

## ORGANIC FARMING: FROM DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS TO THE AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS AND EVEN POLITICS

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### Abstract

*This article tackles the issue of organic agriculture/farming in all its aspects, from origins to definitions, principles and characteristics, spatial development and world and national level. The older ecological movement is considered a precursor of organic farming that appeared as an agricultural system accompanied by the necessary regulations only in the last decades of the twentieth century. Opportunities are established in response to the anthropic aggression of any nature over the quality of the environment with direct influence on people's health. The world consumer is ready to pay in this way for his/her health and life expectancy. In turn, the chronically sub-paid agricultural producer/farmer, with his work and efforts, sees organic farming as an opportunity to increase his income. Supported by the media, especially the press, organic farming is becoming more or less successful and an object of political choice.*

**Key words:** organic agriculture/farming, definitions, historical background, politics, principles

### INTRODUCTION

Organic agriculture/farming, until recently a niche version, tends to become if not dominant, at least competitive. The historical circumstances (“quickly ahead”) that have led to this phase are as numerous as difficult to explain; by simplifying it to the extreme, we could say that at least two historical circumstances largely explain this evolution. They come from two directions - the consumer is increasingly unhappy with what is given to him as food, starting from vegetables that have not seen the soil, with cheese that did not see the milk with chickens infused with the syringe in relation to which the soy salami could be considered a real delicacy. The consumer is concerned not only with quality (lack of taste, appearance) but also with the fact that the intensive, productive agriculture uses a lot of toxic substances that endanger his health. On the other hand, the farmer perceiving the "demand" is increasing the "offer" of ecological/organic products, taking care to raise the price, the additional costs and to

earn more as the market economy is prone to maximizing the profit.

This material shows the evolution of organic agriculture in time and space with a focus on Romania's case.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials used are partly bibliographical but also based on our own research, with special reference to Romania and especially Dobrogea/Dobrudja, the geographic area where the authorities are operating. Some of the bibliographic sources come from the International Colloquium “Biological agriculture and its perspectives”, which took place between November the 30th and December the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1989 in Belgium under the high patronage of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Belgium. As far as the research method is concerned, this is specific to the techniques of economic research: collection and selection of the material, processing, comparisons, synthesis, conclusions and proposals, if any.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Origins and definitions

Philosopher R. Steiner is considered the precursor of biological agriculture. In 1924, he laid the foundation for biodynamics by proposing an agriculture adaptable to the requirements of living organisms and integrating only four main components of the biosphere: soil, plant, animal and man. In his turn, A. Howard predicts a traditional farming system with high labour input and cheap technology.

In 1975 the Japanese Fukuoka suggested a non-mechanical farming system, without fertilizers and phyto-pharmaceuticals. Similar farming systems have been developed in England and France. Also in France, the "Nature and Progress" Association, with concerns in the fields of ecology, agriculture, food, and organic farming, opposes agricultural productivity and its consequences. Among the new definitions, we refer to that provided in the EU "Codex Alimentarius", according to which the organic farm is a plant and animal production management system that promotes the use of preference practices based on internal resources. According to EU Regulation no. 2092/1991 and its subsequent amendments, the notions of biological (France, Italy, Portugal, Greece, the Netherlands), ecological (Germany, Spain, Denmark, Romania), organic (England) farming are used interchangeably.

Regarding the origin of organic farming, it seems that this is much older and its location could be even in the Mountains of Orastia in Romania where our ancestors, the Dacians built their capital city Sarmizegetusa not on high lands hard to reach and to conquer, but in a sort of glade 1,200 m height, where the bio-productivity of the meadows ensured their survival in times of restraint [9].

### Principles (characteristics) of organic (biological) agriculture

At the risk of being either dogmatic or incomplete due to numerous schools of biological agriculture, it is admitted that it defines a form of management based on the permanent restoration of organic soil,

allowing the maintenance of the biosphere balance due to a specific cultural technique [2, 7].

Hence, two objectives:

- pollution reduction by excluding the use of pesticides and soluble fertilizers;
- fertility heritage preservation and even enrichment by enriching the soil with organic matter.

Regarding the two objectives, the biological farming techniques in plants production are: fertilization, soil works, crop rotation, crop maintenance, disease and pest control. For each of these techniques, the author offers the list of products obtained on the farm or outside it, as well as rules to follow or use. [2]

In connection with the control and certification of biological agricultural products, A. Roig considers that this control is necessary across all links of the inter sectorial chain of which the most important are:

- Producers of fertilizers and pesticides;
- Farmers who obtain primary agricultural and animal products;
- processing industry;
- the distribution network.

The same author [13] identifies two systems:

*(i)The preferential system* according to which all interested enterprises from fertilizer manufacturers, farmers, to transporters, distributors are members of a single professional organization.

*(ii)The interdependent system* whereby the members of a professional organization can supply themselves and deliver upstream, through companies adhering to one or more member enterprises of one or more member enterprises or of one or more professional organizations.

### Organic farming as separate technology

Recently, the conditions from country to country both in terms of the technological development and exploitation structures, technological systems or even agricultural systems have diversified a lot. We mainly distinguish:

- the precision agriculture characteristic to the countries with developed agriculture, but also to a growing portion of Romania,

represented by the big national and transnational commercial firms;

- rational agriculture that seeks to have the least impact on the environment, without affecting the economic efficiency;

- traditional conservative peasant agriculture with a minimum of industrial inputs, characteristic to the still very large subsistence farms in Romania;

- integrated agriculture that particularly aims at improving fertility of soils combined with technological diversification;

- imprecisely defined multifunctional agriculture, considered as a perspective one;

- biological farming (organic or ecological) based on an agricultural system that exploits natural resources so as to rebuild the soil, which uses rational agricultural techniques, multiannual cropping, the reduction and elimination of chemicals harmful to humans and animals [16].

#### **Evolution in time and space of organic farming.**

Due to certain advantages such as the positive impact on the environment as a whole positive trend of demand for organic products on the one hand and also the often confirmed hope for a better gain for the agricultural producer *converted* to the ecological system have resulted in the rapid expansion of organic farming worldwide and in Europe as well as in Romania. In our country year 2017 was registered 8,434 ecologic operators and ecologic agriculture was practiced on 258,471 hectares [10].

It also benefited from the existence of extensive spaces in which pollutants for ecological agriculture such as chemical fertilizers or insect fungicides of synthesis were applied in small quantities, thus making the conversion to it easier. This is the case for Australia, and in Europe, Romania is one of these cases. On a global level, the areas cultivated in the organic system were more than 17 million ha in more than 120 countries. In the Far East, the largest areas are found in Australia and New Zealand, followed by South America with about 568 million ha, in North America around 1.5 mil ha, in Asia 736 mil / ha, in Africa over 435 m

ha, in Europe 6.3 million ha of which only in Italy over 1 million ha [4].

In Romania, before 1990, there was no talk about organic farming. However, the environmental concerns were at least theoretically present in the scientific world. Researchers at the Central Institute of Biology, the Association of Scientists, affiliated or not to the Ecology Commission carried out numerous studies on ecology issues.

For example, at the 4th Ecology Conference in Piatra Neamt in 1989, of the nearly 250 presentations distributed in 6 panels, over 90% had ecological problems as topics. A. Lup participated in this Conference with a presentation related to the irrigation of crops with saline waste water from the seaside spa establishments. The wide range of the ecological movement is proven by the XXXII volumes of Piatra Neamt conferences [6].

In Romania, in 2013 the area occupied by organic crops increased from 17438 ha to 754,000 ha, i.e. over 43 times [6].

Many areas are in the Danube Delta, which has the advantage of enjoying a biosphere reserve status with restrictions as regards the use of synthetic chemicals. It is worth mentioning that in Constanta County, in 1990, based on Law 36/1990 was founded one of the first associations that has ecologically produced since 2000 not only foodstuff but also medicinal plants. An exhibition of Stepa Farm from Stupina village, Constanta county, was visited by Gheorghe Flutur, the Minister of Agriculture at that regarding the economic efficiency of organic products, an interesting and convincing study was conducted by the Research Institute for Agrarian Economy and Rural Development of the Academy of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences, in which a comparison is made between a number of 12 vegetable products cultivated in a conventional and ecological system [8].



Fig.1. Minister of agriculture's visit  
Source: Archive of Stepa farm.

### Stepa's Exhibition

Based on the findings of the study, we note that:

- in an organic system, more manual labor and fewer inputs are used, some expensive ones being available in small quantities on the market or even absent.
- production per area unit is lower but is compensated by higher sales prices than those of the conventional products. However, it seems that the profitability of organic products is largely ensured by subsidies, not like in the case of conventional products [15].

### Organic farming and the media

Before 1990, environmentalists only acted in scientific meetings, while after 1990, it was the turn of the press in which not only journalists like Buica, Dragusanu or Papadiuc [3, 5, 12] but also personalities such as: N. Stefan the first minister of agriculture after the conversion of Romania to the market economy or the eminent professor O. Parpala (a believer in communism) were alongside the new ecological agriculture that would catch up soon [12, 14].

### Organic agriculture and politics

In Romania, like in other countries, the ecological movement so justifiable as a reaction to a polluted world in all sorts could not escape politics. It has to do with a lot of votes – “Let’s found a party”. On this issue, the newspaper “Coditianul” of August the 9<sup>th</sup>, 2002 published on a double A3 page a Multimedia analysis [1].

It seems, however, that as the volume of speech is growing, the deterioration of the environment is advancing (at the same pace).

## CONCLUSIONS

The history of organic farming is as old as the

methods by which the expanding human species has used the resources of the environment for a long time to secure its *land for food* and later on for the sake of getting rich. The organic farming recommended by enlightened minds could ensure the sustainability of the environment and of the human species. Regulatory efforts to preserve and to exploit natural resources rationally need to be appreciated. Given that more than half of the world’s population is undernourished and underutilized, the extra work effort required by organic farming would not be a problem, but the gaps exist, i.e. the gaps between West and East, North and South. We also ask ourselves the question: Does globalization save ecology? This could be done if it were to be translated into deeds.

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