

Institutions and Organizations in the Development of Organic Farms in the Lubelskie Voivodship

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Abstract

Organic production is an important area for the development of the competitiveness of the Lubelskie Voivodship. Development of this production, however, depends on the support households can get for taking this kind of action. The aim of the study is to assess the scale and nature of institutional support in the opinion of the surveyed farmers, organic farms in the Lublin area. For the achievement of this objective, 60 interviews were conducted using a questionnaire survey among farms pursuing organic production. The obtained results indicated that institutions whose support, in the opinion of the respondents, is the highest were: Agricultural Advisory Centres, the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture, and certification bodies.

Keywords: institution, organic production, organic farms, Lubelskie Voivodship

Introduction

Organic production in the Lubelskie Voivodship may be the basis for the development of this region, because focus on this kind of specialization can be the basis of its competitiveness. Organic farming and its development is the domain of regions with a low degree of industrialization, and characterized by a low degree of environmental pollution. An additional factor in the development of organic production is traditional production technology and abundant labour resources (Kasztelan 2010, 82). However, the development of an ecological sphere of agricultural production is related to the implementation of various forms of assistance to agricultural producers. Development of this farming sector is conditioned by the action of various types of institutions and organizations supporting farmers. The support may have both an economic and non-economic dimension. Among the institutions that constitute an important element in the development of organic production we should indicate, among others: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection, the State Inspectorate of Plant Health and Seed, the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics, and the Institute of Soil Science and Plant Cultivation.

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1 Institutions and organizations that support organic production development

The main factor in the development of organic farming in Poland is the support system implemented under agri-environment schemes of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. Analysis of the experience of other EU countries shows that restricting this support causes a reduction in organic farming (Brodzińska 2010, 19).

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Another form of support for the development of agriculture, including organic farming, are clusters. Clusters are an opportunity for the creation of economic specialization of regions, strengthening their potential. Implementing joint economic and promotional activities allows cluster members to produce, and promote, unique products and value offered by agriculture in the region (Szymoniuk 2008, 86). Another area of activity of the institutions are promotional initiatives implemented by state institutions (e.g., a nationwide promotional campaign for organic farming). Their purpose is to provide information to consumers about how to identify organic products, as well as the very knowledge about the health benefits of such foods. Such activities indirectly affect the growth in demand for organic food. Campaigns of this kind are carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.¹

An important element of the implementation of organic production is a system of production control and certification. In Poland, this system is created by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Inspection Authority for the Commercial Quality of Agricultural and Food Products, the Polish Centre for Accreditation, and certification bodies. The aim of the efficient system is to provide consumers with certainty that organic products are manufactured according to the provisions and high quality.

Taking action in the realization of organic production or introduction of specialization in agricultural production is associated with the need for professional support both at the very production level and activities related to production. Advisory support to agricultural producers can be provided by both Agricultural Advisory Centres and non-governmental organizations. This support may include a number of different activities, among others, the transfer of knowledge about food production, and identifying methods of production.

2 Material and methodology

The study, whose results are presented in the paper, was conducted in November-December 2013 in 40 rural, urban-rural communes of the Lubelskie Voivodship (about 20% of all communes), including 30 communes of the most ecologically valuable group and 10 comparative communes from a group of municipalities with low ecological value according to the index developed by Guzal-Dec (2013) within her study of ecological value of rural and urban-rural communes of the Lubelskie Voivodship.

The choice of the Lubelskie Voivodship as the area of research implementation results in part from the fact that organic production in the region is an important part of agricultural production. The number of organic producers in 2013 in the voivodship was 2180, which accounted for 12% of such producers in Poland. The number of organic processing plants was at the level of 45. A larger number of processing plants was only recorded in the Mazowieckie Voivodship—78, and 53 in the Wielkopolskie Voivodship. Organic farming is a part of agricultural production which is growing from year to year. Within the selected municipalities, 60 interviews were carried out using a questionnaire survey among farms pursuing organic production. The questionnaire included a number of questions related to the characteristics of the agricultural production, allowing for an assessment of conditions conducive to the development of this type of production. Respondents assessed the role of institutions and organizations in the development of agricultural activity. Another important element of the questionnaire was the study on the area of environmental awareness of agricultural producers, as well as their pro-environmental activities.

3 Characteristics of the study sample

In the studied group of farms, the arithmetic mean for the period of implementation of organic production is 4,69 years (standard deviation 3,69). However, farms implementing this type of production have prevailed from two years. The period for certified organic farms was shorter—the arithmetic mean for the production of certified products in the surveyed population is 3,86 years

1. See information presented at <http://www.minrol.gov.pl/Jakosc-zywnosci/Rolnictwo-ekologiczne>.

(standard deviation 3,02). More than 50% of the studied units have been achieving certified production for two years.²

The studied agricultural farms with organic production are mainly entities specializing in plant production—84%. The rest carry out mixed, animal-plant production. The factor influencing the ability of business is undoubtedly the level of agricultural income, being one of the most important economic factors. The profitability of production affects further decisions in relation to production, and its direction. Among the organic producers, 86% of respondents were of the opinion that the profitability of agricultural production is satisfactory and allows its continuity. Only 3,5% of participants in the study indicated that the level of income encouraged them to increase production. Every tenth manufacturer was of the opinion that the resulting income encourages them to cease production.

Analysing plans of the studied manufacturers for the three coming years, as related to the level of organic production, it can be noted that satisfaction with their income is reflected. Over 90% of those participating in the study assume to maintain the current level of production in the future. Only 2% of the respondents consider total abandonment of this form of agricultural production. The level of income achieved depends on a number of different factors, including the quality and the acreage of the owned land. The average size of the surveyed farms is 18,85 ha (standard deviation 25,05), while the average area of organic farming 17,20 acres (standard deviation 15,86). In 82% of the farms where organic production is carried out, the production is within all of the owned farmland. Only 4% of respondents indicated that organic production covers 40% of the utilized area. Other agricultural producers pointed out values from 50% to 80%.

4 Institutions, organizations as units supporting the development of organic production in the opinion of the producers

Activity in the implementation of organic production involves taking a series of actions for which not all manufacturers are prepared. Searching for customers or improving the entity's qualifications through training and advice are often particularly sensitive areas. Among the entities that were the subject of the respondents' assessment, there were fourteen institutions and organizations (fig. 1). The results show that respondent producers rated most highly the support offered by the Agricultural Advisory Centres—the mean of 4,14 (standard deviation 1,20). This support is mainly focused on consulting (27 responses), training (15 responses) or assistance in preparing documents related to obtaining grants. Another institution highly rated by respondents were certi-

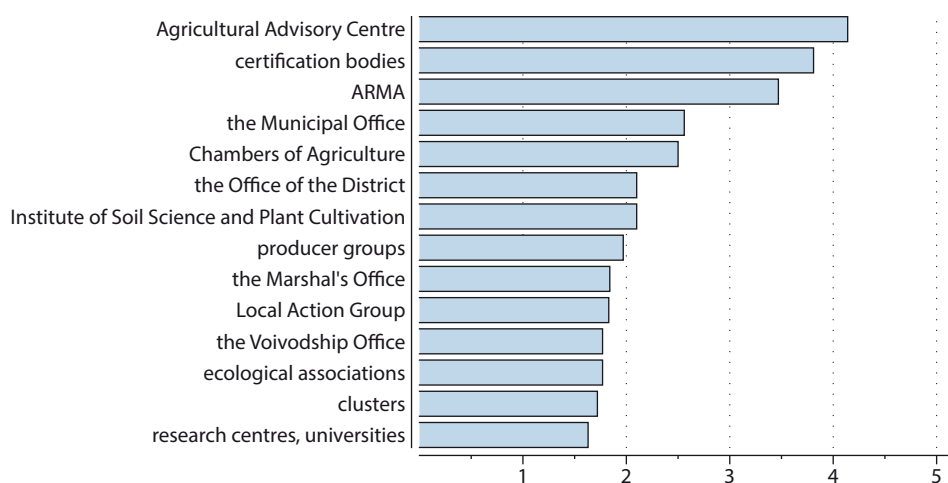


Fig. 1. Assessment of support granted by selected institutions and organizations in the implementation of organic production (rating on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 as the lowest level of support, and 5 as the highest level)

2. [In the journal European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style).—Ed.]

fication bodies (the mean of 3,81, standard deviation 1,28). At the date of the study, there were ten certification bodies in Poland. However, among the studied group, more than 90% of such entities have the EKOGWARACJA PTRE certificate. Among other units, there were the Polish Centre for Testing and Certification (4%), AgroBioTest (2%) and the AgroEko Center of Quality (2%). These institutions, in the opinion of respondents, support organic production through counselling, assistance in filling out documents and the very certification.

The Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture is an extremely important institution in the implementation of direct payments, and agri-environmental packages. It is an institution which, in the opinion of the surveyed producers, was rated highly as an entity supporting the development of organic farming (the mean of 3,47, standard deviation 1,48).

Local governments are yet another group of institutions which should encourage development of agriculture. In the case of ongoing research, producers subjectively assessed the support offered by the Marshal's Office, the Voivodship Office, the Office of the District and the Municipal Office. The level of support from the Municipal Office was rated by the respondents, and that of the Voivodship Office, as the lowest. Analysing the average level of support from these institutions, the opinion of those surveyed indicates the existence of the following dependency: the "farther" away the institution of the place of agricultural production, the lower rated it is with respect to its support by the respondents. In addition, this level of evaluation of support may be due to feelings associated with the analysis of the barriers associated with the development of organic farming. Nearly 40% of respondents indicate that the problem is little support of organic farm development on the part of local government. An equally large percentage of respondents indicate little interest of national government in the development of organic production. It can be assumed that such feelings translate into the assessment of support for the development of organic production on the part of local government institutions in the opinion of the respondents.

The support of such institutions as associations, clusters and producer groups was assessed equally low by the surveyed farmers. However, it should be noted that the low assessments were accompanied by low interest of respondents in such organizations. Only 7% of respondents belong to a producer group, while 15% are planning membership. The remaining respondents did not intend to belong to such institutions and organizations. In the case of marketing groups, these values are much lower—2% of the respondents belong to them, 10% of the respondents are considering such activity, while 88% are not interested.

Searching for factors that may influence the assessment of the level of support of the institutions and organizations, the following variables were included: the level of education and the gender of the head of a household and its agricultural area.

The level of education of the head of the household is a demographic feature differentiating subjective evaluation of organic production support by institutions and organizations.³ Although, due to the size of the sample, it is difficult to talk about statistically significant differences, slight differences in the case of assessments of individual institutions, particularly in relation to local government, can be observed in the group of producers. Respondents with higher education assessed the actions of units at the national and commune levels lower when compared with those declaring their education at vocational level. Average assessment of organic production support from the Voivodship Office and the Marshal's Office was higher for respondents with higher education.

The producer group declaring higher education also assessed the support of the Agricultural Advisory Centres and certification bodies slightly higher (compared with those declaring secondary and vocational education). It can be assumed that this is the result of awareness in this regard, but also the fact of participation in various trainings, workshops and the use of other support provided by these institutions.

While, in the case of the analysis referring to the support of institutions depending on the level of education of household heads, no significant differences are visible in the assessment, having this kind of assessment in relation to gender, you can observe certain characteristics. Women better

3. The head of a household is a person who, for the most part, provides means of subsistence or who determines the choice of objectives and strategies to meet the needs of household members.

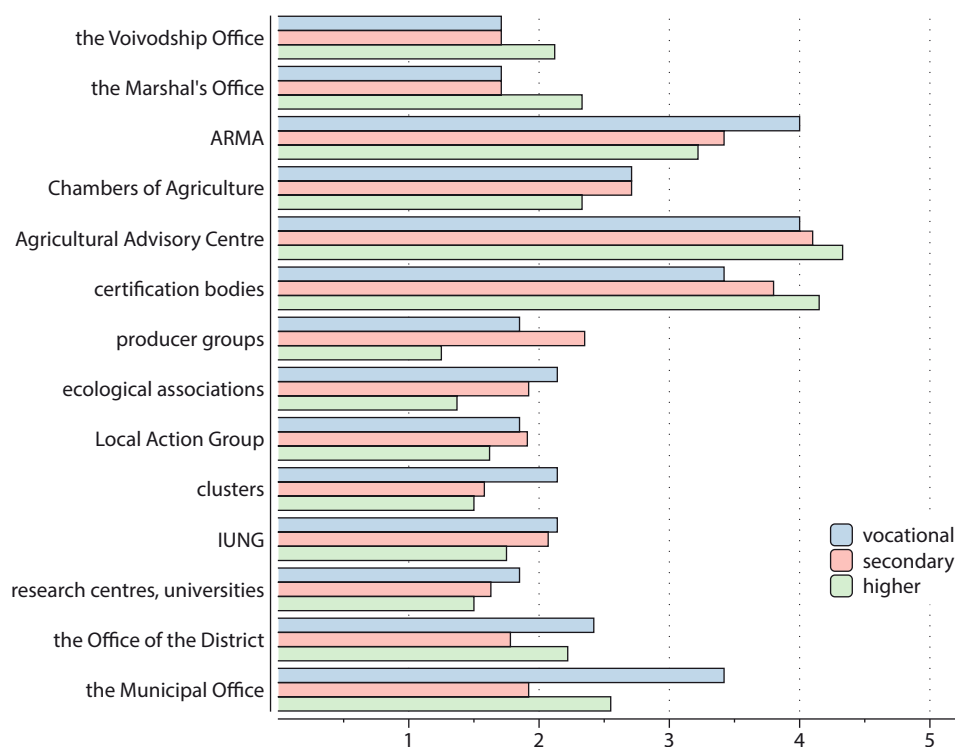


Fig. 2. Assessment of selected institutions and organizations' support in the implementation of organic production in the group of manufacturers, according to the education of heads of households (rating on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest level of support, and 5 being the highest level of support)

assessed actions taken with respect to supporting development of organic production in the case of such institutions as the Chambers of Agriculture, producer groups, local action groups or clusters. It can be assumed that in the case of women who are heads of households, such an assessment may result from their increased activity, in searching for new solutions related to running the farm. Perhaps they see the opportunities that are presented by such institutions. It is also worth considering that such an assessment is not due to the fact that women definitely have a larger proportion of higher education. Nearly 40% of women who are in the group declared higher education at the BA and MA level.

It should also be noted that, as long as the assessment of local government units at the provincial level is similar for both the evaluation of men and women, referring to this kind of assessment of local and district government, the surveyed women evaluate their actions better.

The area of the farm on which agricultural production is carried out is a factor that may influence the needs connected with the support of external institutions in production. Analysing the assessment of support in the opinion of producers taking into account their acreage, it can be observed that in the case of producers with an area of more than 30 ha the assessment of actions by the ARMA and Chambers of Agriculture was considerably higher. This assessment may be associated with the intensity of the support of these institutions. In the case of the other assessed organizations and institutions, those with large farms may have much higher expectations for help with respect to institutions within external environment than other surveyed households. Confirmation of this may be the assessment of support provided by the surveyed institutions in the opinion of representatives of smaller households — with less than 10 ha.

Against the background of all of the assessed institutions and organizations, the assessment of the level of support for organic production provided by the Agricultural Advisory Centres is particularly characteristic in the assessment of farms with an area of 10 ha. It can be assumed that this is due to the fact that nearly 70% of households with a small area are entities carrying out certified organic production for a period of one/two years. Initial implementation of this type of activity is associated with a greater need for support both in the form of consultancy, training as well as filling out documentation.

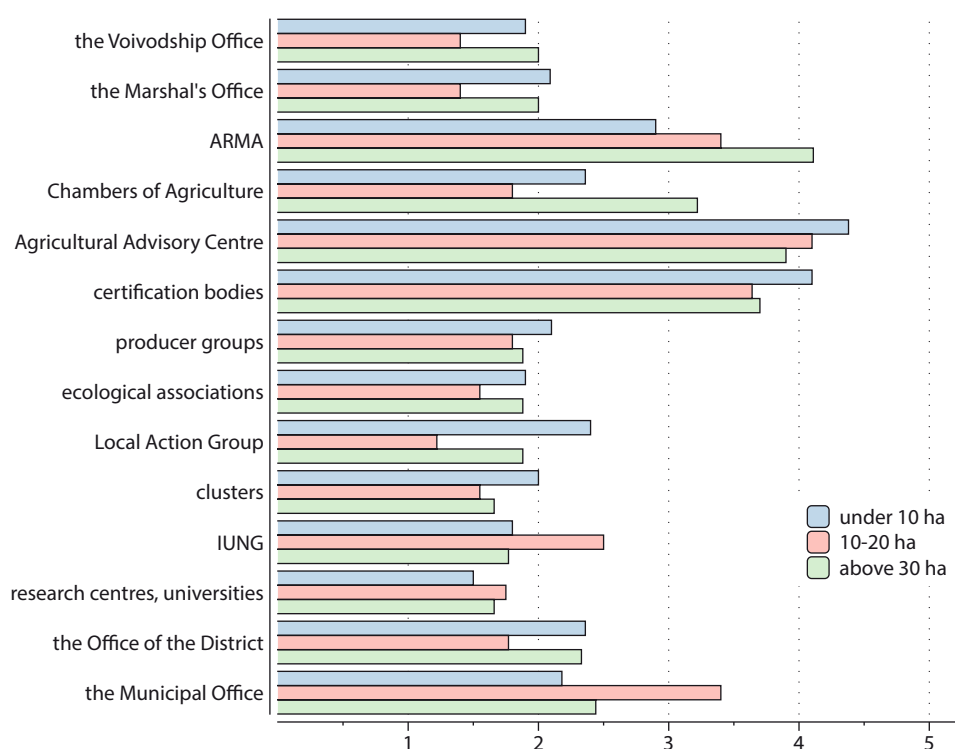


Fig. 3. Support assessment provided by selected institutions and organizations in the implementation of organic production in the studied group of producers by farm agricultural area (rating on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest level of support, and 5 being the highest level of support)

Conclusions

Activities and support from institutions and organizations are extremely important to the development of organic production in Poland. Especially in the next programming period, the scale of support in the form of subsidies provided in the RDP for 2014–2020 provides for restrictions. The fear is that this situation may affect the degree of significant inhibition of the development of organic production. It seems reasonable then to search for solutions that provide significant support for organic producers. Producer organizations and those providing advisory, organizational support play a significant role. The obtained results indicated that institutions whose support, in the opinion of the respondents, is the highest were: Agricultural Advisory Centres, the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture, and certification bodies.

Searching for causes of low assessment of the support in the opinion of those surveyed we can assume that this is the result of much higher expectations on the part of agricultural producers. Another important reason is the lack of knowledge of the existence and the activities of certain groups, institutions and organizations at the local and regional level. The respondents, in some cases, showed no interest in participation in producer groups, or local action groups. Another reason for the low assessment of activities aimed at promoting organic production undertaken by the analysed organizations and institutions is the lack of proximity to the given area.

The education level of heads of households, farm managers, influences the support assessment with respect to different institutions and organizations.

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