

The Role of Organic Agriculture in Networks for Rural Development

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1. Main Questions

- a) What are the societal contributions of organic agriculture in terms of
- spreading knowledge and experience,
 - maintaining the natural resources and landscape aesthetics and
 - stabilizing social resources?
- b) What is the organizational context of their entrepreneurial activities:
- In which types of regional networks are they engaged in and what is the regional benefit of this engagement?



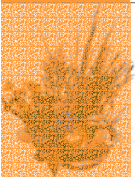
2. Results

a) The societal contributions of organic farms

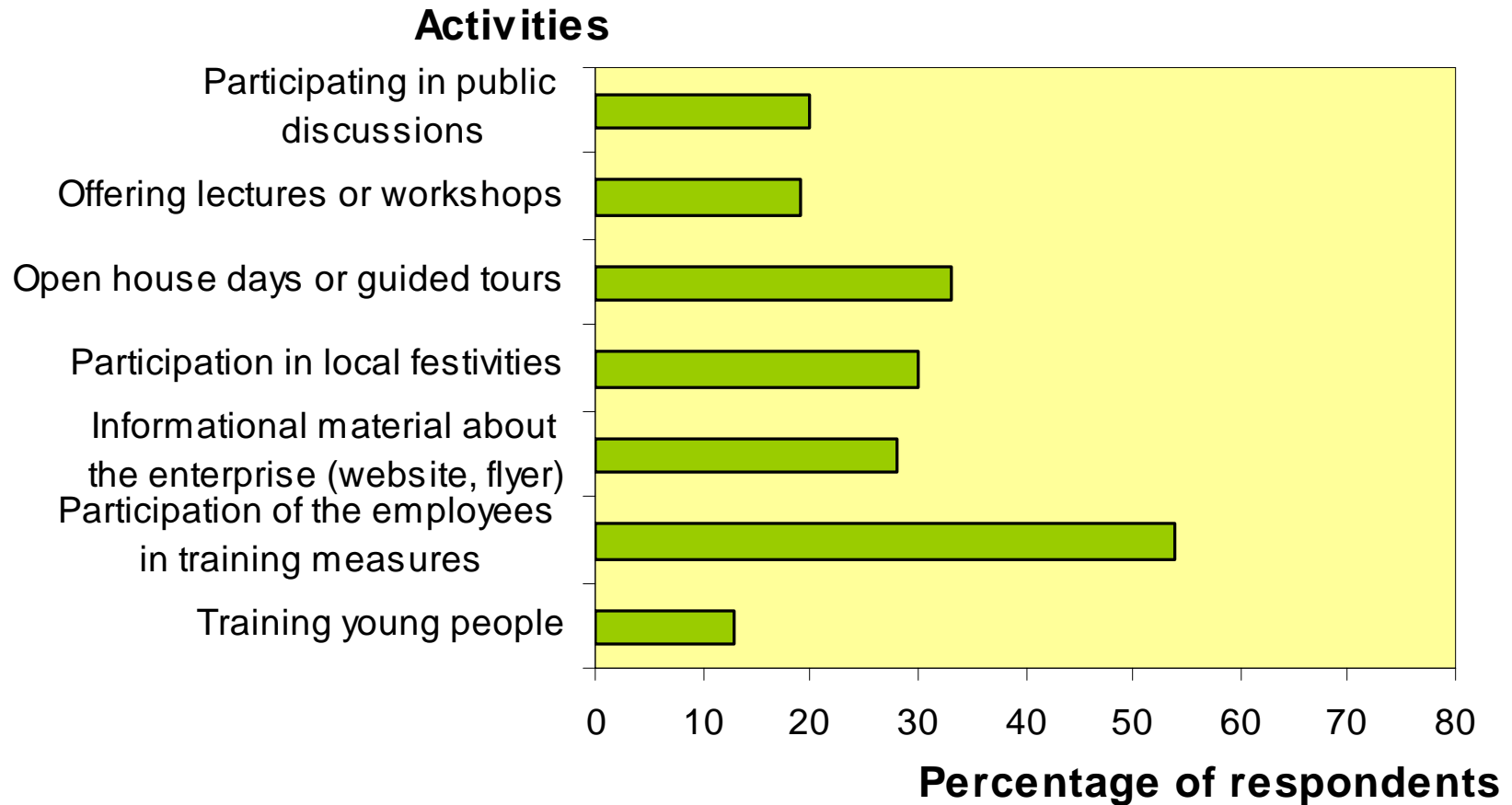
Spreading knowledge and experience

- Half of the farms are active in communication; the main topic is “organic agriculture”.
- A minority of the farms are active in offering short- or long-term formal training measures for young people.
- Almost half of the farms are active in spreading information in informal ways such as offering open house days, via flyers and internet, or by participating at local or regional festivities.

The farms contribute toward spreading knowledge about agriculture and food; and they are important partners for building bridges between city and countryside.



Activities of spreading knowledge and experience by organic farms in Berlin-Brandenburg

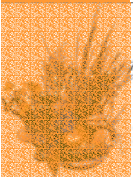


2. Results

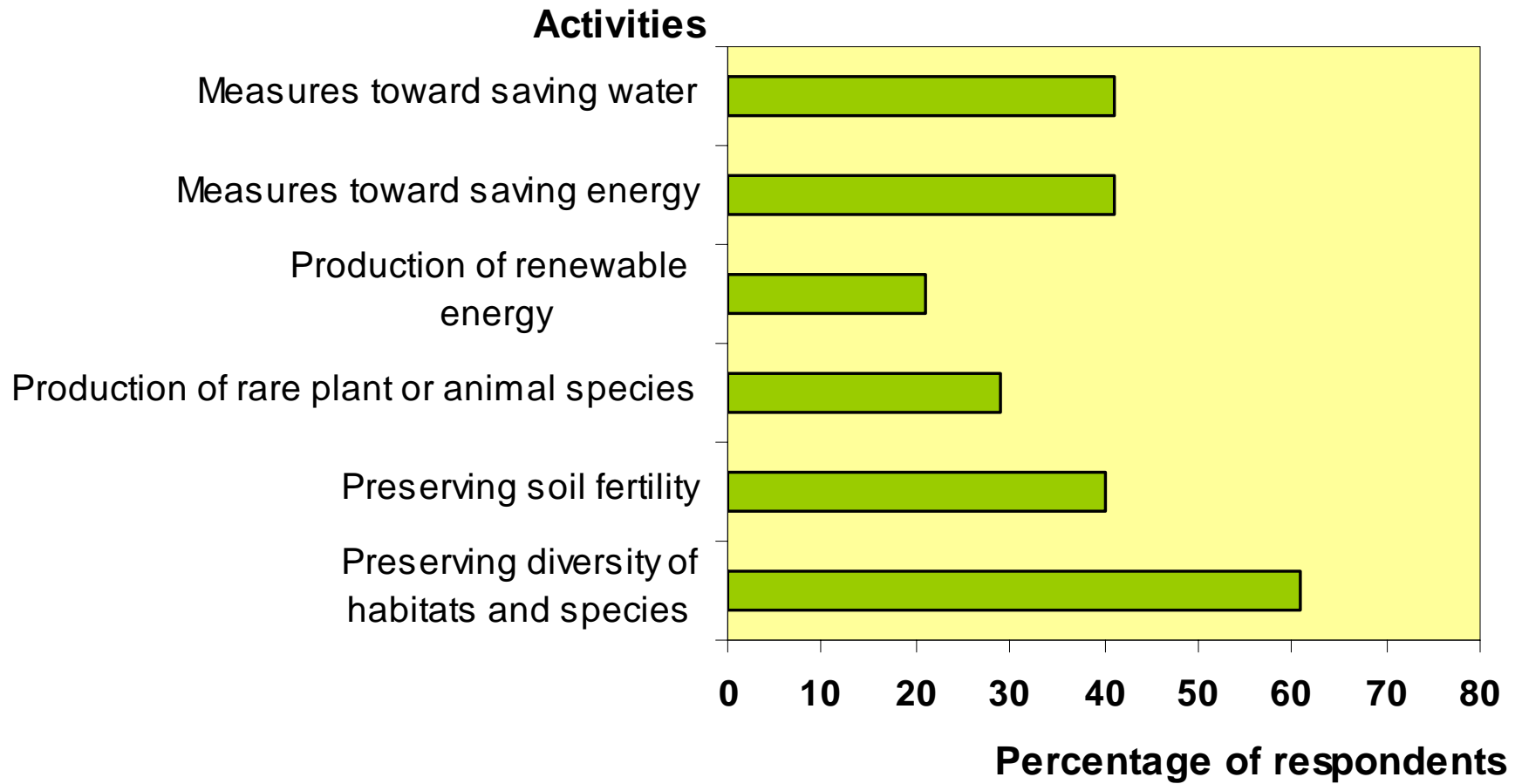
a) The societal contributions of organic farms

Ecological activities

- About half of the farms engage in ecological activities that go beyond the organic standards. By preserving the diversity of habitats and species, they play an important role in preserving a varied and aesthetically attractive landscape.
- Besides applying measures toward saving energy and water, a minority (20%) of the farms are active in the production of renewable energy.



Ecological activities of organic farms in Berlin-Brandenburg



2. Results

b) The organizational context of the entrepreneurial activities

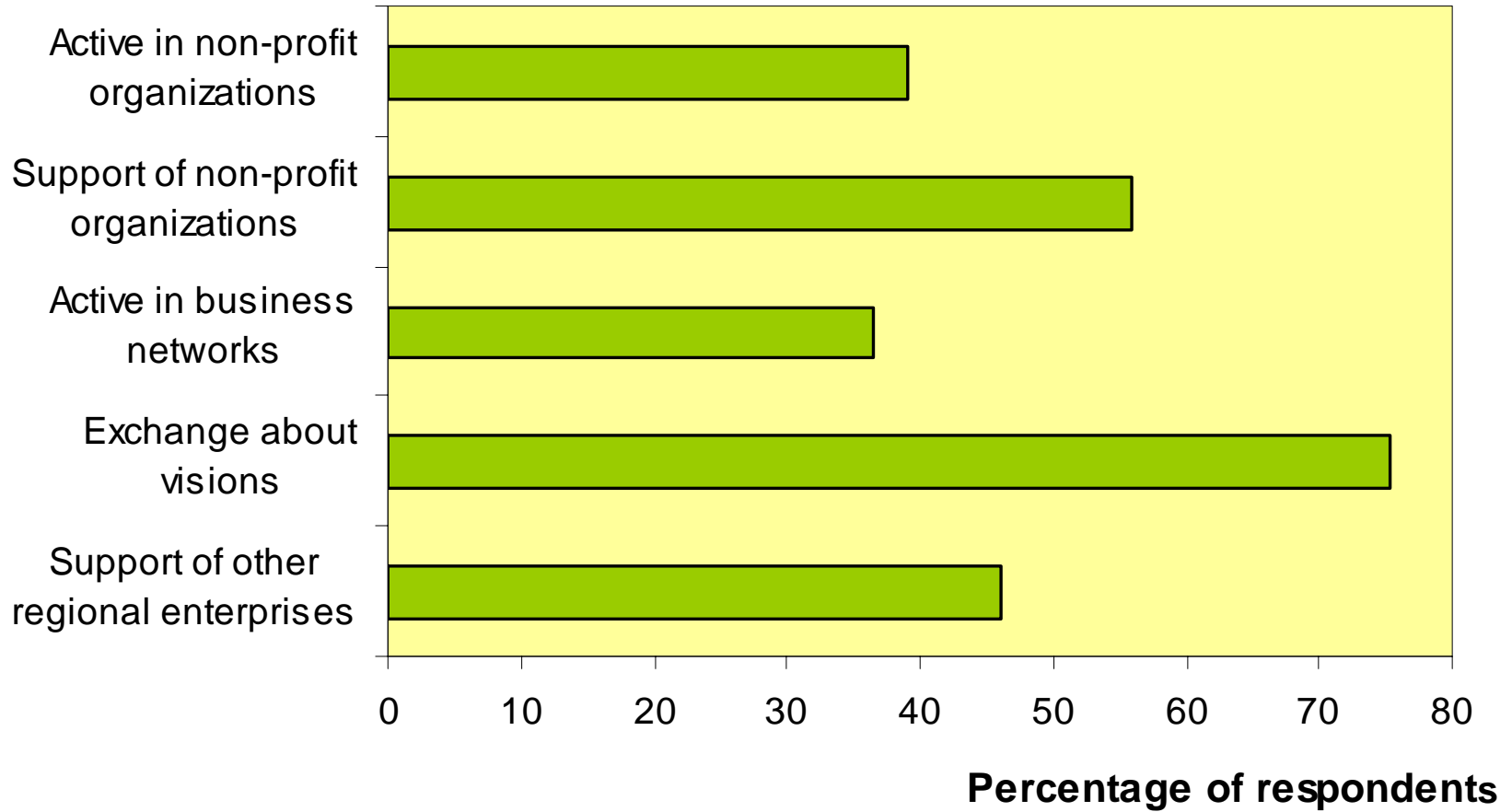
Types of Regional Networks

- Regional business networks (vertical or horizontal) or associations of farmers
e.g. informal or formalized networks of organic enterprises, organic associations, associations for small scale farming
- Regional networks for sustainable development
e.g. Leader-Network, Regional Action-Network, Natural Parks
- Civil society networks or organizations
e.g. environmental organizations, social organizations, grass-root movements, Agenda 21-initiatives, village associations, schools, universities



Regional involvement of organic farms in Berlin-Brandenburg

Activities



Type of Network	Benefits for the farm	Benefits for the region
Regional Business Networks	<p>horizontal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of products (e.g. fodder, dung, animals) • Enhancement of the product range • Mutual aid: advice, transports, technical assistance <p>vertical:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable trading relations; relations of trust, transparency for the clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic stabilization of the regional enterprises • enhancement of the regional added value • reduction of environmental pollution through reduced transports
Agricultural Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of experience, spreading information and knowledge • political lobbying • providing options for trading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stabilization of the regional farms

Type of Network	Benefits for the farm	Benefits for the region
Regional Sustainability Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking advantage of funding • new contacts in the region (e.g. politicians, administrators, customers), gaining acceptance and support, higher degree of regional embeddedness • realization of joint projects, e.g. establishing regional trading channels • improvement of the entrepreneurial image; use of marketing strategies by labeling etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • realization of projects of regional interest: e.g. establishing regional marketing channels, enhancing tourist infrastructure, measures of nature protection • taking advantage of synergies between the different fields of regional action • enhancement of the actors' identification with the region and strengthening regional identity

Type of Network	Benefits for the farm	Benefits for the region
Civil Society Networks and Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new local or regional contacts, gaining acceptance and support, higher degree of local and regional embeddedness • more effective political representation of common interests (e.g. criticism of genetic engineering) • improvement of the entrepreneurial image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stabilization of social resources • support in maintaining natural resources and a varied landscape • diffusion of information and knowledge; stimuli for regional vision processes • development of self organization and grass-roots democracy

3. Conclusions

The organic sector has the potential to contribute to regional quality of life and sustainability through activities in various fields that go beyond the benefits derived from organic standards of production.

- By spreading information and experience about agriculture and food, the farms help to link city and countryside and strengthen regional identity.
- By caring for a variety of species and habitats, the farms contribute to landscape aesthetics and tourist attractivity.
- By supporting and engaging in NGOs, they stabilize social resources.

The engagement in different types of networks is mostly motivated by a mixture of economic and altruistic reasons.

Organic farmers therefore can be important actors in regional development networks and projects that link the fields of agriculture, tourism, natural protection and healthy food.

In the future politicians and administrators should take advantage of the potentials in this sector in a more strategic way.

