

Bulgaria: Boom of Organic Agriculture

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Recent developments

Considerable growth occurred in organic farming between 2009–2010 in Bulgaria. The certified land doubled between 2009 and 2010. During this time, the number of operators (producers, processors, exporters, importers) increased by 76 percent and the highest growth was seen for cultivated oilseeds, which increased fourfold. The area for medicinal and aromatic plants and nuts increased by more than 50 percent, and the cereal and vegetable area doubled.

Milestones in the development of organic farming Bulgaria

- **1993: The first organic pilot farm** (8 hectares) was established on the farm at the Agrarian University of Plovdiv.
- **1996–2000: First intensive activities in the development of organic farming** in Bulgaria, such as trainings for farmers, publication of literature, and the preparation of the national legislation. The project “Development of organic farming in the Central Balkan Region” was financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and Bioselena (www.bioselena.com).
- **2000–2004: First steps in organic farming in Bulgaria took taking place.** The establishment of a national organic legislation (Ordinance 22 and Ordinance 35), the first national organic farming festival, the first farm certification; in 2003, Bulgaria participated for the first time at the BioFach Organic Trade Fair; in 2004, the first specialised organic shop in Sophia was established.
- **2005–2008: Organic products became available in Bulgarian shops.** In 2005, organic foods appeared for the first time in the supermarkets of Sofia; in 2007, organic foods became available for the first time in shops outside Sofia; in 2008, the organic boom begins with more than 1'500 shops selling organic products; the first TV advertisement for organic food also appeared during this time.
- **2009–2010: Economic crisis and consolidation of the sector:** Organic farmers began receiving payments from the government; the association of organic farmers was established; the association of traders of organic food was set up; organic agriculture in Bulgaria begins developing into a real economic sector.

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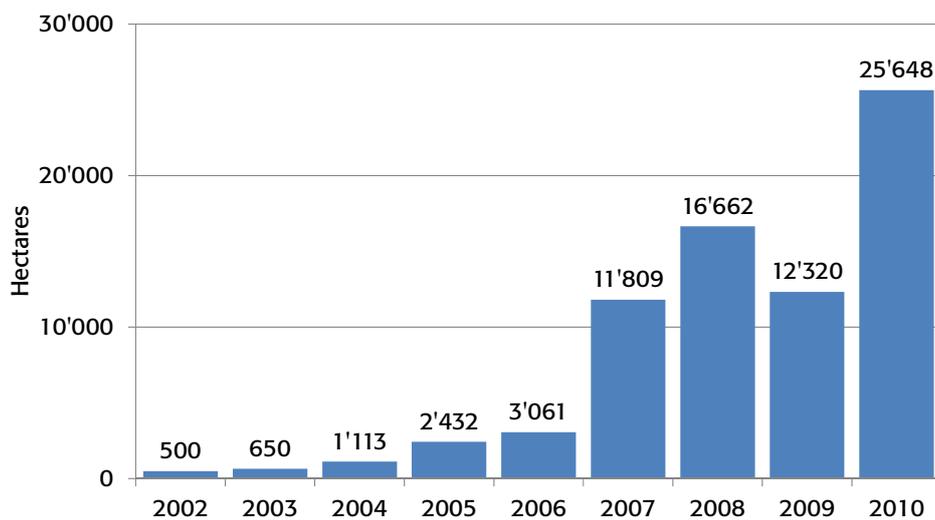


Figure 64: Bulgaria: Development of organic agricultural land in Bulgaria 2002–2010

Sources: Data for 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005: Bioselena. Data for 2006-2010: Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Bulgaria

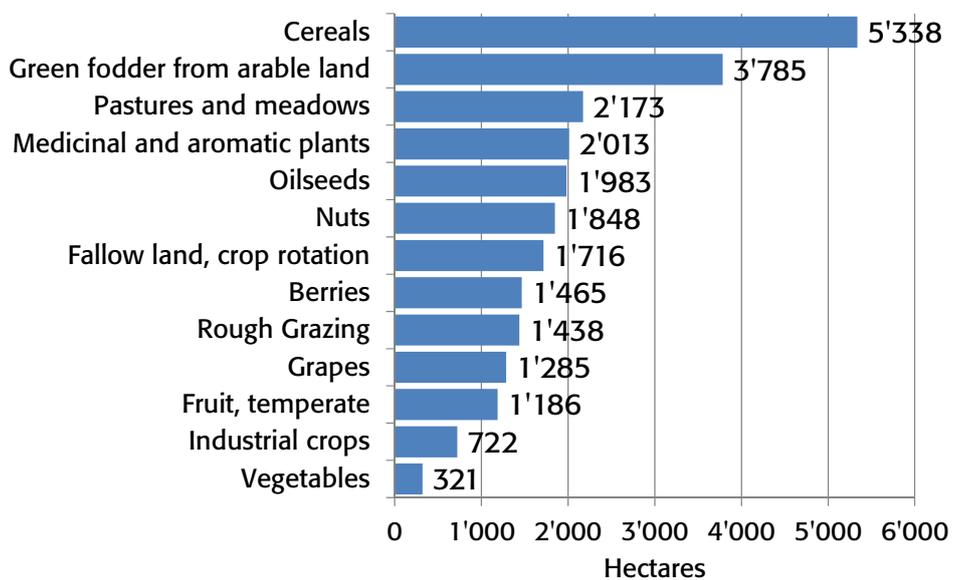


Figure 65: Bulgaria: Key crops grown 2010

Source: Ministry of Agriculture Bulgaria

Production and operator data

At the end of 2010, 25'648 hectares were farmed organically, constituting 0.47 percent of the total usable farmland in Bulgaria. The main crops cultivated were aromatic and medicinal plants, small fruits, and nuts.

The Bulgarian organic agriculture consists of large areas, certified for the collection of wild fruit, herbs and mushrooms.

Organic animal breeding was still underdeveloped in 2010, with only a small number of certified farms and animals. Organic apiculture had 46'429 beehives under organic management at the end of 2010.

Bulgaria has ten control and certification authorities for organic farming. Only one of them is a Bulgarian company, the latter having the largest market share.

Key institutions/organizations

- Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Organic Farming Unit of the Directorate Plant Production has four employees in this unit. The key role of the directorate is the supervision of the work of the control bodies.
- Commission Organic Farming to the Minister of Agriculture and Foods, consists of representatives of manufacturers, traders in organic products, research and consulting organizations and structures of the Ministry. The scope of activity of the commission is to approve the control authorities in the country as well as to take decisions regarding the duration of the transition period.
- State Fund Agriculture accepts and processes applications to support organic farmers, carries out spot checks of the farms and is in charge of the payments.
- Bulgarian Organic Products Association is a national organic association with members consist mainly of producers and processing units. It was established in 2010.
- Association of traders of organic has twenty-one businesses as members (mainly importers).
- Foundation for Organic Farming „Bioselena” offers professional advice for producers and processing units of organic foods, as well as professional training in organic farming. It issues literature in organic farming in the Bulgarian language, promotes organic agriculture among farmers and policy-makers, as well as organic foods among consumers.
- The Agrarian University of Plovdiv offers master degree courses in organic farming and is the only university in Bulgaria to do so. It also has a nine-hectare organic farm.

Market and trade

Most of the organic products (about 90 percent) are exported to the Central and Western European countries, North America, and Japan. There are no official data on exports.

The local market has been developing rapidly since 2007. Bulgaria now has over 2'000 shops that sell organic foods. The market leaders are baby foods and dairy products (milk, yoghurt, cheese). There are no official statistics on sales. According to unofficial information, the market for organic products in Bulgaria ranges between six to eight million euros. About 90 percent of organic products marketed in Bulgaria is imported from the European Union. There are no imports from third countries.

Legislation

The “Law on the application of the general organizations of the agricultural product markets in EU” settles organic farming in Bulgaria. The terms “bio”, “eco”, and “organic” are protected by law, but only for food, produced in compliance with the organic farming requirements.

Detailed rules for the production, processing, and labelling are laid down in the European regulation No. 834/2007 of June 28, 2007. Some of the certification authorities offer certification according to private standards as well (Bio Suisse for example).

Government support / development cooperation

Government support is limited to financially supporting certain crops for a period of five years. The support is granted under Measure 214 of the Rural Development Program (Table 61).

Research, advice and training

Specialised consulting organizations, such as Bioselena, offer advice to farmers against payments. Some of the researchers also offer consulting services. The traders of fertilizers and plant protection products also offer advice.

The Agrarian University of Plovdiv offers a facultative academic program of 30 hours for students, as well as master degree programs in organic farming. Bioselena offers professional training in organic agriculture for farmers.

Links

- www.mzh.government.bg/mzh/en/Home.aspx: Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- www.prsr.government.bg/index.php/en: Rural Development program 2007-2013
- www.dfz.bg/en: State Fund Agriculture
- www.bgbio.org: Bulgarian Organic Products Association
- www.abt-bulgaria.org: Association of organic traders
- www.bioselena.com/en: Foundation for organic agriculture Bioselena
- www.au-plovdiv.bg/en: Agricultural University of Plovdiv

Tables

Table 60: Bulgaria: Development of the number of control bodies and operators, organic agricultural land & wild collection area, and beehives in Bulgaria 2002–2010

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Control bodies¹	2	2	2	2	6	10	10	10
Certified operators²	29	51	111	181	339	285	467	820
Certified organic land (hectares)	650	1'113	2'432	3'061	11'809	16'662	12'320	25'648
Areas for collection of wild plants (hectares)	-	-	-	110'143	397'835	397'835	401'426	546'195
Certified animals	-	-	-	1'514	3'101	4'565	8'939	9'952
Certified beehives	-	-	-	708	35'747	44'861	41'089	46'429

Sources: Data for 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005: Bioselena. Data for 2006-2010: Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Bulgaria

Table 61: Bulgaria: Support for organic farming under the Rural Development Programme (Euros per hectare and year, rates since December 20, 2011)

Crops	Transition EUR/ha/year	Converted EUR/ha/year
Meadows and pastures	120	120
Field crops, including fodder crops	250	197
Perennial plants, vineyards and roses (<i>Rosa Damascena</i>)	729	613
Aromatic and medicinal plants	448	327
Vegetables³	547	446
Bee hives	18.4	18.4

Source: Ministry of Agriculture Bulgaria

¹ Control bodies, accredited by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food

² Certified operators (producers, processors, exporters, and importers)

³ Including cultivated mushrooms and potatoes