**Demand for organic potato in professional kitchens and new production potential in Northern Ostrobothnia, Finland**

K. Korhonen1), T. Muilu1), L. Hiltunen1), V. Vorne1), E. Virtanen1), Y. Degefu1) & M.-L. Tausta-Ojala2)

*1)Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), P.O. Box 413, 90014 University of Oulu, Finland (kirsi.korhonen@luke.fi), 2)ProAgria Oulu/Rural Women’s Advisory Organisation, P.O. Box 106, 90101 Oulu, Finland*

**Implications**

There is increasing demand for organic food. However, improving its availability requires actions within the whole food supply chain. Understanding of different price requirements that producers and professional kitchens have, regarding to organic potato for instance, must be improved. Consumers and especially professional kitchens need more information about why organic food is more expensive than conventional products. Potential producers in turn need better knowledge about organic farming, but above all improved availability of organic seed potatoes and new and more profitable cultivation methods. Also new market channels, especially export, should be considered while thinking about the opportunities to cultivate organic potato.

**Background and objectives**

Local and organic foods have been on the political agenda in Finland especially since 2010. In 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry published *Local Food – But of Course! Government Programme on Local Food and development objectives for the local food sector to 2020* (Finland’s 72nd government 2013a)and *More organic! Government development programme for the Finnish organic product sector and objectives to 2020 (*Finland’s 72nd government 2013b)*.* These programs aim at developing markets for local and organic food and increasing their production. The objectives for the organic product sector include *greater diversity in the supply of domestic organic foods* and *improving the access to organic food through trade and institutional kitchens* for instance. Organic production is also among the priority issues in the EU programming period 2014–2020.

There is increasing demand for local and organic food products among professional kitchens (see. Korhonen & Muilu 2015), and potatoes and potato products are among the most commonly used locally produced food stuffs. However, the supply of organic potato is quite low. In 2016, the production of organic potatoes was 7.2 million kilograms and its share was only 1.2 % of the total yield for potato (Luomusatotilasto 2016), despite the largest harvest in the decade.

The aim of this study was to find out the present situation concerning the use of locally produced potatoes and potato products in professional kitchens in Northern Ostrobothnia and their interest and need for organic potatoes and potato products. In addition, the potential of increasing organic potato production was studied.

**Key results and discussion**

Over two thirds of all kitchens (n=33) under study said they use potato products produced in Northern Ostrobothnia and the most important factors for choosing products were quality, flavor and flexible delivery. Over half of the respondents also told to use organic potato products - most commonly unpeeled or peeled potatoes. Although the amounts used were rather small, most of the kitchens were interested in using organic potato products. Currently, the poor availably restricts the use of organic potato products considerably. Previous studies also show (see. Korhonen et al. 2013, Korhonen et al. 2014, Kotavaara et al. 2014) that availability of organic potato products is very low compared to availability of nonorganic local potatoes.

The aim of the study was also to investigate, if there are new potential organic potato producers among nonorganic potato producers in Northern Ostrobothnia. All organic farmers in the region were also under study. A survey was sent to these producers to find out which factors prevent their transition to organic potato farming and whether or not they have interest in it. The preliminary results indicate that farmers are especially concerned about plant protection, fluctuations in yield quantity and quality as well as pricing. However, about 20 % of potato producers (n=57) and 11 % of organic farmers (n=46) had clear interest towards organic potato production and even greater amount were interested to some extent.

**How work was carried out?**

An electronic survey was sent to professional kitchens in the Northern Ostrobothnia area in spring 2016. Total of 33 responses were received from private and public operators. The second survey was sent to nonorganic potato producers in December 2016. However, due to a small number of responses a supplementary survey was needed. The third survey aimed at all organic farmers was executed during the spring 2017.

**References**

Finland’s 72nd government 2013a. Local Food – But of Course! Government Programme on Local Food and development objectives for the local food sector to 2020. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Finland’s 72nd government 2013b. More organic! Government development programme for the Finnish organic product sector and objectives to 2020. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Korhonen K, Miettinen M, Kotavaara O, Muilu T & Rusanen J 2013. Local and organic

food activity and accessibility: the case of food circles in Northern Ostrobothnia.

Unpublished paper presented at the Futures for Food, Turku, Finland.

Korhonen K, Muilu T, Kotavaara O & Rusanen J 2014. Defining local food and its’

accessibility in Northern Ostrobothnia, Finland : views of different actors in the food supply

chain. In: Book of Abstracts: Nordic ruralities : thriving and declining communities (eds T Thomassen and M Villa), p. 44.

Korhonen K & Muilu T 2015. Developing local food cooperation and public procurement in Oulu South region, Finland. In: Proceedings of the conference. Reconnecting

agriculture and food chains to societal needs, second international conference on agriculture

in an urbanizing society, 14-17 September 2015, Rome, Italy, pp. 527–528.

Kotavaara O, Korhonen K, Miettinen M, Lehtinen U, Muilu T, Juga J & Rusanen J 2014. Lähi- ja luomuruoan saavutettavuus Pohjois-Pohjanmaalla. MTT Raportti 152.

Luomusatotilasto. 2016. Luonnonvarakeskus.