

The Prospects of Organic Agriculture Development in the Chosen Regions of Poland – Podkarpacie and Kurpie.

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Abstract

Organic farming is developing dynamically in the European Union. In Poland its growth is dynamic but still not on a wide scale. The area of organic farms has just exceeded 1%. Research shows that the main obstacles of the dynamic development of organic farming are lack of properly educated young farmers, lack of efficient distribution system of organic products in Poland and abroad and a lot of small farms of low productivity.

Introduction

Organic farming not only provides high quality produce, but at the same time is a crucial element of multifunctional development of agricultural areas, in other words sustainable development (Knickel et al. 2006). Organic farming is developing in Poland. According to Main Inspectorate of Market Quality of Agriculture Products and Foodstuffs (GIJHAR-S) there is a constant increase in number of organic farms. (www.ijhar-s.gov.pl). Poland is a country in which historical events and political conditions do not foster a dynamic increase in consumers' organic awareness. Poland is on the fifth place in the world after the USA, Argentina, Italy and Canada in terms of increase of organic land area (Willer and Yussefi, 2007). Even though the organic utilised agricultural area rose up to more than 80 000 in 2004, although, it is still a bit below 1% of all UAA. As a result, a supply of organic products on the domestic market has increased; still, the demand keeps its fairly low level (Żakowska – Biemans, 2005).

Organic production is a chance for a number of small, not very specialized farms. Due to difficult climate conditions, poor soils, not good economic and social conditions, regular farming production is very close to organic production which makes it easier to convert into an organic one. However, there is a need for financial, organizational and educational support for organic agriculture production and for improvement of market organization of organic products (Runowski, 1996; Runowski 2003). The Kurpie region is located in the north-eastern part of Poland called "The Green Lungs of Poland". There are a large number of small low income farms and the soils are poor. Lack of big cities and unpolluted environment comprise excellent conditions for organic farming development. This part of Poland is especially suitable for milk production. Nevertheless, it is still underdeveloped in terms of tourism (Bołtromiuk, 2001; Toryfter, 2002). The Podkarpacie region is similar in those respects although it is situated in southern-east Poland. There are a lot of environmentally sensitive areas. Agriculture is based on family ownership and dairy production (Sołtysiak, 2002).

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The aim of the research was to present the possibilities and barriers for development of organic farming in those regions and present the practical outcome of the situation.

Materials and Methods

The paper is a review of the current situation of organic farming in the Kurpie and the Podkarpacie regions among organic and conventional farmers. The research has been conducted in the form of a personal interview – a questionnaire, which included both opened and closed questions. There were two types of questionnaires: respectively for organic and conventional farmers. The results included in the paper come from the research done in 2006 and 2007. In the Kurpie region there were 72 farmers questioned: 35 organic (9 during conversion) and 37 conventional. In the Podkarpacie region there were 96 questionnaires: 63 organic and 33 conventional.

Results

The average age of organic and conventional farmers is similar in the Kurpie region whereas in the Podkarpacie region organic farmers are older than conventional (fig.1). In the group up to the age of 40 there are more conventional farmers in both regions (about 5%) whereas in the group over 60 there are more organic farmers in both regions (about 5%).

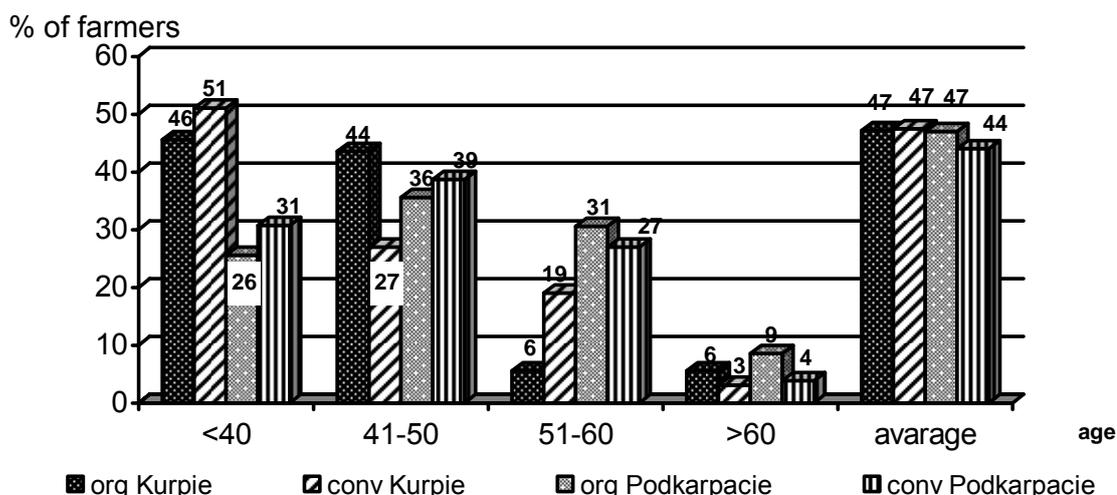


Figure 1: Age of organic and conventional farmers in Kurpie and Podkarpacie 2006/2007

In both regions the majority of organic farms are the small ones, i.e. the size do not exceed 20 ha (fig. 2). However, in the Podkarpacie region there are 66% of farms that belong to the group of 1 – 5 ha. In the Kurpie region 51% of farms have 5 – 10 ha.

Horizontal integration is one of the factors that let farmers improve their situation on the market, e.g. better access to distribution channels. The regions are different in this respect (fig.3). In the Podkarpacie region farmers are better organized, i.e. 88% belongs to seven different kinds of farmers' organizations whereas in the Kurpie region 42% belongs to 2 farmers' groups.

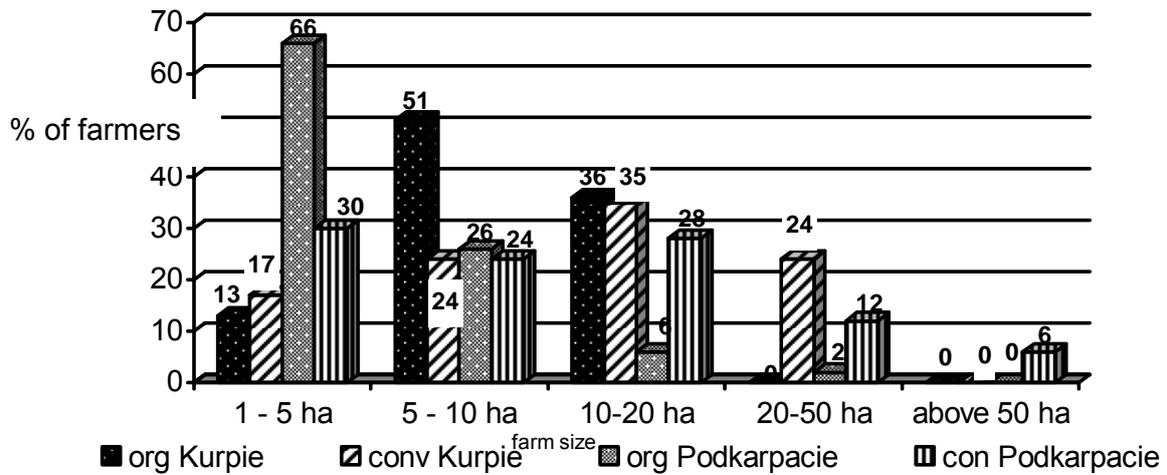


Figure 2: Participation organic farmers in farmers' associations

Selling products on the local market dominates in both cases (fig. 3). However organic farmers seem to use direct sales more often than conventional ones. Moreover, among organic farmers in the Kurpie region box schemes and selling products directly to the different kinds of shops is better developed.

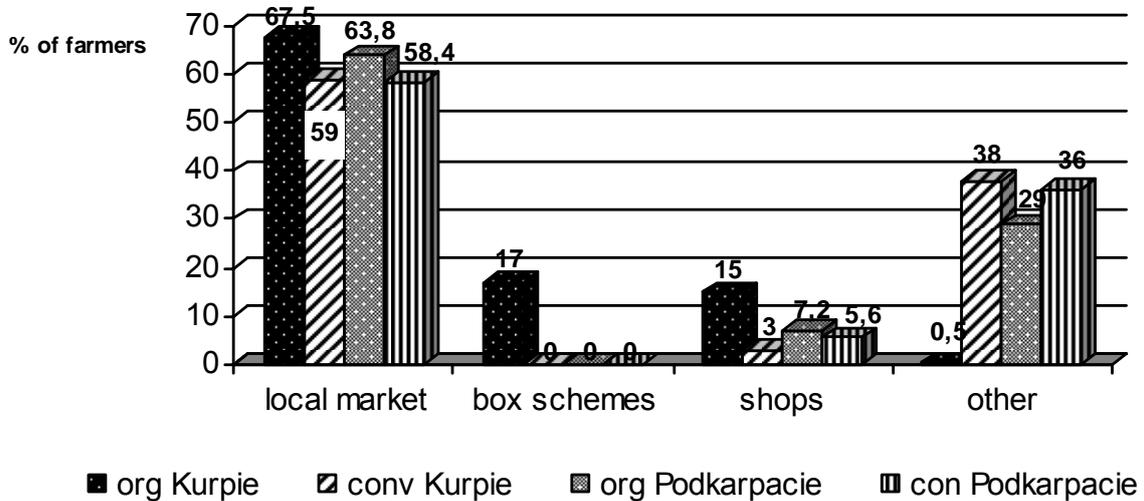


Figure 3: Distribution of organic product

Discussion

As indicated by earlier research, both regions are perfect in terms of environmental conditions for development of organic farming (Sołtysiak et al 2002, Toryfter 2002). One of the main factors stimulating growth of organic farming are young well educated farmers who proved to be more dynamic and ready for changes and improvements (Runowski 1996, 2003). Therefore in the researched regions there is a need to introduce incentives which will influence the lowering of the average age of the

farmers, and will encourage the young ones to stay in the country. One of them might be financial support, especially during the conversion period and after for further development and modernization. Presented results prove (Slabe et al, 2006), that well organized market is one of the key conditions for development of organic sector. They also show that the farmers from the small farms, regardless of their association with production groups or other organizations, are not capable to develop the production to the extend allowing them to go beyond the local market. Organic farmers from the Kurpie region, for example, despite the fact that they are worse organized, show better creativity when it comes to sales methods (box schemes). It may be related to the fact that there is a significantly bigger number of the young farmers (below 40) in the Kurpie region in comparison to the population of farmers from the Podkarpacie region. A lot of small low productivity farms, lack of connection between producers and processors and lack of well organized distribution channels for organic products were listed by the farmers in both regions as the main factors which hamper the development of organic farming.

Conclusions

1. Development of organic farming is a chance for sustainable development in the Kurpie and the Podkarpacie regions. Both regions have suitable environmental qualities for the development of organic farming, but they need suitable forms of support in order to encourage them to stay in the country.
2. The main obstacles for organic agriculture development are: small size of organic farms, their low productivity and lack of young well educated farmers.
3. The young age of farmers is a much stronger influence regarding their creativity and looking for new methods of sales than their participation and membership in producers' associations and organizations.

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