ORGANIC FARMING PRACTICES IN LITHUANIA

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After Lithuania joined the European Union, support for producers of agricultural products increased, especially that for organic farming. During the membership period the number of organic farms increased significantly. In spring and summer of 2005 a survey on the attitude towards organic farming was carried out at the Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics.

Keywords: organic farming, support for organic farming.

Introduction

The adoption of organic farming is important because this method of farming makes potential possibilities to solve the issues of competitiveness of agricultural production, employment and additional income in rural areas. Besides, it helps to reduce the negative effects on the environment and supplies consumer with more healthful food products. Such method of production enables to form public consumer goods as well (Treinys, 2002; Vinciūnienė, 2003).

With reference to research data (Harring, 2004), EU-15 farmers indicated the following motives to convert to organic farming: higher prices of organic products, increased compensatory payments, avoidance of harmful effects on health and environment, protection of biodiversity, and a wish to farm sustainably.

According to the results of a survey carried out by the researchers of the Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics in 2004 farmers decision to switch to organic farming was motivated by the following main incentives: healthy nutrition, environmental protection, larger compensatory payments, healthy lifestyle, interesting activity (Radzevičius, 2005). Lately the numbers of organic farms and organic areas increased significantly. It is likely that one of the reasons of such a rapid expansion of organic farms is noticeably increased support to environmentally-friendly farming against traditional after Lithuania joined the EU.

The aim of the work is to find out farmers’ attitudes towards organic farming and to identify the factors that made farmers to take a decision to switch to organic farming, to evaluate importance and priorities.

The object of the research is organic and traditional farming farmers. This survey based on the results of questionnaires is the first attempt to evaluate the factors that encourage farmers to choose organic or traditional method of farming.

Research methods - the scientific literature on the object, investigation methods of comparison and logical abstraction, systematic approach, monographic method, typology, economic and statistical analysis.

Research and results

D. Znaor (Croatia) in his study concludes, that only in case of the organic output with 10-20% of the total agricultural output organic farming becomes beneficial to the national economy, and a negative impact on the environment starts to
decrease. However, the extensive method of farming at present ongoing in Central and Eastern Europe is unsustainable (Znaor, 2002).

As A. Wos and W. Joswiak say, Polish agricultural products are not able to compete with those of the developed Western European countries. Therefore, it is necessary to switch to the production of organic products since the present method of farming is close to organic farming (Zemės ir maisto ūkis Lenkijoje integracijos ES kontekste, 2003).

Organic agriculture is one of the most dynamic sectors; its development depends on increased market acceptance and state support. In the countries where support is sufficient, the number of organic farms has been increased very rapidly (Ribasauskienë, 2004).

Panevėžys County has been chosen for a survey and questionnaire interview. This county can reflect situation of the whole country according to the further stated arguments. Also there were other factors that influenced the selection of Panevėžys County to be surveyed: a rather large number of organic farms in this region as well as 15-year traditions of such method of farming.

By gender of the total 214 respondents 150 men (70%) and 64 women (30%) were interviewed; the average age of the respondents was 50 years.

By method of farming at the moment of the survey 108 respondents were running organic farms and 106 had traditional farms.

By level of education more than 2/3 of the respondents belong to a level of secondary or secondary vocational and technical background. 46% of the respondents have an agricultural background.

With regard to the opinions about the income from farming per hectare (including payments) in the next 5 years, it is necessary to note, that 30% of the respondents think that the income would stay on the same level; the other approximately equal numbers of the respondents expect a slight increase or a slight decrease of the income.

The attitude on organic farming as an economic development of the farm and a possibility to manage the farm more efficiently the respondents evaluated with cautious optimism. Only every twelfth of the respondents marked it as a priority solution. The same results show and farmers’ opinions on the increase of land value in organic farms. The abovementioned statement also is proved by the fact that 59% of the respondents have a negative opinion about the statement that organic farming leads to higher land productivity. Generally the respondents agreed that in comparison with traditional farming organic farming gives more possibilities to increase farm profitability (including payments). Among the most important reasons they indicated that organic products can easier to penetrate into markets; such opinion have almost 70% of the interviewees.

The analysis of farmers’ opinion on organic farming and the switch to that method of farming showed that 20% of the respondents never had an idea to change method of farming and nearly 19% briefly considered but did not go into this idea. The majority (72%) of the respondents are sure that organic farming has a positive influence on people health.
Conclusions

1. The results of the survey that was carried out in Panevėžys County in 2005 make a possibility to know farmers’ opinion about the main groups of social and psychological, and economic factors that have influence on the decision to start organic farming.

2. The respondents do not emphasise the farm size, type of farming and structure among the incentive factors important to switch to organic farming. The location of the farm, labour force and the expansion of the market for organic products are much more important factors (69-74%). The most important are support for organic farming (87%) and healthy family’s environment (91%).

3. Even if the ongoing support for organic farming were stopped, 52% of the entities running organic farms would continue this method of farming but a quarter of them would decrease production.

References


EKOLOGIŠKAI ŪKININKAUSKAI PATIRTIS: PRAKTIKA IR POŽIŪRIAI

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Raktiniai žodžiai: ekologinis ūkininkavimas, parama ūkininkaujantys ekologiškai.