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## ANALYSIS OF THE POSSIBILITY FOR ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING IN ALBANIA

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**Abstract** — Over the past few years organic products have witnessed a massive development both in terms of crop adaptability practices and in the applied norms as well as in the assessment on the consumer's side. The latter has been well placed to gain a well-defined identity in the possible scenarios of development and integration of the agricultural sector into the regional economy and beyond.

In several instances, the increase in production might attest to the successful implementation of a certification program of the areas of land long organic by nature rather than the reversal of the agricultural system. It is the case of Albania that might be able to adopt the certification procedures for the recognition of organic products in order to attain or better boost the economic worthiness of production.

One of the critical points that presents themselves in the Albanian organic agriculture has been depicted from the inadequacy of the evaluation of the products. The operating lack of the commercialization chain, the missing integration of the supply chain and the weak links among manufacturers, processors/exporters and consumers make the Albanian producers face an ever-decreasing profit once they return to organic products. On the other hand this is going to favour traders and exporters who stand to gain more in terms of the margin of profit.

The existing organic agricultural systems are characterized by small-sized and fragmented structures, far from being organized in groups and not integrated into the supply chain. Thus, the establishment of the ever-increasing fully-operating forms capable of permitting a concentration of supply is assuming notes of urgency along with the provision of farmers with a contractual power.

**Key words:** Albanian agriculture, organic farm, SWOT analysis, premium price.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Albania has been and continues to be a typically “agrarian” country, in which over 50% of the population lives and works in rural areas, and which has as its major activity the agricultural sector, in which roughly 75-80% of work days are spent on farms. On the other hand, we figure as a country which exports 450-500 million Euros worth of agricultural and food products. This amount with 2008 in mind turns out to be approximately in the region of 500 million Euros (MAFCP, 2008). Every year roughly 25-30% of the food needs are imported. According to MAFCP, (2008), the imports in agricultural and food products have been 10 times as high as the exports. Thus, Albania is classified under the group of “structurally importing” countries or, in other words, a group of countries which are considered to be the most vulnerable and the most exposed to the current situation and the perspective of price increases and the various turbulences of the international agrarian markets.

Although Albania is an agrarian country where agriculture accounts for roughly 22-23% of the GDP, yet the subsidy it gets from the state budget and other public financing is 15:20 times smaller. During the transition period the budgets targeting agriculture were anywhere between 0.5-1.5 of the GDP, at a time when the largest part of them was geared towards the operational expenses for salary and additions on salaries rather than for direct investments.

The average farm size is approximately 1.2 ha per household (MAFCP, 2008), at a time when that one also appears to be fragmented into some 1.8-3 million strips of land. Out of a total of 22-23% of the impoverished population or extremely poor strata, 99% dwells in rural areas. So it’s logical for such poverty to be dubbed “rural poverty”.

The key solution prescribed for the farms has been provided by foreign-funded projects and other major contributions from many donors out there. These contributions have indisputably gone into agriculture. Yet the private investments coming from within the country in this sector have been negligent. To prove this, suffice it for us to refer to the credit index percentage for agriculture and other rural areas as compared to other sectors. Only 1-1.2 % of the bank credits in total have been given to the agricultural sector over the past two years, while the service sector (including trade, hotels and other catering services) has had credits up to 38% and construction at 20-21%.

The structural policies have become indispensable for Albania, when this is seen within the context of supply concentration in the internal production process, or the enormous allocation of financing and investment, and the rapid modernization of agricultural and rural space. In this context, a very meaningful element of these policies is the organic agriculture and its contribution to be given to the Albanian agriculture yet (Leksinaj *et al.*, 2009).

## **1. ORGANIC FARMING IN ALBANIA**

### **1.1. Structure of organic farms in Albania**

The organic agriculture in Albania is closely associated with the establishment of the Organic Agriculture Association (OAA) in 1997 in Tirana with the support of the international donors. From December 1998 onwards OAA proves to be an associated member of IFOAM. Over the 4 first years small projects have been executed, which have contributed to the increase and availability of information on organic farming. In this context a role has been played by international organizations such as Avalon, USAID, GTZ which have carried out several projects by running promotion activities. In 2001 the SASA project (Sustainable Agricultural Support in Albania) was funded by the Swiss Cooperation for Development (SDC) while SECO was implemented by FiBL.

Other such organizations as Avalon, USAID and GTZ have also proposed a number of other projects which have allowed for the realization of other promotional activities.

Initially the Organic Agriculture Association was carrying out the functions of the farmers’ association which had adapted the organic method of cultivation, assistance and technical counselling, along with the control and certification of the organic farming. Afterwards seeing the existence of many roles for just a single association, with the risk becoming imminent from the emergence of conflict a interests, in 2006 the Organic Agriculture Association

assumes the administration of the farmers' association; *BioAdra* is established which deals in providing technical counselling, as well as *Albinspekt* that will cover the functioning of certification of organic produce.

Only in January 2009 was the Private standard of Bioadria approved for organic farming with *Albinspekt*, upon national accreditation, recognized even by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Protection of Consumers, (MAFPC), which is functioning in full conformity with the Albanian law 9199, dated 26.02.2004 on "Production, processing, certification and marketing of "Bio" products. With such recognition being granted *Albinspekt* as the only domestic certifying body in the country's capable of getting for its operators subsidies given by the state to the organic agricultural sector. The exported products will have to be certified by a foreign organization.

In close reference to the recent years it is worthwhile to underline the subsidies in the organic agricultural sector. In 2009, as was the case in 2008, the Albanian government offered a scheme for subsidies for organic agriculture, a scheme which is defined in the Decision of the Council of Ministers, no. 18, dated 7.1. 2009 on "Defining basic criteria of sectors that will be supported, along with the measures of benefits from the Agricultural Program Fund and Rural Development" as well as on the respective ordinances of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Protection of Consumers and the Ministry of Economy. In this Decision of the Council of Ministers subsidies have been set out to operators for the certification of organic products from the cultivated plants, including:

- for products targeting internal markets, not less than 50 % of costs, but not larger than 20.000 leks/farms.

-for products intended for export, 50% of the costs of certification, but no more than 70.000 leks/farm/year;

The organic certified operators including those who intend to implement this production method in 2009, should apply to the Directorate of Agriculture in districts to get hold of such subsidies. The certification from *Albinspekt* is recognized for such a subsidy scheme.

## **2. THE PERSPECTIVES OF ORGANIC PRODUCTION IN ALBANIA**

It is reasonable to argue that in Albania, as in other countries, are proper conditions for the distribution and commercialization of organic products. This potential should be exploited to the advantage of the future perspective of the development of organic agriculture (Leksinaj, 2007). By acting in such a manner we would most likely observe an increase in the export of agricultural products towards the EU countries, taking into account the current problems and the costly certification.

According to the methodology of qualitative analysis the role of the interviews with privileged witnesses is that of one which embraces the verification and integration of information that has come from statistical data. Such an analysis, which combines both a structural and dynamic-forecasting feature, is concerned with the economic, social and demographic aspects, not to mention the natural implications arising from the local developments, seen from the urban and territorial perspectives. In Table 1 the situation of the organic potential farms was described by applying a SWOT analysis.

The main requirement for identification of "witnesses" or "experts" has been their ability to recognize the territory and the local reality; they might also be mouthpieces of specific interests (which in fact several of them are), even though they appear to be experts representing many more general interests. The information obtained via the interviews has been formulated in a general fashion. Experts have brought in specific evaluations, which are related to the sector or areas where they have been practicing. Only in the final evaluation stage has a coherent and general tableau of results been set up in the form of the SWOT analysis.

*Table 1 - SWOT analysis*

| <b>Strong points</b>   | <b>Weak points</b>  |
|--|---|
| Full integration possibilities into supply chain                       | Small-sized farms   |
| Low cost of labor force  | Lack of a system of standard quality control              |
| Favorable environmental conditions                                     | Difficulties in identification of clients                 |
| Organizational powers  | Difficulties in identification of suitable trade networks |
| Bigger opportunities from European markets                             | Difficulties in supply segment                            |
| Potential leadership in the internal markets                           | Lack of a price policy                                    |
| Availability in innovations  | Packaging and other non-suitable promotional instruments  |
| Household traditions   | Difficulties in keeping accounting data                   |
| <b>Threats</b>   | <b>Possibilities</b>                                      |
| A poorly defined snapshot of Albania as a producer of organic products | Demand on the rise  |
| Barriers in exports owing to certification                             | Likely synergies among farmers                            |
| Competition among reputed farms  | Availability in the market spaces                         |
| Technological viability  | Benefits in the market                                    |
| Lack of well-defined and clear internal reference norms                | Differentiation in prices                                 |
| Trade agreements   | Availability of a technical assistance service            |

*Source: Direct processing work.*

The weak and the strong points for the farms along with the possibilities and threats of the “organic” market which have come to the fore in the environmental analysis have been selected and presented with the view of having a summary of issues that would help solve the implementation of productive strategies and marketing. The variables under consideration are the fruit of the joint work of authors and experts in the administration of farms. What seems straightforward to notice is the existence of the general rules in favour of the objective “*the attainment of a premium price from the organic products in the market, particularly in the European one*” (Leksinaj et al. 2009).

## CONCLUSIONS

The perspectives of the contribution to organic agriculture, aside from the market aspects, have to be seen in their broader sense. It should be argued that the creation of the organic agriculture might contribute to the conservation of the traditional customs and practices. The possibility of using a higher premium than labour might encourage the population to deal in agriculture for much longer.

Even the environmental aspect constitutes yet another determining factor to the development of organic agriculture. The agricultural activities have a significant impact on the structure, composition and quality of territory by provoking degradation and impoverishment of the natural resources. The control over the utilization of the synthesis substances and other appropriate production techniques usher benefits in both the territory and society, whose effects should work to keep the soils in good shape, maintaining biodiversity and the sustainable development of rural areas.

The organic agriculture has proven that it is able to provide efficient possibilities on diversification and penetration into the market, at a time when reference is being made to both marginal and less developed areas. These possibilities do guarantee a satisfactory return for farmers and retain a satisfactory use of the natural resources. We recommend a series of interventions in the integrated organic system to occur over an efficient action plan at the national level that is primarily intended:

- to satisfy and make the normative framework on the sector much easier to be implemented;
- to promote organic agriculture at all levels;
- to cooperate with other links in the supply chain at the start and end of the production cycle, by improving the availability of inputs, by promoting processing and the positioning of products in the market;
- to support formation, research and extension

- to develop the organic product markets through a consolidation of the exports, as well as a fair share of attention to the typology of the potential customers in the food market (urban populations with high incomes, tourists that appreciate rural wealth and the nature of the country).

In this context the organic agriculture enters into a bond with the programs of territorial development and the ecological conservation of the landscapes by justifying any type of oriented support by means of measures and specific interventions in the context of the environment policies. The presence of such policies constitutes one of the developments of a connection between policies of territory conservation and agriculture in the strategic activities of the development program of agriculture, programs where the environmental policies, tourism and organic agriculture constitute the entirety of a sustainable solution and an evaluation of food products, in rural development and the protection of territory.

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