



PERSPECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN ORGANIC FARMING

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ABSTRACT

Following the main priorities within CAP, the main goal of this paper is to show the organic farming potential on the sustainable rural development and to offer an adequate conceptual model for a future stable and vital development of the rural areas in Bulgaria. The paper presents a discussion, based on literature sources, on the Organic farming as a priority factor in the agro-ecological policy of the government, as well as a strategic goal for the sustainable development of the rural areas in the country. The endogenous model is proposed to be the most adequate and appropriate tool for the implementation of the sustainable approach within its integrated factors: ecological, economic and social, contributed to the rural areas. In order to achieve a successful implementation of the model a more intense and closer exchange of experts at different levels is required, as well as enhancing the relationship between all actors in the organic chain, complying with the local conditions, ecology, culture and scale.

Key words: sustainable development, rural areas, organic farming, Endogenous approach, Participatory learning

The mass exposures during the last years concerning the environmental protection, the health problems, the arising plant and animal diseases led to a mass affection among the population and resulted into many movements and organizations. The economic-developed societies aim to response to the social and economic trends by harmonizing their policy with the environmental and society requirements. As a response to the quickly raising ecological, economic and social problems, organic farming could provide an opportunity for their complex solving. By implementing organic farming a balanced and harmonized connection between all systems and subsystems is built, completely integrating into the policy of rural development.

The main goal is to reveal organic farming potential for sustainable rural development

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and to offer an adequate conceptual model for the future stable and vital development of the rural areas in Bulgaria.

The Concept of Organic Farming

The nature of Organic farming is very complex and it includes many aspects – from one side it is a philosophy – facing simultaneously the nature factor and its contra-factor – the man. From another side, organic farming is a whole process, which includes methods and techniques for a production, processing and selling, providing intensive use of renewable natural resources and environmental protection. By applying effective agricultural resource management, the Organic farming stimulates the self-regulation and nature resistance, which the soil, plants and animals possess.

To define the concept of organic farming we will refer to the definition of *Codex Alimentarius* (1), according to which organic farming involves holistic production management systems, emphasizing the use of management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs. This is accomplished by using, where possible, cultural, biological and

mechanical methods in preference to synthetic materials. Further more, its main objective is to optimize the health and productivity of the integrated communities of soil inhabitants, plants, animals and people.

IFOAM – *International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements* (2) defines organic farming as a whole system approach, based on a system of processes, which result in a sustainable ecosystem, safety food, animal welfare and social justice. Consequently, organic farming is more than a production system, including or excluding certain inputs”.

We could summarize, that organic farming is not just a modern trend, but it is a real way of production, using upgraded methods in the production of healthy, high-quality food, as well as ensuring environmental protection and creating better opportunities for rural development.

Key objectives of organic farming

- To conserve natural resources, and sustain the biological diversity and balance within the whole ecosystem;
- To implement ecologically safety technologies;
- To produce healthy food;
- To establish stable farming units – ensuring self-regulation, low external inputs, rich biodiversity, effective use of renewable local resources;
- To stabilize the labour source in agriculture;
- To regard the bigger social and ecological impact of the agricultural system.

The unique importance and popularity of organic farming can be found in the complex influences of its **advantages**:

Ecological:

- Environmental protection and bio balance reservation through enriching the bio diversity of plant and animal species, as well as through upholding the natural resistance of organic organisms;
- Soil, water, air and produce protection and conservation;
- Enriching the soil structure, increasing the soil fertility, and reducing the soil erosion;
- Ensuring animal welfare.

Economic:

- Minimizing the external inputs through reducing the costs for energy, pesticides and fertilizers;

- Increasing the economic activity through ensuring a higher product net value and higher labor intensity;
- Regulating the overproduction in agriculture;
- Creating additional possibilities for the economic development of the rural areas;

By implementing a sustainable management to the organic systems, the organic farming could give stable yields, profits, and return of the used labor, compared to the traditional systems.

- Increasing the attractiveness of rural areas and creating possibilities for development of ecological tourism.

Social:

- Decreasing the process of migration;
- Increasing the level of employment in the rural areas through intensifying the labor by implementing the organic farming methods, within production, processing and marketing (3);
- Providing additional possibilities and alternatives for the farmers;
- Ensuring population health concern.

Using the main advantages of organic farming, it could be implemented not only in the economically developed countries, but as well as in the less developed countries and regions, enhancing their social, economic and ecological development.

Legal Framework

Complying with the main framework of organic farming development, set up by the European policy in this sector, the Government of the country has established a national framework. Considering the specifics of organic farming, such as completely integrating into the rural development policy and ensuring environmental advantages, it has been determined as a priority sector in the national agro-ecological policy. Its development has been dependent on the strategic action plans, through which different measures and policies are implemented.

The National plan for organic farming development within the period 2007-2013 (4), and the Program for development of the rural regions 2007-2013 (5) could be pointed as the most essential government measures in the agro-ecological sector. Both these documents are strategically inter-related. They give the main directions for organic farming and rural development, complying with the sustainable

factors, as well as with the specifics and level of their development.

Organic farming is a key factor for the sustainable development of the rural areas in the country, stated in the National plan of organic farming development. Furthermore, its role could be revealed by achieving the following strategic goals:

- To maintain and improve the environmental quality.
- To conserve the resources.
- To develop the rural areas.
- To avoid the process of land abandon.
- To stabilize the farmers' incomes.
- To reduce the level of unemployment, migration and poverty.

The laid goals in the strategic plans are defended by some basic factors, which in deal present organic farming priorities:

1. Organic farming is a broadly implemented tool, which possesses the potential to take an active role in solving problems concerning the environmental protection, the animal welfare, the rural development, etc.
2. Organic farming turns to be a big possibility for the national food producers. This possibility is existing because of the increased demand for high-quality and healthy food, with a guaranteed origin on the domestic, European and world markets. This factor gives a chance for the organic market development, covering an existing market niche, as well as ensuring additional possibilities for the farmers.
3. Organic farming is a sector with priority significance for the ecological, economic and social aspects of the society development.

Financial framework

The European financial framework set up by Regulation (EO) 1698/2005, refers to the financial support for rural areas, provided by the European agricultural fund.

This support is related to the following main goals:

- Increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector;
- Environmental reservation and land shaft management;
- Increasing the quality of life in the rural areas.
- The Bulgarian farmers could benefit from the next financial possibilities:

- The program for development of rural regions 2007-2013, Measure 214 “Agro-ecological payments”, included in Axis 2 “Improving the state of environment and nature”. It consists of sub measure concerning financial support to the organic farming.
- State Fund Agriculture– ensuring preferential credit schemes to the farmers.
- Donation programs – ensuring additional financial support through international programs.

At the beginning of 2011 the Ministry of agriculture and food launched a National information campaign for promoting the organic production methods and the financial support available.

Unfortunately, the established measures are still not effective. They are not implemented as a whole system, but partially and independently. A mechanism by which these measures will reach the real parties is missing. The connection between them is interrupted and the required effect could be not reached.

The Endogenous model – a tool for sustainable rural development within organic farming

Not far away the agricultural development policies and practices have successfully imposed the exogenous patterns of development, which meant intensive use of external inputs. By this way was supposed to attract external capital, technologies or institutions into rural areas in order to promote change and to increase food production. This has led to growth in global consumption of pesticides, inorganic fertilizer, animal feed stuffs, food additives, agricultural machinery. These external inputs have tended to substitute for natural processes and resources. However, they have become a threat for the surrounding environment and the ecological balance. In order to overcome these negative influences and trends, the economies of the well-developed countries proposed an adequate model – the endogenous model, which implements and promote the internal origin and development. The priority is to look, first, at what natural and social resources are available in rural areas– agriculture, people, natural resources and wildlife – and then to seek for a way, by which these resources to be used in the most productive way, and without causing damage to natural and social capital.

One of the alternatives to implement the endogenous model and to enhance the sustainable rural development is by applying the principles of organic farming. The basic challenge for the sustainable agriculture within organic farming is to optimize the use of physical and human resources. This can be achieved by minimizing and balancing the use of external inputs, by regenerating internal resources more effectively, or by combinations of both. This ensures the efficient and effective use of what is available, and ensures that any dependency on external systems is kept to reasonable minimum (6). A healthy and vital sector could ensure vitality and prosperity to the economy and the environment.

Many authors has been researched in this field and the common conclusion is that many of the answers lie in the hands of local people, seeking local solutions to local problems (7). By implementing the endogenous model into the rural areas, organic farming enhances the closer relationship between people and natural resources.

On its part, organic farming requires additional management skill, knowledge, labour, which means creating better possibilities. They could be revealed in three aspects:

- Integrating to the internal information – a need for specific knowledge for new techniques and technologies;
- More intensive usage of the available labor resource, occupying different activities: production, processing, packaging and marketing, there for a higher level of employment in the region could be reached;
- Added value to the products, using local processing and applying direct marketing on the farm.

Sustainable agriculture, particularly organic farming is, therefore, not simply an imposed model; it is a constant process for learning and perpetual novelty. It needs more than new technologies and practices. It needs agricultural professionals willing and able to learn from farmer and other stakeholders; it needs supportive external institutions, it needs local groups and institutions capable of managing resources effectively; and above all it needs agricultural policies that support these features (8). Many scientists explore this field and they suggest different models for encouraging the internal integrated development of the rural areas. In the context

of the endogenous model within organic farming one very successful model is proposed - Participatory Learning. It offers a methodology for a successful communication between the different actors – institutions, connected into a whole system (9). In addition, in the recent years the practical and research results in Europe and in the world approve the need for a closer horizontal and vertical integration between all participants – institutions and people, with a high significance for the less-developed rural areas.

One of the specific features of the agricultural and organic producers is their limited market power. The needs for specific knowledge and skills, the high level of inputs, the low level of the domestic market development suppose a high risk level, and require producers' collaboration, and integration of all actors in the sector. Implementing such a policy the producers could gain many advantages such as: establishing a synergy power, determined by the enlarged scope of activities, achieved higher level of resource return, increased market potential; gained higher market power, etc. (10-11).

Organic farming, with its multifunctional nature, possesses a high ability to adapt easily to other systems and subsystems on local level, and to be a catalyst for their future development. By implementing organic farming into the rural areas, the regional and local features as culture and history, landscape attractiveness, traditions (holidays and rites), agricultural tourism, etc. could be revealed and develop. Along this approach a certain rural region could become an attractive and effective agro-ecological and tourist center and it could serve as a pilot model to other similar regions in the country. Such a region could also become a training center, where scientific and practical knowledge could be obtained. In order to get a successful approach, a closer coordination is required, based on the principles of co-operation and partnership between all institutions – starting from the government (presented by the Ministry of agriculture and food, the Ministry of environment and water, the Ministry of regional development and public works, etc.), non-government organizations, training and university centers, local bodies, and reaching the beneficiates (farmers, consumers, students, etc.). This approach should be initialized on a

local level and further to integrate the rest of the participants.

Based on the existing national features, the national policy within organic farming, as well as the state of art of this sector, we could draw the following **conclusions**:

1. Closer integration between the participants in the organic farming sector – farmers, processors, traders, government and non-government offices and agencies, is highly recommended.

2. In order to encourage and balance the relationship between research institutions, non-government organizations, government organizations, and the independent farmers, it is required to establish relations which suppose co-operation, coordination and partnership, supported by the government and non-government institutions.

3. An adequate knowledge and training for all participants in the sector should be provided, with the key role of universities, especially those in agriculture.

4. According to the main principles of organic farming, as well as the strategic goals, laid in the national policy for rural development within organic farming, the endogenous model is considered to be the most appropriate one for the Bulgarian conditions – nature, traditions, culture, which could serve as a solid base for its implementation and performing the connection: rural development – organic farming – ecotourism.

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