

ORGANIC FARMING IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

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Along with structural changes, new farming practices have developed in the Baltic countries during the last several years. Ideas of organic farming were introduced in the very end of the 1980s. Today in Latvia about 200 farmers with a total area of 1080 ha have converted their farms to organic or biodynamic farms, and the first ecological labels were established; in Estonia there are 119 ecological farms;¹ in Lithuania organic farmers control 1117 ha of land.²

The aim of this paper is to analyse the social aspects of development of organic farming and to evaluate the future prospects of such farming practices. First, the understanding of the concept of organic farming in the Baltic countries is analysed and the place of organic farming among other practices alternative to conventional agriculture is looked upon. Secondly, connections between organic farming and the agro-food chain are viewed. Thirdly, the future prospects of the development of organic farming in a wider context of the structural changes of agriculture in the Baltic states are discussed.

The term "organic farming" is used as synonym to organic as well as "biodynamic farming." This does not ignore some conceptual and technological differences between these two agricultural practices, but focuses on their common objectives and common problems in marketing their products. In Latvia, the general term "biological farming" is used as a synonym to organic and biodynamic farming, and in Estonia, the term "ecological farming" is applied.

Organic farming as a sustainable agricultural practice

The concept of "style of farming," proposed by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg³ is one of the most adequate for the needs of situation analysis of organic farming in the Baltic countries. It allows the conceptualisation of the social construction of the specific ways in which the process of production is organised in farms as well as how the farm develops through time. Style of farming is defined as "the responses adopted by farmers to technology and the markets..."

First, farming styles represent a specific unity of farming discourse and practice, a specific unity of mental and manual labour. Second, farming styles entail a specific structuring of the labour process, of the organisation of time and space as concrete dimensions, and consequently, farming styles result in a particular organisation of the process of production - including a wide range of technical, economic and social interrelations - and in a particular structuring of the development process at farm development level. Third, styles of farming represent specific connections between economic, social, political, and ecological dimensions.³

The concept of "farming styles" concentrating on farmers' orientation towards markets and technologies, as structural principles, allows us to look at biological farming as a sustainable agricultural practice, based on the appropriate system of farmers' value orientations. This concept helps to analyse the connections between organic farming and the agro-food chain - a network of social relations and institutions structuring the process of food production and consumption, to see organic farming in a wider context of the structural changes of agriculture in the Baltic countries.

This paper is based on a study carried out in 1994-1996. The main sources of information are statistics, legislative documents and interviews with agricultural experts, farmers, officers of the ministry of agriculture (MA) and ministry of environment and regional development (MERD).

One of the most widely quoted definitions of sustainable development is from the report of the Brundtland Commission: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."⁴ Speaking about sustainability in agriculture, the main focus is on environmental protection, conservation of non-renewable resources and maintenance of biological diversity, taking in account also social concerns for the rural population. Bio-dynamic - based on the concept of "anthroposophy" developed by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner - organic and similar agricultural practices could be regarded as sustainable. N.H. Lampkin defines organic/biological farming as "an approach to agriculture where the aim is to create integrated, humane, environmentally and economically sustainable agricultural production systems which maximise reliance on farm-derived renewable resources and the management of ecological and biological processes and interactions, so as to provide acceptable levels of crop, livestock and human nutrition, protection from pests and

diseases, and an appropriate return to the human and other resources employed.

The main aim of organic farming is to produce healthy, high quality food without usage of herbicides and artificial fertilisers under control of certified technologies. Organic fertilisers, systems of crop rotation and specific agro-technologies are used instead of chemicals to control weeds and pests and to restore soil fertility. The key elements of organic agriculture are:

- to protect the long-term fertility of soils by maintaining organic matter levels
- to provide crop nutrients indirectly by using the action of soil micro-organisms
- nitrogen self-sufficiency through the use of legumes and biological nitrogen fixation, as well as effective recycling of organic materials including crop residues and livestock wastes
- weed, disease and pest control by crop rotation, natural predators, diversity, organic manuring, resistant varieties and limited thermal, biological and chemical intervention
- the extensive management of livestock
- careful attention to the impact of the farming system on the wider environment and the conservation of wildlife and natural habitats⁵

Conventional and organic agriculture represent also two different systems of farmers' attitudes that can be illustrated by conventional and alternative agricultural paradigms introduced by C.E. Beus and R.E. Dunlap.⁶

Organic farming in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

Concerning technology, the situation is very much alike in all three Baltic states. According to the experts' evaluation⁷ in Latvia, approximately 20% of agricultural producers - farmers, share-holding companies and agrofirms - use intensive technologies. These practices include intensive soil cultivation and the usage of large amounts of agrochemicals. Agro-ecologically wrong and improperly applied, these technologies lead to the degradation of soil ecosystems, environmental pollution with pesticide residuals and heavy metals, and to the decrease of biological diversity.

The majority of farms - nearly 80% - use extensive agricultural practices characterised by unproductive land-use resulting in weedy fields, low yields and decrease of soil fertility. Extensive agriculture is economically and ecologically ineffective. A small number of farmers - about 0.3% - today have accepted organic farming practices. Ideas of integrated farming - low-input sustainable farming agriculture (LISA) - seeking a compromise between intensive conventional and organic approaches, have also been introduced in Latvia. The Environmental/Agricultural Project Balticum 1994, launched by the Danish Agricultural Advisory Centre and supported by the Latvia Agricultural Advisory Centre, envisaged to encourage a development of agricultural production based on the principles of integrated agriculture in Latvia.⁸ Principles of integrated farming are acceptable for the majority of agricultural researchers brought up on the traditions of conventional agriculture. During the First Congress of the Latvian Association of Organisations of Biological Farming they expressed their view concerning biological farming and its future prospects in Latvia in the Report of the Scientific Section.⁹ In the future, integrated farming should be the leading approach in agricultural production.

Organic farmers' organisations

Ideas of organic farming were introduced in Latvia at the very end of the 1980s when the development of private farming began. In 1989, the Estonian Biodynamical Association was established. In Lithuania, the implementation of ideas of organic farming is a part of the Lithuanian karst zone management plan, launched in 1993. The very first organic farmers in the Baltic states were rather optimistic about the opportunities to conquer the Western-European markets with their eco-products. Many of them soon lost their optimism. Regardless of that, the first organisations uniting organic farmers were founded.

The Estonian Biodynamical Association (EBA), uniting about 160 members, was established in 1989. The main activities of the EBA are: organisation of training courses for farmers; technical and financial help for farmers; publishing a leaflet and informative materials on ecological farming; responsibility for inspection and certification of ecological products. Estonian organic farmers have accepted two labels for their ecological products: ÖKO, the lower step, and Demeter, the higher step, valid only within Estonia.

The Latvia Society for Biological Agriculture (LSBA) was founded on September 18, 1993. Its leader, Imants Heinackis, is a researcher from the Latvia Institute of Agriculture. Activities of the LSBA are based on bio-dynamic agricultural practices and are aimed at production of agricultural products meeting the standards of the internationally accepted certificate Demeter. 18 farms have already received the rights to use the label Demeter, but 12 farms are in the process of conversion. The main activities of the LSBA are: organisation of training courses for farmers; scientific research of bio-dynamic practices; organisation of processing and marketing of bio-dynamic agricultural products; co-operation with international organisations of bio-dynamic farmers in Germany and Switzerland. LSBA member farms are found in Liepāja, Kuldīga, Saldus, Gulbene and Riga.

The Latvian Department of the OCIA has existed since 1993. Its leader is Skaidrite Albertina, the Head of the Rural Innovation Centre of the Latvia Agricultural Advisory Services. The activities of this organisation are based on the standards of the OCIA. This organisation unites 40

farms; 29 of them are in the process on conversion. These farms are situated in Ogre, Cesis, Riga and Tukums. Activities focus on the organisation of training courses for farmers and on co-operation with the inspectors of the OCIA from the USA.

On April 7, 1995, the Latvian Association of Organisations of Biological Agriculture (LAOBA) was founded. The main aims of this association are to promote the ideas of organic farming in Latvia and to support the common interest of the LSBA, the Latvian Department of the OCIA and other members. It is a national organisation uniting about 200 organic farmers all over the country. The total amount of land where biological farming practices are used is 1080ha.¹⁰ This association: provides co-operation among organisations of biological farmers and the state, particularly the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development (MERD) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MA); has elaborated demands for the system of a Latvian state standard and certificate for biological farming, for the label "Latvijas ekoprodukts" - Latvia ecoproducts - approved by the Latvian Board of Patents; organises farmers' training in biological farming practices and establishes contacts with international organisations of organic farmers.

Gaja is an organisation promoting bio-organic farming in Lithuania. Its main activities are farmers' education and training in the karst zone.

State support for organic farming

In Latvia and Estonia, there is no sufficient state support for the development of organic farming. In Estonia, the state support programme for ecological farming has been worked out. This programme analyses several main topics: demonstration farms; farm advice; credits; certification system; legislation.¹

In Latvia, co-operation between the Ministries of Environment and Regional Development (MERD), Agriculture (MA) and Economics (ME) is going on in the matter concerning organic agriculture, but only the MERD has provided permanent support. The main activities of the MERD in issues of organic farming are:

- support for the ECAT Environment Centre in the gathering and popularisation of information about organic farming
- establishing, in 1994, a special dealing with organic farming
- co-operation with international organic farming organisations such as the AVALON Foundation
- in co-operation with the MA, the establishment of special prizes for environmentally friendly farms, including organic farms, and the organisation and financial support of the foundation congress of the Latvian Association of Organisations of Biological Farming
- the concept of state support for biological farming is included in the environmental policy plan and action programme for environmental protection
- the development, in 1995, together with the Latvian Association of Organisation of Biological Farming, of a draft report on Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on the Certification of products of Biological Agriculture
- supporting the ME to accept the labels Demeter and OCIA as legal in the territory of Latvia September 1, 1995
- the formation of the Board of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, in co-operation with the MA, November 16, 1995

In Lithuania, the situation is different. The very ideas of development of organic farming were initiated by the state as a part of the karst zone programme approved by the Lithuanian government in 1992. Farmers were assisted in preparing farming models and business plans. A special fund renders assistance to all farms willing to start organic farming. The budget for the karst programme is allotted through the National Agriculture Development Programme and is transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture.² In 1995 the Baltic Forum was founded to co-ordinate the development of organic agriculture in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Institutions and organisations

Several other institutions and organisations are closely linked with the development of organic farming in the Baltic countries. In Estonia, advisory work for organic farming has been done with the help of the Finnish Biodynamical Association and the Swedish Rural Development Group.¹

In Latvia, Agricultural Advisory Services have the Department of Environmental Protection and Regional Development at the Latvia Agricultural Advisory Centre which takes part in the popularisation of biological farming along with other responsibilities: advice for farmers in questions of environmental protection, rural development and rural tourism. The LAAS has widely developed the network of advisor co-ordinators on issues of biological farming and environmental protection all over the country.

Another unit of the LAAS connected with the issues of biological farming is the Rural Innovation Centre, founded in 1990 and led by S. Albertina. Support for biological farming is only one part of activities of the Rural Innovation Centre. The main concern is about rural development planning. Biological farming is regarded as one innovation in Latvia. Founded in 1990, it later became a part of the LAAS. The Latvia Agricultural University and other agricultural education and research institutions - research institutions, research stations, agricultural schools - are also closely linked with issues of biological agriculture. Researchers and professors are engaged in the research and popularisation of ideas and practices of biological farming on a voluntary basis.

Other organisations, such as Vides Aizsardzibas Klubs (VAK), ECAT and the "Renda" Centre for Sustainable Development should be mentioned. Their activities in the popularisation of biological farming and organic food play a significant role in the change of public opinion towards these issues.

In Lithuania, most of the educational activities are concentrated in the Joniskelis Agricultural School. Special training courses for farmers from the karst area were organised. Iowa State University along with the US Environmental Protection Agency Region VII and the Lithuanian Rural Sociology Association have studied farming practices in the karst area and have created farm management models for different karst zone groups.²

Farmers' attitudes towards organic farming

There is a strong relation between farmers' attitudes about environmental issues and their behaviour in choosing certain farming practices. At the present time in Estonia and Latvia, there are no economic incentives for farmers to choose environmentally safe farming practices, particularly organic farming.

A study of farmers' attitudes about environmental issues in agriculture in Estonia shows that farmers have environmentally friendly attitudes but they are not always able to act as they think. Farmers have few financial possibilities to invest in environmentally friendly agricultural technologies.¹¹

Table 1. Farmers' information (%)

Are you informed about environmentally-safe agricultural practices?	%
well informed	23.3
some information	50.8
not informed	16.9
difficult to say	9.0

Table 2. Future plans concerning biological farming (%)

If you had the possibility, would you use organic farming practices?	%
yes	45.8
no	8.2
difficult to say	46.0

Farmers' attitudes about environmental issues in agriculture in Latvia were analysed in a farmers questionnaire survey in November 1995.¹² The results are shown in tables 1 and 2. In general, farmers are informed about environmental regulations, some of them have even discussed these issues with neighbours, or contacted some organisations and institutions in connection with environmental problems. Farmers have a positive attitude concerning organic farming and some of them are positive about using organic farming practices in the future.¹² On the other hand, many of them are not informed about technologies of organic farming. For example, it is a common prejudice that the main difference between organic and conventional farming is in the use of agrochemicals, but some farmers do not understand the necessity to keep the balance of soil nutrients in plant production.

Experience of the development of organic farming in Lithuania shows that farmers begin to understand that they do not have a favourable future with traditional agriculture in the karst zone.²

Organic farming and the agro-food chain

Marketing of organic products in the Baltic countries

To evaluate the development of biological farming and its future prospects in the Baltic countries, it is necessary to analyse organic farming in the wider context of the whole agro-food chain - a network of social relations and institutions structuring the process of food production and consumption.

Successful sales of organic products are the most effective economic incentives to the further development of this agricultural practice. The experience of marketing and processing organic products in the Danish food market shows that organic farmers have adapted to the conditions of the conventional food market and conquered an important share in it. It has been a long process where several stages with different dominating actors can be distinguished.¹³

Farmers in post-socialist countries do not have marketing experience. During the soviet period, with the conditions of a centralised state planned economy, the main concern of agricultural producers in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was to produce as much as possible, regardless of production costs and quality of the products, for the needs of the whole USSR.

Organic products need special approaches in marketing to enter conventional food markets and to compete with products familiar to consumers for a long time. Organic farming offers a new concept of food and consumption, based on different values. Consumers may choose between highly-processed, nutrient-fortified conventional and minimally processed, naturally nutritious organic food. Nevertheless, some qualities, for example, appearance of these products, differ a lot from average products offered by conventional agriculture. At the first stage of development of organic farming, when amounts of products are small, farmers use their own distribution channels selling directly to consumers, in special stores or departments. They can control the entire process from producer to consumer. The circle of consumers is limited. Capacity of this market is limited, and sooner or later marketing problems will arise.

Since organic farming sets rather high quality standards for the products, the whole process of production should be certified to meet these standards. Production costs of course are higher than in conventional farms, and organic products should be more expensive to the consumer.

To sell these products successfully, organic producers should inform consumers about organic products, and consumers should be able to afford to pay more for them. In general, consumer attitude towards organic food in the Baltic countries is positive. Unfortunately, at the present time, the purchasing capacity of consumers is extremely low; therefore opportunities to sell organic products in the domestic market are limited.

One of the main problems in marketing organic products is that organic farms are few and dispersed all over the country. It creates additional difficulties in the marketing and processing of organic products and in the co-operation of organic farmers. The previous experience of collective farms during the soviet period has left a burden of prejudices against co-operation and farmers in the Baltic countries who are not willing to unite in co-operatives. In Lithuania partnerships are still important agricultural producers. Associations of organic farmers are not able to solve all the problems, and the main areas of their activities are oriented to the spreading of information.

In Latvia, the members of the LSBA have gained some positive experience of co-operation in selling organic products on Liepaja and Dobele where special shops have opened. In Lithuania, in October 1995, organic products fairs were held in the largest cities. Many organic farmers deliver their products directly to regular consumers - kindergartens, hospitals, schools, restaurants. Organic farmers want to control the whole process - from fields to consumer. At the present stage of development of the distribution system, it is an important guarantee not to lose organic products in the range of food products.

We also have to take into account that, in general, the food distribution system in the Baltic countries is poorly developed and is still in the process of change. For example, the traditional Western European supermarket chains do not exist in these countries. With the further advancement of the distribution system the opportunities for selling organic products will improve.

Demand for organic products is growing in Western European countries. The first organic farmers in the Baltic countries were oriented to the Western markets but this idea soon failed, because farmers were unable to meet the main needs of a highly developed distribution system including, delivery guarantees, and sufficient quantities and qualities of organic agricultural products. Farmers still have to learn the "ABCs" of marketing.

Processing of organic products

Regarding the ability of the processing industry in the Baltic countries to process organic products, the situation is similar. Often these products are processed together with conventional agricultural products. The structure of the food processing industry in the Baltic countries has been formed under the conditions of the state planned centralised economic system.

Today, many huge processing enterprises are in shortage of raw materials. Small family farms are unable to meet their demands. At the same time, farmers have problems selling their products - quantities are too small and production costs are too high.

Co-operation in the collection of primary products should be necessary as well as the reduction of production costs. Development of small local processing enterprises would be the best solution for several problems. In these enterprises, specific organic technologies could be used to produce high quality local speciality foods and new jobs in rural areas will be created.

Labels for organic agricultural products

One of the most important elements of marketing organic products is certification of the process of primary production. This scheme, inspired by the international organisations of organic agriculture, is elaborated and practised in many countries. Several labels marking ecoproducts are internationally known.

In Estonia there are two labels for ecological products: ÖKO, the lower step and Demeter, the higher step, valid only within Estonia. Latvian state standards and the label "Latvijas ekoprodukts," marking organic products, will help to solve many problems in marketing. Consumers will be able to recognise organic products and these labels will guarantee the organic origin of products.

The Ministry of Environment and Regional Development, in co-operation with the LSBA, have worked out a project for the regulation of primary production, processing and for the distribution of biological products based on the "law on protection of the rights of consumers." It is envisaged to introduce the label "Latvijas ekoprodukts" in the autumn of 1996. These regulations are harmonised with the main demands of the EEC regulations on organic production of agricultural products. The next step will be the recognition of international ecolabels meeting the demands of the Latvian state standard. Many Latvian farmers have already received the rights to mark their products with internationally approved ecolabels, such as Demeter and OCIA.

Another important task would be the popularisation of organic products. Consumers do not have enough information about the advantages of such products. Organic products should be made available to consumers at the same stores as conventional food products. Consumers should be able to make their own choices. Danish experience shows that expenses of organic product marketing research and development are rather high and state support is necessary.¹³ At present, in the Baltic countries, there is no state policy regarding the selling of organic products.

Future prospects for organic farming in the Baltic countries

Radical structural changes have been completed agriculturally in these countries during a relatively short period of time. Private farms have become the main agricultural producers in the Baltic countries. For example, in 1994, Latvian peasant farms and household plots produced 63% of the total agricultural output. Relatively small family farms using mostly the labour force of family members are the main agricultural producers. State farms produce 4.5% of the total agricultural output and form the basis for scientific research, plant selection and cattle-breeding. They could not be regarded as production-oriented enterprises. Collective farms - 22% of the agricultural output - are not able to play the leading role in agricultural production.¹⁴

This process of structural changes has been accompanied by considerable changes in agricultural technologies, motivation and attitudes, and in life-styles in general. The Baltic countries have experienced a considerable decrease of agricultural output during the last several years. Small family farms have serious technological and economic problems, and the majority of them use extensive technologies. Agricultural production is the main type of employment and source of income for a significant part of the population. For example, in Latvia about 30% of the population live in rural areas.¹⁴ A complex approach to the solution of issues of rural development is necessary in the Baltic countries. Alternatives to agricultural job and entrepreneurship opportunities should be created for rural inhabitants, along with further intensification and structural improvements in the agricultural sector.

Advantages of organic farming

Organic farming practices solve problems of environmental pollution in agriculture and take care of non-renewable resources. Organic farms maintain the natural landscape and traditional rural life-style and produce high quality products. Multi-functional organic farms can be run in areas where intensive farming is impossible. As a sustainable agricultural practice, organic farming is oriented to the maintenance of rural landscape historically traditional to the Baltic region's biological diversity. Organic farming could be regarded as one of the preconditions to the successful development of rural tourism. It will create new opportunities for employment in rural areas that are beneficial for rural development.

One of the most important results of organic farming is the production of healthy food. Produce does not contain residues of pesticides, heavy metals or other matter harmful to human health because organic farming and food processing technologies avoid mineral fertilisers, pesticides, artificial preservatives and other additives. Demand for these products is increasing in developed countries. Successful organic farming could give farmers from the Baltic states a chance to penetrate the European food market. In organic farms, technological processes are under strict control, executed through the system of certification, and organic products are marked with special labels. Organic farmers have different attitudes than conventional farmers and more responsibility concerning the environment.

Organic farming allows a balance of economic, environmental, social and ethnic concerns in rural development planning. Farming in these countries is not only a business, or a form of commodity production. It is an essential element of the ethnic identity and rural life-style. Due to the relatively low level of soil pollution with heavy metals, agrochemicals, and other pollutants in the Baltic states, the conversion to organic farming could be accomplished easier than in many Western European countries, where intensive agricultural production is dominant. Organic farming is among the advanced, environmentally friendly, sustainable technologies of future agricultural production.

Problems in further development of organic farming

Today, there is no sufficient state support for the development of organic farming in the Baltic countries. The Danish experience shows that state support has played the decisive role in the steady advancement of organic farming. The state subsidises conversion eases the marketing process by enacting rules of primary production, processing and distribution, inspired by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements, and covers expenses of research and development.¹³ As far as the Baltic countries are concerned, only in Lithuania have some steps been taken to facilitate the development of organic farming in environmentally sensitive areas.

Since gaining political independence in 1991, agricultural policy has been one of the issues of political discussions in the Baltic countries. For example, in Latvia, basic legislation on agricultural production is at the stage of preparation. Accordingly, there is no specific legislation on organic farming or on the sale of agricultural products. In general, there are some differences in agricultural strategies in the Baltic states, but their policy concerning organic farming is more or less similar.

The movement of organic farming in Estonia and Latvia is based on the enthusiasm of farmers themselves. However, they are unable to solve several essential problems for further development. These problems include adopting legislation, subsidising conversion and getting loans. Many interesting initiatives are exhausted, due to the lack of financial support. Only in Lithuania is some state assistance provided to farmers willing to start organic farming in the karst zone. The Baltic states today are unable to provide permanent financial assistance to organic farming.

State institutions still do not have sufficient information about organic farming and its importance for the future of the agricultural sector. Co-operation between different state institutions on the issues of organic farming is insufficient. Consumer purchasing is low and the majority of consumers cannot afford to pay more for organic agricultural products.

The local market for these products is limited. People in the Baltic countries today do not have an actual choice between conventional and organically grown products. Organic food is available only in limited amounts and range, in very few stores. The majority of environmentally friendly products is lost in the common distribution and processing system. Marketing problems, such as unattractive packaging and insufficient advertising, are common to the whole agricultural sector and also affect organic farming.

Farmers do not have sufficient information about the export opportunities of their ecological products. Research and education in the area of organic farming is still based on enthusiasm. Further research of the technological as well as social aspects of organic farming in the Baltic countries is a necessary precondition to the solution of many problems mentioned above.

Conclusion

Analysis of organic farming as a farming style helps to draw some conclusions about its development and future prospects in the Baltic countries. Organic farming as a sustainable agricultural practice offers the most radical solution to environmental problems in agriculture, by demanding rather strict obedience to technological requirements and, therefore, is acceptable to a relatively small number of farmers who are concerned about environmental problems.

Today, there are only about 200 biological farms in Latvia, approximately the same number in Lithuania and 119 biological farms in Estonia. Organic farmers are very active in forming volunteer groups and associations. In general, the activities of these associations are oriented towards the organisation of training courses for farmers in organic farming, establishing contacts with international organisations of organic farmers and other similar projects. Some of these associations have made successful efforts in the organisation of selling and processing organic agricultural products.

State support for the development of organic farming in the Baltic countries is insufficient. The basic legislation concerning issues of organic farming is still in the process of preparation. The main activities to support organic farmers' organisations and to popularise ideas of organic farming come from the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development in Latvia. In Lithuania, support activities are connected with the implementation of the karst zone management programme.

The support of organic farming from research and educational institutions is based on individual enthusiasm. Only the Latvia Agricultural Advisory Services has a network of advisors/co-ordinators all over the country who are able to give advice on issues of environmental protection and organic farming practices. Farmers' attitudes towards organic farming in the Baltic countries are positive in general but, due to poor financial conditions, farmers are unable to start conversion. Moreover, many farmers do not have sufficient knowledge about organic farming technologies.

Organic farmers have serious problems marketing their products. On the other hand, the purchasing capacity of the local population today is extremely low. The situation with the processing of organically grown products is also quite poor. These products are produced in amounts too small to organise separate processing procedures and they are often lost in the general stream of the food processing industry. Hopefully, ecolabelling will help to solve these problems and will boost the marketability of organically grown food.

A wider spreading of organic farming practices in the Baltic countries could be beneficial for the further advancement of the agricultural sector and rural development in general. It could produce high quality ecological products, maintain the traditional rural life-style and

landscape, and provide conditions for the development of ecotourism in the Baltic region.

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