



FiBL project manager Thomas Bernet introduces the two “Albanian Guarantee” labels on Albanian state television’s morning programme.

Guaranteed food quality for Albania

FiBL is carrying out pioneering work in regional development in the southern Balkan state of Albania. The first milestone is the introduction of two labels that certify the origin of food and guarantee that it is GM-free and quality-controlled. Albanian Guarantee is the first standard of this kind in a country that is at the same time in the process of establishing its own certified organic products.

In 2001 the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) and SECO (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) together launched the SASA project. SASA stands for Sustainable Agricultural Support for Albania. FiBL was appointed by the SDC and SECO to implement the project.

In 2010 the SASA project reached a milestone: with the launch of two Albanian origin labels – one for the south and the other for the north of the country – there now exists for the first time in the Balkan state a food standard that certifies the origin of the food and guarantees that it is GM-free and quality-controlled.

People want guaranteed quality

“The labels were created as a result of market research which showed that guaranteed quality is becoming increasingly important in Albania – especially in the case of goods produced within the country,” maintains FiBL project manager Thomas Bernet. This is because things that are taken for granted in

western Europe – guaranteed product quality, declarations of origin and lists of ingredients on the packaging – are virtually unheard of in Albania.

The supermarkets in the capital Tirana mostly stock surplus goods from the EU, particularly from Italy, while in the streets small traders sell goods of questionable origin and often dubious quality. “In Albania shopping for food is a matter of trust,” says Thomas Bernet. “But this trust is based on subjective perception. As yet there are almost no guarantees for the quality of a product.”

Focus on the market instead of production

At first glance this FiBL project seems to bear no relation to either organic farming or agricultural production in general. “In conjunction with our two clients we have decided to shift the focus of the SASA project more onto the market,” explains Thomas Bernet. As a result, organic products are to be promoted together with regional specialities in the new project.

“The marketing, including the launch of the two labels, is only part of the project. We are working along the whole value chain to strengthen the sector and generate important income in rural areas.” So SASA is also continuing to support the producers’ organisation Bio Adria, the newly established Institute for Organic Agriculture (www.ibb-albania.org) and the Albanian certification company Albinspekt, in order to advance organic farming.

Here too, however, the emphasis is on the market. For that reason SASA is pursuing a dual strategy: establishing the organic market in Albania will go hand-in-hand with expand-

ing exports of the country’s organic products. Information gathered at the Nuremberg BioFach, the world’s leading organic trade fair, indicates that, in particular, there are market opportunities in the EU for medicinal plants, olive oil, and raw materials for the food industry such as chestnuts, other nuts and dried fruit. Organic winter vegetables from Albania could also find an outlet on the European market. *jf*

Contact: thomas.bernet@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)

Thomas Bernet talking to potential purchasers of the products carrying the new organic labels.





Organic farming stands up well to comparison

Since 2007 extended system comparisons, designed to run for fifteen to twenty years, have been running in Kenya, India and Bolivia. These field trials are comparing organic and conventional cultivation systems. The aim is to investigate the long-term contribution of organic agriculture to food security, natural resource conservation and the fight against poverty.

Experts regard organic farming as having a key part to play in the transition from resource-intensive conventional agriculture to sustainable land management. They base this on numerous experiences of organic farming projects in developing countries. In contrast to the industrialized countries there has been virtually no systematic study and documentation of the economic and ecological outcomes and services of organic farming in the developing world, let alone in long-term trials, even though scientifically validated data is vital in order to set up robust development projects.

For Dionys Forster, Monika Schneider, Juan Guillermo Cobo and Christine Zundel of FiBL, who are running the trials in India, Bolivia and Kenya, the system comparisons have various purposes: “They are important for moving the debate about organic farming away from polemics and onto a rational basis, but as well as this they are meeting places where farmers, traders, consumers, scientists, consultants and politicians engage in constructive dialogue.”

Cotton, maize and vegetables, and cocoa

The studies in the three countries include amongst other things the development of yields, soil fertility, biodiversity and the efficient use of nutrients and energy. However, for the farming family the decisive element remains economic profitability.

In India FiBL is researching different cotton growing systems, in Kenya a maize/vegetables/fruit rotation is being tested and in Bolivia a trial of cocoa in monoculture and in various agro-forestry systems is taking place.

In the Narmada River valley in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh cotton is the cash crop, i.e. the crop which puts money into farming families’ pockets. FiBL is carrying out the trial with a two-year fruit rotation typical of the region, in which soya and wheat are grown as well as cotton. As the producers are unsure whether they should embrace organic farming or genetic engineering, a trial of genetically modified Bt cotton is also underway. Those responsible are pleased with the results from the first years of the trial. Although the yield from organic cotton was somewhat lower than from cotton in conventional trials, that is entirely to be expected in the conversion phase. “The premium paid for organic cotton compensates for the drop in yield,” says Dionys Forster and draws attention to the long duration of the comparison trial.

Christine Zundel points out too that, at the Kenyan site with high yield potential (near the small town of Chuka), yields from organic and conventional plantations reach similar levels. It is only at the site with low yield potential (outside Thika, the district capital) that the organic trials produce a lower yield. As yet there is no data available from the comparison trials in Bolivia. *jf*

Contact: dionys.forster@fibl.org; monika.schneider@fibl.org; juan.cobo@fibl.org

Funding: BioVision, Coop Sustainability Fund, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Liechtenstein Development Service (Liechtensteinischer Entwicklungsdienst, LED)



2



3



4



5

To complement the comparison trials, FiBL is working with its partner organization bioRe and smallholder families to carry out practical trials near Kasrawad in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. The aims are to improve soil fertility and to make more efficient use of raw phosphate.

- ① A group of farmers discuss various techniques of using raw phosphate.
- ② bioRe consultant Ramesh Verma (left) and farmer Madan Kadwa with his wife Kalindi assessing the quality of compost.
- ③ Optimising the use of raw phosphate: Rajeev Verma talking to a group of farmers.
- ④ Rajeev Verma and Sitaram Ramsingh of bioRe evaluate the quality of the wheat grain.
- ⑤ Wheat grain from trials using raw phosphate (left) and without it (right).
- ⑥ Nadika Anandram harvesting wheat at one of the field trials.



6



Knowledge from experience: participants in a workshop in Kenya show plants that they use to produce biological crop protectants.

Africa: increasing and securing yields through organic farming

The majority of families in rural Africa live from less than a hectare of land and have less than two dollars a day at their disposal. They cannot buy synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. If yields are to rise the available resources must be used as efficiently as possible. Organic farming offers great potential for this. That is why FiBL is working to make organic agriculture accessible to smallholder families in Africa.

Raymond Auerbach, Professor at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and Director of the Rainman Landcare Foundation organic institute, concludes: “The so-called green revolution, which aimed to bring about a drastic increase in yields in developing countries from the 1950s onwards by using high productivity seed and synthetic fertilizers, did not work in Africa. It failed not least because of the high water consumption”.

For this reason most families in rural Africa still rely today on traditional farming methods to feed themselves. These traditional methods do not draw on up-to-date knowledge about the efficient use of natural resources. Yields and yield security remain low.

“In this respect organic farming offers enormous potential for Africa,” says FiBL Director Urs Niggli. “It creates value sus-

tainably, especially in developing countries. By using simple, cost-effective methods smallholders can achieve high yields, yield security and high-quality produce. Organic farming can be practised in all climate zones and can contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction.”

Producing appropriate teaching and learning materials

A FiBL survey of training organizations in Africa found that there are hardly any suitable teaching materials on organic agriculture available for carrying out good training. That is why, since 2009, FiBL experts have been working with African agricultural consultants to produce such material for trainers and farmers. The aim is to combine the best and most important methods used in organic agriculture and the methods of sustainable land use tried and tested in Af-

rica and to present them clearly in a training manual and in booklets for the farmers.

The materials address topics such as compost-making, water use, erosion prevention and marketing. “Videos and radio programmes on the same subjects are also being produced,” explains Gilles Weidmann, the project manager. As innumerable languages and dialects are spoken in Africa the teaching materials are being published in English for the time being. “As many farmers in Africa can scarcely read, we set great store by graphics and illustrations,” emphasises Weidmann.

The Gates Foundation now also aims to make organic farming knowledge accessible to farmers in Africa. By funding this programme the Foundation, set up by Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife Melinda, is supporting its first organic project. *if*

Contact: gilles.weidmann@fiBL.org

Funding: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



Gilles Weidmann, FiBL, and Brian Ssebunya from Uganda discuss drafts of the training materials.



How organic farmers keep crops healthy

AFRICAN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE TRAINING MANUAL BOOKLET Nr. 1

A healthy plant will grow to its full size within its natural time and will produce well-formed food materials. So organic farmers look at providing good growing conditions to the plants. They perform all field activities in time, plant early in the season, remove weeds before they damage the crop, and remove excess branches in tree crops before flowering to ensure good fruit size.

Organic farmers use strong plant varieties, which have been tested under local conditions to be fast growing, resistant to pests and diseases and good yielding.

Organic farmers carefully check seeds, seedlings and cuttings for pests and diseases before using them.

They grow crops in a planned sequence to starve and kill pests and diseases that live in the soil.

The better the farmers prevent pests and diseases from developing, the less efforts they have to control them.



Use healthy seeds, seedlings and cuttings only

Feed the soil with sufficient manure and keep it moist

Remove competing plants and infected plant material

Protect natural grass boundaries and bushes around the fields to encourage development of natural enemies of pests

Trap, repel or kill pests and diseases with natural substances

Pests and diseases also have their natural enemies. Have you ever thought of creating favourable conditions to enhance development of these useful creatures?

6
7

Illustrated clearly: how African farming families can keep their plants healthy without recourse to plant protection products.