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# POLISH ORGANIC FARMING ON THE BACKGROUND OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN LIGHT OF NEW REGULATIONS

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**Abstract.** The theme of the development of organic farming in the EU and in Poland was taken up in the study, pointing out that organic production is an element of the EU agricultural product quality schemes. In this sense, organic production pursues the same objectives under the Common Agricultural Policy which are an integral part of all the EU systems of quality agricultural production. Within the EU, the number of organic farms increased from 124.8 thousand in 2004 to 186.2 thousand in 2010 (49.2%), while the level of organic crops increased respectively from 5.9 million hectares to 9.2 million hectares (55.9%). In Poland in 2013, there were 19,900 certified organic farms adding 6.7 thousand ones which were to undertake organic production during the so-called transition (adaptation) period. The average area of an organic farm was twice larger than that of the average size in the country. These farms occupied 1.4% of the total area of agricultural land including farms which are in the stage of transition. This area accounted for 2.0% of arable land in the country. An important part of the functioning of such farms was their certification, which implied products with logos and mandatory labelling. Financial support for organic farming was carried out within the framework of agri-environmental programmes with participation of farmers in the food quality scheme of the RDP. Between 2014–2020, additional actions related to organic farming were undertaken.

**Keywords:** organic farming, certification, agri-environmental measures, financial support

## INTRODUCTION

Organic farming is becoming more and more popular throughout the European Union, in particular, because it exhibits values, which are conducive to protection of the environment and enhancing its vitality, to care about animal welfare and protection of natural resources (Lampkin, 1999). Organic farming determines a new approach to agriculture, but it does not mean a mindless return to the agriculture of 100 years ago. A part of agricultural producers, who sought to avoid agrochemicals with their numerous negative effects, put up opposition against intensive production methods. Production of organically grown food does not mean turning away from modern science and technology. Farmers use them creatively, trying to activate biological processes through the use of natural means of production according to the principles of sustainable development (Moschitz et al., 2004). It is well known that the so-called green revolution has helped with regards to the nutrition of a growing population, thanks to genetics, proliferation of chemical fertilizers, and pesticides. The implemented intensive production methods, having provided an increase in the level of food production, also caused the devastation of the environment at the same time (Meredith and Willer, 2014).

There are many definitions of organic farming, which is also known as organic agriculture, biological or

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biodynamic agriculture (Lampkin, 1999). Some authors put an equal sign between organic farming and sustainable agriculture assuming that for both the similar agro-ecological systems are used. According to Willer, organic farming is both a philosophy and a system of management based on values that reflect the environmental awareness of the society (Willer, 2009). It also shows the actual skills of a particular person for taking effective actions in the changed reality. In practice, organic farming encourages work under natural conditions, self-regulation through diversity, minimizing waste, and protection of the environment while aiming at maintaining the profitability of a farm. Many researchers suggest that organic farming is one of the fastest growing agricultural sectors in the world, especially in the European Union. A characteristic feature of grassroots initiatives were the farmers themselves, who established associations, unions, and organisations bringing together like-minded people. Only after that the policymakers started to use such initiatives in the relevant legal framework (Lockeretz, 2007).

### **PROBLEMS, PURPOSE AND METHODS OF STUDY**

The initial process of a spontaneous emergence of organic farming was reinforced by legislative regulations. The farms that had undergone transitions which required time and incurred costs were financially supported. The key objective of the study was to present changes in the EU legislation which was initially a response to the then existing situation in order to inspire the deepening of this phenomenon later. Nowadays ecology has entered into a whole series of actions aimed at making the rural areas contribute to sustainable management of natural resource. The situation with organic farms in Poland is presented against a background of European agriculture. From the point of view of economy, these farms are an increasingly important sector of food production in the country, but still they are just at the beginning of the organic production system. The study aimed to assess whether the actions of Polish farmers fit well into the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy, as part of the EU system of quality of agricultural production or is there a need to make changes in existing policy. The study was based mainly on the EU legislation, the data of Eurostat, the Central Statistical Office, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Quality

Inspection of Agricultural Food Products, and reports prepared on the subject. All research works were made in 2015 with the use of the following economic research methods used in two phases. In the first stage, there was an analysis of the collected material prepared in order to extract key concepts and determine research issues adequate for the intended subject using the method of analysis and comparison. In the second stage, an analysis of the documents was prepared in order to establish the facts and ideas in the context of the research problem.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIC FARMING IN EUROPE**

Organic farming as a concept has existed for over 80 years, but only since 1990 has it attracted the greater attention of decision-makers, consumers, environmentalists, and farmers across Europe. The legislation of 2007 aimed at the improvement and the enhancement of the Community standards relating to the agricultural sector and was of great importance for the further development of markets with organic products. This legislation was a response to the increased consumer demand for organic products. The legislation created a general framework covering the principles of organic plant production, livestock and aquaculture production, processed food production rules, and ways of distribution. Simultaneously, it was pointed out that genetically modified organisms (GMO) are not compatible with the concept of organic production and the way in which consumers perceive these kind of products. The condition for recognition that the product is organically produced is that the farm is operated on the basis of renewable resources in the framework of the agricultural systems organised at the local level. Production of this kind should help maintain and enhance soil fertility. The path towards this objective should be a long-term crop rotation, recycling of organic materials, and cultivation techniques. The role of livestock production is to provide organic matter and nutrients in combination with the appropriate system of ecological feeding stuffs produced on the given farm. To maintain consumer confidence in organic food, there is a need for it to be properly labelled in order to inform consumers on its ingredients as well as to ensure market transparency and fair competition (EC, 2007).

The share of the organic farming sector in recent years showed a dynamic growth which was a function of the factors conducive to the return to producers of

**Table 1.** Areas of organic farming, expressed in thous. ha and in percentage relative to surface of agricultural land and number of organic farms

**Tabela 1.** Obszar gospodarstw ekologicznych, wyrażony w tys. ha i w procentach, w odniesieniu do powierzchni gruntów rolnych oraz liczby gospodarstw ekologicznych

Country – Kraj	2004	%	2008	%	2012	%	Number of organic farms	
							Liczba gospodarstw ekologicznych	2004
							2004	2008
Austria	:	16	:	17.4	:	18.6	19 826	20 102
Belgium – Belgia	19.8	1.7	27.4	2.6	46.8	4.4	693	869
Bulgaria – Bułgaria	:	:	4.2	0.3	11.9	0.8	351	264
Cyprus – Cypr	0.1	0.6	:	1.6	3.5	3.4	225	159
Denmark – Dania	149.0	5.8	139.0	5.6	159.0	7.3	3 166	2 763
Estonia	:	7.2	71.8	9.6	119.9	14.9	1 013	1 269
Finland – Finlandia	148.1	7.2	134.8	6.5	161.1	8.7	4887	3991
France – Francja	468.5	1.8	502.2	2.0	855.6	3.6	11 059	13 296
Greece – Grecja	202.8	6.5	266.7	7.8	351.8	11.1	8 427	24 067
Spain – Hiszpania	430.9	2.9	691.2	5.3	1 366.8	7.5	15 693	21 291
Ireland – Irlandia	24.6	0.7	:	1.0	42.2	1.1	897	1 185
Lithuania – Litwa	18.3	1.4	89.9	4.6	114.5	5.5	1 811	2 797
Luxembourg – Luksemburg	2.7	2.5	:	2.7	3.5	2.7	66	85
Latvia – Łotwa	12.1	1.6	141.5	8.9	144.6	10.6	1 043	4 203
Malta	:	:	:	0.4	:	0.3	5	10
The Netherlands – Holandia	46.1	2.5	46.9	2.6	:	2.6	1 377	1 402
Germany – Niemcy	:	4.5	:	5.4	:	5.8	16 603	19 813
Poland – Polska	37.7	0.5	178.7	2.0	457.7	4.6	7 183	14 888
Portugal – Portugalia	75.1	5.6	:	5.7	:	6.1	1 577	1 696
The Czech Republic – Czechy	208.0	7.2	232.9	9.0	402.6	13.1	829	1 842
Romania – Rumunia	:	:	71.6	1.0	103.1	2.1	1 200	2 776
Slovakia – Słowacja	25.6	2.6	113.1	7.3	:	8.6	218	360
Slovenia – Słowenia	14.3	4.6	26.1	6.1	28.8	7.3	1 568	2 067
Sweden – Szwecja	206.6	7.0	246.6	10.9	424.3	15.8	3 138	3 686
Hungary – Węgry	75.8	2.3	108.6	2.1	106.3	2.4	1 583	1 614
Britain – Wielka Brytania	635.5	3.9	582.2	4.1	559.9	3.4	4 010	5 383
Italy – Włochy	708.0	6.4	812.2	7.5	923.8	8.9	36 639	44 371

Source: Eurostat data.  
Źródło: dane Eurostat.

natural production methods and by consumers' interest in the qualities of this food. In addition, the reform of the common agricultural policy was aimed at adapting production to market needs by providing high quality products which meet the expectations of customers. As a part of the CAP budgets, the financial support for organic farming, also indirectly through actions related to the agri-environment schemes, was foreseen. This included conversions, which meant the transition from non organic to organic farming, marking of goods, certification and other actions connected with it (Regulation..., 2014).

Looking at the development of organic farming in the EU, it should be pointed out that this movement was developing more intensively at first in Western Europe, then it was accepted by farmers from Central and Eastern Europe. It is worth mentioning, among the reasons for this situation was the use of excessively high doses of agrochemicals. Indeed, such methods carried out stimulated the growth of agricultural production. However, it caused serious environmental degradation and in extreme cases led to such deformities as the mad cow disease (BSE). The situation was different in the new Member States which had less access to modern agrochemicals and their low level of consumption was similar somehow to the production being produced in natural conditions. Therefore, there was no emphasis on ecological products because the food was not as saturated with chemicals as in other Western countries (Facts..., 2013).

The assessment of organic farming has also been developed as part of the strategy "Europe 2020" in which it is indicated that the global market for organic food has quadrupled since 1999 with areas intended for this purpose having increased but twice. Every year 500 thousand ha are converted for the cultivation of organic food. However, neither the internal supply, nor the legislative framework are able keep pace with the expansion of the market. It has been stated that the rules are complicated. There are also shortcomings in the control system and trade regime that discourage small agricultural producers to join the EU organic farming system. Therefore, in the framework of rural development, the new rules were established in 2014-2020 which aim at achieving the sustainable competitiveness built on the economically profitable sector of organic food production, which is recognised as one of the key elements of the CAP model (Regulation..., 2014). Organic production fulfills

a double social function: on the one hand, it forms a specific market in response to consumer demand for organic products, on the other hand, it provides the widely available common goods contributing to environmental protection and animal welfare as well as development of rural areas (Regulation..., 2014). With regards to particular provisions, the objectives of environmental policy can be included. These were entered into the CAP by ensuring adequate payment to farmers for respecting the rules of organic production. Moreover, organic production creates a system that helps to include the requirements for environmental protection into the framework of the CAP and thus contribute to sustainable agricultural production. In addition, this production contributes to achieving the objectives of environmental policy, especially on greening, soil protection, the Birds Directive, water, nitrate, and emissions issues, etc. (Commission Regulation..., 2014).

## CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF ORGANIC FARMING IN POLAND

After Poland's accession to the EU, the direct subsidies (about 1.5 million households) were allocated to the country right away, but the country itself was obliged to comply with the general principles of good agricultural practices. In the set of these principles, there was the law on protection of the environment in rural areas. In addition, in 2004–2006, two programs of the CAP, namely the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) were implemented, which indeed had no direct links to ecology. But indirectly through the support of the agri-environmental and animal welfare they encouraged farmers who wished to join the system of organic farming. In accordance with the package of organic farming, a manufacturer was required to obtain a certificate of compliance with the required regulations for organic agriculture or a document certifying that the holding was in the transition period of producing the agricultural production organically. 218.9 million EUR were reserved for this purpose.

A more comprehensive package of measures related to the issue in question is found in the subsequent RDP for 2007–2013, which contained agri-environmental payments. Implementation of agri-environmental programme was to contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas and conservation of biodiversity in these regions. Besides, the programme was aimed

at promoting agricultural production based on methods compatible with the requirements of environmental protection and nature conservation. The programme included the most comprehensive package on organic farming with 12 objectives targeted at crops, permanent grassland, vegetable crops, fruits, and herbals. 2.3 billion EUR were foreseen for this measure.

The contemporary Common Agricultural Policy (2014–2020) is even more focused on the greening of agriculture, which is specified in the first and second Pillars of the CAP. Within Pillar I of the CAP, a new pattern of direct payments was introduced. They were better targeted, were to be fairer, and more environmentally friendly. A new phenomenon is the introduction of payment for greening which indicates the implementation of agricultural practices beneficial for the climate and environment. These practices include crop diversification and the maintenance of permanent grassland and of Ecological Focus Areas (EFA). As part of the diversification of crops, a farmer must keep at least two different crops if the area of arable land exceeds 10 hectares, and keep at least three crops if the area exceeds 30 hectares. The main crop may cover a maximum of 75% of arable land, and the two main crops up to 95% of arable land. The necessity of maintaining the Ecological Focus Area means allocating for this purpose at least 5% of the arable land of the farm. Ecological Focus Areas are expected to contribute to the protection and improvement of biodiversity on the farm.

The payment for greening will automatically be received by farmers who produce the agricultural production in accordance with the principles of organic farming which are defined in the Rural Development Programme for 2014–2020. In order not to treat unfavourably those who have already opted for environmental protection and sustainable development, the Regulation provides a system of “equivalence of greening” where they acknowledge that now undergoing beneficial practices for the environment are considered to meet these basic requirements. Within the second Pillar of the RDP (2014–2020), a new package, i.e. organic farming is included which was not included in the previous programme. The main purpose of organic farming is to support the voluntary commitments of a farmer who decides to maintain or pass on practices and methods of organic farming. The action organic farming is to some extent a continuation of the package in the framework of the agri-environmental programme. In this sense,

it means that there is synergy between the actions and packages. All crops in organic farming will be subjected to inspections by certification bodies. The support under this measure consists of two sub-measures. For the first, payments in the transition period for organic farming, and for the second, payments in order to maintain organic farming. For this purpose the amount of 699.9 million EUR is foreseen (RDP, 2014).

## ORGANIC FARMS IN POLAND

As it was mentioned above, organic farming is a specific form of farming and food production. This food is produced by natural methods in a clean and safe environment without chemical fertilizers and synthetic pesticides, antibiotics, growth hormones, or genetically modified organisms. Due to the exclusion of pesticides and fertilizers, it does not cause contamination of soil and groundwater, reduces the leaching of nutrients from soil, and is conducive to biodiversity. Organic farming is a system of farming based on the balanced plant and animal production on the farm. It is based on natural means (from biological and mineral resources) which are not technologically processed. On an organic farm one strives for the balance between plant and animal production in order to achieve the balance between fodders and fertilizers. Among others, the characteristic features of organic farms are their location in uncontaminated environments, care for the state of environment and biodiversity by keeping and growing trees and midfield bushes, maintaining the richness of species of plants, meadows and pastures, protecting of streams and ponds etc. Organic farms are not allowed to use synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, seed dressings, artificial concentrates, genetically modified organisms, industrially produced fodder, or ionizing radiations for the organic production. Great interest in organic production is one cause that some organic farms have been showing a systematic growth in recent years. That growth must be analysed separately for the certified farms and for the farms in the period of transition, which is the period of adaptation to standards and criterion of such farms.

During the period from the accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004, an increase in the number of the certified organic farms was recorded in every voivodeship. Such increases for obvious reasons were not equable across the country, but the highest levels were recorded in the regions with the presence of large-scale

**Table 2.** Organic farms in voivodeships

**Tabela 2.** Gospodarstwa ekologiczne według województw

Years/Voivodeships Lata/Województwa	Certified – Certyfikowane			During transition period W okresie przejściowym		
	Number of farms Liczba gospodarstw	Agricultural area (thous. ha) Wielkość gospodarstwa (tys. ha)	Average farm size Średnia wielkość gospodarstwa (ha)	Number of farms Liczba gospodarstw	Agricultural area (thous. ha) Wielkość gospodarstwa (tys. ha)	Average farm size Średnia wielkość gospodarstwa (ha)
2005	1 463	38.7	26.4	5 719	127.6	22.3
2007	6 618	137.9	20.8	5 252	150.4	28.6
2010	12 901	308.1	23.9	7 681	210.9	27.5
2013	19 872	492.9	24.8	6 726	177.0	26.3
Dolnośląskie	1 009	30.9	30.7	180	6.5	36.0
Kujawsko-pomorskie	341	8.9	26.2	74	2.2	30.1
Lubelskie	1 711	31.3	18.3	418	9.5	22.6
Lubuskie	923	35.5	38.5	499	19.2	38.5
Łódzkie	396	7.2	18.3	132	3.1	23.5
Małopolskie	1 696	15.2	8.9	142	1.8	12.6
Mazowieckie	1 946	46.0	23.6	663	17.4	26.3
Opolskie	74	2.6	34.8	14	0.9	68.9
Podkarpackie	1 573	25.9	16.4	177	3.6	20.5
Podlaskie	2 235	44.8	20.0	1 172	18.7	16.0
Pomorskie	645	21.1	32.8	248	7.5	30.5
Śląskie	205	5.7	27.6	37	1.5	42.1
Świętokrzyskie	1 081	12.7	11.8	126	2.4	19.0
Warmińsko-mazurskie	2 606	74.1	28.4	1 629	42.1	25.8
Wielkopolskie	762	32.3	42.5	244	9.2	37.9
Zachodniopomorskie	2 669	98.5	36.9	971	31.1	32.0

Source: CSO, 2014.

Źródło: CSO, 2014.

farms. For such regions, there may be referred Lubuskie voivodeship, where there was a 23.2-fold increase or Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship with an 18.7-fold one. Farmers applying for inclusion in the system of organic farms had to do a lot of organisational and productive activities which required not only a different way of thinking about the proceedings and management, but also about certain investments (Report..., 2013).

A group of farmers, whose farms were in the adaptation period or were reaching upwards the standards set out in the relevant regulations and laws, was also large. In the period of at least two years, or within three years of the cultivation of perennial crops, a farmer had to give up the existing methods of cultivation and get the test results for soil, water, plants, animals' settlement, and the like in accordance with the standards of organic farming.

The basic requirement was that the whole farm would be managed in compliance with the requirements applicable to organic production. In special cases, a farm could be split up into the clearly separated units or production sites. Apart from the general principles of agricultural production, one should use tillage and cultivation practices that help maintain or increase organic matter in soil, enhance its stability, biodiversity, and prevent soil from compaction and erosion. Transition from traditional to organic farming was a difficult process requiring from a farmer good theoretical preparation, and also of gaining some practical skills which often meant following someone's example. In this first period, a lot of help may be received from organisations of organic producers. The number of organic farms which were in the state of transition was significantly lower in relation to the number of the already certified households. There was a certain regularity which reflected the fact that in the voivodeships where there were organic farms of a larger size, a further group of farmers applied for entering the path to organic farming. Organic farms at the beginning of their appearance did not occupy large areas of arable land in Poland. In 2013, these households occupied a total of 177.0 thousand ha of agricultural land, which accounted for 1.5% of all arable land in the country. The largest areas belonged to the organic farms in Zachodniopomorskie (6.4%), Lubuskie (4.3%), Podkarpackie (3.6%) and Warmińsko-mazurskie (3.2%) voivodeships. In turn, a low level of such households was represented in Łódzkie (0.4%), Opolskie (0.4%) and Kujawsko-pomorskie (0.6%) voivodeships (Report..., 2013).

Whereas it is interesting to compare the average area of an organic farm with a certificate that amounted to an average of 24.8 ha, which is more than the double average in the whole country. When analysing the average size of these farms, it turns out that the average area was the highest in Wielkopolskie (42.5 ha), Zachodniopomorskie (36.9 ha) and Lubuskie (38.5 ha) voivodeships or in the regions with the largest number of farms of highly industrial character (Framework..., 2014). There are similar trends, if we analyse an agricultural land attributable to an organic farm, which is in the transition period. Those were the largest organic farms whose owners laid claims for obtaining certificates in such voivodeships as Wielkopolskie (37.9 ha), Lubuskie (38.5 ha) and Dolnośląskie (36.0 ha). The dominant feature of the areas occupied

by the environmentalists was that the organic farms were more than twice the national average. It points to the fact that farmers need large surfaces to be able to produce certified goods.

## FINAL COMMENTS

It is widely believed that organic production is the most environmentally friendly agricultural production. Due to cultivation without agrochemicals and controlled production methods, organic farming is beneficial for human health and also helps to preserve biodiversity and protect natural resources. High requirements for organic farms resulted in decreasing the productivity of agriculture, but nevertheless this decrease was compensated by higher prices for the produced foodstuffs. Besides the lost income, a farmer was charged with additional costs connected with expenses on agro-chemical activities related to environmental protection. On the one hand, the extensive production methods were used, on the other hand, they caused reduction of expenses for the purchase of industrial means of production. However, it required higher costs for the working force.

A farmer being an owner of an organic farm represents a completely new kind of a producer with the new management philosophy which relies on an autonomous respect of ecology principles in combination with a deep respect for the environment. Although farmers are subject to inspection and certification, their production marked by the common logo and mandatory sign should guarantee safeness and sanitary conditions, as well as meet all the standards for certain kinds of foodstuff.

The pace of development of organic farming in Poland against the background of the European Union is satisfying. Organic farms meet the expectations of consumers and are supported by the EU. According to the Eurostat data, since 2012 Poland has ranked third in the European Union in terms of the number of organic farms. However, in terms of the value of the ecological production Poland ranks lower than third. The market of organic production must adapt to the existing distribution network in which the large scale entities are increasingly growing in importance. Still, agriculture without agrochemicals is not possible in the near future. But agriculture with lesser levels of agrochemicals is within reach due to use of genetically modified plants. Nevertheless, Poland is among countries which protect themselves against the latter.

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## POLSKIE ROLNICTWO EKOLOGICZNE NA TLE UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ W ŚWIETLE NOWYCH REGULACJI PRAWNYCH

**Streszczenie.** W badaniach podjęto temat rozwoju rolnictwa ekologicznego w UE i w Polsce. Wskazano, że produkcja ekologiczna stanowi element unijnych systemów jakości produktów rolnych. W tym sensie produkcja ekologiczna realizuje te same cele w ramach Wspólnej Polityki Rolnej, które stanowią nieodłączny element wszystkich unijnych systemów jakości produkcji rolnej. W ramach UE liczba gospodarstw ekologicznych wzrosła ze 124,8 tys. w 2004 r. do 186,2 tys. w 2010 r. (49,2%), natomiast poziom upraw ekologicznych odpowiednio z 5,9 mln ha do 9,2 mln ha (55,9%). W Polsce w 2013 r. było 19,9 tys. gospodarstw ekologicznych z certyfikatem oraz dodatkowo 6,7 tys. w okresie przejściowym – przystosowywania do podjęcia produkcji ekologicznej. Średnia powierzchnia gospodarstwa ekologicznego była dwukrotnie większa niż przeciętna wielkość dla całego kraju. Gospodarstwa te zajmowały 1,4% ogólnej powierzchni użytków rolnych, a łącznie z gospodarstwami będącymi w fazie przejściowej stanowiło to 2,0% użytków rolnych kraju. Istotną częścią funkcjonowania tego typu gospodarstw była ich certyfikacja, a produkty musiały mieć logo i obowiązkowe oznakowanie. Wsparcie finansowe dla rolnictwa ekologicznego realizowano w ramach programów rolnośrodowiskowych i uczestnictwa rolników w systemie jakości żywności PROW, a w okresie 2014–2020 podjęto dodatkowe działania związane z rolnictwem ekologicznym.

**Slowa kluczowe:** gospodarstwo ekologiczne, certyfikacja, działania rolnośrodowiskowe, wsparcie finansowe

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