



# Ukraine – even the Russian war can't stop organic sector development

What comes into your mind when you think about Ukraine? In the past it was Chernobyl, today it is the Russian full-scale war that has been raging in Ukraine since 2022. However, when you would ask importers of organic products in Europe, they will tell you something in addition – Ukraine is the biggest European exporter of organic products to the EU.

## Organic agriculture and market before the full-scale Russian invasion

Before the war, Ukraine had 42 million hectares under agricultural cultivation. According to monitoring by the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine 422,299 hectares (about 1% of the total agricultural area) were certified organic in 2021. The Ukrainian organic sector has its origins in Soviet times in the 1970s, when a few pioneers started with no-till farming. The movement really took off about 15-20 years ago, when the Swiss SECO-FiBL project, in close collaboration with local organic stakeholders and policy makers, facilitated

**Before the war, Ukraine had 42 million hectares under agricultural cultivation, 1% of them organic**



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Ukrainian organic sector development through knowledge-transfer, creating trade opportunities and strengthening networking. At the same time, a wider organic product offering and awareness creation activities resulted in the availability of organic products at supermarkets and increased demand for organic products in local markets, especially in large cities.

But what happened with the Ukrainian organic sector and to organic exports after the Russian invasion started?

## Surviving during the war – how the organic sector showed strength, resilience and consolidation

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Ukrainian organic sector, and the entire agri-food

industry, has been suffering and experiencing losses. According to a survey conducted by the stakeholder platform Organic Initiative and the NGO Organic Ukraine, the most significant negative impacts on organic production processes include the overall safety situation (74 percent), access to financial resources (72 percent), destroyed infrastructure (65 percent), lack of fuel and lubricants (79 percent). Many organic operators have experienced direct losses because of occupation and direct hits, seaport blockades, destruction of infrastructure facilities and supply chains, and a significant increase in prices of inputs, fuel and logistics. The main problems of the domestic organic market are the disrupted supply chains, migration of many organic consumers to other regions and abroad, decreased purchasing power and, therefore, reduced demand for organic.

Massive hits on energy infrastructure facilities caused power cuts and emergency blackouts in the majority of regions in Ukraine. Lack of light, water, heating, internet and mobile connection became part of new living and working conditions for Ukrainians during last autumn and winter.

Most of the Oblast (regional) state administrations in Ukraine, previously supported organic producers in their regions. However, due to martial law in the country, regional support for organic producers remained only in very few regions. The organic digital communication campaign,

which was launched by the Organic Initiative, targeting consumers in 2021, was postponed, as was the introduction of organic products into public procurement for schools and kindergartens in Ukraine due to the full-scale war.

The big surprise is, that despite the terrible consequences of the war and the fact that many organic farms had to cease production in the occupied areas, other organic operators, processors and traders continued defying all odds. As the ability to export to the US market via the ports on the Black Sea was almost impossible, importers from Europe helped the Ukrainian operators to find a market for their products. As the main sea routes were blocked, importers helped their Ukrainian suppliers to find logistics solutions with trucks and railway cargo. Especially in the first months of the invasion there was a unique wave of solidarity among the organic movement in Western Europe, remembers Toralf Richter.

## 2022 – organic exports from Ukraine to the EU at an all-time HIGH

Thanks to the tireless efforts of partners across Europe, exports from Ukraine to the EU and Switzerland further increased during the period of war. The courageous resistance of these farmers, their creative and flexible logistical solutions and a great wave of solidarity from international buyers have made this possible,

In 2022, according to the EU database Traces, 219,125 metric tons of organic products were exported from Ukraine to EU countries, an increase of 16% compared to 2021. As a result, Ukraine became the third largest exporting country to the EU (behind Ecuador and the Dominican Republic).

The largest European importers of Ukrainian organic products (by volume) are, according a study by the Ukrainian Certification Body *Organic Standard*, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Lithuania, Italy, the UK, Czech



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Republic, Bulgaria, Romania and France. Ukraine has 18 free trade agreements with 46 countries. The most exported organic products (by volume) from Ukraine in 2022 were corn, soybeans, wheat, sunflower oil, sunflower cake, sunflower, frozen bilberries, barley, rapeseed, frozen wild berries (rose-hip; sea-buckthorn; lingonberries; hawthorn; elderberries; black chokeberry; blackthorn;



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rowan berries; cranberries; chokeberry), hulled millet, dried walnut kernel, concentrated apple juice, frozen raspberries, millet, flax seeds, frozen blackberries, peas, oats, frozen strawberries, mustard, lupine, honey, apples, birch sap, oat flakes, buckwheat and dried echinacea root. More higher value organic products have been added to Ukraine's export portfolio over the last few years. But while the volume of organic exports increased for railway and road vehicles, it decreased for sea vessels.

The state institution Entrepreneurship and Export Promotion Office plays a leading role in organic export facilitation and capacity development for Ukrainian organic exporters.

Also crucial to this success was the financial support from international projects financed by Switzerland (SECO), Germany (BMEL), the EU and USA (USAID), which continued with project activities in Ukraine despite the full-scale war.

### Outlook

Despite the difficult situation, the Ukrainian organic sector and policy-makers continue to work hard for a recovery and further organic market development. However, according to the latest local survey, in 2022, 12% of organic operators had to cease organic production and one-third of the certified organic area is broken away due to the consequences of the war. Nevertheless, Ukrainian organic operators, representatives from Ukrainian authorities as well as private service providers strongly believe in the recovery of the organic sector after the war is over. For the time being any support is highly welcome. ■



More information about organic in Ukraine  
[www.organicinfo.ua/en](http://www.organicinfo.ua/en)

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