

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I have the honour to convey to you best regards from the Austrian Federal Minister (of Agriculture and Forestry, Environment and Water Management), Mr. Josef Pröll, who regrets he cannot be with us as he has to fulfil duties in his function as the present chair of the informal Council of Agriculture.

I am Alois Posch; I am competent for organic farming in our ministry; this is why Mr. Pröll has asked me to be with you on his behalf.

In Austria, organic farming has been playing an important role in the national agricultural policy. We are proud to have a high share of organic farming in Austria. If the farmers, who are registered in the integrated administration and control system (IACS) are taken as basis, the share of organic farms in Austria amounted to 13.1 % and the share of organic areas (without mountain pastures) was 14.4 % in 2004 (since then, the share has even risen). One reason for the positive development is the fact that we have been trying to best use the options offered within the framework of the Austrian action programme for organic farming – like other European countries have also been trying.

Among other things, the following activities are also means to support organic farming:

Farmers' initiatives regarding innovation, processing and marketing. Other important aspects are extension, subsidisation of investments, public relations and efficient self-management of the Austrian organic farmers' association BIO AUSTRIA. Apart from the subsidisation of rural development, the support of research is also very important, like it is in our host country Denmark.

The rural development programme is playing a central role in this process. The compensatory payments for environmental services comprise the largest part of the agri-environmental programme. About 25 % of this budget are paid to organic farms. The recognised environmental services are the reason why organic farming makes up for a large part in the implementation of the sustainability strategy, the biodiversity strategy and Natura 2000 objectives.

The second part of the services rendered to society, namely the better quality of organic products, is paid for by the consumers by way of higher prices.

Consequently, it is probably not surprising that Austria has advocated to foster the development of organic farming also at EU level. The European Commission has already planned important activities within the designated organic action plan and Austria is ready to support the European Commission in its actions.

During our presidency, we have been trying to get under way a new concept of the Regulation for organic farming, however, as you all know, it was not possible to finalise this concept at short notice.

Still, we hope we all have managed to make a few steps forward.

The programme for rural development offers a variety of possibilities to influence the development of organic farming. It is essential that research is included in the development, implementation and evaluation of the various measures; in this context I

would like to mention CORE ORGANIC – an exemplary project led by Denmark – which also makes important contributions in this respect.

I am convinced that this meeting will contribute essentially to the further development of organic farming and to the possibilities of the rural development programme.

Let me conclude by extending many thanks to our hosts for organising this congress and wishing this meeting a lot of success!