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ALBANIA

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1. General aspects

Organic agriculture products have been firstly introduced in Albania by HIPP, the German producer of organic baby food. It has been promoting and selling basically organic foods in Albania since 1995. They have a good distribution system all over the country and operate basically with drug stores.

Oxfam - Novib support a very interesting project in Northern Albania in the region of Shllak to develop permaculture. (Permaculture is a dose relative to organic agriculture, with a strong orientation on farm planning and very diverse cropping. The objective is to produce sufficient amounts of diversified food in a small area). They have developed a good extension network in approximately 30 villages, elaborated interesting training modules and introduced numerous successful technical improvements (including water reservoirs, mulching and "Konfej" as fertilizer). In 1998, they created a resource centre (near Skodra) with the objective of creating a model farm according to permaculture. Even though the centre is not yet fully operational, they have been holding courses and demonstrations (train approximately 20 people a month) during the summer months. This project has supported the establishment of a co-operative for herbs, which tends to export under 'organic' label.

At least one private fresh herb producer and exporter "Aris-frucht" is certified by BIOSWISS and is exporting fresh herbs to Switzerland, since January 2001.

Two groups of women are certified by an Italian certification body as organic herb collectors in Zadrime, region in Lezha district. There are no data on exporting wild herbs.

Three bee-keepers have applied to the Organic Agriculture Association (OAA) to convert to organic, but OAA is not yet recognized as a certification body, neither by IFOAM nor by the Albanian government.

Some olive oil producers, members of OAA, are actually trying to enter the procedure for labeling 'organic' and thinking for exporting.

The OAA, whose objectives are the promotion of organic agriculture in Albania, is a young and dynamic association. It was established on June 1997. It has undertaken a number of interesting activities, all on voluntary basis, and has developed a strong membership among the

agricultural experts. The Association is very conscious of the need to motivate more producers to become involved in organic production. Agricultural producers in three districts are members of the Association and are willing and capable to deliver organic goods if and when some infrastructure will be set up. However, efforts in contacting producers is limited because of the lack of resources.

The activities OAA has undertaken, especially efforts to present organic agriculture to a wider public, have created a lot of interest among both “intellectuals” and consumers. A local market, though small, does exist in Tirana for higher quality goods, for Albanian specialities and products, which can be easily traced to the producer.

OAA has established a commission for the certification of organic products based on the IFOAM basic standards.

OAA is now supporting the efforts of one of its members to improve the performance of a shop (natural and organic) in Tirana in which organic products can be sold.

Recently OAA has been appointed as Albanian coordinator for the project “Introduction of Organic Agriculture and Low Input Sustainable Agriculture in Balkan Countries”, in the framework of Stability Pact.

From the government side, there are attempts to introduce organic agriculture in its policies. In the governmental strategy for agriculture “The Green Strategy” organic agriculture is considered as an alternative in rural areas, especially in the mountains.

2. Regulatory aspects

Actually, there is no legislation in the country concerning organic agriculture. The inspection and certification system in the country is managed by OAA, but it is still weak, since it is not associated with any national legislation or international scheme of inspection and certification.

3. Structural aspects

There is only one organic farm certified by BIOSWISS, Switzerland.

The farm’s area is about 4 ha (two in the open field and two under green house). It is located in Gjakaj - Tirana. The main product is fresh herbs. The total production per year is around 20 tons. The turnover is around \$US 80 000 per year.

There are groups of farms in Lezha districts involved in wild collection of herbs and certified by an Italian association (not yet identified). Also, there is a herb cooperative called “Kiri 2” in Shllak Shkoder, which is collecting organic herbs (but not yet certified). Some training activities

were organized, financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, the World Learning Program (USAID) and the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari.

4. Agronomic aspects

The main problem in soil fertility management is the lack of adequate drainage and irrigation systems.

The main issue in pest and weed control is the quality of pesticides and the lack of knowledge about their use.

The main authorized product for soil fertility is manure.

Imported propagating material is basically certified, but not necessary as organic. Propagating material in the country might be considered organic.

There are not local companies producing technical means.

5. Market aspects

There are no organic shops in Tirana and no organic products are sold in supermarkets. Products usually go to the foreign market such as Switzerland and Italy. About 20 tons of organic fresh herbs are exported to Switzerland per year.

Aris-frucht is the company that exports to Switzerland. There are some demands from German and British markets.

The main difficulty in exporting Albanian products is the lack of internationally recognized inspection and certification body.

Domestic consumption of certified organic products is not developed yet. Ten percent of people in remote rural areas consume non certified organic products (self producing and self consuming).

There are no evident forms for promoting organic products, apart from the organization of pavilions in national fairs by OAA.

6. Association

In Albania actually there is only one organic association, the OAA, which has branches in main districts of the country, and good membership (90 members). It has also continuous contacts with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

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