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## IMPLEMENTED METHODS IN EXTENSION PRACTICE FOR NEW PRODUCERS/FARMERS IN ORGANIC PRODUCTION

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### Abstract

*Reorientation from conventional to organic and other controlled types of ecological production requires a more systematic approach and the multiple knowledge of different areas encompassed by these types of production. The introduction of organic production represents a multiphase process, where a producer must master technical, technological, economic, legal and ecological aspects of production. The need for services provided by an extensionist in most European countries represents a norm which significantly contributes to the increase of the number of certified producers. In our conditions, such an approach in extension practice has been initiated only recently. To be more precise, in the shape of their planned activities, the expert team of the "Tamiš" Institute, Pančevo has created a method of extension practice, which was used on the occasion of the introduction of organic production to producers.*

**Key words:** *method of extension practice, period of conversion, organic production, certificate, production technology*

### Introduction

To engage in agriculture has always been tied with a certain amount of knowledge and capital (8), and that stands as one of the basic preconditions in today's circumstances of market economy. In Serbia, in the period so far, the trainings and education of doing organic production have generally been executed through various international projects. The executed projects encompassed certain regions, circles and people (4). The result of this kind of engagement was the transfer of theoretical knowledge to a narrow circle of people, chiefly concerning general information on organic production, and less about technical, inspection and marketing information. In connection with the mentioned need for further education concerning practical

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knowledge about organic production, in late 2008, the expert team of the Research and Development Centre of the Institute "Tamiš" (14), through the activities of its extension service, began with active engagement for the purpose of promotion and spreading of organic production on the South Banat area.

The improvement of farm production as a goal of an extension process actually means the change of attitudes, ideas, and thus, the change of the ways farmers act. These changes are made possible as a farmer acquires new knowledge, technologies and skills that make it possible for them to solve problems in certain aspects of farm production. The task of an extensionist is to facilitate this process, so, as the basic mechanism of transferring necessary knowledge and skills, the extensionist uses certain methods of extension practice (3). The informing and education of producers, manufacturers and consumers about the production and advantages of organic products, their effect on health, as well as the building of the credibility in the system of certification, are necessary conditions for the development of a market of organic products in Serbia. Also, for the purpose of easier export of organic products from Serbia, it is necessary to adjust the legal regulation in the field of organic agricultural production to the regulations of the EU (1). The existing legal regulation does not allow certifying agencies to provide consulting services. Therefore, with their activities, extensionist contributes to the promotion and development of organic production.

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the importance of complementary implementation of extension practice methods on the occasion of the introduction of organic production to conventional producers.

### **Possible reasons for the introduction of organic production**

According to FAO data from 2009, the total organic production in the world is currently taking place on 32.2 million hectares, with a noticeable trend of the increase of the areas (14). In the world, there is currently 3.0% of soil reserved for organic production, which is present in this country with symbolic 0.3%. The tendency of growth in the world is 25.0% each year, whereas in this country, according to certain sources, as much as 80.0% of agricultural soil could be certified. Without a three year conversion, it would be possible to switch as much as 20.0% of soil to organic production (5).

According to the data of the Ministry of Agriculture, in 2009, the total area on which the methods of organic production were implemented amounted to 2,875ha, of which 488ha are registered as certified areas, while the other areas are in the period of conversion. Although the cultivable soil under organic production has grown by the annual rate of 20% in the past few years, its share in the total agricultural area is still low, given the natural potentials that Serbia has (source: The Quality Group of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Resources, 2010). Based on the elementary ecological principles – caution and prevention, as a part of multifunctional agriculture, organic production allows revitalization and various types of production, the development of family farms and a happier life for rural families. That is particularly

important in Serbia, where 56% of agricultural farms have less than 3.0 hectares of soil, and 54% of Serbia's population live in rural areas. (2). Multifunctional agriculture opens the road to development for small and medium family farms where economic and ecological results are conditioned by knowledge, the creation of the conditions for various sales of food and non-agricultural goods and services, with the respect for hygienic, sanitary and esthetic measures and the code of behavior.

One of the possible directions of the further development of organic production is also provided by the National Programme for Serbian Agriculture, which has been adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Resources for the period 2010-2013, in which this sort of production is classified as a programme aimed at the making of added value (11). In the Article 24 of the Regulation of Organization and Work of the Agricultural Extension Service of the Provincial Secretariat of Agriculture Forestry and Water Resources of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (9), it is indicated that The provision of expert advice is in connection with specific areas and demands on the part of producers, which are, inter alia, concerned with: organizational and other aspects of agricultural production; informing clients of measures of agrarian policy, subsidies, legal regulation; farm keeping, the making of business plans, the increase of incomes and the productivity and quality of production, the improvement of life standard and the raising of social and educational standards in rural areas, the conservation of environment, the association of producers, etc, by which is, in a certain way, included the extension practice at the introduction of organic production to producers.

As one of the goals of the National Action Plan of the development of organic production in Serbia, in the course of the following five years, an extension sector is planned, which would be easily accessible and market demand oriented extension sector, providing expert and contemporary support to producers, for the purpose of the development of organic production (10). In order to put the plan into practice, in the course of the year 2010 started the implementation of the project "The education of extensionists in the field of organic production", whose aim is the introduction of organic agricultural production to the system of expert extension services of Serbia (15, 16). The creation and implementation of the programme is, inter alia, participated by the expert team of the Research and Development Centre of the Institute "Tamiš", Pančevo, which have presented to the present extensionist their past engagement dealing with practical methods and techniques in organic plant production.

### **The method of extension practice on the occasion of the introduction of organic production to producers**

In order to present the possibility of doing organic production to producers in the best light, on the occasion of the introduction of organic production, the first step was the observation of critical points on a farm, caution and inclusion (not at any cost). In this engagement, the importance and seriousness of decision-making about the embankment on organic production. The facts were presented that in the first two years we have had the drop of crops and the increase of investments, as well as a

greater engagement in mastering the technology and getting familiar with the market. Having learnt the conditions on a farm, in the cases where the conditions were marked as positive for the inclusion in organic production, together with the producer, we visited every parcel that was supposed to enter the process of conversion, as well as the household in all. On the occasion of determining which type of production to take, we have taken into account the past experience of the producer, the knowledge, tradition and characteristics of the community. The recommendation was to start with smaller areas. We pointed out the existence of any sort of processing in the household as an advantage for the inclusion in organic production. In the environment where there is no organic production, it was leaned toward the forming of groups of three producers, which, informally associated, enter this type of production system. The goal of such an approach was that group-organized producers more quickly and easily reach a larger number of certified products in order to enter the market (12). Also, one of the directives for the inclusion in this production was that producers start with the production of organic seed (11). The fact that it is negotiated production speaking in favour of that, and also in contact with participants, the conclusion was reached that there had been a constant lack of certified organic seed. By the implementation of organic production methods, biodiversity is preserved and improved through the introduction, preservation and improvement of autochthonous and less present species and materials. This sort of approach requires incessant planning and multidisciplinary. We pointed out the Internet as a means of informing and advertising, and trained the producer for the making of a site before getting the product from the period of conversion.

The existence of demo-field by the methods of organic production on the demo-field of the Institute "Tamiš" is the foundation of our engagement, and is supposed to be of a long-term use for the research and development work, the performance of field experiments, experience gaining, the establishment of technology, and, based on that, the provision of recommendations (6).

As a result of this sort of approach in extension practice in the region of South Banat (7) in the period from the year 2008, five producers have been included in organic production. In the text to follow, we will set the profiles of the producers we have worked with.

**Atanacković Farm, Crepaja (the second year of conversion period):** Long-term producer of autochthonous food, food products prepared in traditional style. Products with characteristic organoleptic qualities are famous enough that they informally hold the title "Healthy food of Crepaja". By its system of work, Atanacković Farm represents a generator of the development of organic production in the broader territory of the residential area of Crepaja. Apart from crop products (the most famous is cold pressed sunflower oil) and the production of the organic seed of black soybeans, in this household can be found mangulica meat and meat products and various poultry eggs.

**Marionc Farm, Crepaja (the second year of conversion period):** Hardworking producers of vegetables and crop products have been present in Belgrade market for several years now as farm managers whose products have well recognizable appearance, scent and taste. Their main orientation is the production and improvement less present

plant species and their processing in controlled conditions with certified production. Apart from the offer of different vegetable species, in their product programme, they have soybeans, beans, blue corn, wheat, meat and other pork products.

**Krčadinac Farm, Crepaja (the first year of conversion period):** Young and respectable conventional producers who have recognized the advantages of organic production. On their parcels, they grow cereals, red cabbage, black soybeans (seed production) and beans. In the period to follow, the enlargement of the area and the number of plant species is planned.

**Belča Farm, Dobrica (the first year of conversion period):** The household whose primary activity is the production of soybeans, corn, sunflower, honey and other bee products, as well as the production of eggs, chickens, poultry and turkey meat. The plan of this farm is the improvement of the environment where they live. Through associated acting, they want to promote the residential area of Dobrice through the offer of several autochthonous products under the brand name "Dobrica u srcu" (Dobrica in heart).

**Velja Farm, Dobrica (traditional producer):** The long-term orientation of this household is the production of soybeans, corn, sunflower and the production of livestock food for the needs of the production of eggs, chickens, poultry and turkey meat. In association with other locals, they will work on the presentation of so far little known products originating from Dobrica.

Apart from the individual producers, in the past periods, contacts were established with several subjects from the territory covered by the Institute "Tamiš" concerning the engagement in organic production (the Beekeeper Society "Bagrem" from Alibunar, "Galus – Soyafod" from Lokve, "Zrnco" from Kovačica, etc), as well as with several firms out of the mentioned region (Secondary School of Agriculture "Vršac" from Vršac, "Bio farma" from Belgrade, "Budućnost" from Čurug, etc).

### **The facts which, in our opinion, hinder the development of organic production**

In the period to follow, for the purpose of establishing, organizing and functioning of organic production, it is necessary to resolve the following deficiencies and problems:

1. The lack of applied research work.
2. The lack of profiled extensionists for sustainable agriculture.
3. Payment for control and certification.
4. Delays on the occasion of certificate issuing.
5. The non-existence of complete and clear organic legislation.
6. The non-existence of transparency and the "slowness" of bureaucracy.
7. The lack of organic seeds, as well as the non-existence of a database of the available organic seeds.
8. The lack of the means for plant protection and strengthening, as well as the bureaucratic slowdown of the adoption of the positive European list of the mentioned means.
9. The lack of manufacturing activity and the ignorance of the technology of the conservation and processing of organic products.

## Conclusion

The tendency of the contemporary agriculture is the increase of the inclusion of the sustainable ecologically acceptable systems of production, so agricultural production, in good part, moves towards the production of organic food. Organic food, in its production, needs the maximum involvement of knowledge, through a complete management and through a complete cost control.

Our experience has shown that the role of everyday work is of great importance for the introduction of organic production to producers. Cooperation with individual farms and firms that have chosen organic production required a lot more intensive extension practice, given all the specificities of this production. As a result of such work, a method has been created, which facilitated the very process of the inclusion of producers in organic production. Through interactive work, the producers we have worked with accepted advice, and, working with them, solving various problems, we, as extensionists, have also reached new knowledge and progressed.

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