

Management Aspects Regarding the Market of Organic Products in Romania

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Abstract

The organic products that have been produced in harmony with nature and maintain the health of the population are increasingly required on the market in Romania. The production is directed especially to food, but non-food products are made in Romania or imported, too. Although the diversity and percentage of these products increased and the number of operators in this field is also increased, the achievements are relatively insignificant representing less than 1 % of total production; this fact may be explained by a variety of reasons, like technological, economic, bureaucratic, etc. Therefore, it is necessary primarily to grow the organic production in both agriculture and industry. Farmers must be supported by the government in achieving their final products. In a sustainable development, the intervention of state to support those who produce organic food and non-food should be felt more strongly.

Keywords: *ecological products, organic farming, environmental certification, eco-labels, organic food.*

JEL classification: D10, I15.

Introduction

Europe is the largest and most developed market for organic products in the world, these representing over 50% of the total consumption of products of Europeans. The predominant ecological products are organic food and beverages. Considering only organic food, the annual growth rate of the sector in Europe was 15% in 2010, exceeding four times the growth rate of traditional food sector. The first European countries that have increased business turnover for organic products include Germany, Great Britain, Italy and France, and according to expenses per capita for organic products, the first places are occupied by Sweden and Denmark.

In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe organic products market is only 2% of European revenues, most of these products coming as a raw material in Western Europe (Sahota, 2007). Organic products, made in harmony with nature, and maintaining the health of the population are also found on the market in Romania. The production is directed especially to food, but there are made or imported organic non-food products, too. Although the diversity and percentage of these products increased and the number of operators in this field also increased,

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the achievements are insignificant representing less than 1 % of total production; this fact may be explained by a variety of reasons, like technological, economic, bureaucratic, etc.

Romania exports organic products that are then used as raw materials rather than processed products. Farmers in Romania are not able to sell their finished products, the 90% of export being raw materials. Actually this market is still immature and the Romanian buyers do not have a culture of consumption of organic products. In addition, the economic crisis has reduced bio expansion of chain stores.

According to *BIO Romania* Association (www.bio-romania.org), our country has huge potential for the production of organic food especially, because in the past 20 years the agricultural lands were treated with very few chemical reagents. Moreover, in the last 10 years a territory between one and three million hectares of arable land with a highest quality remained uncultivated; as a consequence, in some areas, the conversion period to organic farming is even reduced to one year. It could be also mentioned the low cost transport on the river Danube, for the cereals as an example. Actually, Romania sells a lot of agricultural products, but only under foreign certification because the Romanian products are not certified, yet (www.sanatatesiviata.ro/ ..., www.bio-romania.org/....)

1. A short description of organic products concept

Organic products, also denoted simply as *bio / organic*, are made without using chemicals or genetic intervention, in harmony with nature and the environment, and are certified for this purpose by a certification document (Alexandri et al, 2003, Diaconescu, 2004, Zahiu, 2010).

The word *organic* is used in the Anglo-Saxon area (*e.g.* organic food, organic milk, organic expo, etc.). The prefix "bio" means the same thing and is used especially in the Franco-German space (*e.g.* agriculture biologique in France) as the prefix "eco", too. On the logo of agricultural products in Romania this is similarly written, being mentioned as *Organic Agriculture*. Also, other names are generally used on the market, such as *natural product* and *conventional food*. *Natural product* derived from conventional agriculture, meaning that synthetic food additives were not used for its production; this is just a marketing name, without legal constraints. *Conventional food* means that during its preparation the raw material is provided from conventional farming, including the use of synthetic chemicals and artificial food additives.

Although ecological products are more expensive, many consumers are turning nowadays to these products, because today's society requires a lifestyle less balanced with a fast rhythm of life, inappropriate diet and excessive pollution. Events such as "mad cow" disease, "avian flu" or the dioxin existing in food, have generated unease and anxiety safety of food products. The organic products help

people to enjoy everything that nature has better, reducing the risk of cancer, allergies and skin diseases.

On the other hand, the consumers are interested in quality of foods consumed and they request information about production methods of these foods. The organic foods are also popular for their taste, because the plants are grown by obeying the appropriate seasons and are harvested at maturity, giving them a good taste, unobtainable in other culture types. The meat of animals (or birds) bred in freedom differ in taste from the meat of the same type obtained in large farms (poultry farms, for instance).

Organic food products have a high content of amino acids, vitamins (especially vitamin C) and trace minerals, low in nitrogen (Williams, 2002). Studies on the influence on human health caused by consumption of organic food and conventional food are not conclusive and may be biased by confounding factors (Magkos et al, 2006). However, consumption of meat of animals fed green indicated a slight improvement in human health (Magkos et al, 2003). In addition, organic farming does not introduce chemicals into soil and groundwater, so in this way our environment is better protected. Moreover, producers of organic products revitalize local economies and contribute to sustainable development (Stagl, 2002).

In this respect it worth to mention the statements of French Food Safety Agency: (1) green growth plants contain more dry matter, more amounts of minerals (iron and magnesium) but less than 50% nitrates; (2) organic products from animals have a higher content of polyunsaturated fatty acids; (3) a percentage of 94-100% from organic foods does not contain pesticide residues; (4) mycotoxins concentrations in organic foods are at levels similar to that in conventional foods (Lairon, 2010),).

More persons have realized the benefits of organic products. It was established a profile of a today's consumers of bio-products that may be characterized by followings (Directorate General for Agriculture, Bruxelles, 2010):

- they are active persons of 30-50 year age, living in urban areas, with an average or above average education;
- they have children and, therefore, are interested in their own health and children;
- they are not consumers of organic products only, but are aware that their chances to maintain a good health increase by increasing the consumption of organic products;
- they are not all only rich people.

Romanian consumers of organic products are city dwellers with a high or medium education, having 25-45 years age and generally high incomes. Additionally, there may be persons with serious health problems, who choose therefore to make financial effort to buy organic products.

2. The quality of organic products

The requirements that must meet a food to be certified as organic vary from country to country, although there is a general set of rules around the world:

- is prohibited, with few exceptions, to be used synthetic chemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides, other food additives;
- is forbidden to use genetically modified organisms;
- is forbidden to use irradiation;
- the soil used for plant growth must be free of chemicals for several years (2 years minimum, in Romania) before starting organic production;
- certified producers must maintain the written records of daily operations;
- inopportune inspections of authorities for certification can take place anytime.

For non-food ecological products it is compulsory to specify the protection of environment and health of users. For example, the following requirements are necessary to be fulfilled:

- ecological detergents used must not contain phosphate and must be biodegradable in more than 90%;
- the organic cosmetics should not contain preservatives, dyes, synthetic fragrances, derivatives of ethylene glycol, silicon, chlorine, and should not derive from raw materials resulted from oil processing or processes based on nanotechnology;
- ecological textiles should contain only cotton produced by ecological production methods (without use of pesticides) or silk obtained from silkworms; there admitted recycled fibers and products that meet certain additional criteria for granting the European eco-label. It is known that the ecological textiles produce a low pollution of both water and air in environment and do not contain hazardous chemicals. Ecological textile materials meet the specific requirements throughout the production process, they have colors that resist to repeated laundering or forced drying, are resistant to sunlight without discolored and have long durability;
- tires for vehicles made from green rubbers are stiffer, thus reducing drag, whereas their grip and life time are higher;
- ecological home appliances should minimize emissions of greenhouse gases; also, they should have increased energy efficiency and eliminate germs and allergens in the environment, their packaging does not pollute the environment and can be recycled;
- childcare products should be ecological, easy to use, hypoallergenic and biodegradable.

On the market of non-food products, the price of organic products is higher than for the synthetic products or for the conventional ones. This is happen because

their costs for achievement are higher, according to the followings:

- the use of more expensive ingredients in the production process;
- a prolonged duration of production;
- the production process requires specialized people;
- the production must meet certain established standards to receive certification;
- a lot of technological operations are performed manually or using natural means.

3. Certification of organic products

According to the rules, only agricultural products or other products related to agriculture can be certified, for instance: seeds, meat, processed foods, dairy food, etc. In terms of trade, the organic certification can be also granted by private certification organizations, which are not subject to any control of state authorities and they do not have to be accredited. These certification bodies can provide certification for other products than food products, too: organic cosmetics, textiles, certificates for restaurants and catering companies.

The organic certification has the role to protect consumers and help them to distinguish easily organic products from other products. The first international standard for organic food products was published in 1980. Countries like Austria and France had the first legislative initiatives in organic products. The adopted EU Organic Regulation 2092/91 has set standards for quality, labeling and inspection of organic products, and in 2001 the conditions for livestock production were included (Huber et al, 2007).

In Romania, the control and certification of organic products is currently provided by private inspection and certification bodies (from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, MARD). They are approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on the basis of independence, impartiality and competence established by Order No. 65/2010 that established the rules on: (i) the organization of inspection and certification system; (ii) approval of inspections and certifications; (iii) approval of monitoring activities. Approval by MARD Ministry for inspection and certification bodies is preceded compulsory by the accreditation of these bodies in accordance with European Standard EN ISO 45011:1998.

The national logo "ae" together with the EU logo ([www.eticheta-ecologica.ro/...](http://www.eticheta-ecologica.ro/)) are attributed to complete the labeling, in order to identify by the consumers all products produced under organic production methods.



Figura 1. National logo "ae" for specification of organic products



Figura 2. EU organic farming logo

Application of the EU logo on pre-packaged food is compulsory since July 1, 2010. EU organic logo and the organic logos of other Member States are used to supplement labeling and increase visibility of organic food and drink for consumers. Consumers that buy products bearing both national logo and EU community can have confidence that at least 95% of product ingredients were obtained according to organic production and the corresponding products follow the rules of organic production. In addition, every product bears the name of the manufacturer, individual processor or vendor, as well as the name or code inspection and certification body.

Marketing of organic products is made only by traders registered at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through various market channels: farm gate sales, sales by wholesale stores, sales in specialized stores (traditional retail), modern retail (hypermarkets, supermarkets), sales through online stock organic products, network marketing (Life Care), sales through seasonal markets. The consumers are aware, using specific information and training, of the advantages of organic food consumption; so, they can offer a higher price for clean products, whose quality is guaranteed by the system of inspection and certification described above.

4. Organic products in Romania

The organic products commercialized in Romania are very different in their nature, as it is shown in Table 1.

In the followings we examine comparatively some aspects of these products, classified in two main groups: agricultural and non-agricultural products.

Table 1. Organic products existing in Romanian markets

Organic products market in Romania	1. Food	vegetables fruit wine juice oil tea honey and bee products milk and cheese bread and bakery soy products baby food nutritional supplements
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	2. Non-food products	childcare products cosmetics (for make-up, hygiene, relaxation) organic textiles (clothes, organic cotton sheets) green tires detergents household appliances ecological furniture
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a. Organic food

The major percentage of food products consists in organic food provided by organic farms in Romania or imported products. For example, traders in organic products have imported sugar from Brazil (brown sugar derived from sugar cane). Biscuits, wafers and various sorts of cream came from Holland, Germany and Italy, and ecological bread from Poland. In large supermarkets (Carrefour, Cora, Gima, Real, Mega Image) the share of organic products is given by dairy products and eggs ([www.sanatatesiviata.ro/...](http://www.sanatatesiviata.ro/)).

Romania has a significant agricultural potential, the soil and climatic conditions favorable to agriculture and around 14.8 million hectares of agricultural land, being ranked in Europe on 7th place, after France, Spain, Poland, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom. Romania holds a share of 8% of total agricultural area used by EU Member States. However, this agricultural potential is still untapped at its best, and regarding the organic products only 2% of the agricultural area is reserved for this type of products. As a comparison, other developed countries accounts more surface area: Austria 11%, Sweden 9.9%, Latvia 9.8%, Italy 9%, Estonia 8.8% and the Czech Republic 8.3%. Worldwide, the sales of organic products are 1-2% of total food sales.

Organic products market in Romania is still rising. Thus, the total area under cultivation increased from 17,438 ha ecological land in 2000, to 170,000 ha in 2007, reaching about 300,000 ha in 2011. There are grown grains, oilseeds and protein containing plants, vegetables, fruits; some other crops are collected from wild flora. The number of animals and birds are increasing.

Table 2 shows the evolution of surface area where the organic cultivation is made. The evolution of crop areas of ecological and organic products (www.agricultura-ecologica.ro) and the increasing number of operators involved in organic production are presented in Tables 3-5.

Table 2. The evolution of surface area with organic cultivation

Year	2000	2007	2010	2011
Area of organic cultivation, ha	17438	170000	260000	300000
Dynamic, %	-	975	1490	1720

(Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development)

Table 3. Evolution of crop areas and production of ecological and organic products

Parameter	Ecological and organic products			Total area or production in Romania	Share (2011/Total) %
	U.M.	2005	2011		
Area planted on arable land	ha	22100	158825	14.8 mil	1,07
Pastures, fodder	ha	42300	51200	14.8 mil.	0,35
Permanent crops (vineyards and orchards)	ha		5484 ha	14.8 mil.	0,37
Collection of spontaneous flora	ha	17360	47101	14.8 mil.	0,32
Organic milk production	L	10 mil.	11,2 mil.	5.5 billion	0,20
Organic honey production	tone	600	1243		

Table 4. The evolution of organic operators in Romania

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of operators	3409	3834	4191	3228	4322	10156

(Source: Communications of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, inspection and certification bodies)

Table 5. Romanian companies specialized in organic products, registered in February 2011

Manufacturers	Processors	Beekeepers	Merchants	Importers	Exporters	Aquaculture producers
9594	195	206	124	24	13	40

(Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development)

In general, local farmers have produced cereals, honey, eggs and organic milk with costs about 30% higher than for conventional products, due to the use of natural fertilizers, special treatment of plants and higher cost labor. Unfortunately, the Romanian citizen can not afford to spend significant money for organic food consumption; therefore, most of the organic products obtained in Romania go to export. For instance, in 2010 there were exported 85% of organic vegetable products and 20% of the animal products.

In 2010, among the products sold in foreign markets, the largest search had the grains, accounting for 57%, followed in order by cooking oil, fruits and mushrooms, processed milk products, honey, and other organic foods (Table 6).

Table 6. The structure of the export of agricultural products and organic food in Romania (2010)

Percentages in the export on 2010 year, %					
Cereals	Oilseeds	Fruits and mushrooms	Processed milk products	Honey	Sunflower oil
57	23	17	1	1	1

(Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development)

In accordance with new EU regulations on organic farming, Romanian producers and individual processors of organic products must be directed to the followings targets:

- obtaining products mainly from ingredients of agricultural origin;
- use limited number of non-ecologic ingredients, authorized by the European Commission or the Member States;
- use a limited number of total additives (ingredients) and complementary food substances which are authorized, under certain conditions by the Commission;
- do not use artificial flavors or food colors, that are prohibited;
- to ensure that organic food ingredients are always stored, handled and processed separately from non-ecologic products.

As above mentioned, the organic food market is still developing slowly in Romania, one of the reasons being the price, by 10-40% higher than for conventional products. It is a fact that the eco-operators are forced to transfer their higher production costs to consumers. Other reasons for raising the price and decrease of sales are much stricter controls and certification operations involved in organic production, as well as the low purchasing power of Romanian consumers. Actually, the majority of Romanian agricultural products are processed by multinational companies, many of them processing Romanian products abroad (in Italy, Netherlands, Cyprus, etc.) and then they resell them under foreign brand. On the other hand, Romania imported large amounts of food from states within Europe, America and Asia.

The domestic consumption of certified organic products is only 2% of total food consumed, although nearly 70% of all products provided from the Romanian rural environment may be classified as natural and organic (www.agricultura-ecologica.ro). The export of vegetables and fruits was about 75 million Euros in 2006; over 20 million Euros of this export has been made with organic products (see the comment of the Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry, quoted by Mediafax). According to estimates, Romania should reach to an export of organic products of 1.5 billion Euros during the next five years, in comparison with 200 million Euros in 2011. This needs of course, a support by the authorities of this industry.

Romania continues to export mainly cereals, oilseeds and protein, berries, herbs, honey and very little processed products such as cheese, wine and bakery products. European countries, like Germany, Austria or Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Netherlands and Italy are Romania's main export markets for organic products

In 2010, the food products exported by our country exceeded 150 million Euros being traded over 100 000 tones of cereals, oilseeds and protein, berries, milk and dairy products, honey and sunflower oil; in 2011 this export increased to approximately 250 million Euros.

However, the Patronage Association in Romania shows that the domestic consumption of organic products is estimated as 120-150 million Euros annually.

Meanwhile, the value of imports of organic products in 2010 was 35 million Euros. The main foods imported were dairy products, chilled canned vegetables, muesli, fruit juices, bakery products, nutrition products for infants. These products come mainly from countries like Austria, Germany, Hungary and France, but also from other states within America and Asia. A reason for the most organic products imported on the Romanian market is the very small number of local companies that process such products. Another problem is the processing of many Romanian agricultural products by foreign companies in Italy, Netherlands, Cyprus, etc.; afterwards, they resell these products under foreign brand.

b. Non-food products

These types of products, such as organic detergents, baby products, household appliances, cosmetics, are imported mainly from countries like Germany, France, Italy, Finland, UK, USA, Australia, etc. All non-food products are labeled specifically, certifying their environmental quality (www.bio-romania.org/..., www.organicbaby.ro/..., www.michelin.ro/, www.eco-style.ro/..., www.detergentiecologici.ro/). As an example, on apply labels for cosmetics, the label BIO expressing that at least 95% of vegetable ingredients must be certified as organics, or the label ECO, when at least 50% of vegetable ingredients must be certified as organics.

The European ecological labeling, ECO label, was established by the European Commission in 1992. This system is a tool for certification of "green" products or services, *i.e.* products with reduced environmental impact. Environmental labeling uses certain criteria, set by product groups or services.

Qualifying for ECO label is voluntary. A trader who wishes to obtain a European ecological label for one or more products or services should contact a competent body (in Romania, Ministry of Environment). If the product meets the requirements, the ECO label is given.

The ECO label can be obtained, on the one hand, by manufacturers, importers and retailers of certain products and, on the other hand, by certain service providers (hotels and campings). Regarding the merchants, they can apply for the ECO-label only for products entering the market under its own brand. Do not give this label to food, drink and medical products.

For example, it was applied for cosmetics labels certifying quality, such as BIO label, when at least 95% of vegetable ingredients are certified as organic, or ECO label, where at least 50% of vegetable ingredients are certified as organics.

The label "Green Technology Inside" applied to household appliances means the use of resource saving technologies that will improve not only the future, but the quality of life today. The corresponding products are manufactured using sustainable processes and they work effectively with maximum performance. In Romania, EN-Flower eco-label was introduced, which is a label similar to European label awarded for textile group. The awarding authority belongs to the Ministry of Environment that has a special commission (National Commission) for the awarding eco-labels.

The Eco-labeling benefits would be the followings: increase of the export opportunities through compliance with international law and attracting buyers worried about their own health; health insurance of consumers; the financial savings achieved by optimizing the fabrication processes. Moreover, the most important benefit is improving environmental performance by eliminating toxic and dangerous substances.

The energy eco-label shows, by means of colors, arrows or letters of the alphabet, the energy efficiency of a household electrical appliance. Regarding this label, the legislation in Romania has been harmonized with Directive 92/75/EEC, in order to reduce environmental pollution. Labeling scheme is based on "energy efficiency index", as a result of comparison of energy consumption of given household electrical appliance, to be labeled, to averaged energy consumption of the European model at the level of year 1993, using variable values depending on the appliance category.

Romanian companies must prove the process and quality of the products that protect the environment and maintain the health of consumers. A very good example is that manufacturers which produce green furniture; they can use auxiliaries as finish varnishes for wood, water-based or oil-based wax, which could increase the price up to 40% of furniture. These manufacturers were able to penetrate on markets in The Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Austria, UK, Belgium, Sweden and Russia. In 2011, the sales of environmentally friendly furniture exported abroad have increased by nearly 20 % comparative to 2010.

In Romania, Ministry of Environment introduced Ro-Flower eco-label, a label similar to European textile group. Eco-labeling benefits are the followings: (1) an increase of export opportunities through compliance with international laws; (2) winning the confidence of buyers concerned their health; (3) providing health insurance of consumers; (4) financial savings achieved by optimizing the processes; (5) improving environmental performance by eliminating toxic and hazardous substances during the technological process and from products themselves.

The energy label shows (through colors, arrows or letters of the alphabet) the energy efficiency of the given household electrical appliance. In this respect, the legislation in Romania was harmonized with Directive 92/75/EEC, to reduce environmental pollution. Labeling scheme is based on "energy efficiency index" resulted by comparing the energy consumption of household electrical appliance (to be labeled) with the average energy consumption of an European model at the level of 1993 year, using variable parameters depending the appliance category.

5. Support for all Romanian and foreign operators wishing to invest in creating green products

Romanian government should support supplementary, by appropriate programs, all Romanian and foreign operators wishing to invest in green products. Currently, in our country the government provides different kinds of support, such as:

- provides payments for engagements recorded regarding those farmlands certified in ecological agriculture;

- awards priorities for operators registered in ecological farming systems, in comparison with producers / processors belonging to conventional agriculture;
- helps the organic beekeeping sector, together with conventional beekeeping;
- provides war chests from the state budget for participation of companies to fairs and international exhibitions.
- provides war chests from the state budget for payment of 30% of the proposed programs regarding the promotion of professional and inter-professional organizations in the ecological sector. About the remaining 70% expenses, 50% was covered from the European Commission budget (according to the Resolution EC no.3/2008 regarding information and promotion of agricultural products sold domestically and in third countries) and at least 20% from professional and inter-professional organizations of sector.

A National Export Strategy was launched for 2012-2016 period in the field of organic farming in Romania that aims mainly to increase the amount of processed organic products, together with their promotion at home and abroad. Also, this strategy will help the export in already known or new markets, optimizing costs in all stages of an ecological product (processing, distribution, storage, transport, customs activities, application of personalized packaging) and will improve the certification.

Conclusion

Organic products of any kind will keep the health and environmental protection. In Romania it is necessary to increase organic production, primarily in agriculture and industry. Agricultural areas have been intensively exploited in the past 20 years, so their treatment with fertilizers and pesticides has been reduced, allowing now organic crops. Research institutes and universities, by performing research work and micro-production, can be more involved the organic market. Small or medium enterprises should also focus more on organic products, winning both domestic and foreign markets. Romanian government, through his specialized programs, should support more Romanian and foreign operators wishing to invest in production and marketing of organic products. Farmers must be supported in achieving their final products, not only in creating organic farms that produce raw materials for export. It aims to build strong regional brands focused on excellence or national traditions that promote the identity of places and that can be an important source of sustainable regional development.

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