

A perspective on the management processes specific to organic farming

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Abstract

The evolution of society has attracted positive changes in all fields of activity, implicitly in agriculture, but at the same time the increase in productivity in agriculture has also come with negative consequences, as they have significantly increased the use of fuel for agricultural machinery, electricity for automatic systems. In addition to providing safe and nutritious food, organic production is considered sustainable and protects natural resources and the health of consumers.

In this context, the main objective of the research is to analyse the current state of organic food on the Romanian market compared to the European Union by taking into account the main aspects of the market, to identify its weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. For these reasons, we believe that the chosen topic is current, the research team thus assuming an active role in participating in campaigns to promote and inform consumers about the benefits of consuming organic products.

Keywords: organic food, challenges, opportunities, consumers, Romanian organic food market, control bodies.

Introduction:

Organic food is gaining increasing popularity among consumers, leading to a recent increase in demand due to human health concerns. Trends in the European organic market are hotly debated because, although they account for a small percentage of total agricultural production, they are quite often highlighted in public discussions. Opportunities to provide this type of food to a large segment of consumers should be considered an important opportunity by producers.

According to Regulation (EU) 2018/848, "Organic production is a global system of food production and agricultural management that combines best environmental and climate action practices, a high level of biodiversity, the conservation of natural resources and the application of high animal welfare standards and high production standards which meet the

requirements of more and more consumers, who want products obtained with the help of natural substances and processes.”¹

The research methodology realized was the empirical one, by combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques (mixed method), including the collection of data on information on management processes specific to organic farming at European and national level.

In order to achieve the goals of this study, the article is structured on 5 subheadings, whose titles describe the purpose of those sections:

- subheading no. 1 – Organic and conventional foods, comparisons and an estimate of the possible health effects of organic foods
- subheading no. 2 - Importance of certification, costs, procedure and types of certification, as well as the economic viability of organic production management
- subheading no. 3 - Identifying the main challenges and the main opportunities on the Romanian organic food market
- subheading no. 4 - Tools for promoting and informing consumers about the benefits of consuming organic products at European and national level
- subheading no. 5 - Green product quality policies by promoting national strategic objectives.

The chapter is completed with conclusions, proposals and references.

Organic and conventional foods, comparisons and an estimate of the possible health effects of organic foods

The most common definitions of an organically produced food emphasize the technology or production practices and principles used and / or the "organic philosophy" (eg Goldman & Hylton, 1972; Klosky & Tourte, 1998, FAO, 1999; Bourn & Prescott, 2002). Thus, while some definitions highlight dimensions such as “organic production systems” or “natural systems” (e.g. Klosky & Tourte, 1998) and “green” or “environmentally friendly” (e.g., Goldman & Hylton, 1972), others emphasize the limited use of artificial chemicals in organic production (e.g., FAO, 1999) or its general philosophy (e.g., Torjusen, Nyberg & Wandel, 1999).

Although the attributes associated with organic food can be difficult to identify only by visual inspection, most consumers buy organic products due to the perception that these products have unique attributes (and in some cases superior) compared to conventionally grown alternatives (Vindigniet al. , 2002). On the other hand, a major reason why some consumers do not buy organic food is related to the perception that such foods are no better than their conventionally produced alternatives (Jolly et al., 1989).

Several studies have assessed whether there are differences between organic and conventional foods from both a producer (or supply) and a consumer (or demand) perspective. Supply-side evaluations generally focused on yield, producer price, and cost-effectiveness comparisons. In contrast, demand-side studies investigated differences in biophysical and chemical characteristics (eg nutritional, sensory, and food safety), as well as consumer preferences and retail prices.

- a) Comparison of production, producer price and profitability

An assessment of supply, the gap between organic and conventional products is especially important for environmentalists and humanists (see Table 1), or for consumers who have an "external orientation" (Gunter & Furnham, 1992) and tend to respond to the benefits or the impact of increasing organic production. Such consumers believe that conventional production systems can have off-site effects, with a negative impact on society. Other consumers choose to reward producers who they consider to be using, for example, organic production methods (Davis, 1994).

Most economic comparisons of the performance of organic production systems compared to conventional ones focus on marketable production (eg yield) or other related quality attributes over a period of time. For example, in a study for Denmark, Halberg & Kristensen (1997) reported organic yields 20 to 30% lower than conventionally grown crops, attributing this primarily to lower soil nitrogen, weed pressure, pest and disease problems. Studies for other regions of Europe have reported grain yields of 60-70% of conventional production, 20-50% lower for organic vegetables and 75% lower for potatoes (Conolly, 2002). A more recent survey by Statistics Canada covers 11,000 fruit and vegetable farmers over a two-year period (2018-2019) and most organic fruits and vegetables have lower yields compared to conventional alternatives.

b) Nutritional, sensory and food safety comparison

Nutritional, sensory and food safety attributes influence the consumer's choice between organic and conventionally produced foods (Bourn & Prescott, 2002). Therefore, several studies have compared organic foods and most products conventionally using such attributes. There are several non-economic attributes that buyers take into account when comparing organic products with conventionally grown alternatives. Although buyers generally link the quality of products to their appearance (Beharrell & MacFie, 1991), Goldman & Clancy (1991) reported a relationship between the consumer's desire to accept imperfections and the buying behavior of organic products. In general, appearance tends to be less important among consumers with a strong preference for organic and pesticide-free products (Lin et al., 1986). Product taste (ie aroma), freshness and shelf life are other characteristics that buyers take into account in purchasing decisions.

Studies on the long-term impact of organic food on human health are very difficult to establish. There are several factors that prevent conclusions. There are several types of comparative studies performed on humans. All must provide as much control as possible to rule out any distorting factors. People who eat organic food usually have a different lifestyle than conventional consumers. Factors such as living conditions, nutritional pattern, eating habits and sports are as important to human health as the quality of the food consumed. Therefore, a true comparative assessment of the health status of people consuming food from different production systems is very difficult to achieve. There are several observational studies that show that people who follow an organic diet rate their health better than others (Rembiaikowska et al., 2008), but this result cannot be separated from the above-mentioned aspects of lifestyle.

Various chemicals commonly used by farmers to protect their crops from pests and diseases are considered dangerous to human health due to their genotoxic, carcinogenic, mutagenic and teratogenic activity. Curl et al. (2003) and Lu et al. (2006) showed that young people who consume organic raw materials consume significantly less organophosphorus

pesticides than others. The conclusion was based on the metabolite content of the pesticides in the urine. Therefore, not only the nutritional value is an advantage of organic food, but also food safety.

Importance of certification, costs, procedure and types of certification, as well as the economic viability of organic production management

Operators engaged in the production and / or marketing of raw or processed agricultural (or fishery) products may use the term "organic" (or variations) in labeling and advertising only if those products comply with all relevant provisions and criteria. Thus, in the case of processed foods, at least 95% (by weight) of the ingredients of agricultural origin must be organic. As organic production prohibits the use of Genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the term "organic" cannot be used to refer to a product manufactured or derived from a GMO and also to designate a product whose composition would require labeling as a product containing GMOs. In addition, it is forbidden to use terminology that refers to an eco-label (for example, by using a trademark) that could mislead consumers.

The labeling of a product presented as organic must include the identity of the control body (country and code number). A single European Union logo was officially adopted in March 2010 and is represented by a symbol called the Euro leaf (a stylized leaf with its edge made up of 12 stars, set on a green background) according to the figure below. In 2013, he was familiar with only one in four EU residents. The logo is now mandatory on the packaging of pre-packaged organic food. Its use is optional for products imported from non-EU countries. When the EU eco-logo is used, the operator must also provide information on where the constituent agricultural materials were produced (EU and / or non-EU agriculture).

There are also specific provisions applicable to the eco-labeling of feed, products of conversion crops and seeds (or plant propagation products).

Member States must implement a control system to monitor compliance with the provisions applicable to organic production. Although it must be established on the basis of a risk assessment, EU law also requires that operators be checked at least once a year (except for retailers and wholesalers who only sell pre-packaged organic products). Competent authorities may delegate control activities to accredited certification bodies, but they must nevertheless carry out certain supervisory activities (verification that accredited bodies are independent and that their verifications are effective, information on any irregularities found being properly returned, etc.).

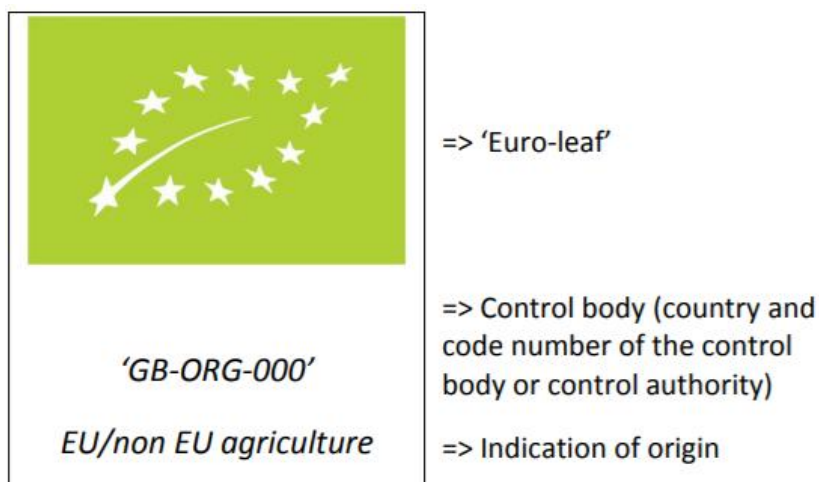


Figura nr.1

In five of the EU Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and the Netherlands), controls are carried out exclusively by public sector institutions. In four Member States (Spain, Luxembourg, Malta and Poland), control systems are a mix of public and private sector institutions. In the other Member States (19 countries), controls are carried out by private sector institutions, and at the beginning of the current decade, there were around 190 certification bodies in the EU.

EU action is not limited to defining control and certification standards and rules for green activities. Recognizing the unique qualities of these types of production, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provides financial support for their promotion and development. Following the most recent amendment to the CAP and its funding for the period 2014-2020, farmers complying with the obligations of the "Green Regulation" (No 834/2007) have received direct payments from the EU², in particular as regards their ecological component. (payments for organic or organic farming practices or "green measures"). Furthermore, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD³) promotes organic farming not only through support for advisory services or through collective and cooperative actions, for example, but also through support measures that encourage conversion to these organic production methods. In order to avoid double funding, Member States are also exempted from the obligation to establish other selection criteria for subsidized projects (such as criteria to ensure equal treatment of applicants) when measures related to organic farming are involved.

The European Fisheries and Maritime Fund (EMFF⁴), which later became the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), introduced support for the conversion to organic aquaculture, the marketing of such products and investment in their processing. The EU also contributes to research and innovation initiatives in the green production sector under Horizon 2020. Representatives of the sector and civil society are grouped under the auspices of a technology platform dedicated to organic production, which allows them to play a key role in identifying research needs and priorities.

Identifying the main challenges and the main opportunities on the Romanian organic food market

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, approximately 80% of the ecological production on the Romanian surface is delivered to the European market. The most important countries in the Community, which are important markets for unprocessed organic products (organic raw materials), are: Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and Denmark, which are also major suppliers of organic products for Romania. Thus, it is observed that organic raw materials are delivered to the Community and finished products are purchased. 80% of these intra-Community deliveries include raw materials such as cereals, berries, oilseeds, sunflower oil, honey, and processed products such as cheese, wine or dairy products on the domestic market, along with eggs are in a low percentage.

Organic farming has not evolved in the last 10 years, the number of operators active in this field register inconsistent variations specific to a sector in the early stages of formation and consolidation. According to the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture, the existing support

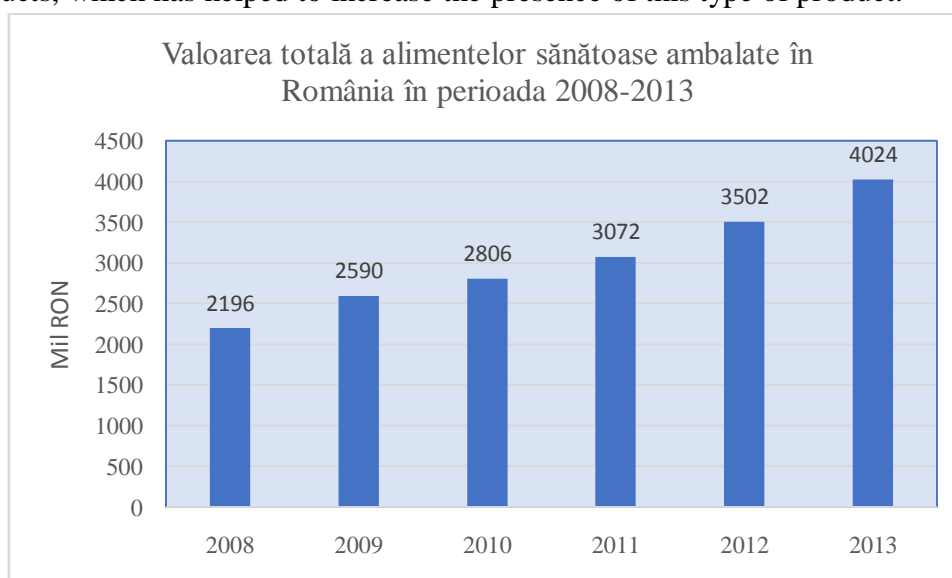
measures for the conversion period granted under Article 68 of Regulation (EC) 79/2009 were the ones that supported this increase in area. Organic farming in Romania represents approximately 3% of the total agricultural area of the country of 14.7 million hectares, respectively about 470,000 hectares. About half of this area is dedicated to the cultivation of cereals and plants for industrial processing, which are located mainly in the plains of Satu Mare, Arad, Timiș and Dobrogea.

The BIO market in Romania is mainly generated by supply, because the presence of products on the market actually arouses the interest of consumers. A big problem of the Romanian market of ecological products is the small number of processors. Most of the Romanian raw material is exported, the products are manufactured abroad and return to the country as finished products.

Organic food is more expensive than conventional (worldwide), for the following reasons: ingredients used in the manufacture of products are much more expensive and difficult to obtain, labor is higher, many standards must be met, most organic products are sold only in specialized organic stores, the harvest is 20-50% lower than in traditional agriculture, etc.

The most important sales channels for organic products in Romania are: farm sales; sales on seasonal markets; traditional retail - specialty stores; modern retail - hypermarkets, supermarkets, cash & carry stores.

The healthy prepackaged food market in Romania almost doubled in value between 2008-2013, reaching a total of 4 billion lei in 2013, as can be seen from the figure no 2 below. This development is due to growing concerns general health and lifestyle diseases, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis, all of which lead consumers to switch to natural alternatives on a daily basis. This increase is also linked to the increase in the number of retail stores whose offer has diversified, including a wider range of healthy products, which has helped to increase the presence of this type of product.



Source: *Euromonitor Internațional*

Figure no.2

With the penetration of healthy prepackaged foods in the menu of Romanian consumers, these were increasingly found in the offer of traders. However, the share of the

healthy products category in the total turnover has steadily decreased. Between 2014 and 2018, sales of packaged healthy foods grew at a similar rate, with most sales coming from large retail chains as can be seen in Table no 1.

Health concerns and awareness are on the rise among Romanian consumers and the upward trend will continue as the population ages. Buyers are looking for products that can help them maintain or at least improve their health. As a result, they change their preferences for the products they buy for the family. It is estimated that the Romanian population is willing to pay a high price for products that ensure better health. Thus, producers who orient their products to the health of consumers will find a positive response from buyers and gain a favorable position in the market.

Although no official data is collected on all sales of organic products, based on industry sources, it has been estimated that organic food sales in 2018 reached 280 million lei (\$ 65 million), up 30% from 2016 ”(Dobrescu, 2019).

Table no 1: Sales of organic food by various categories of representative packaged products

Sales of the main categories of packaged organic food (millions of lei)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Organic baby food	18.49	17.63	20.64	24.51	26.66
Organic bread	10.32	9.89	10.75	11.61	12.04
Organic breakfast cereals	13.33	9.89	9.89	10.75	11.61
Organic sweets	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.86	0.86
Organic dairy products	28.81	25.37	28.38	31.82	33.97
Organic edible oil	1.72	1.29	1.72	1.72	2.15
Organic rice, pasta and noodles	12.47	10.32	10.75	11.18	11.61
Organic savory snacks	5.59	5.16	5.59	6.45	7.74
Organic sandwiches	1.29	1.29	1.72	2.58	3.44
Organic sweet biscuits, fruit bars and snacks	8.6	9.03	10.75	12.47	14.19
Totally packaged organic food	101.05	90.3	100.62	113.95	124.27

Source: Euromonitor

Based on data provided by the market research company Retail Zoom, Financial Newspaper calculated that in 2019, the trade in organic food reached about 590 million lei (137 million euros) on organic food (or 1.2% of total food expenditure in the country).

Interest in health and improved purchasing power led to a significant increase in the market before the pandemic. During the pandemic, the appetite for organic food decreased somewhat, so that the growth rate of sales of such products went from almost 22% in March 2020 to 14.4% in May-October compared to the previous year. The growth rate of conventional food sales was even higher, at 15.2% compared to the corresponding period in 2019. However, there is a steady evolution of the organic food market which is the result of a combination of several factors, such as be:

- an improved economy
- expansion of retailers
- consumer education.

Demand is directly related to the purchasing power of consumers and the level of education, therefore it is higher in the capital and in the big cities. Food processors and retailers also play an important role in their efforts to create and sustain affordable prices.

Tools for promoting and informing consumers about the benefits of consuming organic products at European and national level

In the last decade, the concept of organic or organic farming has taken on new dimensions, being in a continuous dynamic, and the transition to organic farming from conventional has a trend that has developed rapidly in recent years, with consumer interest in this category products.

During 2020, the European Commission unveiled the "Farm to Fork" Strategy, one of the objectives of which is to ensure climate neutrality by 2050, related to the evolution of the current EU food system towards a sustainable organic model. both in the European Green Pact and in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It is also known that this strategy is complementary to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, both of which are in the attention of the EU Executive, due to their impact on environmental resilience, biodiversity restoration, zero pollution, climate neutrality, sustainability. food systems and implicitly on consumer health.

At the same time, under the first pillar of the CAP, there are three major greening practices:

- permanent conservation of pastures
- areas of ecological interest
- crop diversification.

They are promoted to reduce the negative environmental impact of EU agricultural activities. For this reason, the European Commission has set as its priority the goal of achieving organic production to account for 25% of total agricultural land by 2030.

In order to achieve the goal of increasing the area for organic farming, the demand for certified organic products must increase. Although comprehensive, this action plan emphasizes the "attraction effect" and aims to increase the consumption of organic products throughout the Union. European citizens are increasingly valuing foods that are produced to a greater benefit to society, such as organic products, local food production systems, geographical products and innovative production of low-carbon foods.

The proposed actions focus on increasing production, stimulating the demand for certified organic products by improving awareness of their benefits and increasing consumer confidence in the eco logo. States can encourage the consumption of ecologically certified products, with some instruments adopted at their level. For example, the Romanian executive has opted to reduce the VAT rate to 5% for organic products. Supporting the production of organic products will stimulate farmers to adopt organic production, which in turn will lead to an increase and diversification of supply to meet consumer demand.

Although the EU's eco-logo is one of the most common quality marks in Europe, its recognition can be further enhanced. The latest Eurobarometer survey on the subject, made public in October 2020, shows that 56% of Union consumers know the green logo. This is a significant improvement over previous years. However, important differences remain between states, with values ranging from 30% to 74%.

As part of the EU's agricultural policy, the Commission has already actively pursued the promotion of certified organic products and will continue to do so in the future, with a number of action policies in place, with the aim of:

- Use of green public procurement (EPA) and development of green canteens

The emergence and development of canteens promoting organic food as well as the allocation of organic meal vouchers could provide important opportunities to increase the production and consumption of organic food.

- Intensify the role of school programs

The Union's school curricula support the distribution of fruit, vegetables, milk and dairy products to children, combined with educational activities, with the aim of reconnecting children with agriculture and learning healthy eating habits to promote healthy eating and consumption. In line with the 'Farm to Fork' strategy, EU countries should prioritize the distribution of certified organic products in the EU's school curriculum by setting selection or award criteria in public procurement procedures.

- Increasing consumer confidence and preventing food fraud

Product preference depends on consumer confidence in the EU logo and control system. Fraudulent behaviour and intentional breach of environmental rules can irreparably affect buyers' confidence in the certification system and organic products. Cooperation between food chain officials, police and customs officials, judges and prosecutors is absolutely necessary at Union and Member State level to prevent and combat fraud in connection with certified products.

- Improving traceability

Confidence in the organic sector is inextricably linked to the ability to check each product in the supply chain between the consumer and the farm. In order to increase transparency and improve traceability, it is important to have an undistorted global picture of the actors involved in the production, distribution and sale of organic products.

- Private sector participation

Retailers, restaurants and catering services can make an important contribution to promoting organic food. A first approach could be the sufficient supply of such products to online stores, grocery stores, supermarkets but also the inclusion of organic menus in restaurants and catering companies.

- Stimulating conversion and strengthening the entire value chain

There are significant differences between the EU states in the green sector, one of the reasons being the lack of adequate structures in some countries. The creation of these structures would contribute to a targeted alignment of organic production in relation to supply chains, and this alignment would allow farmers, as a result, to take full advantage of the added value of organic production.

- Encourage the transition to organic farming, investment and the exchange of good practices

Rural development programs provide financial support to farmers to convert and maintain organic farms. The budget for support measures for the conversion to organic farming, for the conservation of organic practices but also for the financial support for investments provided for in the strategic plans must correspond to the national objective of increasing organic production.

- Developing industry analysis to increase market transparency

Additional actions on the systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of data will increase transparency and confidence in the green industry.

- Support in organizing the food chain

Organic farming is dispersed and producers' access to processors or retailers is limited. By setting up or joining "producer organizations", organic farmers can access financial aid available under the CAP as well as funding from the common organization of the market in fishery and aquaculture products.

- Strengthen local and low-volume processing and promote short-chain trading

Supply chains have to face another challenge, namely the continuous reduction of distances travelled by them, thus reducing the effects on environmental factors, which requires a rationalization of production and related logistics, and transport. Small farmers in the organic sector in remote regions find a market for their production and benefit from the added value of their organic status. (Stolze et al, 2016).

The exchange of experience and knowledge can encourage the emergence of local food markets and short supply chains, thus keeping all the ecological characteristics of the product intact. Organic production can lead to the emergence of new business models. The "eco-districts" have shown their successful role in increasing the tourist interest for areas that are not part of the traditional tourist circuit by integrating organic farming and other local activities.

Green product quality policies by promoting national strategic objectives

The transition of agri-food businesses to organic farming involves two main steps, namely: conversion to organic production and its subsequent certification. It is therefore necessary to ensure an appropriate allocation of all resources, such as material, financial, economic, information and human resources, which require adequate management for both business and sustainable development. Finding and applying the best technical and economic solutions in the management of these companies is not only a condition for the sound management of the company, but also a requirement for the proper conduct of the inspection-certification process.

Sales of high value-added processed organic products and the development of exports to areas with high absorption potential and the identification of new export markets are among the priorities of the National Export Strategy 2021-2025 in the field of organic farming in Romania. The priorities of organic farming in the National Export Strategy 2021-2025 are primarily aimed at the sale of high value-added organic products, the identification of new export markets and the establishment of an efficient processing and distribution system. In addition, other priorities in this area are the professional development of the participants, the creation of organizations specializing in the marketing of organic products, as well as an integrated certification system.

In the European Union, the countries of interest for selling are Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, where there are consumers who appreciate these products and also have purchasing power. Third countries are also targeted for export, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Singapore and the Middle East, where growing demand has been reported. An important thing would be to improve the

value chain and this is only possible by conducting market research to stimulate exports and expand them in areas with high absorption potential, by improving the promotion of organic products and an efficient selection of distribution channels.

Organic farming along with the wine, tourism and handicrafts sectors are the vectors for the development of foreign exports. The strategy addresses these sectors together, without neglecting sectoral differences. The vision of the field is to create strong regional brands focused on performance, traditions, to promote the history of places and which could be an important source of sustainable regional development.

In the coming years, Romania will promote its local agri-food products, innovative and creative products with high added value. According to the estimates made by the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Romania could exceed a figure of 1.5 billion euros by exporting organic products in the next five years, if this sector receives aid from the authorities.

Conclusions and proposals

Organic farming is becoming more and more important and is constantly expanding. This development is supported by the growing demand of consumers for organic products, as they become more aware and interested in health insurance, to which are added the many favorable effects on the farm and the environment.

Ensuring the sustainability of agriculture is at the heart of EU policies and measures, both within the Union and in the external research, development-innovation and cooperation policies developed by the Commission. Environmental practices can make decisive contributions to these policies, as explicitly recognized in the new European Consensus on Development. From a political point of view, both the regulation of organic farming and the Common Agricultural Policy can be considered as instruments with a strong potential to promote this.

Experts point out that Europe's future depends on a healthy planet, which is why all proposed political and legislative initiatives on climate, environment and soil require urgent, efficient and consistent implementation.

The national organic food market is still in an emerging stage. In this study, the major constraints for the development of the organic market in Romania were identified, showing that the management and marketing tools must be adapted to increase the production of organic products throughout the food chain. Organic farming is a promising sector for Romania, our country benefiting from adequate conditions for the development of this system of agriculture, fertile soil and low pollution of the rural landscape, compared to other economically developed countries that widely use super-intensive agricultural technologies, based mostly on synthetic chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The future development of new markets for Romanian organic products, the added value by processing agricultural products from organic farming and / or increasing the market share at national level creates opportunities for many operators.

In this sense, at national level we should advocate for educating, informing and raising awareness of Romanian consumers on the benefits of organic farming, both in terms of human health and the protection of nature and biodiversity, by promoting healthy food consumption and sustainable, including reducing food loss and waste.

At the same time, it is necessary to create economic premises for the benefit of expanding organic farming to the detriment of conventional for Romanian farmers in similar conditions of financing and market access with European ones, by developing specific, coherent and applicable policies and ensuring a legal framework. to facilitate the easy implementation of the legislative provisions, in order to achieve the objectives of the respective strategies.

With regard to soil protection, it is necessary to harmonize national legislation with the latest European provisions of the EU Soil Strategy so that the objectives set can be met through policies that include defining the conditions for good ecological status of soils, identifying contaminated areas and techniques for their restoration, as well as requirements for monitoring soil quality.

In conclusion, the research team will support and promote the opinion of experts, who have shown that the future of Europe depends on a healthy planet, so all proposed political and legislative initiatives on climate, environment, soil and food require urgent, efficient and effective implementation by all Member States of the European Union, in order to achieve the major goal of developing an environmentally sustainable European food system, from production to consumption.

Romania can be an engine of these changes, committing itself to a profound transformation of its own economy and society in order to achieve this goal, which as it generates economic growth, new business models and new markets, the creation of new jobs, technological development, as well as a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system.

Thus, the research team considers that it would be optimal for Romanian specialists to corroborate their efforts in partnership with academia and the private sector, in order to create levers in order to obtain a more dynamic, resilient and competitive organic agriculture. We also believe that recovery should be fair, respecting the principles of competitiveness, sustainability, cohesion, solidarity, circularity, environmental protection, soil and respect for social standards.

Efforts need to be channelled towards the standardization of organic farming, the transfer of knowledge and technology from academia to the private and public sectors, the promotion of digitalisation in organic production, intensive information campaigns on the benefits of consuming organic products and the influence on the environment and soil of organic farming, the need for collaboration between operators etc.

At the same time, we consider that the following guidelines could be included in the Organic Agriculture Strategy or in the specific guidelines, respectively:

- reorienting the current organic food system towards a sustainable model;
- extending the scope of organic rules to a wider list of products and new rules for organic production;
- increasing the amount of subsidy for organic farming;
- supporting the sustainable development of small and medium producers of organic agricultural products by creating effective promotion tools and specific distribution models;
- simpler but still strict certification requirements for small organic farmers;
- a more uniform approach to reduce the risk of accidental pesticide contamination;
- intelligent monitoring of crops and livestock in the ecological system;
- promoting and supporting Research-Development-Innovation in the field;

- stepping up efforts by addressing the direct and indirect factors of biodiversity and nature decline;
- consolidation of protected areas;
- restoration of degraded soils through the development of organic agriculture;
- reducing the use of pesticides, antimicrobials and fertilizers;
- promoting organic food consumption and healthier sustainable diets;
- reducing food loss and waste;
- control systems strengthened by stricter precautionary measures, based on a uniformity of risks, throughout the entire production chain of organic products;
- information and consultancy for students, PhD students, producers, processors, traders in agro-ecological agriculture.

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¹ Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council from 30 May 2018 on organic production and labelling of organic and repealing Council Regulation No 834/2007

² Regulation (EU) no.1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules for direct payments to farmers receiving support schemes under the common agricultural policy (see Article 43)

³ Regulation (EU) no. 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the on support for rural development through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (in particular Article 29 thereof)

⁴ Regulation (EU) no. 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Maritime and Fisheries Policy Fund (see in particular Articles 53, 68 and 69)