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Organic Food Production as a Development Opportunity for Serbia

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ABSTRACT

Serbia, as a developing country, can’t have a number of competitive advantages in relation to the international competition that faces. The growing demand for food has led to the fact that agricultural production relies mostly on the use of chemicals, which endanger human health and disrupt nature balance, and all in order to achieve a higher yield and profit. However, in the process of globalization, the only thing Serbia could rely on, except trained staff, are the natural resources. Favorable climate, large areas of arable land and forests, a healthy environment are the main prerequisites for the development of organic production (OP) in Serbia. The paper aims at giving an overview of the current situation of the Serbian organic sector especially potential, animal and crop production, governance, legal framework and market. Some solutions to overcome the main barriers to OP development are discussed. The achieved results indicate the advantage which the increase in organic production could bring Serbia, such as economic growth, increased exports, reduced trade deficit, sustainable natural resources management and rural development. For allowing OP to express all its potential, domestic market should be further developed, legal framework and governance enhanced and institutional and financial support secured. Due to high prices of organic food in the world market, it is considered one of the most profitable jobs in the world, and therefore organic production in Serbia can be a key generator of economic growth.

INTRODUCTION

Over 80% of land in Serbia is in uncontaminated soil

Serbia is situated in southeastern Europe and has a surface area of 88,361 km². According to 2011 census, population is 7,186,862 with an average density of 92.8 inhabitants per km².

Serbia has 5.11 million hectares of agricultural (60% of the territory) and 4.1 million hectares of arable land.

About 43% of the total population lives in rural areas.

OBJECTIVE

The paper aims at giving an overview of the current situation of the Serbian organic sector especially potential, animal and crop production, governance, legal framework and market.

The main regions for organic fruit production are Central and South Serbia.

82.5% of the interviewed organic operators think that the decision to convert to organic was appropriate as production of healthy food is a good way to increase household income and to make agricultural production more sustainable.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Semi-structured interviews (SSI) were conducted in summer 2013 with 40 organic producers randomly chosen from several cities/municipalities all over Serbia.

Ministries, Specific organic statistics, certification bodies, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), the Mediterranean Organic Agriculture Network (MOAN).

Checklist for SSI included 24 questions dealing mainly with:

- main sources of information about organic agriculture
- access to agricultural extension and subsidies
- reasons for converting to organic farming
- problems and constraints
- main marketing channels
- organic animal and crop production as well as beekeeping
- social capital of organic producers
- economic, social and environmental impacts of organic agriculture
- collaboration and contact with other institutions and actors
- awareness of organic agriculture

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The process of harmonization of Serbian legislation and the EU in the field of organic farming is still pending. For this reason, there is an ongoing initiative for amending the existing Law from 2010.

The most common organically grown crops are: onion, pepper, carrot, potato, tomato, rice, maize, buckwheat, and barley.

As for livestock, the most important treasured species are bovines, goats, sheep and poultry.

The development of organic agriculture brings about multiple and multifaceted benefits to rural economies as well as urban consumers and the society as a whole. Organic farms have economic multiplier effects that go beyond the farm systems boundaries. They support local economies in rural communities by providing jobs for community members and purchasing local businesses products. Short supply chains initiatives - such as farmers’ markets, food cooperatives, and community supported agriculture - offer consumers the opportunity to put their dollars directly into farmers’ pockets thus strengthening sustainable regional food systems.

For Serbia, organic production is very important, because it has always been an agricultural country with significant capacity of natural resources and a long tradition in the production. As more consumers consider the environmental, health and social consequences of industrial food production, demand for sustainably raised foods - including organic production - is growing. Contemporary trends and awareness of the necessity of a healthy society, and preservation of the environment fostered an organic production method as an alternative to conventional agriculture. Farmers are dedicating more and more land to organic production in response to consumer demand. Organic agriculture has a multifunctional character because it provides opportunities for the development of family farms and small producers in Serbia, the promotion of eco and agro-tourism and the preservation of traditions. In this sense, the contribution of the state, in the form of proper funding and subsidizing producers, is invaluable and important for the whole national economy.

CONCLUSION

The land used for organic farming occupies an area of over 11,000 hectares.