

THE ECOLOGIC PRODUCTION – A PRIORITY NEED IN THE ROMANIAN FOOD INDUSTRY

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***Abstract.** The ecological production implies several cultural and processing practices that have as main purpose protecting the environment, maintaining and raising the soil fertility and obtaining qualitative, unpolluted food products.*

The control is ensured for all the production, stocking, transformation and promotion stages; all operators without exception must submit to this permanent control that is officially acknowledged and supervised by the state.

The development of the ecological production is conditioned on the one hand, by a constant interest taken in these matters by farmers and by producers – the offer supplied on the market, and on the other hand by the consumers' education – the demand on the market.

***Keywords:** ecological production, standards of species, market study.*

1. The legal and organizational regulation of the ecological production in Romania

The ecological food production in Romania has been protected ever since the year 2000 as a result of creating a legal and organizational environment in accordance with the norms imposed by the European Union.

In line with the 34/2000 Emergency Ordinance, **the ecological production** consists in obtaining food products without using synthetic chemical products.

The ecological food production holds as main purpose the accomplishment of certain varied and balanced, long enduring agricultural systems able to guarantee the safety of the natural resources and the health of the consumers.

The main object of this ordinance is made by:

- The unprocessed primary vegetal products.
- The unprocessed animals and their products.
- The processed vegetal and animal products meant for human employment.
- The products obtained of one or several vegetal and/or animal and fodder ingredients.
- And the composed fodder and raw materials.

The National Authority of Ecological Products (N.A.E.P.) was formed in order to put this ordinance into effect; it functions as a specialized service in The Ministry of Food and Agriculture,

ensuring the observation of the specific legal norms and of the control concerning the ecological production methods of food products.

The 34/2000 Emergency Ordinance sets the methods and the basic norms of the ecological production in Romania.

The ecological production methods have to complete several conditions such as: observing the norms of the ecological production; getting fertilizers and taste ameliorators out of use; not using ingredients to prepare food, substances used in feeding animals, adjoining substances to prepare fodder, products to clean and disinfect animal shelters and other products than those allowed to be used in the ecological production, as well as using planting seeds or vegetal material obtained during ecological production methods.

The basic principles of the ecological food industry are:

- Eliminating any polluting technology.
- Making production structures and cropping-systems where the main role is held by those races, species and kinds that have a high degree of adaptability.
- Keeping and improving the natural soil fertility.
- Including rearing in the production system of plants and their products.

- Using technologies that live up to the standards of species, kinds and races both in raising plants and in rearing.
- Moderating the use of conventional energetic resources and replacing them by reusable secondary products.

The conversion of the conventional production into the ecological one must consider the accomplishment of a viable and enduring food-system. The whole unity, be it a farm or a piece of land in a farm, rearing included, has to be changed in keeping with the national and international ecological norms in a certain period. The time span of the conversion was set for two years for the annual field crops, lawns and fodders; three years for perennial crops and plantations; twelve months for store cattle; six months for small chewers and hogs; twelve weeks for milking animals; ten weeks for poultry for the egg or meat production bought when they are three days-old; one year for bees, if the family was purchased from conventional beehives.

The ecological production in Romania is supported by the National Agency for Agricultural Consultancy (N.A.A.C.). This institution has closed a collaboration project with ECOCERT, a body of accreditation and certification for the ecological production and the following resulting norms were set:

- ECOCERT - the consultant body specialized in ecological agriculture - is to take part in the programmes of the National Agency for Agricultural Consultancy for the training and formation of the formatters.
- It is also supposed to collaborate with N.A.A.C. on rural development projects and especially on European-financed projects where an important place is held by the S.A.P.A.R.D. programme.

ECOCERT is officially accredited by the COFRAC National French Agency for its international activity in accordance with the 15065 guide (the European norm EN 45011); COFRAC is a member of E.A. (European Accrediting) and of I.F.A. (an International Forum of Accrediting). It is therefore accepted on an international plan.

ECOCERT is an IFOAM member (the International Federation of the Biological Agriculture Movement) and a constant supporter

of the IFOAM actions; it is also an EOCC member (the Council of the European Bodies of Biological Certification) that has been involved in maintaining cooperation between the certifying bodies. It is also a supporting member of I.O.I.A. (the Association of the Inspectors in Independent Biological Agriculture) particularly involved in training inspectors.

ECOCERT was created in 1991 by a group of agronomists and biologists at a time when the regulation concerning the biological production was on the point of being accepted. The local and international ECOCERT inspectors are specialized in agriculture and food industry and they control daily the observation of the administration norms of the biological quality (the 2092/91 CEE regulation, EN 45011 and the close national norms).

In Romania, ECOCERT enjoys fruitful partnership relations with the Embassy of France in Romania, the National Agency for Agricultural Consultancy as well as with the National Federation of the Ecological Agriculture.

ECOCERT and the National Agency for Agricultural Consultancy have set a programme of professional training going on a national level so as to promote ecological agriculture.

2. The market of the ecological food products in the countries of the European Union

Statistics from 1992 have shown that the percentage of the ecological products from the total amount of agricultural products that were commercialised was of 0.1% in Italy, 0.2% in France, 0.3% in Great Britain, 0.8% in Germany; the best represented products were vegetables, fruits and cereals.

Ecological agriculture has registered an annual increase of 20-30% and a value of over 6 milliard dollars. In 2001 more than 3.7 million of acres (2.9% of the workable surface) in the European Union were cultivated in keeping with the norms of an ecological production.

Ever since 1995, ecological agriculture has been faced with a real boom in Denmark. In 2002, the cultivated surface was measuring approximately 300.000 acres, i.e. 10% of the total amount of the cultivated surface. The demand for ecological products keeps increasing in Germany too, even

though the prices of these products are even higher with 30-100% as compared to those of ordinary products.

In France, the ecological production represents only 1% of the total amount of the agricultural production. The market of the ecological products is on increase in this country too, so that in the year 2002 it has reached the value of 2.5 milliards of dollars. The French suppliers of ecological products cannot face such a growing demand. Likewise, France imports ecological products such as cereals, milk, meat and vegetable.

The French government has adopted a main development programme in agriculture where it is stated that France is to become the main European supplier of ecological foods.

During the past few years, there can be noticed an increase of over 40% in the sales in Great Britain, while the surfaces allotted to ecological agriculture represent only 3% of the total amount of the cultivated surface.

In 1997, in the countries of the European Union, ecological agriculture was allotted almost 2 millions of acres (as compared to only 120.000 acres back in 1986) and, during the same period of time, the number of the companies that have focused on ecological productions has increased from 7.000 to 73.000 it is estimated that, in 2010, ecological technologies will be used in 20% of the cultivated surface of the E.U.

The annual rhythm of increase of the ecological food products on the European market is of 20-40%. This is a natural consequence of the growing demand and interest in people's health and safety. The most required ecological foods are those that can be consumed fresh, especially fruits, dairy products but cereals and their adjoining products as well.

The results of several market studies coincide: the European consumers are interested in consuming ecological food products because they are convinced by the superior quality, as compared to the conventional products. Even if the area of the ecological products still has a small percentage in the total amount of the commercialised food products, all the surveys and forecasts agree on a long and short-term important raise in the field.

While on a worldwide level there is a number of approximately 100 countries that supply ecological food products, in Europe, almost all the countries present their own offer with such products, richer or poorer as the case may be.

The main European supplier is Germany. Likewise, throughout the whole world, Germany comes only second to USA. At the end of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's, there has been noted a considerable increase on the German market due to the fact that chains of supermarkets were supplying themselves such products.

In Germany, homeopath shops occupy a main place in what concerns the supply and commercialisation of ecological products (35%), followed by supermarkets (24%), door-to-door sales (20%) and other channels of distribution.

3. The development of the ecological production in Romania – a certain perspective

Romania has been gaining territory in the food production obtained through ecological methods, the ecologically cultivated surface in 2003 being three times bigger than that in 2000 (57.200 acres as compare to 17.438 acres).

Likewise, natural lawns and fodder cultures measured 41.9% of the total amount of the cultivated surface back in 2003. There is a tendency in the growth of the ecological population manifested with cereals (27.9% in 2003), as well as with oleaginous and protein plants (27.2% in 2003).

In 2003 there has been an increase of 79% in the dairy products as compared to the year 2000. The production of ecological honey has been increased from 10 tons in 2000 to 110 tons in 2003.

In 2000 95% of the vegetal ecological products were exported on the markets in Germany, Switzerland, Holland and Italy. 20% of the dairy products as well as 100% of the honey production were also exported.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, at the end of 2004 there were 264 suppliers of ecological products, and the majority was held by the vegetal production (146) and by the animal production (95), the rest of 91 goes to apiculture. In 2004, the cultivated surface under ecological conditions has been constantly improving, meaning 75.500 acres, by 31% more than in 2003.

For the first time in 2004, the Ministry of Agriculture has given subventions for ecological products. Therefore, it considered the fact that apart from having to support higher production expenses, those who obtain ecological products also have to support the certification expenses, and the special packaging and labels.

On the interior market in 2004, apart from supplying ecological food products, vegetables, Schweitzer cheese, butter and eggs were also commercialised.

Nowadays, the Romanian consumer is not ready yet to demand ecological products on a large-scale, neither financially nor educationally speaking. Thus, a volume of measures for the education of the citizens in order to drive them to ecological products is most welcome.

The driving lines of an ecologic demand must be implemented especially in young people's minds, starting as early as the school years.

Likewise, supporting suppliers on a large scale (in 2004 they only number 13), would mean avoiding the import of certain products requested on the Romanian market such as: the brown sugar made of ecological cane (Brazil), the natural diet bread (Poland), the vegetal rice and soja milk and the soja pudding (Germany).

Conclusions

There are certain specific traits that make the ecological food production different from other production methods such as:

- Improving in the variety of plants and animals.
- Cutting down or limiting the pollution of the environment, soil or of the phreatic water as a result of eliminating chemical synthetic substances.
- Maintaining the structures and a balance in what concerns the activity of the micro organisms in the soil;
- Protecting crops and animals through natural defence and self-defence methods.
- Using local resources on a large scale in order to obtain natural products.

Consecutively, obtaining true ecological products means expanding investments in the food industry or rearing areas, and ensuring the control on all its stages.

In 2004, Romania enjoyed an ecological production that benefited from financial support from the state budget. This leads to a raise in the percentage of the export contribution with such products. On the interior market, the Romanian consumer is not yet enough trained to choose ecological products exclusively, which only leads us to the conclusion that apart from creating the necessary income, educational measures have to be taken as well.

References

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