

Organic Farming in Belgium

CARINE HEUSCHEN

Contents

1	Situation of Agriculture in Belgium.....	32
2	History and Development of Organic Agriculture in Belgium	32
3	Organic Agriculture Organisations.....	32
4	Regional Distribution of Organic Farms	34
5	Land Use and Animal Husbandry	36
6	Standards and Certification, State Regulations, Implementation of EU Regulation 2092/91	36
7	State Support and Policy Initiatives	37
7.1	Direct Financial Support for Farmers	37
7.2	Other State Support for Organic Farming: Advice, Demonstration Projects, Research.....	37
8	Implementation of Agenda 2000	38
9	Marketing	38
10	Training.....	38
11	Advisory Service.....	39
12	Research Situation	39
13	Challenges and Outlook	39
14	Author	40



1 Situation of Agriculture in Belgium

The situation of agriculture in Belgium is comparable to the situation in France or Germany: The number of farmers is decreasing every year, but the total agricultural area has decreased only slightly so that the average area per farm is growing. Between 1998 and 1999, 1,826 farms ceased their activities. They represent 2.8 percent of Belgian farmers. Only 0.3 percent of the agricultural area was lost for agricultural use within this period.

The percentage of organic farmers is still very low in comparison to the number of farms in Belgium, but their number is growing (table 1).

Table 1: Total Number of Farms and Number of Organic Farms in 1999

	Belgium	Flanders	Walloon region
Total number of farms	63,848	42,289	21,558
Number of organic farms	550	172	378
Percentage	0.86%	0.41%	1.75%

Source: Ecocert and Blik, 2000

2 History and Development of Organic Agriculture in Belgium

The first conversions to organic farming in Belgium took place during the 1960s. But most organic farmers have only recently begun organic farming. This increase in conversions has been particularly strong in the Walloon region. In the hilly regions of the provinces of Liège and Luxembourg, conventional agriculture is already extensive, and a lot of farms that convert are grassland cattle farms. Most organic farms in the Flemish region practice rather intensive agriculture on very few hectares (vegetable and fruit crops).

The implementation of the European subsidies for organic agriculture in 1994 and the lack of consumer confidence in the quality of agricultural products due to well-known crises (e.g. dioxin, BSE, OGM) are the decisive factors for the increasing number of conversions.

Nevertheless, the area used for organic agriculture is relatively small in Belgium. The land used for organic agricultural production is now 1.3 percent of the total agricultural area and organic farmers represent 0.86 percent of the total number of farmers.

On the other hand, trade in organic products is more important and is growing faster in comparison to organic agricultural production.

3 Organic Agriculture Organisations

The development of organic agriculture organisations in Belgium is shown in the following chronology of significant events.



Important dates for the development of organic farming in Belgium:

1961 First organic farm in the Walloon region

1967 Nature & Progrès



1974 Consumers' organisation Velt
(<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Vines/4142/>)



1976 *Crabe* advisory service, training, inspection
1981 Producers' organisation *Belbior*
1984 Producers' organisation *Unab*
1984 *Carab* advisory service
1984 Processing firms' association *Probila-Unitrab*
1988 Subsidies for extensive agriculture
1987 Inspection body *Blik*

1988 Label *Biogarantie*
(<http://www.ecocert.be/LISTOF.htm>)



1991 Inspection body *Ecocert*
(<http://www.ecocert.be/>)



1993 *Blivo* advisory service
1994 Subsidies for organic agriculture
1998 Producers' organisation *Agölob*
1998 Umbrella organisation for organic farming *BioForum*
(<http://www.ecocert.be/ecobf.html>)

In Belgium there are two main organisations for organic farmers. In the Flemish region, *Belbior* (*Belgische Organisatie voor Beroepstellers*) promotes the organic farming method. In the Walloon region, *Unab* (*Union Nationale des Agrobiologistes Belges*) defends the interests of the organic farmers of the Walloon region. The German-speaking farmers are represented in Unab through their association called *Agölob* (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ökologischer Landbau Ostbelgien*).

Belbior and Unab represent the organic farmers at different levels. They are members of BioForum and IFOAM (<http://www.ifoam.org/>) and are represented in the Ministry of Agriculture (<http://cmlag.fgov.be/>), on the committees of the inspection bodies and in the following research centres for organic agriculture: *Proefcentrum voor de biologische teelt* (*PCBT*) and *Centre technique pour le développement de l'agriculture et de l'horticulture biologique* (*CEB*).



The associations *Nature & Progrès* and *Vereniging voor Ecologische Leef en Teeltwijze (Velt)* were originally associations of both consumers and farmers. Today Velt promotes organic agriculture for consumers and hobby gardeners. Nature & Progrès is not officially recognised as a producer association because consumers can be members as well. In fact, it also defends farmers' interests. The label Nature & Progrès is still used by a certain number of farmers (for direct marketing) and by many small organic shops.

The processing firms are represented by *Probila-Unitrab (Nationale Beroepsvereniging van Verwerkers en Verdelers van Producten van Biologische Landbouw - Union Interprofessionnelle des Transformateurs et Distributeurs de Produits de l'Agriculture Biologique)*. This association informs its members, defends them (in court cases, for example), promotes organic products and represents its members' interests at ministries and in the BioForum.

These associations, together with the association of retailers, the inspection bodies and the advisory organisations *Carab (Centre d'Animation et de Recherche en Agriculture Biologique)* and *Blivo (Biologische Landbouw - Instituut voor Voorlichting en Onderzoek)*, are all members of BioForum, the umbrella organisation for organic agriculture. BioForum has replaced the former umbrella organisation *Biogarantie*. Biogarantie is still responsible for the administration of the *Biogarantie®* logo.



Since the Biogarantie® logo (<http://www.ecocert.be/LISTOF.htmv>) replaced former logos (Velt, Belbior) in 1987, the only logos for organic agriculture that are left in Belgium are Biogarantie® and Nature & Progrès. In addition, some farmers and processing firms are also certified by *Demeter* (<http://www.demeter.net/>), *Bioland* (<http://www.bioland.de/>) (both of Germany) or *AB (Agriculture Biologique)*, France).

4 Regional Distribution of Organic Farms

In Belgium there are only very few farms with mixed production which originates in the historical development of agricultural policy and in the geographical conditions. They are located in the region between Liège and Namur and at the borders to France and Luxembourg.

In general it can be said that dairy farming and beef cattle are the most important enterprises of the organic farms. Especially meat makes an important contribution to the organic farmers' income.

Organic beef production can be found in the Walloon region and in the Ardennian mountains area which as a low mountain range is suitable for this kind of meat production. Organic dairy farming concentrates on the region of Herverland. Farms with arable farming can be found rather in Flanders as there are better soils for arable crops. Here one quarter of the organically managed land is used for arable crops compared to only ten percent in the Walloon region.



Organic horticulture farms can be found all over the country, although the conventional horticulture farms are concentrated mainly in Flanders. There are also some farms with intense organic fruit growing on small trees. They are located in the triangle of Liège – Maastrich – Aachen. In other parts of Belgium commercial fruit growing is rare.

In the Flemish region, most farms have only a very few hectares, producing vegetables and fruit. Land use in organic agriculture in the Walloon and the Flemish regions is shown in tables 4 and 5. A map (<http://sunsite.informatik.rwth-aachen.de/Maps/europe/belgium.jpg>) may be helpful to orientate oneself.

Table 2: Organically Cultivated Area in the Walloon Region (Hectares)

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Arable Crops			762	781	1,078	1,455
Grassland			2,616	4,247	9,556	12,335
Total arable crops and grassland			3,378	5,028	10,634	13,790
<i>In conversion</i>			1,537	3,035	7,568	<i>n.a.</i>
Fruit crops			37	51	56	60
<i>In conversion</i>			9	13	11	<i>n.a.</i>
Vegetable crops			49	50	46	72
<i>In conversion</i>			4	4	4	<i>n.a.</i>
Others			6	12	9	14
<i>In conversion</i>			2	0	1	<i>n.a.</i>
Total	2,043	2,646	3,470	5,141	10,745	13,936
<i>In conversion</i>			1,551	3,052	7,584	<i>n.a.</i>

Source: Ecocert and Blik, 2000

Table 3: Organically Cultivated Area in the Flemish Region (Hectares)

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Arable Crops				242		819
Grassland				383		3,319
Total arable crops and grassland			452	625		4138
Fruit crops			160	158		201
Vegetable crops			179	216		296
Total	640	739	791	820	1,257	4,636

Source: Ecocert and Blik, 2000

There is as well a list of organic farms and processors (<http://www.ecocert.be/LISTOF.htm>) published by Ecocert.



5 Land Use and Animal Husbandry

Table 4: Organic Land Use in Belgium in 1999 According to Ecocert and Blik

Crop	Ecocert (hectares)	Blik (hectares)
Arable land	1,454.95	818.91
Permanent grassland	12,334.79	3,319.51
Vegetables	70.57	276.98
Glasshouse production	1.72	18.65
Fruit	56.83	193.78
Small fruit	3.14	7.47
Others	13.94	0.54
Total	13,935.94	4,635.84
Total Ecocert and Blik	18,571.78	

Source: Ecocert and Blik, 2000

6 Standards and Certification, State Regulations, Implementation of EU Regulation 2092/91

Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 (http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/fr/lif/dat/1991/fr_391R2092.html) was implemented in Belgium in 1993.

In addition to Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 (http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/fr/lif/dat/1991/fr_391R2092.html), Belgian producers must adhere to the Belgian law on organic farming for animal husbandry (A.R. July 10, 1998, A.M. October 30, 1998). The ministry published the rules valid for organic husbandry on their internet pages (pork (<http://cragx.fgov.be/produits/PORCBIO.htm>), cattle (<http://cragx.fgov.be/produits/BOVINBIO.htm>) and poultry (<http://cragx.fgov.be/produits/POULETBIO.htm>), milk and milk products (<http://cragx.fgov.be/produits/PRODLAITBIO.htm>), eggs (<http://cragx.fgov.be/produits/OEUFSBIO.htm>). Farmers and processors who keep the private standards of Biogarantie and Nature & Progrès (in addition to the official standards for organic production) may use the label Biogarantie® and Nature & Progrès.

The state authority for organic farming is the Ministry of Agriculture. It recognises two inspection bodies: Blik and Ecocert. They are both accredited according to EN 45005 and EN 45011. Both inspect farms and farmers and are responsible for the certification of organic products. They are supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture (Direction Générale 4 and Direction Générale 5).



7 State Support and Policy Initiatives

7.1 Direct Financial Support for Farmers

The implementation of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2078/92 permits granting aid to farmers who adopt or maintain practices which preserve and benefit the environment and contribute to the protection of the countryside for a minimum of five years.

Direct support for organic farmers was granted as of 1994 (table 5) under Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2078/92. This scheme (http://www.cmlag.fgov.be/fr/dos/dosdg3_fr2.html) ran out in 1998. The bulk of the payments were allotted in 1998 (on average 127,000 Belgian francs / 3,148 EUR per farm).

Table 5: Payment Rates for Organic Farmers per Hectare until 1998

Land Use	1 st and 2 nd year of conversion (EUR)	Following years in organic farming (EUR)
Annual crops eligible for arable area payments	180.52	111.55
Other annual crops	300.87	223.10
Pasture	297.47	173.53
Vegetable crops	300.87	297.47
Perennial crops (fruit trees)	842.47	743.68

Source: Ecocert and Blik, 2000

The payment rates will not change very much in 1999 and 2000. Vegetable crops will, however, be subsidised far higher than before: 991.57 EUR in the first year of conversion, 867.62 EUR in the second year and 743.68 EUR in the following years.

7.2 Other State Support for Organic Farming: Advice, Demonstration Projects, Research

A five-year demonstration project was established in 1995 with a budget of 3.5 million Belgian francs (86,763 EUR). The project is being carried out by Blivo in Flanders and by Carab in the Walloon region. These projects aim to raise interest in organic farming among conventional farmers through: farm visits to established organic farms; articles in the agricultural press; demonstrations on weed control and other typical organic farming techniques; conferences; seminars and so on.

Since 1999, the Walloon region has co-financed an advisory service for organic farmers which is run by Unab and Nature & Progrès. The Flemish region also co-finances an advisory service established by Blivo.

Since 1999, the two research centres for organic agriculture *Proefcentrum voor de biologische teelt* (PCBT) and *Centre technique pour le développement de l'agriculture et de l'horticulture biologique* (CEB) have been co-financed by the Agricultural Ministry. They concentrate on field experiments.

There is no other funding of any kind apart from some smaller initiatives by regional public authorities, mostly aimed at extension work on organic farming. These projects



are co-financed by EU "Objective 5b Programme" funds and "Objective 1 Programme" funds.

8 Implementation of Agenda 2000

The implementation procedures of Agenda 2000 in Belgium will be published in January, 2000. Farmers converting after 2000 will be subsidised through Agenda 2000.

9 Marketing

The traditional marketing channels for organic products are: natural food shops, weekly markets and direct farm sales. Marketing organic food through supermarkets (S.A. Delhaize (<http://www.delhaize-de-leeuw.be/product/bio/indexn.html>), the GIB-group, S.A. Colruyt) gained importance in the 1990s.

The demand for organic products in Belgium is still greater than national production. The consumer profile for Belgium has not yet been studied. No statistical data on processing and marketing organic products or on their development is available.

The only marketing initiatives that are subsidised by the European Union and the regional governments are situated in the "Objective 1 and 5b Regions". These subsidies have made it possible to build up structured marketing channels for the growing production of beef in the extensive regions.

Only a few initiatives have come from organic farmers themselves, and they use their own (regional) marketing channels. Most organic products are produced within conventional production units, as the number of firms producing only organic products is very small.

10 Training

Training in organic farming is still difficult to find in Belgium. At most schools there are interested teachers, but until now hardly any organic programmes have been offered. In the Flemish region, some agricultural schools have begun to offer lectures on organic farming or even have organic departments.

The SPIGVA offers a course once a year in conventional agriculture which comprises 5 hours of organic farming lectures.

Farmers can get technical support and training through the demonstration projects offered by Blivo and Carab. Attending training courses is not obligatory for farmers converting to organic agriculture.



11 Advisory Service

The organic advisory service was launched by Blivo and Belbior for the Flemish region and by Unab and Nature & Progrès for the Walloon region. These services organise seminars and farm visits.

In the Walloon region, the advisory service was launched in 1999 for two years because of the pressing demand for an advisory service by the organic farmers. Two people are employed at this office. It is partly paid for by the Walloon region.

In Flanders, Blivo can only offer individual consultancy to the farmers of the Objective 5b regions. Some private consultancy firms in Flanders also give advice.

The *Centre interprofessionnel maraîcher (CIM)* gives individual advice to vegetable farmers.

12 Research Situation

Hardly any research has been carried out until now. Research of interest to organic agriculture is being carried out by:

- Département de lutte biologique et ressources phytogénétiques du *Centre de Recherche Agricole* (<http://cragx.fgov.be/>) à Gembloux
- *Centre d'étude en Agriculture Biologique (CEB)*

The two research centres for organic agriculture, *Proefcentrum voor de biologische teelt (PCBT)* and *Centre technique pour le développement de l'agriculture et de l'horticulture biologique (CEB)*, concentrate on field experiments rather than on research.

13 Challenges and Outlook

The market will grow with the increased sales of organic products through supermarkets and through the implementation of the European regulation for animal production. These factors will make organic food much more widely available.

Organic agriculture is an opportunity for many farmers. It is an alternative for many farmers which enables them to receive better prices for their products. The development of the organic sector requires the organisation of networks. The public also needs to be made aware of the problems due to conventional agriculture. Direct and indirect support by the government will, however, be necessary to achieve this.



14 Author

Carine Heuschen, Ecocert Belgium, Chemin de la Haute Baudecet 1, B-1457 Walhein, phone +32-81-600377, fax +32-81-600313, E-Mail carine.heuschen@euronet.be

© by Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau, 2000. All rights reserved.

- **Bibliographical Reference**
Heuschen, Carine: Organic Farming in Belgium. In: Steffi Graf / Helga Willer (Eds.): Organic Agriculture in Europe. Results of the Internet Project <http://www.organic-europe.net>, Co-funded by the EU-Commission, General Directorate Agriculture (GD Agri), SÖL-Sonderausgabe 75, Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL), Bad Dürkheim, Germany, 2000.
- **Address of Editor of Internet Site**
Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL)
Weinstraße Süd 51, D-67098 Bad Dürkheim
Tel. +49-(0)-6322-8666, Fax +49-(0)-6322-989701
E-Mail: info@soel.de, Internet: <http://www.soel.de>



Heuschen, Carine: Organic Farming in Belgium
<http://www.organic-europe.net>, 30.3.2000
© Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL), Bad Dürkheim, Germany, 2000.