Specialisation through co-operation between farms in organic farming

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Abstract
Co-operation in organic production provides the potential for production specialisation with the help of co-operation in machinery use, input integration, crop rotation, shared buildings and marketing. Co-operation models provide the opportunity to optimise production between different lines of production from environmental, economic and functional perspectives.

Keywords: specialisation, co-operation, crop rotation, environmental impacts

Introduction

In organic production, specialisation has been feasible only up to a certain point. Appropriate crop rotation means, in practice, that in addition to the main production line, the farm engages in supplementary production. Co-operation can bring even greater benefits in organic production than in conventional production. On animal and cereal farms co-operation between two farms would allow both farmers to specialise in their respective lines while safeguarding an adequate nutrient rotation.

Methods and preliminary results

Technical, subsidy-related, legal, social and ecological hindrances and advantages and obstacles and opportunities for close co-operation between farms have been recorded by a literature study. The first stage of the field study studied existing co-operation models in five co-operating rings of farms. The effectiveness of co-operation was assessed with the help of nutrient balances and cost accounting. The second stage of the field study will create co-operation models between different lines of production. The models aim at optimising production from the environmental, economic and functional perspectives compared to that of farms operating alone. Five different forms of co-operation were identified according to farm interviews: co-operation in 1) machinery use and contracting, 2) input integration, 3) crop rotation, 4) shared buildings for production, and 5) marketing. According to both the literature study and the farm interviews the benefits of the co-operation were reflected in terms of lower production costs and better profitability, specialisation of professional skills, more free time, better or wider crop rotation, more efficient use of green manure as fodder and animal manure as fertiliser. However, increases in road transport and machine weights, the need for social skills, and problems in machinery maintenance were identified as drawbacks.

Conclusions

Specialisation through co-operation is practised amongst organic farms in Finland. However, the types and scales of co-operation are not always well planned. The scepticism of farmers towards co-operation could be altered by advice services and training.