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ISSUES ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN ROMANIA

Lidia Iurchevici¹, Rodica Chetroiu²

Abstract

It is important for Romanian agriculture and for the food chain system to collaborate in advantage of local agricultural producers and to expand the market for the Romanian organic agricultural products. The present situation of Romanian economy and agriculture is very favorable for the extension of the organic agriculture sector. There is a general sense of an ecological product in Romania, related to the good fate of the common-sense family, either placed in urban or rural areas. Romanian people know that, through Romania's integration in EU, the organic agricultural sector and the organic products and foods have favorable opportunities of valorization on the European market.

Keywords: *organic agriculture, market, organic products*

Introduction

Romania is situated in the South-Eastern part of Central Europe, inside and outside of the Carpathian Mountains, on the Danube lower course and opens to the Black Sea. The total area agricultural land of Romania is 14.800 million ha, out of which 9.283 million ha is arable land, 4.930 million ha pastures and meadows; 0.298 million ha are vineyards and 0.289 million ha are orchards. The arable land is about 0.43 ha/inhabitant. The Romanian climate is temperate-continental of transition, with oceanic influences from the West, Mediterranean influences from the South-West and continental-excessive influences from the North-East.

1 Eng. Iurchevici Lidia, Scientific Researcher – Research Institute for Agricultural Economy and Rural Development, 61Marasti St., Bucharest – Romania;
e-mail: lidia_iur@yahoo.com

2 Eng. Chetroiu Rodica, Reseach assistent – Research Institute for Agricultural Economy and Rural Development, 61Marasti St., Bucharest – Romania;
e-mail: rodigeo7@yahoo.com

Material and methods

Agriculture is an important sector of the Romanian national economy, with 28-35% of the active population involved in agricultural productive sectors and a contribution of 15-25% to the GDP. Rural space occupies more than 95% of the territory and agricultural space 62%. In Romania, there are approximately 240,000 ha for organic farming. Of this, cereals such as wheat, maize, sorghum, rye and millet make up more than half of the certified area.

Organic hay and animal feed crops are grown on 50,000 ha and industrial crops take up 22,000 ha. Organic apiculture produced more than 600 tons of bee products.

As Romanian organic agriculture is harmonizing its structures with the European and world standards, it is important for Romanian agriculture and for the food chain system to collaborate in advantage of local agricultural producers and to expand the market for the Romanian organic agricultural products. This can be achieved only with increasing assistance from the authorities that should create economic and legislative framework for a functional economy in general, and organic agriculture products and food availability in particular.

The present situation of Romanian economy and agriculture is very favorable for the extension of the organic agriculture sector. Romanian agriculturists are interested to produce marketable agricultural products and food for domestic and external market. Romanian people know that, through Romania's integration in EU, the organic agricultural sector and the organic products and foods have favorable opportunities of valorization on the European market.

Results and discussions

About 35 % of the soils have good and very good fertility, being suitable for a relatively wide range of culture, the fertility and biological activity of soils are maintained solely by products derived from animal farms; diseases, pests and weeds are mostly controlled by means of selecting tolerant or resistant varieties, providing an adequate crop rotation, by physical and mechanical means of control; the fodders for the animals are mostly obtained from natural grasslands on which no fertilizers or other synthesis products were used, the existence of varieties and hybrids created in Romania, adapted to the specific conditions, wide biodiversity, specific for pedo-climatic areas.

Organic products are mainly sold in urban areas where the target beneficiaries are families with significant income, as well as those educated in the concept of certified food products. An estimated amount of families consuming organic products in Bucharest includes about 100,000 families. Organic food tends to be sold more through specialized shops, in small neighborhood supermarkets where dedicated selling areas do not cover more than 3% of the total area per shop. Organic products could also be identified in supermarkets.

There is a general sense of an ecological product in Romania, related to the good fate of the common-sense family, either placed in urban or rural areas. Forty

percent of the Romanian population lives in rural areas while the rest has relatives in Romanian villages.

Traditional agricultural methods, still practiced on a wide scale in rural area are perceived as “ecological”, acknowledging the good sense of producing the agricultural produce without using intensive techniques. Therefore, even though not necessarily true, market agricultural products – artificially labeled as “Romanian” are considered ecological. This is true in most cases, provided that labeling respects the origin.

In modern thinking, this cannot be recorded as valid certified organic products. This means that changes must occur in the perception of what certified products mean. Imported organic products sold in Romania include a limited range of products (about 30 products), among which brown sugar, flavored milk, etc.

Figure 1 - Certified organic products



The internal production market of Romania is developing owing to a strange driving force, namely associated to the poverty of the average farmer and grows constantly in the range of products, together with the awareness of the farmers to establish market association, to keep certification costs low per farmer, awareness to enable them to negotiate better prices at the farm gate. Export is made particularly for raw products. Those are mainly associated with operators who could have afforded large investments in processing plants.

The marketing needs for the Romanian organic products are connected to the level of perception of the necessity to buy products from a trustful source. The internal market also needs grow in the purchase power of the average Romanian families. Spectacular changes in this respect are not expected to take place on short term.

In the case of exports, in close connection with the international market trends,

the organic sector of Romania must adapt its production, storage to the cleaning possibilities to the following link in the “organic chain” international transport. There is a clear requirement in Romania for the development of the intermediary operators such as whole crop purchasers, and cleaning and storage facilities. The progress in organic agriculture is, by its very nature of making use of local resources, dependent on knowledge of optimum local conditions.

Problems managing the selling of organic products are those of the adaptation of post harvesting system to following links of organic chain:

- relationship with selling procedures and operators;
- relationship with handling and transportation possibilities further in the chain.

All these must take into account the quality requirements underlined in the merchandise specifications. The capacity of good quality storage to increase access to better pricing over time seems to be crucial at farmers’ level. For farmers, it is important the income (income generated by selling of organic products) and the cost associated with the necessary inputs. Farmers will use more money during the conversion period before certification, and the modernization of facilities is expensive - especially for dairy and animal farmers.

On medium and long term, organic agriculture and rural development will play an essential role in the government's strategy that will provide high domestic food quality and sustainable and diversified production according to European safety standards. EU support agriculture and in specially, organic agriculture by direct payments, rural development (also including the reconversion of the labor force), and funds for market interventions.

Considering the demand of organic products from the foreign markets and the prices paid for these products, organic farming can represent an important source of money for Romanian farmers.

The institutional framework must stimulate and sustain the Romanian agricultural producers in developing this type of agriculture, because there is an important external demand and, in addition, through Romanian consumers’ education (which have the tendency “natural products” for the following reasons:

- they are aware of the importance of food safety and quality;
- they imitate the consumers behavior from EU member countries.

The increase of consumer demand for organic food has created opportunities for all sectors in the chain of production, distribution and marketing, which have contributed to an increase of the economic and social development of many rural areas in the EU. The annual growth of the market for organic products is 10-15%. Besides providing greater financial security of producers, processors, distributors and retailers of organic products, the economic benefits of this trend will inevitably have an effect on other businesses in rural areas and the whole rural community – both directly and indirectly.

Conclusions

In the conditions of EU integration, food industry has to meet some essential conditions too. Thus, the farmers and the companies within the entire technological food industry chain must adopt the rules and regulations that are specific to a common market and the EU agriculture policy and all the institutions involved in organic agriculture that will promote the organic agriculture principles.

Organic farming has a great contribution to a lasting economic development and plays an important role in the improvement of the environment, preservation of soil, improvement of water quality, biodiversity and protection of nature and may move ahead in the rural economy and make it viable by expanding economic activities with high added value and generate jobs in rural areas.

However, financial support should be given for stimulating organic farming initiation. This presentation represents an argument in the favor of the necessity to promote organic farming practice on large scale in Romania.

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