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## CERTIFICATION AND LABELLING OF ORGANIC PRODUCTS IN POLAND

### 1. Consumer awareness and organic farming

Organic farming is a growing reality all over the world. The development of the organic food sector has rapidly increased in recent years. It can be said that the organic trade is now entering a booming phase. There is an impressive number of organic farms in developed countries: 10,000 in Germany, 20,000 in Austria and, more than 30,000 organic farms in Italy. But similarly impressive developments can be seen in countries like Uganda (7,000 farms where cotton is cultivated by organic methods) and Mexico (10,000 farmers produce organic coffee). Organic farming in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is developing well in Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Poland. A change in lifestyle and consumption patterns – searching for a better way of nutrition – was a starting point for the establishment of organic ideas [*An Overview and Facts...*, 2003].

Unfortunately, there is still too little consumer interest in organic products. In most cases, such interest is supported more by personal health concerns than worries about environmental damage. For instance, health consciousness is the main motive for purchasing organic foodstuffs in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland [*An Overview and Facts...*, 2003]. Another problem is that a large number of people do not realise what “organic” really means. Thus, it can be stated that organic production in CEE countries has developed around export needs. It thus seems to be obvious that the prices of products are kept too high for local market consumers [*Organic Europe*, 2003].

## 2. History, development and distribution of organic farming in Poland

Farmland occupies about 60 percent of the total surface area of Poland, which corresponds to 18.5 million hectares. Over 92 percent of land is owned by 2 million individual farmers scattered through the country.

The first Polish national group of organic small holders was established in 1989 under the name of "Ekoland". The establishment of the association was initiated by far-sighted scientists and German experts. Ekoland was the first Polish organisation to become a full member of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) in 1990. In the following years, other Polish organisations became members of IFOAM – in 2002 there were nine of them.

During the beginning phase, in 1989 there were 27 certified organic farms in Poland. An increasing number of organic farms certified by Ekoland was observed until 1996. Between 1997 and 2000 the number of such farms did not show a clear trend, probably because of the introduction of some changes in the certification process. A new development boom appeared in 2001 (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The number and acreage of organic farms certified by Ekoland

| Year | Number of farms | Land area [ha] |
|------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1990 | 27              | 300            |
| 1991 | 49              | 550            |
| 1992 | 94              | 1,240          |
| 1993 | 174             | 2,170          |
| 1994 | 225             | 3,540          |
| 1996 | 236             | 6,855          |
| 1997 | 207             | 6,010          |
| 1998 | 181             | 5,546          |
| 1999 | 254             | 5,050          |
| 2000 | 183             | 6,380          |
| 2001 | 669             | 14,967         |
| 2002 | 1,787           | 44,886         |

Source: Ekoland Co. data.

In 2001, the number of organic farms reached 669, with a total surface area of 14,967 hectares, which is equal to 0.05 percent of the total num-

ber of farms in Poland. The following number of inspections were performed:

- 1114 farms by Polskie Towarzystwo Rolnictwa Ekologicznego (PTRE),<sup>1</sup>
- 242 farms by Bioekspert,
- 431 farms by AgroBioTest,
- SKAL, BCS, INAC, Ecocert.<sup>2</sup>

An increasing trend in the level of organic farming was also observed in 2002. In comparison to 2001, the number of farms increased by 1,118. Further growth in organic farming is expected in 2003 as a result of support programmes including training, subsidies and technical support in finding European markets.

In the past, farms were mainly located in the neighbourhood of Przysiek (Toruń), where the regional extension service ran its first training courses in organic farming. Nowadays, organic farms are most common in the central part of Poland. The reason for this is the better access to big markets such as the cities of Warsaw, Cracow, Gdansk, Lodz and the Silesia Region at the same time (Figure 1).

The character of Polish organic farms differs from Western European ones. Polish farms focus on mixed farming, while Western European farms concentrate on specialised production.

### **3. Certification and labelling of organic produce in Poland**

It seems to be obvious that standard setting, inspection and certification are the most important elements in a certified system of organic agriculture. It was expected that each CEE country becoming a member of IFOAM would set up a national body with responsibility for certification and control of ecologically produced goods.

The first national "standards for organic farming", based on IFOAM's "Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing" were set up in Poland by Ekoland in 1990, and followed by the Polish Association of Organic Farming in 1992. Both sets of standards have been revised since 1998 in accordance with the relevant European Council Regulation 2092/91.

The EU 2092/91 regulation has been developed in the EU countries as the law on standards of organic farming. Individual certifying organisa-

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<sup>1</sup>Ang. Polish Association of Organic Farming.

<sup>2</sup>Lack of data on number and acreage of farms controlled by EU inspection bodies.



Fig. 1. Regional distribution of certified organic farms in Poland in 1999 (first figure: number certified by Ekoland, second figure: LUB-EKO-farms)

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1999.

tions must implement these standards as the basis of their own, if they want to sell organic products within the EU market. It is also necessary for organisations to prove their worth through accreditation, according to the EN 45011:1998<sup>3</sup> standard. This guarantees that an organisation is independent, transparent and reliable, and ensures the easy acceptance of certificates issued by conforming certifying organisations.

The EU 2092/91 regulation was implemented into Polish law as a part of the Act on Ecological Agriculture [Government Records, No. 38, Item

<sup>3</sup> EN 45011:1998 meets the requirements of the international standard ISO/IEC Guide 65(1996).

452] that came into force on the 3rd of November 2001. The Polish PN-EN 45011:2000 standard fulfils the requirements of EN:45011:1998.

There are several certifying organisations in Poland that fulfil the requirements of the EU certification system. The most important of them are: AgroBioTest, Bioekspert, Polish Centre for Testing and Certification (PTRE). The biggest independent inspection bodies are: AgroBioTest, Bioekspert, PTRE.

### 3.1. The certification system

Nowadays, the Polish certification system for organic farming meets the requirements of the EU certifying system. Its basic rules are defined by the Act on Ecological Agriculture. Diagram 1 presents the steps that must be taken by a producer (farmer), in order to achieve the certificate of compliance.

A certificate is issued for 12 months. In order to get a new certificate, a producer must prepare a new application 3 months prior to the expiry of the current certificate.

### 3.2. Labelling system

Growing consumer interest and the presence of organic products on the market initiated work on regulation aimed at preventing misuse of "ecological" labels. In 1992, the Minister of Agriculture issued a regulation on the labelling of food products. This regulation was amended in 1994. The State Trade Inspection Board was responsible for the implementation of the act. According to these inspections, about 50 percent of tested products (existing on the Polish market) labelled with "healthy food", "from ecologically clean regions", "without pesticides" did not meet the criteria, which in fact are not clearly defined in the regulation.

The Act on Ecological Agriculture, which came into force in 2001, introduced many changes in the labelling of ecological products. Products produced by certified organic farms can be indicated by the logo "produkt rolnictwa ekologicznego".<sup>4</sup>

Organic farms that meet the criteria (in other words, have implemented the accredited certification system) may place this logo on their products and must support it with the following information:

- name of the producer,
- name and identification number of the certifying body,

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<sup>4</sup>Ang. product of organic farming.

**The producer provides the accredited certification body with the following documents:**  
 (1) a declaration that the farmstead will be based on ecological methods; (2) information about the types and amounts of products that will be produced by ecological methods; (3) description of a farmstead, including location of arable land and production plants; (4) title deeds for arable lands and buildings on the farmstead; (5) information from the environmental inspection body and sanitary & epidemiological station that there is no excess in amount or concentration of pollutants released to the environment by a farmstead; (6) plan of actions necessary to undertake conversion from a conventional way of farming to organic farming;

Although documents (3) and (6) must be prepared in the presence of a person representing the certification body, there is no charge.



#### **Two-year conversion period**

for changing from a conventional way of farming to organic farming. During that time, a farmstead may be inspected by certification body representatives without any information being sent to the producer earlier. A second type of inspection is an inspection previously agreed to by the producer and it takes place once per year.

The conversion periods for:

- cattle and horses produced for meat 12 months,
- herd, sheeps, goats produced for meat 6 months,
- milk production 6 months,
- poultry 10 weeks,
- hens 6 weeks.

The conversion period can be shortened by a certification body from 2 years to 1 year in the case of grasslands, if in the last 3 years they were not cultivated with pesticides and fertilisers not allowed in organic production of food.



#### **Certifying inspection**

A producer is informed about the date and plan of the inspection. As a result of the inspection a protocol is written and signed by the producer and the inspectors from the certifying body.



As a result of the inspection a protocol is written and signed by the inspectors from the certifying body, but is **not signed** by the producer if he does not agree with the content.



Within 7 days, the producer makes **comments to the protocol** and sends them to the corresponding certification body.



The certification body considers these comments and **replies to the producer** within 14 days.



As a result of the inspection a protocol is written and **signed** by the producer and the inspectors from the certifying body.



The producer sends an **application to the certification body** in order to get a certificate of compliance. The application consists of:  
 - information on the scope and kind of activity performed by organic farming methods,  
 - agreement to inspecting a farmstead by the certifying body according to the plan of inspection.



#### **Certificate of compliance**



#### **Inspections**

Testing compliancy and products. If standards are not met, a certificate can be recinded.

**Fig. 2.** Certification process of organic production in Poland in accordance with the Act on Ecological Agriculture that came into force on 3 November 2001

Source: Own elaboration.

– in the case of imported products: name of the importer and particularly in the case of products imported from the EU the wording “objęte systemem kontroli Unii Europejskiej”.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Perspectives for organic farming in Poland

In spite of the existing stagnation in the national economy, there are still many sectors characterised by slow but steady development. Ecological agriculture is one of these sectors.

The market share of certified organic food products on the domestic market is quite small. Growing consumer consciousness in distinguishing ecological products (including organic food) from others on the local market seems to be one of the main incentives for developing organic farming in Poland.

There are still only a few exporters selling mainly fruits and vegetables for processing abroad. The problem with export can be seen via the prism of a lack of big producer organisations and lack of a market for organic food.

At the same time it should be remembered that the new certification system for organic farmsteads in Poland is compatible with the European one and it can create some problems for new farmers (producers) interested in changing from conventional agricultural production to organic production. On one hand, some problems can appear in certifying farms. 2002 was the first year in which the law on organic farming and accreditation of certification bodies by the Polish Accreditation Centre was implemented according to EN-45011 standards. The certification process after revision has become more complicated and it requires a two-year conversion period that might be a time and cost barrier to the fast expansion of organic farms. On the other hand, an existing system of subsidies for organic agriculture<sup>6</sup> should attract new organic producers.

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<sup>5</sup>Ang. under the control system of the European Union.

<sup>6</sup>The first subsidies were granted in 1993 in the form of reimbursement of the costs of soil analysis. Later, state subventions appeared on the basis of the Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Economy of May 11, 1998 on providing agricultural grants and specifying their mode of allocation (Law journal No. 71). Finally, the system of subsidies has been changed into direct subsidies to farmers in the second year of conversion and in the first year of certification – introduced by the Minister of Agriculture in March 1999. Since 1999, subsidies paid to farmers depends on the surface area. Up to 50 ha – 100% of the sum for 1 ha, from 50 to 100 ha – 50% of the sum for 1 ha, over 100 ha – no subsidy is granted.

There are a number of training centres, such as Centres for Extension Service in Agriculture working in all voivodships (regions/provinces), trade companies, NGO's, universities, and advisory services, from Poland and EU countries, which offer a broad range of educational support for the development of ecological production. The number of organisations interested in obtaining accreditation in organic farming is also increasing year by year.

### Literature

*An Overview and Facts on worldwide Organic Agriculture*, <http://www.ifoam.org/over&factsoa.html>, April 2003.

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*Dziennik Ustaw, Act on Ecological Agriculture from 16<sup>th</sup> March 2001*, No. 38, Ite. 452, 2001.

*Organic Europe*, [www.organic-europe.net](http://www.organic-europe.net), March 2003.