

Information Letter for Organic Agriculture of Central and Eastern Europe

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S E P T E M B E R 2 0 1 3

Dear readers,

The marketing of the organic products of this harvest season and long term trade cooperations were again important topics of the 8th Organic Marketing Forum on June, 17th to 19th in Warsaw. 30 % more exhibition area than last year is an indicator for a virtual growth of this biggest organic trade exhibition for organic professionals in Central and Eastern Europe and for the growing organic market of this region.

In the flooded areas of Central Europe there was unfortunately often nothing more to harvest for organic farmers. Thousands of acres have been under water. The foundation Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft collected money for organic farmers. We support this action of solidarity very much.

The threat for seeds through genetic engineering is unfortunately an ongoing issue, on which the initiative "Save Our Seeds" has been working on for years. We sincerely ask to support their work and petitions at www.saveourseeds.org and www.no-patents-on-seeds.org.

We hope all our readers enjoy this information letter.

Bernhard Jansen, EkoConnect

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Content

1. The Organic Regulation is undergoing significant change – organic organisations and companies should support IFOAM EU
2. Land Grabbing concerns Central and Eastern Europe
3. Foundation of the association of the sheep- and goose milk producers e.V.
4. Organic Marketing Forum with increase in number of exhibitors and visitors
5. Announcement of the International Conference on Organic Agriculture Sciences in Central and Eastern Europe (ICOAS)
6. Country report: Finland
7. Upcoming events

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1. The Organic Regulation is undergoing significant change – organic organisations and companies should support IFOAM EU

In 2012 the process to review the Organic Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 was kicked off. As the market for organic products - and consequently the sector - has significantly increased over the last years and growth likely to continue, demand for organic products is currently greater than supply. The European Commission thinks that the legal framework must be able to support such fast development and therefore decided to start a review process of the 2007 regulation, in order to avoid organic farming and production from becoming a victim of its own success.

The Lisbon Treaty also requires that the Commission present a legal proposal for the European organic regulation to the European Parliament and the Council. It is expected that this will take place at the end of 2013. Then a co-decision process between the European Institutions will start. These discussions will probably take a couple of years - or even more considering that European elections will be held in 2014. Therefore a new - or an amended - regulation will not likely be published before 2016.

The key topics under discussion are simplification, control, environmental performance and areas currently out of scope.

Simplification is about reducing administrative burden for operators and control authorities and about making the regulation understandable for all stakeholders.

An effective *control* system plays a key role in credibility, which plays a major role in the success of organic food and farming. Although the current control system works – it has detected the small number of fraud cases that have occurred in the organic sector – it can nevertheless be improved further.

Organic consumers also care about *environment*. At the primary production – farm – level, the requirements of the organic regulation already make organic the most environmental-friendly standard. At the processing and trading level, some improvements can be made to requirements for these operators.

Organic textile and organic and natural cosmetics are very high profile sectors which are not yet covered by the European organic regulation. The term "organic" is currently protected for food and feed, and an extension of this protection for such areas must be considered.

IFOAM EU is actively taking part in this process. Since the beginning it has provided significant input to Commission based on the feedback from its European-wide network. The IFOAM EU position is that the legal framework can and must be improved, but to preserve the stability of the sector the basic principles must not be upset.

In addition to the further development of the regulation, IFOAM EU Group is strongly in favour of a new Organic European Action Plan. The previous one is from 2004 and the organic sector has significantly developed since then.

IFOAM EU in Brussels will continue working and gathering input from the diverse actors of the sector throughout the review. IFOAM EU invites all organic organisations to take an interest in this process and to provide support and information to them so they can best represent our sector.

If you want to be involved, please contact IFOAM EU office.

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2. Land Grabbing concerns Central and Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe, land acquisitions by foreigners continue to boom. According to “Standard News”, Ukraine is one of the most seriously affected East European countries, alongside Rumania, Lithuania, Bulgaria and East Germany. Especially funds and agricultural companies from Western Europe and the Gulf States are considered as investors, such as the Danish company “Jantzen” cultivating 17,000 hectares of land in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Rumania. Capital flows in from outside Europe as well: A Chinese company has signalized its willingness to produce fruits and vegetables in Rumania; Libya allegedly acquired 250,000 hectares in the Ukraine. Attractive to foreign investors are particularly fertile soils, low land prices and agricultural subsidies granted by the EU. (Source: Die Presse.com)

The new East European large scale land-holding is being subsumed under “land grabbing” by some NGOs, which indicates a negative meaning. But the consequences for the affected countries can be manifold. On the one hand major foreign investments can boost agricultural productivity, on the other hand the loss of jobs and bio-diversity or increasing purchase prices and rental prices for agricultural land can be possible consequences.

According to “Frankfurter Rundschau”, the Warsaw Ministry of Agriculture wants to avoid such land purchasing and rather sell state-owned land to Polish farmers, in total 2 million hectares which had been cultivated by state-owned firms during socialism.

The Hungarian government is on the lookout for solutions as well. In the past, neighbouring Austrian farmers snapped up agricultural land on a significant scale, therefore, the Hungarian government anchored a provision in the Constitution, which prohibits the sale of agricultural land to foreigners. Though, it is yet unclear if this is compatible with European law.

Due to a lack of transparency, the real extent of land grabbing is difficult to assess. According to the German Institute of Human Rights, in the last few years up to 80 million hectares were sold or leased, particularly on the African continent. This would be equivalent to five per cent of all agricultural land used worldwide. (Source: Lexikon der Nachhaltigkeit)

Translation: Benjamin Hirschfeld, Proofreading: Claudia Neumann, EkoConnect

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3. Foundation of the association of the sheep- and goose milk producers e.V.

“Germany is a developing country regarding sheep- and goose milk production” says Sebastian Schäfer, head of the recently founded association of the sheep- and goose milk producers e.V. (VSZM), which is going to take care of this task. The association was founded in November 2012 in Apolda (near Leipzig, Germany) and represents the interests of organic and conventional sheep- and goose milk producers in Germany and other EU countries.

A special challenge is the breeding: professional milk sheep- and goat keepers are rarely organized in breeding associations due to lack of time. In sheep- and goat breeding associations the breeding aims of keepers, who breed animals as a hobby, therefore often prevail. Beside the low breeding progress the uncertain economic data for dairy farms with small ruminants is a further problem. There is too little data to allow a horizontal business comparison and thus to find out the profitability of sheep- and goose milk producers. But this would be essential to calculate the own economic efficiency. “At the moment there are a lot of farmers, who just manage by “trial and error”. But due to this aspect many farmers and especially newcomers failed” says Schäfer. A central organization like the VSZM shall simplify the centralization of data and information. Furthermore it shall serve as contact point.

Thereby it is a main concern to allow the communication between sheep- and goose keepers as well as an international exchange as a possibility to learn from each other.

The most frequently used communication tool of the VSZM will probably be the homepage. It shall have a special area for members, for example with the milk prices of different European countries, and there shall be information about the sector and events as well. Furthermore a platform to exchange experience and offer animals, respectively, is planned. In cooperation with the breeding associations an auction for breeding animals would be imaginable. An area on the homepage is planned to inform

consumers about sheep and goose milk. Additionally members can introduce themselves by publishing farm descriptions.

The VSZM is supported by the association for craft milk processing (www.milchhandwerk.info) and Bioland. Further associations and supporters are looked for. All goat- and sheep keepers may take part in setting up the sector representation. If you are interested, please ask Mr. Sebastian Schäfer (chairman), telephone number +49 2264 1585, info@schafundziegenmilch.org.

Author: Lilian-Marleen Beck, EkoConnect, Translation: Meike Grosse

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4. Organic Marketing Forum with increase in number of exhibitors and visitors

Organic Marketing Forum – 8th European East-West Organic Trade Exhibition and Networking Conference from 17th – 19th June 2013 in Warsaw with a growth of 30% on the exhibition space and 8% on the number of visitors; retailers, manufacturers and farmers from 27 countries participating; concerns about negative impact of a free trade zone between the USA and EU

About 380 visitors from 27 countries came to the Polish capital to learn more about the European organic markets and to make new business contacts. Overall the organizers registered a growth of 8 % on the number of visitors, 14 % on the number of exhibitors and a 30 % increase in the exhibition space. Thus OMF counts again as the largest organic business meeting in Central and Eastern Europe.

The growth of OMF reflects the growing interest of businesses and consumers in the organic sector of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

In Poland and the Baltic states a dynamic growth of the business sector of about 10 - 15 % per year is to be observed. The number of processors 2012 increased in Poland to more than 310.

In addition to the food market, the sector of raw materials was a second main focus of the Forum. In this sector well known commodity producing countries like Ukraine, Lithuania and Slovakia extend their offers and new countries like Russia or Moldova are starting to offer raw materials. Also in Poland the organic farmland has increased in the last 5 years by more than 100% to about 660,000 ha in 2012.



*Exhibition area of the Organic Marketing Forum,
Photo: EkoConnect*

Concerning the further development of the organic sector, many participants of the OMF saw a threat in the planned free trade agreement between the EU and the U.S. Also Bernhard Jansen, Executive Director of EkoConnect, highlighted in his opening speech the danger for food safety in the European Union due to the free trade agreement between the EU and USA He stated that therefore now will be the time to act against this threat.

Following the new subtitle of the OMF "European East-West organic trade Exhibition and Networking Conference" next to the exhibition and conference another focus of the event was on new networking elements. In particular, the new Speed Networking Sessions turned out to be a valuable support for business participants. Buyer and seller sat face to face for product specific two minute meetings and on a signal they moved to the next dialogue partner. Also other participants signalized a positive feedback on the sessions and expressed interest in participation in the next year edition. Approximately 20 companies also used the opportunity to present their companies in short lightning presentations in the exhibition hall.

Another new program element was a training for polish retailers, which included elements of marketing, personal management and cooperation possibilities with other shops. Among others experienced

organic traders shared their know how like Meinrad Schmitt (*Terra Naturkost*) and Georg Kaiser (*BioCompany*), but also Karin Lösch from *Communications Consulting Klaus Braun*.

EkoConnect - International Centre for Organic Agriculture in Central and Eastern Europe is since 8 years the main organiser of the Organic Marketing Forum. The Forum is organised in cooperation with "BioFach" Organic World Fair Nuremberg. Partners are also the Polish Organic Farmers Association "Ekoland", the Polish Processors Association "Polska Ekologia", the Polish Agriculture Advising Center Radom (CDR) and the Organic Retailers Association Vienna (ORA). The Organic Marketing Forum has two patrons: the Polish Ministry for Agriculture and the EU Group of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

The 9th Organic Marketing Forum will take place on June, 1st and 2nd, 2014.

More information and photos are available at www.organic-marketing-forum.org.

Author: EkoConnect

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5. Announcement of the International Conference on Organic Agriculture Sciences in Central and Eastern Europe (ICOAS)

The 4th International Conference on Organic Agriculture Sciences in Central and Eastern Europe (ICOAS) will be held **9-13th October 2013** in Hungary. Previously held in the Czech Republic, ICOAS will cover current topics of organic agriculture research. The theme for ICOAS 2013 is **Targeting Global Sustainability – Food Security, Biodiversity and Climate Change**. It will bring an estimated six hundred participants to Hungary. ICOAS provides an opportunity for researchers, non-governmental organizations, practitioners and policy makers around the globe to meet and discuss current results of organic agriculture sciences. The conference will offer approximately fifty panels in organic agriculture studies, plenary sessions, posters, excursions, receptions and exhibits.

From 2013 ICOAS will be a bi-annual event organized every second year in a different Central and Eastern European country with a special emphasis on selected topics of organic agriculture research for each conference.

Please visit the conference website (www.icoas2013.org) for further details!

Author: Claudia Neumann, EkoConnect

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6. Country report: Finland

Finland is the world's northernmost country that is self-sufficient in most major agricultural products. Up until the 1960s, the five-million Finns lived in a predominantly agricultural society. Finland has many forests and countless lakes. Only around 5% of its surface area is used for agriculture (2.2 million hectares) and this is almost exclusively arable land. Pastures are generally part of the crop rotation and are ploughed every few years.

The collection and cultivation of wild berries and mushrooms also plays an important role as wild products from Finland are enjoyed as delicacies all over the world. Food production in Finland is normally undertaken by small family run businesses, although these have rapidly decreased in number in recent decades and have become much larger. Organic farming received a big boost in 1990 as a result of a national conversion program. At this time already 373 organic farms existed. By 1994 this had increased to 1,818. Following Finland's accession to the EU in 1995, there was a sharp decline in the producer price index and many more farmers turned to organic farming hoping for a better future. In the following years, the number of organic farms rose even further and currently stands at around 4,300, whilst the total number of agribusinesses in Finland continued to decrease. Organic farms account for a total of 205,000 hectares, and at around 48 hectares each, they are around 10% bigger than conventional farms.

Around 40% of the organic farms rear animals, although there are only 432 farms registered as certified organic animal farms. This obvious discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the production of organic animals is not a requirement for organic accreditation of the land. Organic production subsidies can be obtained separately for agricultural areas. A supplementary grant for animal production has existed since 2005.

There is barely any processing and marketing structure for organic animal products in Finland. Many farms process their produce independently. Around 12% of the farmers process their own meat and 5% process milk on their farm. Around 30% process crops.

Although organically farmed areas are on the rise, they still cannot meet the ever growing demand. This is a result of the increasing consumption of organic products by consumers and, above all, the increased amount of feed needed in the rearing of organic animals. This can be observed in the crop market: Until now Finland was exporting crops and has begun just recently to import organic rye, barley and even wheat. Now there is only a surplus in oats.



In Finland most organic products are sold in supermarkets. Mervi Saarela at S-Market Bulevardi presenting Samsara organic rye sour bread. Photo: Erkki Pöytäniemi

If you are now interested in organic agriculture in Finland and want to find out more, the agronomists Erkki Pöytäniemi and Marja Nuora, who have both been active in this field for over twenty years, have compiled an affectionate portrait of Finnish organic farming, through the portrayal of farms and businesses along the value chain. In 2010 they started travelling around Finland visiting organic farms and businesses. Their book contains a multitude of impressive and fascinating photographs by Erkki Pöytäniemi to uncover the true picture of organic agriculture in Finland.

The book "TALES OF ORGANICS IN FINLAND" can be ordered from <http://erkinkuvat.luomusalonki.fi/tales-of-organics-in-finland/> (English and Finnish, 200 pages, around 35 Euros).



Source:

http://www.foodfromfinland.com/files/687/Okologischer_Landbau_in_Finnland_2008.doc (15.07.2012),

Author: Sampsä Heinonen,

<http://www.organic-finland.com/wp/organics-in-finland/> (15.07.2012), Author: Erkki Pöytäniemi

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This [German - English](#) translation was done by the translator **Tizzy Mann** for the [PerMondo](#) initiative that involves providing free translations for NGOs. Initiative sponsored by Mondo Agit.

Proofreading Claudia Neumann, EkoConnect

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7. Upcoming events

Date	Event	Place	Topic	Website
13.09.2013 - 27.09.2013	Faire Woche 2013	Germany	Countrywide period of campaigns dealing with fair trade. Approx. 5000 events	http://www.fairewoche.de/veranstaltungen
25.09.2013	“Ökologisch Handeln”	Lower Silesia, Poland	Workshop: Economic optimization in direct marketing	www.ekoconnect.org
29.09.2013 - 04.10.2013	International Apimondia Congress	Kiev, Ukraine	Modern beekeeping in Europe	http://apimondia2013.org.ua/en/
05.10.2013 - 09.10.2013	Anunga 2013	Cologne, Germany	The worldwide leading food fair for trade and catering	http://www.anuga.com
07.10.2013 - 10.10.2013	POLEKO	Posnań, Poland	Trade fair for ecology, environmental protection, communal service	http://poleko.mtp.pl/en/
09.10.2013 - 13.10.2013	ICOAS	Budapest and Eger/Hungary	current topics of organic agriculture research	www.icoas2013.org
30.10.2013 - 03.11.2013	INDAGRA	Bucharest, Romania	International fair for arable farming, horticulture and viticulture, animal husbandry	http://www.indagra.ro/about
17.01.2014 - 26.01.2014	Grüne Woche	Berlin, Germany	The world's largest trade fair for food, agriculture and horticulture	http://www.gruenewoche.de/
22.01.2014 - 23.01.2014	BioVak 2014	Zwolle, The Netherlands	Trade fair for the organic and sustainable sector	http://www.biovak.nl
04.02.2014 - 07.02.2014	SALIMA 2014	Brünn, Czech Republic	International food fair	http://www.bvv.cz/de/salima/
12.02.2014 - 15.02.2014	BIOFACH & VIVINESS	Nuremberg, Germany	The worldwide leading trade fair for organic produce	http://www.biofach.de http://www.vivaness.de

Translation: Sarah Brumlop

Did you enjoy this information letter?

If yes, we would appreciate it if you recommended it to your friends, partners and colleagues. But if you have any comments, criticisms or other suggestions for improvement, please contact EkoConnect. Your feedback regarding the topics as well as the quality of articles and translations is very important to us.

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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.

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