

## TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIC FARMING IN BULGARIA

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this article is to follow trends in the development of organic farming in Bulgaria, and to identify the factors' strength and direction of their impact on organic production of agricultural products. The study covers the period from 2003 to 2013 and is based on information from official statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and the author's own research. There are distinct rates of increase in both areas and organic agricultural production in Bulgaria. While in 2003 the areas under organic management are 8,364 ha by 2013 they numbered 56, 287 ha. Bulgaria has a high potential for production and export of organic agricultural products fresh and processed, but significantly lags behind other European countries. However, there is increasing momentum in organic farming, driven by a group of economic, market, social and legislative initiatives. The main reason for this growth is consumer demand of organic products in Bulgaria. In general, the motivations of Bulgarian consumers of organic products are related to the benefits for health and the environment, to the improvement of food quality and to the support of local small farmers, communities and markets.*

*Key words:* areas, Bulgaria, factors, organic production, trends

### **INTRODUCTION**

Organic farming as a way of thinking and practice is originated in the early years of the 20th century with the application of various alternative methods of agricultural production. The method of organic farming is practiced in approximately 100 countries and agricultural areas under organic management are constantly increasing [9].

Bulgaria is one of the most biologically rich countries in Europe. The severe soil fertility and water purity is a prerequisite for the successful development of the organic agricultural products.

Therefore, the producers involved in organic production guideline and actively seek ways of rational use of this potential through organic farming methods for overlapping economic and social issues of this agricultural system with the environment.

In accordance with this facts, the main goal of our study is to trace the condition and development of organic farming in Bulgaria.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The trends in organic production in Bulgaria

during the period 2003-2013 are revealed by analysis of factors affecting the development of organic farming in Bulgaria, a conditions and changes of the areas under organic management, a production of biological crop and livestock, and also economic, social and legislative initiatives for this period [1].

Achieving its purpose, the study includes official statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the author's own research.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

One of the biggest challenges for Bulgaria in the process of economic restructuring and implementation of organic production is to ensure a balance between sufficient food production, to increase employment and preventive protection of the environment.

According to the official information from Department of Agroecology of Ministry of Agriculture and Food in Bulgaria, the distribution of areas under organic management during the period 2003-2013 is significantly increasing (Table 1).

Table 1. Amendment of areas under organic farming in Bulgaria during the period 2003-2013 (ha)

	ha
2003	8,364
2004	12,284
2007	13,646
2008	16,663
2009	12,321
2010	25,648
2011	26,622
2012	40,378
2013	56,287

Source: Department of Agroecology of Ministry of Agriculture and Food in Bulgaria

The information submitted by the supervisory authorities shows that at the end of 2013 the total areas under organic agricultural method amounts to 56,287 ha, which accounts for 0.006% of the UAA. The comparison with data from 2003 shows that the areas are highly increased.

The most preferred organic crops by farmers are plantations, industrial crops and cereals (Fig. 1).

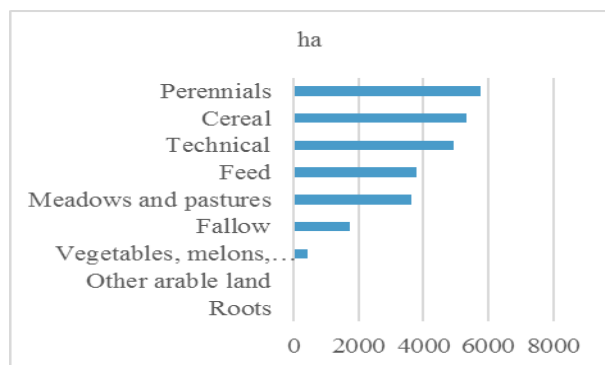


Fig. 1. Areas of organic crops in Bulgaria during the period 2003-2013 (ha)

Source: Own research

The number of animals kept by the methods of organic farming in Bulgaria also is growing up. In the studied period, we saw that the number of sheep and goats fell slightly, while the number of cattle and bee colonies has a considerable growth. (Table 2).

As a result of the increase in the number of bee colonies in 2013 was an increase in the amount of organically produced honey from the previous year - from 2,448 tons in 2012 to 2,718 tons in 2013.

Undoubtedly, Bulgaria is a traditional producer of various types of certified organic honey with excellent quality indicators, as

much of the production is exported to the world market.

Table 2. Organic livestock in Bulgaria during the period 2003-2013 (number of animals)

	Cattle	Sheep	Goat	Bee colonies
2008	470	2,471		
2009	272	5,831	2,732	41,089
2010	364	6,698	2,773	46,429
2011	976	6,648	3,397	58,855
2012	1,173	9,175	2,831	85,346
2013	1,311	7,894	3,235	117,360

Source: Own research

Bulgaria is also the largest producer of organic rose oil in the world, one of the largest exporters of organic cucumbers in Europe, second in the European union by the size of certified organic properties for collection of wild fruits, herbs and mushrooms, and also fourth in the European union in the number of certified organic bee colonies.

The main reason for the changes in organic farming is not only overproduction of subsidized crops, but increased sensitivity of European countries to protect the environment, biodiversity and animal welfare [9].

In accordance with the results from our own research in a few of organic farms during the period, we found both the general and average yields of organic produce in different crops (Table 3).

Table 3. Organic production in organic Bulgarian farm during the period 2003-2013 (kg/da)

Organic production	Area (da)	Average yield	Total yield
Wheat	20	400	8,000
Sunflower	20	180	3,600
Tomatoes	2	3,500	7,000
Pepper	2	3,900	7,800
Cucumbers	2	2,500	5,000
Apples	10	1,600	16,000
Peaches	10	1,800	18,000

Source: Own research

On the one hand, organic production of fruits such as apples and pears occupies quite a high proportion of total organic agricultural production. On the other hand, vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers have

satisfactory yield, despite their smaller areas.

The assessment of factors influencing the development of the organic sector in Bulgaria is of utmost importance. Certainly, growing export demand, especially from European consumer subsidies for the organic production and favorable government policy, and the national legal framework have the greatest influence.

The negative factors on organic farming and marketing are the lack of awareness of organic products quality, lack of marketing strategy and advertising, and strong competition from imported organic products.

In our opinion, after the accession of Bulgaria to the European Community, a considerable progress is established.

Definitely, Bulgaria need large investments for marketing and advertising. Because the achievement of open and competitive international market cannot rely just on the organic products quality.

Bulgarian organic farming is helped by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, which supports the creation of a single legal basis for organic crop production, livestock and establishment of an adequate certification system. Thus, more and more farmers are turning to organic production. However, bulgarian organic production is enshrined as a priority in the government of the country. Among the recommendations in the new national policy on organic farming is to use European subsidies to shift from export of biological raw materials to manufacturing final organic products, such as removal of cosmetics rather than essential oils or dried herbs.

In the same time, the market niche of organic products aroused the interest of consumers, as the latter does not want to be misled by faulty products bearing the risk of contamination with pesticide residues, nitrates, GMOs, etc.

In accordance with above facts, the number of operators and areas in the control system in Bulgaria is growing substantially (Fig. 2).

In 2013, control of compliance with the rules of organic production of agricultural products and foodstuffs and designate them according to the requirements of Regulation (EU) № 834/2007 and national legislation are carried

out 11 control bodies, whereas in the beginning of period were about 4. These requirements aimed to improve legislation in the field of organic production both in Europe and in Bulgaria.

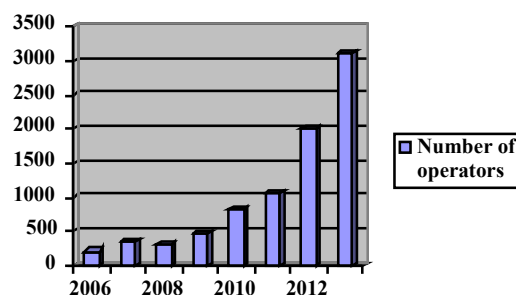


Fig. 2. Number of organic operators in Bulgaria during the period 2003-2013

Source: Vitoshka Research, 2009

The legal basis in Bulgaria includes two ordinances – No 22 from 4 July 2001, for organic crops, crop products and foodstuffs of crop origin and thereto on them; No 35 from August 30, 2001, for organic farming and organic livestock, animal products and foodstuffs of animal origin and thereto on them.

There is still no official statistics on trade in organic products. However, about 90% of currently produced certified organic production in Bulgaria is exported mainly to Western European countries (essential plants and herbs, vegetables, honey).

The share of realized Bulgarian organic products on the national market is about 1%, because it is at the stage of inception over the last decade [7].

Therefore, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food in Bulgaria is working to ensure the implementation of state policy in the field of supervision and control of organic production. The institution, also aims to comply with both the European requirements and national legislation.

Moreover, there is a created plan for improving the possibilities for supporting organic producers and promoting the benefits of organically produced foods and products for human health, and to prevent the environment and natural resources [2].

Since, Bulgaria is one of the European

countries with the richest biodiversity with a variety of natural resources (uncontaminated soil, suitable climate, established regulations), we think that its rapid and extensive development of organic farming is on the right direction.

## CONCLUSIONS

First, organic farming in Bulgaria is at an early stage of development, but with a very large potential ahead.

Second, the rapid development of organic agriculture in the last 20 years driven by the pressure of market forces and increased consumer demand, prompted organic farmers in Bulgaria to seek equivalent alternatives to conventional farming.

Third, there are clearly identified and outlined positive trends of increasing the number of organic operators and organic farming area, amount of space in the control system and increasing the organically grown crops and livestock in Bulgaria.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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