Organic agriculture in Poland

Organic agriculture in Poland before the EU accession

The first inspection of organic farms in Poland was carried out in 1990 on the basis of “Organic agriculture criteria of EKOLAND Association”, elaborated according to the guidelines of International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). As a result of the inspection carried out by Control Committee inspectors, on the basis of their reports, the Certification Committee issued 29 certificates for organic farms. Since that time we have observed a continuous development of organic agriculture, with various growth rates in different periods, depending on the development of know-how, market conditions and subsidies until 2005, when 7 182 Polish farms with the total Utilised Agriculture area of 159 709 ha were subject to control, including 1683 with the certificate and 99 certificated processing plants. Estimated number of organic farm in 2006 is about 9 500 with a total area of over 200 000 ha. There are expectations that the number of organic farms will grow in 2007 to 12 000.

Before Poland’s accession to the European Union, the Act on Organic Agriculture of 16 March 2001 was in force (Official Journal of Laws No. 38 of 2 May 2001). The Act entered into force on 3 November 2001. According to the requirements laid down by the Act, farms should be located in the area where the permissible concentration levels for air, soil and water pollutants are not exceeded, and a farm can be considered as organic provided that it is run entirely according to this method (it was inadmissible to pursue organic and conventional production simultaneously in one farm). During works on the Act the Council Regulation 2092/91 has been used to a large extent, especially in the part on animal production.

Implementation of the Council Regulation on organic agriculture after 1 May 2004

On 1 May 2004 the Act on Organic Agriculture became invalid and the new Act on Organic Agriculture of 20 April 2004 entered into force (Official Journal of Laws No. 93, item 898). The Act sets out the tasks and scope of competence for certifying bodies and institutions in the organic agriculture system and brings into force the following regulations of the Community Law:

- Commission Regulation (EC) No 1452/2003 of 14 August 2003 maintaining the derogation provided for in Article 6(3)(a) of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 with regard to certain species of seed and vegetative propagating material [...]

Article 3 of the Act specifies basic levels of the control and certification system for organic agriculture

1. the minister of agriculture - authorises the certification bodies accredited for organic agriculture, according to the Polish Standard PN-EN 45011 „General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems” to carry out inspections and issue and withdraw certificates confirming that unprocessed agricultural products as well as products derived from them were produced or processed in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 2092/91,
2. Agricultural and Food Quality Inspection (IJHAR-S) exercises supervision over certification bodies, receives applications of producers who start operation in organic agriculture, authorises imports of organic agricultural products from the third countries and inspects them, collects and stores information on the producers and makes it available to the entities interested in it.
3. Certification bodies - carry out inspections and issue and withdraw conformity certificates. At present there are 6 operating certification bodies.

Moreover, the following institutions carry out other important tasks in the scope of organic agriculture:

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- State Plant Health and Seed Inspection Service issues permissions (in form of decisions) to use the material not complying with the requirements laid down in regulation (EC) 2092/91 in organic agriculture,
- Plant Protection Institute in Poznań qualifies plant protection products to be used in organic agriculture and maintains lists of these products (Official Journal of Laws No. 164, item 1719),
- Institute of Soil Science and Plant Cultivation in Puławy qualifies fertilisers and soil conditioners to be used in organic agriculture and maintains lists of these fertilisers and soil conditioners (Official Journal of Laws No. 164, item 1720),
- Stations for Soil Analysis pay subsidies to the inspection costs for farmers who comply with the requirements laid down in Regulation (EC) 2092/91 (Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development dated 15 April 2004, (Official Journal of Laws No. 72, item 655),
- Polish Centre for Accreditation accredits certification bodies for organic agriculture.

Major changes in the organic agriculture after Poland’s EU accession:
- implementation of control system compliant with Council Regulation (EC) No 2092/91,
- certification system approved by the European Commission, and Polish certificates approved by the recipients of Polish products in all 27 EU member states,
- possibility to indicate organic products with the “Organic Agriculture” logo subject to Regulation (EC) 746 of 22 April 2004.
- subsidies to the areas of organic cultivation in the scope of agri-environmental programmes doubled in relation to subsidies from the Polish budget before the EU accession.
- considerably greater workload for farmers, related to keeping records, not only due to duty resulting from regulation on organic agriculture, but also from the regulation 1257/99 on supporting rural development.

The year 2004 was the first, difficult year due to implementation of the new system (implementation of the new regulation was not so difficult, since the farmers had already known and “felt” the organic production methods). Relations between the institutions of control, certification and financial support system will be worked out and improved, farmers will get more information, expert consultancy and subsidies; the number of organic farms will increase, resulting in a wider offer of their products, very much expected by the interested consumers, and Polish organic agriculture will reach the level of best examples from the EU member states.

Although Poland hasn’t decided the Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming, the 3-years information campaign started in November 2006 with a total budget of 3 mln Euro. We hope the effects of the campaign will bring an improvement of marketing of organic products. There are at the moment approximately 300 shops selling organic product all over the country. The problem of the farmers where to sell the products, whereas many imported organic products from Germany, Italy and all over the world are sold in Polish organic shops, should be solved by the development of processing and networking of trade companies and shops. The development of local market and the ecological and food safety awareness of the consumers is a guaranty for organic agriculture in the future, because we must take into consideration that the subsidy system in the frame of Common Agriculture Policy could be changed in the future. Having in mind the development of organic agriculture in last 30 years all entities interested in organic agriculture hope that the future will be better than the past.