

Organic Farming in Bulgaria: A Recognizable Brand with a Formula for Sustainability and a Horizon for Development and Prosperity

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Дата: 11.11.2016 Брой: 11/2016



The anniversary of the Association for Ecological Agriculture “Ecofarm”, held at the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, became an occasion for a large-scale discussion meeting of interested stakeholders, who sought, at a professional level, to define the common interest in the priority topic and demonstrated their affiliation with environmentally friendly production.

The event – the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the “Ecofarm” Association – brought together on 28 October, in Lecture Hall Seven of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, representatives of all professional circles related to, interested in and involved in organic farming in Bulgaria – science, education, administration, leading sectoral organizations, current and future

organic farmers, businesspeople. The reason why this emblematic event took place precisely here is by no means accidental. The Agricultural University in Plovdiv is the driving force that set in motion the idea that, following the global example, organic agriculture should be established in Bulgaria. The Chair and founder of the “Ecofarm” Association – Prof. Stoycho Karov – is part of the academic community of the University. The Agroecological Centre of the higher education institution, also formed 20 years ago, is the national scientific location where all innovations and adaptations in this business are conceived, developed and cultivated.

In her address at the opening of the scientific and practical conference on “Organic Farming – History and Perspectives”, Prof. Hristina Yancheva, Rector of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, herself an active participant in the launch and subsequent successful development of this type of agriculture in our country, drew attention to the fact that environmentally friendly agricultural production in Bulgaria is already a significant sector, whose profile includes vision, social and environmental effects, and high results. Prof. Yancheva reconfirmed before the broad audience that the Agricultural University will continue in the future to participate actively in the science and education of this highly prestigious and high-tech production, whose basic model must be continuously upgraded. Prof. Vili Harizanova, Dean of the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology, part of the organizers of the conference, stated that organic farming is not merely a livelihood for those who have chosen to practice it – it is a philosophy, a way of life. People who produce organically share common values such as care for the purity of the environment, a healthy lifestyle, and harmonious relations among themselves and with other living organisms. It has been proven, Prof. Harizanova emphasized, that human and societal health is a mission impossible outside the security and balance of ecosystems. The idea encoded in the very “heart” of organic farming as a production system is the preservation of the health status of soils, the ecosystem and humans. To achieve this vitally important cause, reliance is placed on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions and traditions, as well as on innovation and science for the benefit of the shared living environment.

With great interest and professional curiosity, the report of Dobrinka Pavlova, Director of the “Organic Farming and Crop Production” Directorate at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, was followed. With figures and facts she outlined the current state of organic production, with the key words being dynamics, sustainability and growth! Director Pavlova confirmed the position of the MAF that organic production is one of the priorities in national agriculture. Supporting this policy is the fact that the new Rural Development Programme provides for substantial financial resources to support organic livestock breeding as well. In the organic farming component of the national development plan of the MAF for the period 2016–2020, a special place is allocated to the mechanisms, procedures and steps that the state machinery will activate to define the common interest of the nation and the producers of organic products, to reformat the level of connectivity among all participants in organic farming in order to achieve higher standards. The formula for sustainability and growth includes several aspects. One of them is strengthening consumer confidence in this special production. This highly important goal can be achieved through strict control by highly competent and expert bodies. Ms. Pavlova announced that the state control

apparatus has already been established. Another horizon planned by the administration is the development of guidelines for organic production in crop production, livestock breeding and the processing industry, in which sufficiently high agronomic value will be generated. Three regulations and a national legal framework form the legislation in this diverse field. An indispensable factor in the long-term and forward-looking policy of the MAF, Ms. Pavlova stressed, is that every business has rules and they must be observed! Organic farming is a voluntary system and the producer personally guarantees what he undertakes!

Here are the other reports that were included in the conference:

A representative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Mr. Simonov, presented the report “State of Organic Production in Bulgaria”.

The Bioselena Foundation – Karlovo presented the project “Organic Knowledge Network Arable (OK-Net Arable) – Horizon 2020”.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Angel Trifonov, AU–Plovdiv, presented a report

“Machinery for Weed Control in Organic Vegetable Growing”.

The AISA – Balkan presented a report “Stimulation of Natural Plant Defence in Order to Overcome Phytopathogens and Produce Environmentally Clean Products”.

The Bulgarian Association of Organic Products presented the report “Problems Facing the Sector and Ways to Resolve Them”.

A report on equipment applicable in organic farming was presented by Scientact BG LTD – a company operating in the field of high technologies for precision agriculture and the environment.

After the presentation of the scientific reports, the conference continued with a poster session in which 15 reports participated.

Summit Agro presented products suitable for organic farming.

The conference concluded with the awarding of certificates of participation.