

ORGANIC FOOD LABELING AND CERTIFICATION: COMPARISON BETWEEN CZECH REPUBLIC AND ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Based on data collected from specialized reports and articles on organic products, the aim of this paper is to present the importance of organic products, the regulations on organic food and different labels used around the world in order to certify the organic food products. It also seeing the organic trends in both the Czech Republic and Romania.*

Key words: *agriculture, organic food, certification, labeling.*

1. Introduction

The raising of population determines a rush to produce more and more crops to satisfy growing demand. In these conditions, producers use more synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to control disease and insect attack. This has led to international debates about unhealthy food, the effects of human healthy and the measures that must be taken in order to avoid the harmful effects of this kind of food consumption demonstrated by specialists. These debates evolve around the benefits of the organic products versus the pure trade trick outlined by some. The organic food movement has earned its well-deserved place in many markets around the world. Its prestige is lately being widespread to vast parts of Eastern-Europe as well.

2. Organic Food

In accordance with Wikipedia, organic foods are made complying with the certain

production standards. For the vast majority of human history, agriculture was organic but during the 20th century a large supply of new synthetic chemicals were introduced to the food supply. This style of production was named a "conventional" one. Under organic production, the use of conventional non-organic pesticides, insecticides and herbicides is greatly restricted and saved as a last resort.

Organic food production is a heavily regulated industry, distinct from private gardening. Currently, the European Union, the United States, Canada, Japan and many other countries require producers to obtain special certification in order to market food as "organic" within their borders. Most certifications allow some chemicals and pesticides to be used, so consumers should be aware of the standards for qualifying as "organic" in their respective locales.

Organic farms have been relatively small family-run operations so, organic food was once only available in small stores or

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farmers' markets. Since the early 1990's organic food production has had growth rates of around 20% a year, far ahead of the rest of the food industry, in both developed and developing nations. (<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

The table nr.1 shows the area under organic farming (in %) in EU countries. We can also see the difference between the percentaj of organic farming in the Czech Republic and Romania.

Area under organic farming % The indicator is defined as the share of total utilized agricultural area (UAA) occupied Table 1

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU 27	4 ^e	4.4 ^e	4.7 ^e	5.2 ^e	5.5 ^e
Belgium	2.4	2.6	3	3.6	4.1
Bulgaria	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.5
Czech Republic	8.2	9	10.6	12.4	13.1
Germany	5.1	5.4	5.6	5.9	6.1
Estonia	8.7	9.6	11	12.8	14.1
Greece	7	7.8	8.5	8.4	5.8 ^e
Spain	4	5.3	6.6	6.7 ^e	7.5 ^e
Italy	7.9	7.5	8.1 ^e	8.6	8.5 ^e
Cyprus	1.5	1.6 ^e	2.6	2.8 ^e	2.9 ^e
Lithuania	4.5	4.6	4.8	5.2	5.4
Hungary	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.4	2.3
Netherlands	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.5
Austria	17.0	17.4	18.5	19.5	19.6
Poland	1.8	2	2.3	3.3	4.1
Romania	1	1	1.2	1.3	1.6
Slovakia	6.1	7.3	7.5	9.1	8.6
Sweden	9.9	10.9	12.8	14.3	15.7

United Kingdom	3.7	4.1	4.2	4.1	3.7 ^e
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:=not available e=estimated

Source of Data: Eurostat

Comparing the Czech Republic and Romania we can see that even if the Czech Republic is considerably smaller than Romania, its organic farms have a bigger percentage, showing a bigger concern in this field production.

Processed organic food usually contains only organic ingredients. If non-organic ingredients are present, at least a certain percentage of the food's total plant and animal ingredients must be organic and any non-organically produced ingredients are subject to various agricultural requirements. Foods claiming to be organic must be free of artificial food additives, and are often processed with fewer artificial methods, materials and conditions. Pesticides are allowed so long as they are not synthetic.

At the beginning consumers interested in organic food would look for non-chemically treated, fresh or minimally processed food. They mostly had to buy directly from growers: "Know your farmer, know your food" was the motto.

Today there is no limit to organic farm sizes and many large corporate farms currently have an organic division. However, for supermarket consumers, food production is not easily observable, and product labeling, like "certified organic", is relied on. Potential restaurant customers consider the average cost of the meal in the first category of choice criteria of the restaurant and the performance in terms of quality of the food and beverage in the second (Boşcor and Băltescu, 2013). Government regulations and third-party inspectors are looked to for assurance. A "certified organic" label is usually the only way for consumers to know that a processed product is "organic".

3. Organic Certification

Organic certification is a certification process for producers of organic food and other organic agricultural products. In general, any business directly involved in food production can be certified, including seed suppliers, farmers, food processors, retailers and restaurants. Requirements generally involve a set of production standards for growing, storage, processing, packaging and shipping that include:

- avoidance of most synthetic chemical inputs (e.g. fertilizer, pesticides, antibiotics, food additives, etc.), genetically modified organisms, irradiation, and the use of sewage sludge;
- use of farmland that has been free from chemicals for a number of years (often, three or more);
- keeping detailed written production and sales records (audit trail);
- maintaining strict physical separation of organic products from non-certified products;
- undergoing periodic on-site inspections.

The certification of organic food determined a growing of worldwide demand for these products. It is intended to assure quality and prevent fraud, and to promote commerce. For organic producers, certification identifies suppliers of products approved for use in certified operations. For consumers, "certified organic" serves as a product assurance, similar to "low fat", "100% whole wheat", or "no artificial preservatives". (<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

4. Organic food labeling

Organic Labels in different parts of the world.

In the United States, federal organic legislation defines three levels of organics:

1. Labeled "100% organic" - products made entirely with certified organic ingredients and methods;
2. "Organic" – word can be used for products with at least 95% organic ingredients;
3. "Made with organic ingredients" – is a label for products containing a minimum of 70% organic ingredients.

The logo of organic products in the United States can be seen below:



EU countries acquired comprehensive organic legislation with the implementation of the *EU-Eco-regulation 1992*. Supervision of certification bodies is handled on the national level.

In March 2002 the European Commission issued a European wide label for organic food however for most of the countries it was not able to replace existing national product labels. It was re-launched in 2009 with a design competition for a new logo to be used throughout the EU from July 2010. The new logo for European Union member states can be seen below:



In **Japan** the Japanese Agricultural Standard (JAS) was fully implemented as law in April, 2001. This was revised in November 2005 and all JAS certifiers were required to be re-accredited by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The seal of JAS can be seen on the picture below:



In **Australia**, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) is the controlling body for organic certification because there are no domestic standards for organic produce within Australia. Currently the government only becomes involved with organic certification at export, meaning AQIS is the default certification agency. The largest certifier of organic products is Australian Certified Organic which is a subsidiary of Biological Farmers Australia, the largest organic farmers' collective in the country.



5. Case study

A. Czech Republic

The area cultivated with organic products raised in this country from 226,209 ha in 2005 to 354,649 ha in 2011. (Eurostat).

Since 2003, the Minister of Agriculture has been awarding the national designation KLASA ("TOP CLASS") to the highest quality food and agricultural products. Products marked "KLASA" must possess at least one feature of exceptional quality that enhances their added value and guarantees their uniqueness in comparison with the standard products available on the market. As of October 2012, 1,237 products from 221 producers had been awarded the distinction of a KLASA label. (<http://www.klasa.eu/>)

The Food Safety Information Centre (FSIC) is part of the Food Authority of the Ministry of Agriculture. It provides the public with accurate and comprehensive

information covering the whole food production chain. As well as food safety, the FSIC also focuses on public nutritional issues. The main communication channels used by the FSIC are the website www.foodsafety.cz designed for the professional community. The FSIC also organizes specialist seminars for the public and youth education programs. (<http://eagri.cz/public/web/en/mze/food/>)

Specific Czech organic products are:

Fresh bread: Apart from the *Albio* bakery in Prague the supermarkets *Carrefour* and *Interspar* offer daily in-store organic bread. The company *Country Life* opened an organic bakery in September 2005 and its aim is to distribute organic bread throughout the Czech Republic. Other traditional organic bread bakeries can also be found at Jizerské Bakeries, the KaK Bakery at Blansko, Leština Bakery near Zábřeh na Moravě. (e.g. Zemanka Bakery in Lanškroun).

Other new products on the Czech organic market are ham and salami (Sasov farm), Edam cheese (Polabské dairies), kefir (Valašské dairies), the fermented drink Kombucha (Country Life and PRO-BIO), tofu (Veto, Vitall, SUNFOOD), homemade bread mixes (Jizerské Bakeries); plant-based spreads (SIVO) and a powdery spice mix (Terezia Company).

In general, organic food in supermarket chain stores is offered under the labels of the producer organizations. The first organic labels of the retail chains are starting to appear. Super- and hypermarkets are the largest distribution networks for meat (beef from Biopark; pork from Delvita (Farma Sasov) and dairy products (Olma, Valašská Dairy, Polabské Dairies). Delvita, Tesco and Hypernova offer a limited range of fruit and vegetables (supplied by Ekofarma Deblín).

In 2005 the BIO logo of organic food in Czech Republic was transferred from private hands into the state's possession.

The support given by the state varies according to the type of food product.

The main regulation, which was changed as beginning with 2005, is Act. No. 553/2005 which amends Act. No. 242/2000, came into force as of 30.12.2005. The purpose of this amendment was to omit all the regulations from Act. No. 242/2000, which are duplicated in the European legislation. This led to a simplification of the legislation.

B. Romania

The area cultivated with organic products raised in our country from 65,111 ha in 2006 to 103,093 ha in 2012, in accordance with EUROSTAT. The operators number in this field was 26,736 in 2012, almost triple than in 2011, in accordance with Agriculture Ministry. (<http://www.business24.ro/articole/>)

Some of Romanian organic products are: *La Dorna milk* (0,1%, 1,5% and 3,5% fat), *La Dorna chees, white and red wine* (Merlot, Riesling, Sauvignon) from Vifrana, *vegetables and cereals* (onion, potatoes, garlic, green and red peppers) from Biokarpos, sunflower oil from LTA Mondial.

The organic products are found both in the large store network and in the small specialized shops. At the beginning of the year 2007, only two shop networks were registered at MAPDR: the shop "BIOCOOP" (Sibiu) and the shop Naturalia (www.naturalia.ro), with units both in Bucharest and in the county Ilfov (Voluntari).

The sale on the domestic market is through the wholesale networks Metro, Selgros mainly by retail shops. The main stores that introduced organic products in their assortment of goods are: Carrefour, Cora, Gima, La Fourmi, Mega Image, Nic, Primavera, OK.

The general logo for organic food products of Romania can be seen in the picture below:



6. Conclusions

Where organic laws exist, producers cannot use the term legally without certification.

To bypass this legal requirement for certification, various alternative certification approaches, using currently undefined terms like "authentic" and "natural" instead of "organic", are emerging. Consumers have to be informed about real organic products and laws must always be adopted in order to certify these products and to regulate their production processes.

As seen from the information presented in this paper, various labels serve the purpose of guiding consumers. They have to pay attention and to closely analyze the available organic products.

The case studies present another view on the topic of organic food. Former communist countries are trying to adapt to organic production standards and they are keeping a very good pace. Their soils are prepared to meet increasing demand.

Taking into consideration all the aspects of this topic the first and most important issue is to be aware of tricks and to know as well as possible the consumer protection

regulations that might come in handy if bumping into a false organic product.

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