to buy food.

Christopher Stopes, President of the IFOAM EU Group, stated: “The interdependence between farming and our natural resources is the key to ensuring our long-term food security. This serves to highlight the urgency of confronting major environmental challenges facing EU food production. Organic farming is well placed to respond to challenges such as water management, soil protection, and climate change because it provides a system approach to resource efficiency and climate action.”

Some individuals pollute the environment more and some pollute less, but everyone of us, as world citizens, is responsible for the current situation. And everyone of us can do at least a bit to reduce the effects of pollution and climate change. One of the key factors is a change towards a more sustainable agriculture. Let’s all stand together and tell the world that we are for a greener future! Let’s explain to our families, friends, colleagues and partners why to support the organic movement! Together we can do it!

Our dear readers, supporters, colleagues and partners, we wish you a happy and peaceful Christmas and a sucessful start to 2013! Enjoy reading our information letter!

Gatis Caics & Bernhard Jansen, EkoConnect. Proofreading: Kathleen Hewlett, Soil Association

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Content

1. CAP 2014-2020: Striving for more sustainable agriculture?

In the days in which this article is being translated to reach the readers in 10 languages, the European Union is deciding the future of agriculture in Europe.

“Radical changes to food and farming throughout Europe are needed. There are many problems, such as environmental contamination, loss of biodiversity, loss of fertile soils, polluted water and animals kept in poor conditions.” With these words Cristopher Stopes, president of IFOAM EU Group, commented on the ongoing discussion on the agricultural policy of the EU in the next years. With millions of hectares of European farmland affected by soil degradation, one of the most pressing issues that the reform has to address is how to maintain soil fertility. Three main priorities are defined in the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) 2014-2020 proposal: competitive food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate change mitigation by promoting greener agriculture, and balanced territorial development.

According to the European Commission’s current CAP proposal, basic payments would be adjusted by means of a complex formula so that those states currently receiving less than 90% of the EU average would receive more, with the gap being gradually closed by one third over a particular transition period. This would mean farmers in the new EU member states receiving Direct Payments below 90% of EU average (eg. Baltic countries, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria) would still continue receiving significantly below the EU average level. Some governments from Central and Eastern European states have submitted proposals to EU for a more equal distribution of Basic Payments.

What would the current plan mean for the organic farmers? „Top-up” payments for organic farming would be kept under Pillar II (Rural development program) with organic farming becoming a stand-alone measure as part of the rural development programme, rather than one of many agri-environmental schemes. The exact rates per hectare would continue to be decided by national governments.

A greening payment known as the “*Greening Component*” would account for 30% of Direct Payments under the Pillar I. The remaining 70% of each state’s national envelope would account for Basic Payments and other aid allocations for young farmers, small farmers, less favoured farming areas and support of specific products.

All farmers would be required to fulfil the above mentioned „*Greening Component*” and would be obliged to fulfil certain criteria such as crop diversification (an arable farmer would be required to cultivate at least 3 crops with a minimum percentage of 5% and the largest crop not more than 70% of the total farmland), maintenance of permanent pasture (grassland) and dedication of at least 7% of farmland to have specific ecological focus (i.e. field margins, hedges, trees, fallow land, landscape features, biotopes, buffer strips, afforested area) to receive this payment. Organic producers would automatically qualify for the “*Greening Component*” with no additional requirements as they are shown to provide a clear ecological benefit. Ongoing discussions in the EU Parliament are trying to weaken the measures, expand the category of "green by definition" so that not only organic farmers would qualify for the „*Greening Component*” automatically and introduce weak certification schemes based on equivalent criteria.

As a significant measure against large scale farming, the CAP proposal of European Commission is limiting the support that any individual farm can receive from the Basic Payment Scheme to 300 000 EUR per year. Basic payments exceeding 150 000 EUR per year would be reduced by using a special formula. If this proposal succeeds, more support would be left for rural development and innovation.

From the very start, negotiations on the future CAP (described above) were supposed to be about delivering more for Europe’s environment, rural communities and long-term food security. However in the discussions of the European Parliament’s Agriculture Committee and Agriculture Council of Ministers (Member States), clear support for sustainable farming approaches such as organic farming has remained a low priority for decision-makers. Furthermore the current debates have also focused on the possible cutting of the EU budget in this time of financial crisis. A “compromise proposal” has been published on November 14 by European Council President Hermann van Rompuy which seeks to weaken the “*Greening component*” under CAP Direct payments and cut the rural development budget by 13% based on the current rural development budget 2007-2013. Strong Rural Development funding plays a critical role in addressing key EU socioeconomic and environmental priorities and must not be the victim of severe budget cuts. The EU leaders gathered in an EU Budget Summit in Brussels on November 22-23 to decide on the EU budget for 2014-2020. However, talks collapsed and no compromise was found. Final talks are expected to take place in February or March 2013.

Martin Häusling, agricultural policy speaker of the Greens in the European Parliament, says: “The Greens are going to continue collaboration with national and international institutions in order to achieve more sustainable agriculture and a fair share of public funds. We are trying with our amendments to change the direction of the CAP into a more environmentally friendly and fairer European agriculture.”

Isabelle Autissier, President WWF France on Agriculture: “During the next round of negotiations leaders need to ensure that farmers only receive Direct Payments if they respect greening measures that work. So far what we have seen on the negotiating table is weak. Continuing the present regime of printing blank cheques for harmful farming practices is unacceptable in this time of austerity.”

At EU level the IFOAM EU Group continues to actively advocate for a shift towards a greener and fairer CAP on behalf of its member organisations. CAP reform must recognise the important role played by organic farmers in the EU by providing sufficient funding so that these food and farming systems can help to shift EU agriculture towards real sustainability over the upcoming years.

The measures for the next CAP period are not decided yet but it seems that at least a few steps towards more sustainable farming will be made. You can follow the recent news and decisions on the IFOAM EU Group „thinking CAP” blog and on the WWF website. Other sources of this article, where also more information can be found, are IFOAM EU Group, Organic Research Centre, research “Greening the CAP” and a publication in “Wikipedia”.

Author: Gatis Caics, EkoConnect. Proof-reading: Kathleen Hewlett, Soil Association

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Regionality as sales argument? Discussions within Europe

Regional products are currently popular in many countries. Particularly in the fresh food area, the consumer expects eggs, milk, meat, fruit and vegetables to come from nearby. It is not only organic producers that are exploring this trend.

„Regional” not defined - Consumer’s understanding

„Region“ or „regional“ as terms are neither defined homogeneously, nor – in contrast to certificates of origin - registered trademarks. Is the term “region” meant to have a geographical or historical meaning or to be defined culturally, like place of a common language? For the customer, is “regional” a link to a certain “region” of product origin or just connection to a certain local producer?

Organic street market in Jelenia Góra, Poland

A study by the German Agriculture Society (*Deutsche Landwirtschafts-Gesellschaft, DLG*) has revealed that 86% of the surveyed consumers have heard about the term “regional” and nearly all associate it with “*products from their region*”. Half of them think of “regionality” as the metropolitan area around their city, and the rest link their federal state/province to the term. Some are willing to pay up to 15% more for products from their region, while others don’t think additional costs are justified.

“Regionality” satisfies the consumer’s need to establish a relationship to the origin of the goods and to trust in producers and quality. Also reduced transportation distances are considered to be eco-friendly. In reality, this aspect depends on a lot of parameters such as energy consumption in production, storage and logistics as well as means of transportation and the point of sale (central supermarket or farm).

For 96% of the German trading enterprises the word “regionality” has high importance. Supermarkets would like to define the term as broadly as possible to be able to calculate large supply batches and avoid loss of profit due to supply shortages. At the moment every supermarket chain (and many producers as well) define “regionality” to fit their specific needs.

Two examples from Germany: The discounter “Lidl” sells products from all over Germany using the brand name „Ein gutes Stück Heimat“ („*A bit of home*“). Regional brands that define their origin more specifically are sold by the supermarket chain „Feneberg“ from Kempten. Their regional brand „von hier“ („*from here*“) defines products from a 100 km radius around Kempten, though this stops at the Austrian border.

The member stores of the „Verbrauchergemeinschaft“ organic food cooperative in Dresden buy their goods from producers and processors within a 150 km radius around Dresden, independently from federal state borders. Those products are assigned with the producers address and are marked with an own regional label.

A non-profit association „Regionalfenster e.V.“ was founded in Germany in August 2012 as the result of an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, supported by conventional and organic retailers and associations. This initiative is meant to support customers during their purchase decisions by providing reliable and transparent information about the geographical origin of products and will start at the beginning of 2013 at first in five model regions.

Other countries have already gone a step further and established national guidelines. For example, in Czech Republic regional brands have been united and certified by one umbrella organization. In the whole country 22 regions are defined, one of them transboundary with Slovakia. A scale with point system has been created to evaluate the regionality of products according to raw material origin, traditionality and processing. www.regional-products.eu

In Latvia the quality brand „*Green spoon*“ (www.karotite.lv) guarantees that at least 75% of raw materials for the processed product come from the same country or region. Those should be GMO-free and also free of artificial colorings.

It would be desirable that the definition of the term “regionality” is not affected by borders of countries. Another important question is what consumer prefers when choosing between “organic” or “regional”. Maybe both, organic and regional? Here is the opportunity for organic producers to advertise organic origin of their products together with regionality and to reach new consumer groups.

Authors: Inka Sachse & Michael Aust, EkoConnect, translation from German to English: Nina Weis, proofreading: Kathleen Hewlett, Soil Association.

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3. Laying hen husbandry

***The most important reason for choosing organically produced food products cited by consumers is animal welfare.* (Ökobarameter, Germany, 2012). At the same time there is uncertainty about the benefits of organic laying hen husbandry versus conventional due to media reports about poor conditions in organic systems. The main differences between conventional husbandry and the requirements of the EU Organic Regulation for keeping laying hens are described below. The requirements of some grower’s associations are even stricter than the EU Organic Regulation.**

In contrast to conventional poultry keeping, the maximum size of an organic flock is defined at 3000 birds per house. Also, the total number of hens is restricted: a farm may keep maximum 230 hens for each hectare of agricultural land they have. Regarding housing, it is permitted to keep 6 laying hens per square meter which is twice the amount of space provided in conventional housing with small group cages. In organic housing at least one third of the shed’s floor space must be solid and has to be littered to enable the chickens to scratch. The nests must provide space of minimum 120 cm^2 per animal and every hen requires 18 cm on the perch. An adequately sized part of the shed should be used as excrement deposal. In organic hen keeping, a fenced outdoor run area is of particular importance. For every animal, easy access to an outside area that provides 4 m^2 per hen must be guaranteed. Moreover, more than 50% of this area has to be covered with vegetation (Regulation (EC) No 889/2008).

Therefore the rules of animal housing in combination with a green outdoor run can be considered as minimum requirements in organic laying hen production. Often, this husbandry system is achievable in existing buildings. As an upgrade of this system, construction of a roofed area outside the warm house is possible. This “winter garden” could be used by the animals in any weather conditions. In order to ensure that the hens use the whole outside area and don’t stay near the house, it is desirable to plant small trees and shrubs which provide shelter from predator birds.

Houses can be differentiated between aviaries (with several tiers, see picture) and those with one floor. The key feature of aviaries is use of the third dimension: the animals can use elevated perches and reach different tiers of the house.

Such aviary systems are offered by a number of manufacturers and with varied construction. The advantage of elevated aviaries (see picture) is use of the space under the aviary for scratching. Furthermore, the animals can move from one side of the house to the other. The excrement is not stored in the house as the dung removal is done via manure belt.

Single storey houses provide a simple solution for smaller shed and building conversions. The stable contains a central manure pit covered with grid, and a scratching area occupying at least one third of the shed's floor space. There are perches above the grid and often nests are located slightly higher on the wall. In a case of low stocking density additional heating might be necessary during winter.

Image: Stallbau Iris Weiland

Mobile houses offer a further possibility in organic laying hen husbandry. Wheeled sheds can be pulled from one open-air run area to another. Such stables are offered for different livestock sizes equipped with both manure pit and aviary. Due to the regular relocation, each consecutive flock has access to a run area in good state of hygiene and the vegetation has enough time to regenerate or to be reseeded. Additionally, an effective billboard could be created by lettering a mobile stable and installing it close to roads.

Sources: Oekolandbau.de www.huehnermobil.de, implementing rules for Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of the Commission, EC Eco Regulation Annex 3, Bioland, www.mobilstall.de, Naturland, Ökobarometer 2012

Author: Andrea Muehle, EkoConnect. Proof-reading: Kathleen Hewlett, Soil Association.

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4. Organic trade, processing and market in the three Baltic states

Despite the similarities in the political situation, history and other factors, there are some differences in organic production, processing and the organic market in the three neighbouring countries.

The proportion of the agricultural land area that is fully converted to organic is 5,2% in Lithuania, 9,2% in Latvia and 12,8% in Estonia (2010), which in 2011 was 99,410 ha in Lithuania, 130,059 ha in Latvia and 101,906 ha in Estonia. 2/3 of the organic area in Estonia is pasture land, while in Latvia pasture land makes up 40% and in Lithuania only 21%. 75% of the organic area in Lithuania is arable land and 90% of it is used for cultivation of grain and pulses. In contrast, in Latvia and Estonia more then 60% of arable land is used for green fodder. This is mainly due to differences in climate and soils between the three countries, but another factor is likely to be the differences in EU subsidies for organic arable land for grain cultivation: Estonian grain farmers receive 119 EUR/ha, Latvians 109 EUR/ha but Lithuanians 215 EUR/ha.

Estonia is a few steps ahead in organic meat production and processing (mainly beef and lamb), and some export activities have started in the last few years. Latvia can be proud of their organic potato starch production company ”Aloja Starkelsen” and of their own organic cosmetics sector led by ”Madara Cosmetics”. Lithuania, compared to both its Northern neighbours, is in the leading position in terms of production and export of organic grain and legumes (according to different sources,up to 35 000 tons per year is exported). There are several trading companies operating in Lithuania which buy organic grain from farmers for further export mainly to Scandinavia and Germany. In Estonia and Latvia similar activities have started in the last few years. The competition between international buyers has rapidly become tougher, moreover, a large proportion of the grain is used as feed for organic animals in both those countries. Some of the biggest Baltic organic grain farmers have direct contacts for export to Germany.

Nations Online Project www.nationsonline.org

One will find more organic shops and organic products in supermarkets in Estonia compared to the two Southern neighbours. This is probably due in part to the fact that the country's economics has developed a few small steps further than its neighbours' over the last 20 years. Demand for organic products in Estonian market is currently exceeding supply. The Estonian co-operative ”Eesti Mahe”, which started off in 2003 with organic meat marketing, now offers a full range of Estonian organic products i.e. in supermarkets like ”RIMI”, with great response from the consumer’s side. Also the supermarket chain ”Maxima” in Lithuania offers a remarkable range of organic products and brands from Lithuania. This can be seen as exeptional even compared to Western European supermarket offers. Both RIMI and Maxima also sell a lot of local organic products in their stores in Latvia. In all 3 countries the main points of sale for organic products are supermarkets (up to 50% market share). However, organic shops, shops that sell mostly organic products, health shops, farmer’s markets, pharmacies and internet shops also play an important role. Average expenditure per person per year on organic food is a bit above 2 EUR in Latvia and Lithuania and between 3 and 5 EUR (according to different research) in Estonia.

Despite large amounts of organic raw material being produced, up to 80% or more of some production (milk, vegetables, meat cattle, and grain in case of Estonia and Latvia) is sold as conventional or fed to animals. On the other hand, organically processed food is being imported into the countries at high cost from Western Europe. The main reason is the underdevelopment of the organic processing sector, a situation similar to other Eastern European countries. Large investments of time and finance are needed to start organic processing in line with organic regulations and with the local authorities’ very tough interpretation of European hygiene standards. For conventional processors, organically certified production is complicated (investment of time and resources for separation of organic and conventional, regular cleaning plan, etc.), and the machines are made for large amounts and need to run at full capacity to work profitably. Furthermore, there is a lack of local organic suppliers who are able to guarantee long-term reliable quantities and qualities, so raw material often needs to be imported from other countries. Organic food additives (i.e. spices) are often not locally available, which means that small quantities must be imported at high cost. All of this results in a higher price of the end product in a market where competition with imported organic brands and conventionally produced local products is already high. Consumers are often not ready to pay an extra price difference for organic products due to their level of income. Another issue is lack of consumer education about differences between, for example, organic food and ”natural”, ”healthy”, or even ”food bought from the farm”. Organic processing is mainly based on small scale enterprises, though growth in number of processors has been up to 50% per year in the last few years. In Latvia the number of processors has now reached 129, while there are 55 processors in Estonia (2011) and 70 processors in Lithuania (2010).

A few organic processing sectors are relatively high developed in all three Baltic countries, for example, teas and cosmetics from herbs and aromatical and medical plants, honey, milk products, as well as juices from berries. Lack of demand in the local markets leads to low numbers of organic mills and slaughterhouses, which then slows down further development of grain and meat processing, which are both sectors with significant future potential.

Currently, meat cattle are often exported alive. The numbers are up to 10,000 organic cattle, mostly young beef bulls and heifers, per year from each country. Young meat cattle are often bought as conventional directly from farmers and exported for further fattening to Southern and Western Europe, and lately often to Turkey. Most farmers don’t find it profitable to continue fattening animals due to costs of feed and lack of priceworthy sales channels. A positive example of fair prices and stable supply for export promotion is ”Baltic Beef Cattle Auctions” in Nereta, Latvia. Auctions are organised once per month and about 300-400 young live beef bulls and heifers (average weight of 300-400kg) are sold in each auction. About half of them are organic but still sold as conventional as there has been no interest from organic buyers so far.

Another important issue which concerns both organic and conventional farming are the inappropriately low Direct payments from EU to farmers in Baltic states and other Eastern European countries. Basic payment to farmers in the Baltics is currently up to 4-5 times lower than in some Western Europe countries, and therefore farmers can not sell their production in the EU market for competitive prices. This is a big reason for young meat cattle being sold instead of further fattening.

The future role of all three countries can be seen in export of organic products and raw materials, followed by growing internal markets. Lot of abandoned or non-intensively farmed rural areas promise good future prospects for organic production growth. The region is not so attractive as an import market, as the total number of inhabitants in all three Baltic countries together is below 8 million.

More detailed information about the organic markets in Baltic states and 11 other Central and Eastern European countries including the main processors, exporters, wholesalers, retailers and other possible business partners can be found on the EkoConnect website.

Authors: Gatis Caics and Inka Sachse, EkoConnect. Proof-reading: Kathleen Hewlett, Soil Association.

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5. Organic grain from Lithuania for export to North and West Europe

"Scandagra Lithuania", owned by Danish DLG and Swedish Lantmannen, is currently the biggest organic grain trader in the Baltic states. Sister company "Farm Plant Eesti" in Estonia has also started trading in organic grain, while "Scandagra Latvia" has plans to start with organic in the near future.

A fully converted organic area of about 70 000 ha in Lithuania is used for crop production: cereals, pulses and mixtures of both. About 1 700 farmers work only on crop production. Scandagra works with approximately 120 farmers at the moment, most of whom have been partners for a few years already. The company exports about 10-15 thousand metric tons of organic grain every year, resulting in a market share of about one-third of the total organic grain exports from Lithuania. Grain has been sold for export primarily to Scandinavian countries and Germany. Organic grain accounts for about 10% of total Scandagra grain exports. Product manager Mr. Andrius Gritėnas answers questions about his company and cooperation with farmers below.

EkoConnect (EC): Please tell us more about your experience in long-term cooperation with organic grain farmers.

A. Gritenas (A.G.): Cooperation between two parties is possible only when it is profitable for both. Farmers look for business partners who are financially strong, keep their word and offer fair prices. Traders look for farmers who can ensure high grain quality, have storing capacities and are flexible (can load grain in bulk or big bags). Farmers have to be good businessmen and understand that if they want to get a good price they need to have an attractive product. To ensure high grain quality, especially drying and cleaning equipment is important. There are not so many service points in Lithuania, where farmers can dry and clean their organic grain, because of relatively small demand. Organic grain trading companies often have their own storage, but they are often afraid of letting in farmers with small grain quantities, especially if they deliver grain in bulk. Contamination of grain with pesticides has always been an issue. Since quality and safety is most important for us, we work closely together with our farmers and in addition we do regular testing of our grain to avoid "*unexpected things*".

EC: Please describe the management of the whole chain starting from support on the fields to transportation and storage.

A.G.: We as grain traders also would like to be farmer advisors. There is a big need for changing the minds of organic farmers. Lithuanian farmers often do not invest money into soil or seeds despite there being a big potential for improving the harvest. Examples show that just by changing varieties of grain some farms got double grain yields compared with their average ones.

Positive thing is that our organic farms become bigger and this means it is easier for farmers to invest in storage and grain handling equipment. Nowadays it is tough to do organic business without storage: farmers have to sell right after harvesting at a lower price or transport their grain long distances to the storage of organic traders. Or even worse, they have to sell their organic grain as conventional. Caring traders support with coordination between farmers, but in years like this, when the majority of grain from fields comes with high moisture, even traders are powerless. This proves once again how important it is for farmers to have their own grain handling facilities.

EC: In conclusion, could you say a few words about the future of the organic grain sector?

A.G.: About the Lithuanian market, on one hand consumption of organic products is relatively low and prices of organic products are too high for local consumers, considering their level of income. On the other hand, Lithuania has always been an exporter of agriculture products and grain and we are also an exporting country for organic commodities. However, a lot depends on the European Union and our local politics, because without additional support it would be hard for organic farms to survive. In the last few years prices in Central Europe and Scandinavia have been well supported and the price difference between organic and conventional has been quite significant. Because in addition, the local markets are growing, the interest of the farmers to invest in storage, *know-how* and quality is expected to rise. At the moment lots of organic grain is sold as conventional, but this should change with time.

Interview was done by Gatis Caics, EkoConnect. Answers by Andrius Gritėnas, "Scandagra Lithuania". Proof-reading and correction of English text by David Barker

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6. Draft Animals - antiquated or contemporary?

Tractors are commonly known as the contemporary and modern means of propulsion for agricultural requirements. Draft animals seem to be obsolete. Is that true?

In 2010 the British scientist Paul Starkey wrote a report for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) describing the global situation of draft animals. The fact that the use of tractors increases the need for synthetic fertilizers and diesel is an important economic aspect.

Tractors rarely heighten a farm's financial earnings but their power leads to a reduced need for human employees. The consequent rural de-population can lead to urban challenges. In areas where draft animals are still used (e.g. Eastern Europe) many farmers are thinking about replacing them with tractors. According to the FAO report it might be economically advantageous to retain the draft animals.

The German project “Humussphäre” has carried out practical studies about the usage of draft horses since 2005. The results show that draft animals offer *up-to-the-minute* solutions for the agriculture of the future.

Due to the results of the FAO and the positive outcomes of their own studies, the “Humussphäre” project is looking for Eastern European farms, no matter how big or small, that would like to benefit from an economical comparison drawn between tractors and draft animals based on their individual data.

Klaus Strüber, head of the “Humussphäre” project, will be happy to provide you with further information.

Literature: Starkey, P. (2010): Livestock for traction: world trends, key issues and policy implications - Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 42 pages.
Strüber, K. (2011): Humussphäre, Projektbericht Nr. 7 - Projektarbeit der GLP, 57 pages.

Author: Klaus Strüber, Germany, farmer and head of the project “Humussphäre”. E-mail info@hof-hollergraben.de, phone: 0049 4528 764.

English proofreading done by Kathleen Hewlett, Soil Association.

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7. Organic certification now networked Europe-wide

From 29 November 2012, two organic certification platforms “EASY-CERT” and “bioC” are linked, holding detailed and assured information (digital certificates, label approvals etc.) on some 60,000 certified agricultural holdings, processing firms and trading companies in most European countries and beyond.

“EASY-CERT” and “bioC” have already implemented European Union and Swiss requirements for the provision of digital certificates, which will take effect on January 1, 2013. The newly available expanded services assure greater certainty in the international organic certification system.

“EASY-CERT” is a certification platform established several years ago by two certification bodies, the Swiss company “bio.inspecta AG” and “Austria Bio Garantie”. “bioC” GmbH has ten years of experience running a counterpart platform in Germany. “This cooperation between “bioC” and “EASY-CERT” boosts transparency and certainty throughout Europe’s organic market,” notes Ueli Steiner, chief executive officer (CEO) of “bio.inspecta AG” and initiator of “EASY-CERT”.

Further certification bodies are invited to integrate data on the holdings and companies certified by them, thus completing the listings and contributing to improved transparency in Europe’s organic market. “Through this cooperation, we have laid the foundation for a European registry,” stresses Rolf Mäder, chief executive officer (CEO) of “bioC” GmbH.

Further information and contact persons: Rolf Mäder, CEO of “bioC” GmbH: Rolf.Maeder@bioC.info, Ueli Steiner, “EASY-CERT”, CEO of “bio.inspecta AG”, info@easy-cert.com.

Source of the article: press release by “EASY-CERT” and “bioC”, 29 November 2012

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8. Organic Marketing Forum 2013 with a new Networking concept and extended exhibition

From 17 to 19 June 2013 the *Organic Marketing Forum – 8th European East-West Organic Trade Exhibition and Networking Conference (OMF)* will open its doors in Warsaw: the main meeting for the organic market sector of Central- and Eastern Europe will again attract organic companies, experts and other key players in the organic market.

The Organic Marketing Forum, already well known in the calendar of European organic events, will see numerous changes in 2013: the trade exhibition for organic food and non-food products will be extended. Exhibitors will have an opportunity to sell their products during the second half of the exhibition. Apart from the exhibition there will be Business Networking Tables for different product categories. In addition, exhibitors and visitors will have an opportunity to introduce themselves and their products from a stage in the exhibition hall, and experts will be available for free individual consultations. Speed Networking Sessions are another new feature at the OMF; these will enable increased contact between participants. Also, special trainings for organic retailers will be debuted. And finally, a new price policy of the OMF enables more visitors and exhibitors to participate. Organic producers, processors, traders, retailers and other organic experts from about 30 European countries are expected to participate in 2013.

OMF 2012 exhibition. Photo: EkoConnect

The organic conference, with simultaneous translations between English, German, Polish and Russian, will be an important part of the event. With the motto "*It is all about meeting the right people*" one focus of the conference in 2013 will be on networking and cooperation.

More cooperation within countries and between countries is also the goal of the whole Organic Marketing Forum: "The fastest growing part of the European organic market is located in the East. The Organic Marketing Forum will 2013 again bring together the organic people from East and West and will be a starting point for new partnerships and developments" says Bernhard Jansen, the chairman of EkoConnect, the main organiser of the Forum. "I am especially happy about the successful cooperation with "BioFach Nuremberg" and "Polska Ekologia", which helps us to invite more organic companies" Bernhard Jansen concludes.

Besides "BioFach" and the producers association "Polska Ekologia", the organic farming association „Ekoland", the Polish Advisory Centre CDR and the Organic Retailers Association (ORA) are partners of OMF 2013. The forum stays under the patronage of the IFOAM EU Group and the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

More information and registration is available at www.organic-marketing-forum.org. A discount for early registrations is available until 28 February 2013.

Authors: Gatis Caics and Bernhard Jansen, EkoConnect.
Proof-reading and correction of English text by David Barker

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9. New books related to organic farming

Recently a few organic farming-related books have been published in Russian and also in English, providing Eastern Europe with valuable knowledge and new perspectives.

1. "Organic agriculture" (in Russian «Органическое сельское хозяйство»), 2010, 396 pages

Authors: Borivoj Šarapatka, Jiří Urban and colleagues

Languages: Russian and English

About: This practical textbook provides information on plant production, soil, plant nutrition and fertilization, cultivation of crops, weed control, permanent grassland, fruit and vegetable-growing, viticulture and wine-making, and animal husbandry. It also includes chapters on the history and present status of organic agriculture in Europe, regulations and environmental effects. The book is based on the original Czech version written by the Czech Ministry of Agriculture, the Czech Ministry of Environment and PRO-BIO.

Where to buy: all information can be found on the website of publisher BioInstitut: www.bioinstitut.cz in the "Publications" section

2. "Eco-labeling" (in Russian «Экологическая маркировка»), 2012, 128 pages

Author: Elena Smirnova

Language: Russian

About: The book describes different types of eco-labeling - food, textiles, cosmetics, goods from wood, green construction etc. It also includes organic certification.

Where to buy: you can order the book online from the publisher "The Green Book" on their website www.zelenayakniga.ru.

3. Translation from German to Russian of book "Vollwert-ernährung" ("Wholefood nutrition", in Russian «Полноценное питание»)

Authors: Karl von Koerber / Thomas Männle / Claus Leitzmann, translation from German to Russian by Aleksei Ursulenko

Language: Russian

About: The book describes the principles of healthy nutrition and explains how each individual can keep themselves in good health conditions by choosing natural food products. It describes responsibility about our nutrition choice not only towards our health, but also towards the environment.

Where to buy: please contact the author of translation Aleksei Ursulenko (e-mail ursulenko@mail.ru) for additional information.

4. "High Nature Value Farming in Europe. *35 European countries - experiences and perspectives*", 2012, 500 pages

Authors: there are different authors for each chapter depending on specific country. Please see the list of authors here.

Language: English

About: The book provides a comprehensive introduction to high nature value farming and outlines how the concept can be applied in 35 European states, as described by local experts. It is richly illustrated throughout with colour photographs, maps and figures.

Where to buy: The book is available for purchase on the website of European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism: efncp.org/publications/books.

10. Upcoming events

Date	Event	Place	Topic	Website
15.01.2013	"Ökologisch Handeln"	Niederschlesien, Poland	Seminar: Animal Health for advisers and farmers	www.ekoconnect.org
23.1.2013 – 24.1.2013	BioVak 2013	Zwolle, Netherlands	Trade show for the entire organic sustainable chain	www.biovak.nl
13.2.2013 – 16.2.2013	BioFach & Vivaness	Nuremberg, Germany	World's leading trade fair for organic products	www.biofach.de www.vivaness.de
05.03.2013	"Ökologisch Handeln"	Niederschlesien, Poland	Workshop: business management and direct marketing	www.ekoconnect.org
07.4.2013 – 08.4.2013	Natural and Organic Products Europe 2013	London, United Kingdom	Trade exhibition for natural, sustainable, organic and healthy lifestyle products.	www.naturalproducts.co.uk
14.4.2013	BioWest	Duesseldorf, Germany	Trade exhibition of organic products	www.biowest.info
19.4.2013 – 21.4.2013	Biostyl 2013	Prague, Czech Republic	8th Fair of Healthy Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyle	www.biostyl.cz
28.4.2013	BioOst	Berlin, Germany	National trade exhibition of organic products	www.bioost.info
16.5.2013 – 19.5.2013	Ecology – Izmir 2013	Izmir, Turkey	Turkey's leading trade fair for organic products	www.ekolojiizmir.com
23.5.2013 – 25.5.2013	BioFach China	Shanghai, China	International Organic Trade Fair and Conference. The leading exhibition in the Asian Organic Market.	www.biofach-china.com
24.5.2013 – 26.5.2013	EKOGALA 2013	Rzeszów, Poland	Ecological Food and Products fair	www.ekogala.eu
8.7.2013 – 10.7.2013	7th European Organic Congress	Vilnius, Lithuania	July 8 excursions, July 9–10 congress: review of organic regulation as opportunity for sustainable CAP	www.organic-congress-ifoameu.org
17.6.2013 – 19.6.2013	**Organic Marketing Forum 2013**	**Warsaw, Poland**	**European East-West Organic Trade Exhibition and Networking Conference. The main meeting point for organic sector in Central and Eastern Europe**	**www.organic-marketing-forum.org**
27.6.2013 - 30.6.2013	BioFach América Latina / Bio Brazil Fair 2013	São Paulo, Brazil	International Organic Trade Show and Conference	www.biofach-americalatina.com

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This information letter is a project of EkoConnect. Translations are done with the support of our volunteer translators. If you are interested to help us with translating, please don't hesitate to contact us, as we are always happy to receive more support.

With Best Regards, Your Editorial Team

EkoConnect is a non-profit organisation based in Germany which enforces and supports the exchange of information, knowledge and experience in the field of organic agriculture. The organisation serves as a network for people and organisations involved in the organic sector in Western and Eastern Europe in order to meet and interact with each other.

Our primary focus is to **support activities and actors involved with sustainable development and organic agriculture within the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries**. EkoConnect also promotes rural development and the availability of organic products and foods in those markets. Activities include: being a centralized source of information, knowledge transfer between actors and organizations, networking opportunities and continuing education opportunities such as seminars and field trips and supporting private and public facilities implementing structures for the organic agriculture. EkoConnect and its activities are overseen by an Advisory Board that guides the organization in terms of technical and strategic issues.

Membership registration

EkoConnect members include experts and organisations from all over Europe with years of experience in implementing organic agricultural structures, but also non-experts who are interested in learning or supporting the organic idea. You can help to support our work by becoming a "**supporting member**" or as an "**ordinary member**". Please fill out the application form on our website (www.ekoconnect.org). Are you already a member? Then please invite co-workers, friends or other stakeholders to become an EkoConnect member.
