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## Organic Farming in Ukraine 2004

**Martha Stoll**

### 1 Ukrainian Agriculture in General

In 1991, Ukraine attained independence, which led to a social transformation process. The agricultural sector was not exempted from this. Since independence, there has been a sharp decrease in agricultural production. It was not until 2000 that any obvious signs of recovery were observed.

Ukrainian agriculture has been evolving since it gained independence in 1991. State and collective farms were officially dismantled in 2000. 13,300 new agricultural units have been formed, including farms (46%), cooperatives (25%), and private and leased businesses (21%).

Traditionally, agriculture is one of the most important sectors of the Ukrainian economy. The agricultural sector produces 12.8% of GDP, employing a fifth of the working population. Ukraine's arable and farming areas comprise 42 million km<sup>2</sup>. Planted crops account for 54.5% of total agricultural output. Among the dominant crops are wheat, corn, sugar beet, sunflowers, legumes, tobacco, vegetables, and fruits. Livestock farming includes cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, etc.

### 2 History and Development of Organic Agriculture

The development of organic agriculture in Ukraine has a long history. The foundation stone was laid by Prof. Dr. M. Schykula, who, in the mid-1970s, developed a protective soil preparation system at the Agricultural Academy in Kiev. The system is based on increasing biological soil activity. The aim of the system is to conserve and improve soil fertility in the long term. Therefore, the most important measures are:

- soil tillage without ploughing,
- application of organic harvest residues and their incorporation up to depths of 10 cm,
- control of physical and biological disease and of pests.

Since the end of the 1970s, all these measures were applied in the former collective farm 'Ordchenikidse' (in the Poltava region). Today, this farm is named 'Obrij' and successfully demonstrates organic agricultural techniques.

At the end of 1990s, a new developmental stage in organic agriculture arose. An Ukrainian-Swiss project contributed to this. One of the first steps was the visit of a group of Ukrainian specialists from scientific agricultural and educational institutions to the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL and to a number of organic and biodynamic farms in Switzerland, in November 1997. In 1998, training seminars for Ukrainian scientists, education specialists, and producers were held by the National Agricultural University and Berezhan Agricultural College. The seminars focussed on the issues of certification, production, marketing and processing of organic products, organisation of training and extension in the area of organic agricultural production. As a result of the seminars, the book 'Soil Protecting Organic Farming in Ukraine' was published, which provides a good description of the Swiss model of organic

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farming. Having participated in the seminars and learned about the principles and advantages of organic agricultural production, many individual farmers and representatives of large farms expressed a will to convert their farms to organic production. At the end of the 1990s, three biodynamic farms were established in Ukraine.

One of the most important factors was that, at the same time, agricultural traders discovered the European market for organic products. This led to the establishment of several export-oriented organic farms, which presently characterise organic agriculture in Ukraine.

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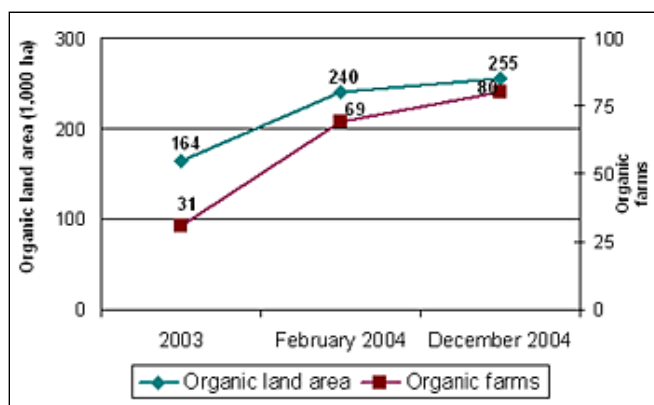
### 3 Development of Organic Agriculture Figures

Organic agriculture in Ukraine is gradually increasing in importance. Particularly in recent years (2003-2004), organic production has developed rapidly. In 2004, the number of organic farms increased to about 80, managing a total of 255,000 hectares of land.

■ **Table 1: Organic Farming in Ukraine**

| Year | Organic farms | Organic land area (ha) | % of total agricultural area |
|------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2003 | 31            | 164,000                | 0.4                          |
| 2004 | 80            | 255,000                | 0.8                          |

■ **Figure 1: Development of Organic Land Area and Farms in Ukraine 2003 2004**



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### 4 State Regulations, Standards and Certification

In October 2003, an Ukrainian-Swiss seminar brought together, for the first time, various organic stakeholders to discuss the current situation, challenges and public policies, and to exchange ideas on a national strategy for organic farming development. Among the participants were Ukrainian governmental officials, policy experts, representatives from the organic business community (including farmers, exporters and certification bodies), academics, non-governmental organisations, as well as representatives of the Swiss partners and from the leading International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

This seminar was the first step towards drafting a law on organic agriculture. It was agreed that organic agriculture has the potential to provide economic, social, environmental and rural development benefits in Ukraine. During the last decade, significant areas of fertile agricultural land were cultivated with little use of agro-chemicals and these can quickly be converted to certified organic agricultural land, provided markets are available and certification costs can be kept to a minimum. In many cases, organic agriculture brings higher yields than traditional management practices. Thus, organic agriculture offers

opportunities, affordable for both large and small-scale farmers, to improve production efficiency and profitability.

However, in order to benefit from organic agriculture, Ukraine, like other nations in transition and developing countries, needs to overcome a number of constraints. To address these at national level, the on-going strategic discussions focus on issues such as increasing public awareness of the potential economic, social, environmental and health benefits of organic agriculture, the need for well-defined governmental policies and regulations, and the promotion of consumption of organic products, for example through consumer information. There is particular emphasis on the need to develop and enforce a national organic guarantee system.

Ukraine is now in the process of drafting regulations. No exogenous legal provisions presently exist in Ukraine for the certification and inspection of organic agriculture. Through the collaboration of various interest groups, a law on organic agriculture was drafted and brought before Ukraine's parliament in 2003. The draft law deals with the definition, regulations and guidelines with regard to production, storage, processing, transport, and certification of organic products, and is in accordance with the international IFOAM guidelines.

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To date, all organic products have been certified by foreign certification bodies. 'Skal International', the Dutch international inspection and certification body, inspects most of the farms. For farms under the Ukrainian/Swiss project, the main certifiers are Swiss certification bodies, such as bio.inspecta and Institut für Marktökologie (IMO).

## 5 Organic Agriculture Organisation

The first organic farming association in Ukraine, the international Ukrainian-Swiss public association Bio-Lan Ukraine, was founded in 2003 and officially registered in 2004. Among its members count small and middle-scale farmers, agricultural teachers, organic farming experts and other individual members. Establishment of the association was initiated and supported by the Swiss Eco-Lan Technical Assistance Programme. However, the association does not represent large-scale organic farms, agro-investment and trading companies, private certification bodies and a number of other organic sector stakeholders.

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## 6 Regional Distribution and Production

Regional distribution of organic farming in Ukraine depends on soil quality and climatic factors. In recent years, dozens of farms have been converted, primarily in South Ukraine (Odesa and Kherson regions), Central Ukraine (Poltava region) and Western Ukraine (Ternopil and Lviv regions). All these farms are located in regions with conditions favourable to organic production. Although Ukrainian natural soils are among the best in the world, much of its arable land now suffers from varying degrees of degradation, causing a decrease in soil productivity. Surveys conducted in the mid-1990s revealed that about 35.8% of land was eroded, 25.6% had increased acidity levels, 9.7% was saline and alkaline, and 8.9% was excessively humid and swampy. On the other hand, as a result of the prolonged economic crises, in particular due to the farms' shortages of operational funds, there has been a sharp fall in the use of mineral fertilisers, pesticides and other chemicals in recent decades. Soils are now therefore recovering from a decrease in quality and natural fertility. Accordingly, there is now a considerable quantity of land made up of environmentally clean black earth, which may be transformed to organic farming after a relatively short conversion period.

Organic agriculture in Ukraine is characterised almost exclusively by vegetable production. Animal production is of far lesser importance. The most significant cultivated crops are grain, sunflower and buckwheat. However, cultivation of oil plants and pulse plants is presently increasing. The main focus of vegetable production lies with export products, as foreign demand for vegetable products (hard wheat, sunflower, buckwheat) increases.

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## 7 Market

In Ukraine, the domestic market for organic products is as yet undeveloped. There is an evident lack of activity on Ukraine's domestic market, and a general domestic market for organic products is currently embryonic. At present, organic farming is fully export-oriented, and has been sustained by large-scale production of organic grain for export to EU countries, concentrated in the hands of a few agro-investment companies. The small-scale organic farmers have been marketing their products mostly through conventional farmers' markets. By contrast to its European neighbours, there are no organic/health food shops or dedicated shelves in supermarket and grocery stores in Ukraine. Processing structures are also undeveloped.

Conversion from conventional to organic farming in Ukraine is seriously hindered by present conditions in terms of both marketing and advertising organic products. A shift in the development of the organic sector is expected where these areas are improved upon, such as retailers running intensive advertising campaigns and food manufacturers introducing organic products into their ranges.

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## 8 Training and Advisory Service

At present, the agricultural technical college in the town of Illinzi (in the Vinnytsa region), supported by Swiss partners, offers a training programme in organic farming. A few universities, including the Agronomic Department of the National Agrarian University, are now considering the possibility of introducing organic farming curricula to their students.

According to the strategic plan adopted in March 2004, the Coordination and Training Centre of Agricultural Advisory Services (TCC) plans, together with the Agricultural Advisory Services, to offer Ukrainian farmers advisory services in organic farming. However, it lacks personnel with appropriate qualifications in organic agriculture. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a specific training programme to allow advisors to specialise in organic farming.

TCC provided several pilot farms in the Poltava Kyiv, Kuhansk and Odessa regions with support for conversion to organic farming. Systematic dissemination of information on organic farming among advisory services, farmers, scientific, agricultural and educational institutions, government officials and interested foreign partners was organised. This focussed on information on standards, reviews, companies producing biochemicals and providing certification, market outlets, international cooperation etc.

Work has begun on the organisation of internships for farmers and agricultural specialists on organic farms abroad.

A study tour to the Netherlands focussing on the issues of organic production, from producer to consumer, was organised. Among the participants in this study tour were farmers, managers of large farms (including certified farms), representatives of research institutes, farm advisory services and governmental bodies.

In collaboration with its partners, TCC developed the State Tailored Programme of Agricultural Advisory Activity. This was presented to the Ministry of Agricultural Policy, Cabinet of Ministers and Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada in December 2004. This Programme provides services to agricultural producers, including those active in organic farming. These services are regarded as socially beneficial and are therefore to be funded by state and local budgets.

An information and consultancy centre on organic agricultural production was also set up at the Illintsi Agricultural College within the framework of the Swiss-Ukrainian project, Ekolan-Ukraine. However, support for potential organic producers is limited by low numbers of specialists and a general focus on farmers involved in the project.

Thus, a serious problem hindering the development of organic farming in Ukraine is that farmers currently have very little or no access to qualified training and advisory services, due to a serious lack of trainers and advisory staff.

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## 9 Research Situation

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Until now, there have been no research activities on organic farming.

### 10 Challenges and Outlook

A potential organic farming boom in Ukraine will necessarily require favourable governmental policies and regulations. Like in other European countries, a major factor that could contribute to a mass conversion of farms, especially the small and middle-sized ones, would be governmental subsidies, such as a subsidy programme for conversion and certification, and an agri-environmental programme.

The experience of the EU (e.g. Austria) shows, however, that incentives concentrating on the production side are insufficient for developing a production chain from farmer to consumer. The success of the organic industry depends on the recognition of its products by the public, i.e. on consumers' trust and demand. Thus, another big challenge for Ukraine is the development of marketing channels and of public awareness in terms of the various merits of organic products, particularly concerning public health.

Development of the domestic market will require the enforcement of a national organic guarantee system to protect Ukrainian consumers, to overcome the lack of confidence and to create trust. In addition, the legal standards and certification system should aim at establishing international equivalency of Ukraine's organic guarantee system in order to promote export of organic products.

Finally, a major challenge facing Ukraine is the development of a co-operative management of the organic sector that will be capable of securing synergies between governmental policies and market forces as the basic mediators between producers and consumers.

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### Links and Documents

#### About Ukraine

- [FAO, Organic AIMS  
General Country Information about Ukraine](#)
- [Wikipedia  
Ukraine](#)

#### Organic Farming in the Ukraine

- [Schneider, Monika; Richter, Toralf; Spahn, Christoph and Portmann, Katrin \(2005\) Overview of international organic market development and potential export markets for organic products of Ukraine. FiBL Project Report, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture \(FiBL\).](#)

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