Organic Farming in Austria 2004

DI Elisabeth Klingbacher and Alexandra Pohl

Austria is still one of the leading countries in Europe concerning the share of organic farms and organic farmland. After a great wave of conversions to organic farming in the mid 1990s and a decrease of about 1'800 farms around the year 2000, another boom of conversion followed. From 2001 to 2003 especially the area of arable land has increased by more than 50%, the number of farms by more than 700.

Since beginning of 2003, organic organisations are working on a complete change of the organisational situation in Austria. The umbrella organisations will be united and replaced by one new association "BIO AUSTRIA". Advisory, quality management, product management, research and innovation, consumer information, marketing, etc. are organised in a better, much more efficient way, which will give farmers and processors better service and consumers more security and quality. BIO AUSTRIA opened its office in Vienna in September 2003.

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1 Introduction

Three main factors contributed to the rapid conversion of farms in the mid 1990s: the federal subsidies that were introduced in 1991; the agri-environmental programme, which was introduced in 1995 and favourable conditions for the conversion of many grassland farms. The decrease of the number of organic farms was caused by problems in marketing, especially in the alpine regions in Western Austria. This situation showed that incentives concentrating on the production side are not sufficient to develop a production chain from the farmer to the consumer.

During the recent years (2001 to 2003) another period of conversion started. More than 700 farms and 50'000 hectares were converted, primarily in Eastern Austria, where producers of cereals and vegetables decided to change their way of agricultural production. Young and innovative farmers, with a different future perspective, took over their parents' farms and realized that a change has to be made, both from the ecological and the economic point of view.

2 History and Development of Organic Agriculture in Austria

The first organic farms were established in Carinthia (Kärnten) in 1927 and 1935. Organic farming was brought to Austria by newly-arrived farmers and has been sustained by consumer demand. These farmers heralded organic farming as a new lifestyle and as a reform of life in general (Pirklhuber and Gruendlinger, 1993).

In the following years, the example set by successful organic farms and by both new and experienced organic farmers in all parts of the country, slowly but steadily led an increasing number of farmers to convert to organic farming. Since most organic farms were mixed farms, many of the organic farmers began to market their products to consumers directly on the farm or through farmers’ markets and organic food shops (Pirklhuber and Gruendlinger, 1993; Vogl, 1999).

Without doubt, the organic farming boom in Austria was caused by government subsidies distributed on a federal scale:

- 1989
  Three Austrian provinces (Upper and Lower Austria and Styria) provide subsidies to individual farms converting to organic agriculture.
- 1991
  The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry introduces subsidies for farms converting to organic methods.
- 1992
  Subsidy programme for converting and certified organic farms.
- 1995
  Start of the agri-environmental programme (OePUL 95).
- 1998/2000
  Follow-up programmes (OePUL 98, OePUL 2000).

The volume of subsidies for organic farming increased from ca. 145'000

In 1995 the introduction of the agri-environmental programme "OePUL - Oesterreichisches Programm zur Foerderung einer umweltgerechten, extensiven und den natuerlichen Lebensraum schuetzenden Landwirtschaft" ("Austrian National Aid Programme for the Promotion of Extensive Farming Which Protects the Natural Living Conditions"), a national aid programme in compliance with Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2078/92, caused the number of organic farmers to increase again by about 5'200 farmers within one year. In 2002 95% (about 17'900 farms) of all the organic farms participated in the OePUL-Programme.

Organic farming represents the highest level of the OePUL-Programme. In 2003, more than 136'200 Austrian farms with 2'258 million hectares participated in this programme. They received in total 628 million Euro, of which 86 million Euro were dedicated to organic farmers (measure "Biologische Wirtschaftsweise").

The shift to organic farming systems was accompanied by intensive advertising by the large food chains and food processors, which first introduced organic brand names to their assortments in 1994. These industries launched intensive promotional campaigns through the media, emphasising not only the merits of organic products and their brand names, but also successfully linking them to positive attributes such as "well-being", "pleasure" and "Austrian landscape and culture". This resulted in greater public awareness of organically produced foods and created a greater demand for organic products. As it could be seen all over Europe, the BSE-crisis created a boom in consuming of organic products, but this boom has also levelled off and turned into a stable demand for organic products.

In February 2001 the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture presented the first Action Plan for Organic Farming, in July 2003 the second Action Plan. This concept includes recommendations for improved consumer information, marketing training, advice and research.

The Action plan is available at the Information Portal for Austrian Agriculture:

- Info on Organic Farming on the Austrian Agriculture Information Portal

3 Statistics
An overview of the Austrian general agricultural statistics is given in the table below.

Table: Agricultural Statistics Austria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical Category</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total area</td>
<td>83,858 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (2001)</td>
<td>8,032,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population per km² (2001)</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP in billion Euro (1999)</td>
<td>195.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP: Share of farming, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of farmland of total area (1999)</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total farmland without forests (1999)</td>
<td>3,400,000 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land utilisation (2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arable area</td>
<td>1,365,290 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Permanent Crops</td>
<td>60,676 ha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grassland 1,643,490 ha
Total number of farms (1999) 217,508
Average size of farms 16.6 ha
Agricultural employment (1998) 4.2%
Organically cultivated area (31.12.2003) 328'803 ha
Proportion of organically cultivated farmland 12.9%
Number of organic farms (31.12.2003) 19'056
Proportion of all farms 9.5 %

Table: Development of the number of organic farms and area under organic management in Austria 1997 to 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Organic Farms</th>
<th>Organically Managed Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>19'996</td>
<td>345'375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>20'316</td>
<td>290'335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>20'121</td>
<td>284'086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>19'028</td>
<td>277'729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>18'292</td>
<td>280'267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>18'576</td>
<td>300'862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>19'056</td>
<td>328'803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bio Austria, Grüner Bericht 2004

4 Organic Agriculture Organisations

Before the organic farming boom, Austria's organic farmers belonged to various associations that had been founded over the years. The spectrum of organisations reflects their different approaches to organic agriculture, regional differences and different marketing strategies. According to the Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Förderung des biologischen Landbaus (ARGE Biolandbau) 71.9 % of Austria's organic farms were organised in farmers' associations in 2003. The remaining 28.1 % are mostly extensive grassland farms in western Austria in the provinces of Tyrol and Salzburg. They are not organised and farm only according to Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 and the Austrian Codex Alimentarii. Their products (meat and milk) are marketed through traditional marketing channels.

At present, there are eleven organic farming associations in Austria. The largest of these is Bio Emte Austria, which comprises nearly 87 per cent of all organised organic farms. These associations have established their own standards, some of which are stricter than the existing legal standards in Austria (Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 and the Codex Alimentarii).

4.1 ARGE-Biolandbau

4.2 Österreichische Interessengemeinschaft für biologische Landwirtschaft OeIG

4.3 BIO AUSTRIA

4.1 ARGE Bio-Landbau
The ARGE Bio-Landbau was founded in 1984 and is the umbrella organisation of:

Bio Ernte Austria (http://www.ernte.at/), founded in 1979;

Oesterreichischer Demeterbund (http://www.demeter.at), founded in 1969;

Foerderungsgemeinschaft fuer gesundes Bauernum, ORBI (http://www.orbi.or.at/), founded in 1962;

Biolandwirtschaft Ennstal, (http://www.bioland-ennstal.at) founded in 1988;

Verein der biologisch wirtschaftenden Ackerbaubetriebe, BAF, (http://www.bioackerfrucht.at) founded in 1986;


Hofmarke (http://www.hofmarke.at/), founded in 1996.

4.2 Oesterreichische Interessensgemeinschaft fuer biologische Landwirtschaft, OelG

The Oesterreichische Interessensgemeinschaft fuer biologische Landwirtschaft, OelG ("Austrian Association for Biological Agriculture") was founded in 1994 and is the umbrella organisation of
Comparable to other European countrires, during the past 20 years, many different organic associations developed, either on a regional level or with a different understanding of "organic culture". This lead to a difficult situation of differing and competing interests, which even weakened the importance of organic agriculture's associations in Austria.

After the "Bio-Enquete 2002" the situation changed: The Minister of Agriculture at that time, Wilhelm Molterer, instructed the chairman of ARGE Biolandbau to initiate the formation of a competence centre for organic agriculture.

Since beginning of 2003, organic umbrella organisations (ARGE Bio-Landbau, OIG, Bio-Ernte Austria's federal organisation) and their member associations are working on a complete change of the situation in Austria. The umbrella organisations will be united and replaced by one new association "BIO AUSTRIA". Advisory, quality management, product management, research and innovation, consumer information, marketing, etc. are organised in a better, much more efficient way, which will give farmers and processors better service and consumers more security and quality.

The conversion of first common projects started in the beginning of 2004.
There are two main offices in Linz and in Vienna. In Vienna representatives of several organisations (ARGE Bio-Landbau, Bio Ernte Austria, Demeter Bund, Bioinfo,) have been working together under the same roof since July, 2004 (Theresianumgasse 11/1, 1040 Vienna, www.bio-austria.at).

5 Regional Distribution of Organic Farms in Austria

The largest concentration of organic farms is in regions with a high proportion of grassland (Tyrol, Salzburg and Styria).

Experience has shown that grassland farms or farms with a high proportion of grassland are easier to convert to organic farming because they have always been cultivated extensively.

In the traditional arable regions of eastern Austria (i.e. the provinces of Burgenland and Lower Austria), the number of organic farms is considerably lower.

Since 2001 about 700 farms and 50'000 hectares have been converted, primarily in Eastern Austria, where producers of cereals and vegetables decided to change their way of agricultural production.

6 Land Use, Animal Husbandry

About two thirds of the certified organic farms in Austria are grassland farms, while about one third are predominantly arable farms. Approximately five percent grows special crops (fruit, herbs, etc.) and wine. Presently, however, there is tendency for more arable farms to convert.

Austria's organic farms are small and medium-scale, and the average size is approximately sixteen hectares. About 75 percent of all organic farms comprise up to twenty hectares. Approximately ninety-seven percent of all organic farms have cattle, on average between sixteen and twenty-four head. Organic farms without cattle are located almost exclusively in the arable regions of eastern Austria. The number of animals varies greatly from region to region.

The total number of livestock kept on Austrian organic farms in 2003 shows the overall importance of dairy farming.

Table: Livestock on Organic Farms in Austria (31.12.2003); Number of Animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>319,169</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dairy cows</td>
<td>85,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suckler cows</td>
<td>60,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>76,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs</td>
<td>35,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>664,377</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BMLFUW; AMA, 2004

7 Standards and Certification

The minimum legal standards for organic farming in Austria are defined by the Council Regulation EEC No. 2092/91. Members of farmers’ associations must also fulfil the (usually stricter or more specific) regulations of their associations.

Organic farms are registered with the Landeshauptmann (head of the provincial government). The prerequisite for registration is a contract with an inspection body. Unannounced inspections are carried out once or twice a year, in accordance with the EU standard. Each inspection costs
between 110 - 150 Euro. The largest inspection body, ABG (Austria Bio Garantie), inspects more than fifty percent of Austrian organic farms.

In 1994 the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry introduced a label to guarantee product safety to the consumer. The "Austria Bio-Zeichen" ("Austria Organic Label", see figure) may be used by approved farmers, processors and trading companies. It guarantees that the food bearing this label originates from organic farming. In addition, the label certifies that at least seventy per cent of the ingredients originate from domestic organic farming.

There is also a supplementary logo for non-domestic organic products.

Figure: The "Austria Bio-Zeichen"

Figure: The "Bio-Zeichen" Without Indication of Origin

Since January 1998, all inspection bodies must prove that they have established a quality management system according to the European Norm EN 45011. Inspection bodies are monitored by the Austrian Accreditation Service of the Department of the Ministry for Economic Affairs.

The prerequisites for accreditation as an inspection body include: reading a quality management handbook, a two-day office audit and a one-day witnessed audit during inspection by the inspection body at an organic farm or processor's site. The audits are conducted by a team of four technical experts who specialise in the regulations and standards for organic farming, quality management, food processing and EN 45011.

The following inspection bodies operate in Austria:

- ABG, Austria Bio Garantie, Gesellschaft zur Kontrolle der Echtheit biologischer Produkte (http://www.abg.at), Koenigbrunnerstrasse 8, A-2202 Enzersfeld
- BIKO Tirol, Verband Biokontrolle Tirol (http://www.kontrollservice-tirol.at) Brixnerstrasse 1, A-6020 Innsbruck
- BIOS, Biokontrollservice Oesterreich (http://www.bios-kontrolle.at), Feyregg 39, A-4552 Wartberg
- LVA, Lebensmittelversuchsanstalt (http://www.lva.co.at), Blaasstrasse 29, A-1190 Wien
- SGS, Austria Controll-Co.Ges.m.b.H (http://www.sgsaustria.at), Johannesgasse 14, A-1010 Wien
- SLK, Salzburger Landwirtschaftliche Kontrolle GesmbH (http://www.slk.at) Maria-Cebotari-Strasse 3, A-5020 Salzburg

Certification is performed by the farmers' associations or by the inspection bodies for their own association's labels and by the Agrarmarkt Austria Marketing GesmbH; for the "Austria Bio-Zeichen".

8 Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91
The Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 stipulates the minimum requirements for organic farming in Austria. Additional regulations are determined by the farmers’ associations. The farms are inspected according to the EU standard. Seven inspection bodies have been accredited by the Accreditation Service of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (see above).

9 Government Subsidies

The first Austrian agri-environmental programme was launched in 1995 (OePUL, (“Oesterreichisches Programm zur Foerderung einer umweltgerechten, extensiven und den natuerlichen Lebensraum schuetzenden Landwirtschaft” – “Austrian National Aid Programme for the Promotion of Extensive Farming Which Protects the Natural Living Conditions”). The participating farmers were bound to the contract for five years. It ended in December 1999 and was followed by a new five-year contract with OePUL, which started in 2000.

About 17'500 registered organic farms (which is about 95% of all organic farms) receive government subsidies through OePUL. Almost fifty per cent of the subsidies are paid by the EU. The remainder is provided by the federal and provincial governments (sixty per cent federal, forty per cent provincial).

Subsidies per hectare (through OePUL 2000):

- Arable land: € 327
- Grassland: € 250
  - Multiple-cut permanent meadows and cultivated pasture
  - One-cut permanent meadows (x 0.5)
  - Meadows producing hay, grazing land and mountain hay crops (x 0.25)
- Market gardens: € 508
- Vineyards, fruit, vegetables, tree nurseries, hops: € 800

10 The Market

10.1 Market Volume and Marketing Channels

According to estimates by Dietachmair (2004), the annual turnover of organic products is at the wholesale level of about 400 million Euro. This in turn corresponds to a market share of approximately 3.9% in terms of quantity and 3.1% in terms of value of Austria’s total food market (RoIAMA, 2003).

In the early 1990s, the explosion in the supply of organic products led to marketing via supermarket chains. The supermarket chain Billa / Merkur launched the organic food brand “Ja! naturlich” (“Yes! naturally”) in 1994.

The intensive marketing of organic brand names by the individual food chains has caused consumer demand to increase. Organic products have improved the image of the supermarket chains.

By now, all major supermarket chains come to offer organic products. Since 2002 the discount store Hofer increased the supply with organic products. This did not lead to an increase of the organic market but to a shift of the market share between the different supermarket chains.

Considering the entire selling of organic products via Austrian food retail trade since 2000, the market increased in terms of quantity by 10%, in terms of value by 12% (Mayr, 2004).

But since 2002 the organic market in Austria has been stagnating. In all, the organic retail trade turnover amounted 121 million Euro in 2003 (RoIAMA, 2003).

By now organic products have an important position on the Austrian
market. About 85% of all Austrian households buy organic products at least occasionally.

The major part - about 60 percent - of Austrian organic products is distributed via conventional food chains. Approximately 30 percent is sold via large scale food supply (like schools, hospitals, canteens, …) - including gastronomy - and export (15 percent each) and about 10 percent is distributed via direct marketing and natural food shops.

An important and growing marketing channel are kitchens in the public and private sectors.

Depending on the different provinces they supply a high percentage of organic products. In Vienna kitchens of all public institutions offer certain components in organic quality – up to 30 percent, and in Salzburg 50 percent of the food offered in kindergartens is organic.

By now the organic turnover of Austrian kitchens in the public and private sectors e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, schools and canteens amounts about 30 million Euro yearly (Kaiblinger and Zehetgruber, 2004).

Direct marketing represents another important marketing channel. Those direct marketing farms are largely responsible for the positive image of Austrian foods. The personal contact between farmers and consumers is essential for the consumers’ confidence. Farm shops, the most direct form of marketing, can be found in every Austrian region.

Many of these farms also offer the possibility of farm-holidays (“Urlaub am Bauernhof”) and excursions for school children to learn more about organic agriculture.

Home delivery services and organic or natural food shops have been established, especially around big cities and offer above all a chance for regional farmers’ co-operatives.

Also Organic markets supply a wide range of regional products and can be found in cities and villages.

For consumers who want to be supplied with organic products during their holidays, the association “Bio Hotels” (www.biohotels.info) unifies the standards based on eco tourism and controlled organic agriculture.

The entire range of food and drinks are from controlled organic farmers. If there is an exception it is clearly marked.

11 Training

11.1 Agricultural Schools

11.2 Magazines With Regular Articles on Organic Farming in Austria

11.1 Agricultural Schools

Nearly all of Austria’s agricultural schools and colleges offer training programmes or individual courses in organic farming within the scope of their curriculum.

Various agricultural schools (Landwirtschaftliche Fachschulen) and agricultural colleges (Hoehere Bildungslehranstalten fuer Landwirtschaft - HBLA) focus their education on organic farming.

Some of them are:

- Lower Austria: Tullnerbach, Edelhof/Zwettl, Hohenlehen, Wieselburg
- Upper Austria: Aigen/Schlaegl,
- Styria: Raumberg, Alt Grottenhof, Gumpenstein, Irdning
- Salzburg: Ursprung/Elixhausen
In addition, agricultural colleges constitute essential partners for co-operation in scientific experiments (on cultivation, varieties, etc.).

11.2 Magazines With Regular Articles on Organic Farming in Austria

- „Ernte Zeitschrift fuer Landwirtschaft“ und „Oekologie Newsletter“ of the farmers’ association Ernte. Articles cover ideas and information on organic farming techniques, processing, and marketing. BIO ERNTE AUSTRIA (ed.), Europaplatz 4, 4020 Linz, Austria.

- “Mitteilungen des Demeter-Bundes” Bio-dynamic news; information for members of the bio-dynamic farmers’ association Demeter. Oesterreichischer Demeter-Bund (ed.), Theresianumgasse 11/1, 1040 Vienna, Austria.

- “Freiland-Journal Newsletter” of the Freilaender farmers’ association; special emphasis on species-appropriate animal husbandry. Freiland-Verband fuer Oekologisch-tiergerechte Nutzterhaltung und gesunde Ernaehrung (ed.), Theresianumgasse 11/1, 1040 Vienna, Austria.

- “Die Bergbauern (The Mountain Farmers)” Emphasis on technical, social and political problems of farmers living under severe natural conditions with fields at higher altitudes and with steep slopes. Oesterreichische Bergbauernvereinigung (ed.), Herklotzgasse 7/21, 1150 Vienna, Austria.


12 Advisory Service

Most farmers’ associations offer advisory services to their members. Advice is also provided by the provincial agricultural associations and the regional farmers’ associations.

In addition, most organic farmers’ associations publish magazines with contributions on organic farming. The quality and frequency of the advisory services depend upon the requests, the availability of personnel and the advisors’ qualifications. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry offers a training programme for advisors specialising in organic farming. Agricultural schools with an emphasis on organic farming offer advisory services as well.

Though farmers who are not members of a farmers’ association often have no access to qualified advisory service.

Advisors of Bio Ernte Austria specialising in viticulture, fruit-growing, vegetable gardening or pig production often work in several provinces. Small associations like Erde & Saat, Kopra, Freiland, Orbi and Hofmarke do not have sufficient financial resources to employ advisors. Therefore, the associations’ secretaries or experienced farmers usually provide advisory services. This work is often done on an honorary basis.

Farmers are also organised into regional and specialised working groups. Periodical meetings offer them the opportunity to discuss problems and exchange knowledge and experience. The average size of these groups is ten to thirty members. Meetings take place three to four times per year.

Table: Number of Advisors in Austria
13 Research Situation

13.1 University Institutes

A slow but gradual increase in research on organic farming has taken place at the university level since 1992. A central institution for research on organic farming is the Institute for Organic Farming at the University of Agricultural Sciences in Vienna. (For addresses see address database).

13.1 University Institutes

- Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna, including:
  - Division of Agricultural Engineering [http://www.boku.ac.at/ILT](http://www.boku.ac.at/ILT)
  - Division of Livestock Sciences [http://www.nas.boku.ac.at/475.html](http://www.nas.boku.ac.at/475.html)
  - Division of Organic Farming [http://www.boku.ac.at/oekoland/](http://www.boku.ac.at/oekoland/)

- Department of Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna [http://www.vu-wien.ac.at](http://www.vu-wien.ac.at)

- Institute for Alpine Agriculture at the University of Innsbruck

13.2 Private Research Institutes and NGOs

The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute in Vienna is one of Austria's oldest research institutions for organic farming.

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL Austria was set up in 2004, and currently has two collaborators. Knowledge transfer is a major aim of this institute. Research focusses on several themes; animal health is of of particular importance.

13.3 Federal Research Institutes

- The Federal Agency for Agro-biology in Vienna, Department of Organic Farming; (www.ages.at)
- Bundesanstalt fuer Bergbauernfragen in Vienna; (www.babf.bmlf.gv.at)
14 Challenges and Outlook
During the recent years, Austria has known several ups and downs in the development of organic agriculture.

In the years 2000/2001, the end of the first five-year agro-environmental programme OePUL 95 brought new challenges. 1'800 farmers (especially in the western alpine regions) reconverted to conventional farming because of problems in marketing their products. This fact showed that governmental subsidies aiming at production are not sufficient to develop the organic chain from the farmer to the consumer. On the other hand, starting in 2000/2001, farmers in the arable region in Eastern Austria converted to organic farming. Meanwhile (2003) the area of arable land grew from 60'000 ha in 2000 to 120'000 ha in 2003. The reason for this second boom in Austria is not only the market for cereals and vegetables (potatoes, onions, carrots), but also the new generation of young farmers that took over their parents’ farms and decided to work in a different, more ecological way.

Challenges for the future include developing ways of co-operative management that take into consideration the interests of organic farmers, processors and traders as mediators between producers and consumers.

Another central challenge still remains consumers’ education in organic agriculture. Considerable educational and public relations work is needed to increase the consumers’ understanding of and interest in organic farming. To this end, ARGE Bio-Landbau founded the BIO CLUB in 1998. The idea was to maintain close contact between organic farmers and consumers. In the meantime, the project has been accorded to the consumers’ needs and has been developed from a “club” with the opportunity of membership into a consumers’ information centre – “Bio Info”. Information is offered via Internet (www.bioinfo.at) and a telephone service.

Since beginning of 2003, organic umbrella organisations (ARGE Bio-Landbau, ÖIG, Bio-Ernte Austria’s federal organisation) and their member associations are working on a complete change of the situation in Austria. The umbrella organisations will be united and replaced by one new association "BIO AUSTRIA". Advisory, quality management, information, marketing, etc. are organised in a better, much more efficient way, which will give farmers and processors better service and consumers more security and quality. Thus, for the moment, is the biggest challenge in Austrian organic agriculture, because it’s a chance for a sustainable development in the future in Austria and in Europe.

Of course, challenges are also caused by the situation of agriculture in the European Union in general and by EU Agricultural policy: GAP reform, GMO-coexistence, enlargement of the European Union put important questions, that have to be answered and to be kept in mind for the future development in the European Union.

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Authors

• DI Elisabeth Klingbacher BIO AUSTRIA
Konsumenteninformation, e-mail:
elisabeth.klingbacher@bioinfo.at

• Alexandra Pohl BIO AUSTRIA Lobbying, e-mail:
alexandra.pohl@biolandbau.at

Theresianumgasse 11/1 - 1040 Vienna,
Phone : +43 1 4037050
Fax +43 1 4037050-190