

Trends and impact of the organic market on the environment

Abstract

According to estimates made by representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Romania could reach exports of organic products of over 1.5 billion euros in the coming years, if this sector is supported by the authorities. As for the domestic consumption of organic products, this is estimated by the employers' association at around 80 million euros, half of this value coming from Romanian products, namely honey, wine and bakery, and the other half from imports made especially by large retailers. Romania currently has only one percent of the total consumption of organic products, compared to 5-6%, the European average. In recent years, more and more people in Romania have chosen to eat organic foods. They know that these are good for their health while respecting the environment.

Keywords: organic market, organic farming, demand, supply, sales, environment

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Introduction

Natural food is becoming an increasingly common topic, in the language of specialists and ordinary consumers, from different corners of the world. Organic consumption is a topic debated both at the level of families, groups of specialists or authorities around the world. Romania also has a growing potential, both from the perspective of organic food supply and demand. Here, both domestic and foreign consumers can be identified.

The scientific approach of the study is to highlight the potential of supply and demand for organic products, in our country and in other countries around the world.

Brief introduction to organic production and consumption in our country and worldwide; analysis of specialized literature

In the following, we will make a brief scientific approach through the specialized literature with the objective of natural food produced and consumed worldwide. This objective required a selection, analysis and synthesis of data from international literature, from official data of the National Institute of Statistics, but also from European statistical data Eurostat, after the year 2000.

Globally, 80% of all natural food is consumed by 20% of the planet's population. According to the report „World of Organic Agriculture, Statistics and Trends”, 2007 edition, Australia is called „the most organic continent”, according to the criterion of the extent of cultivated areas of approximately 11.8 million hectares. In second place is Europe with 6.9 million ha, followed by Latin America with 5.8 million ha.

At the European Union level, organic agriculture represents 3.7% of the total agricultural area, although between 1993 and 1998, an increase of 25% was recorded. Italy also has the largest number of organic farms, 31% of the EU total, followed by Austria, Spain and Germany. In 2001, per capita spending on organic products recorded the highest values in Denmark (58.08 euros/inhabitant).¹

In our country, organic agriculture is carried out on an area of 15% to 25% of the Romanian land. Organic farming is carried out on 300,000 ha, and the continuously growing demand for organic

products for the domestic and foreign market could lead to an almost six-fold increase in the area of crops. Although the area cultivated organically in Romania is increasing year by year, it is now more than ten times larger than seven years ago, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Compared to the markets in Hungary or Poland, it marks very small volumes. Germany cultivates organically almost one million hectares annually, three times more than Romania.

Romanian specialists believe that this sluggish development of organic agriculture is also due to the lack of financial support for farmers, which should come from the Romanian state. Although the number of organic farms and crops has tripled, the total amount allocated for subsidies in 2012 barely increased by one million euros, up to 4.5 million euros. If in 2011, an organic producer received between 3,000 and 4,000 euros, in 2012 the increase in the number of organic producers led to a decrease in the support offered by the Romanian state.²

The organic market is extremely diverse, from food, toys, cosmetics, to electronics and household appliances, cars, clothes or houses. The yield of organic production is on average 20% lower than that of conventional agriculture. This is also the reason why the price of organic products is at least 30% higher than that of conventional products.

The priorities of the National Export Strategy (NES) 2012-2016 in the field of organic agriculture in Romania “...see, first of all, the sale of organic products with high added value, the identification of new export markets and the creation of an efficient processing and distribution system. Also, the professional development of participants, the creation of associations specialized in the sale of organic products, and an integrated certification system should be mentioned as priorities in organic agriculture”.³ The destinations for export to the European Union are England and Austria.

According to estimates made by representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Rural Affairs, Romania could reach exports of organic products of over 1.5 billion euros in the next five years, if this sector is supported by the authorities, given that exports of such products were estimated at 200 million euros for 2011. Regarding the domestic consumption of organic products, this is estimated by the employers' association at around 80 million euros,

half of this value coming from Romanian products, namely honey, wine and bakery, and the other half from imports made especially by large retailers. Romania currently has only one percent of the total consumption of organic products, compared to 6% in Germany.

Specialized stores (La Baci, Green Feet, Băcănia Veche, Pukka Food, Leacul, etc.) are few, and most of the time the best way to purchase food remains direct contact with the farmer.

Since 2012, the European Commission has applied ecodesign rules to all products, not only energy-consuming ones, but also to electrical and electronic equipment that can contribute to reducing energy consumption. Examples include windows, construction products, insulation materials, detergents and water-using devices. Ecodesign aims to reduce the environmental impact of products, including reducing energy consumption throughout the product's life cycle. In addition to consumer behaviour, there are two ways to reduce the energy consumed by products: appropriate labelling to inform consumers about the actual energy consumption (for example, traditional energy labels divide products into energy categories from A to G, with A++ indicating very economical consumption) and requirements related to the energy efficiency of products, imposed already at the design stage.⁴

Total organic sales in Romania amount to approximately 10 million euros, which is less than 1% of the retail market and very little compared to the 5-6% European average, according to industry figures. Demand for organic products will increase in Romania, as it did in the Czech Republic and Hungary after joining the EU in 2004. Most of Romanian organic production is exported: 95% of plant production (including honey) and 80% of animal production (milk and dairy products), mainly to European Union countries.

As in previous years, Romania continues to export mainly cereals, honey, berries and very few processed products, such as cheeses, wines or bakery products. European countries are Romania's main export markets for organic products, with Germany, Austria and Belgium being among the countries that massively import raw materials obtained in the local organic system, but also the main suppliers of bio-processed products for the Romanian market. The report on the domestic market for organic agri-food products prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture reveals a growth in the organic market in Romania: 60 processors are active in plant production, 9 in animal production and 17 in beekeeping. At the national level, Suceava is the county with the most operators, over 700, followed by Mureş, between 200 and 700, and in third place are Bacău, Tulcea and Ialomiţa, between 100 and 199.

On the Romanian market, the range of organic products is quite limited. Most food is brought from abroad. The best-selling organic products are: milk, eggs, yogurts, fruits, vegetables, but also sausages.

Official data from NIS and Eurostat on the organic market in Romania

In 2025, the Romanian food market faced changes generated by economic, climatic and legislative factors. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS), the value of agricultural and food production decreased in 2024 by 4.3% compared to the previous year, reaching 100.5 billion lei. Plant production recorded a reduction of 10.1%, while animal production increased by 5.1%, mainly supported by the increase in demand for meat and dairy products.

Eurostat reports confirm that the food industry represents approximately 10% of Romania's GDP, with a high share of agri-

food processing. In 2025, the major trends aim to increase the demand for organic products, clean-label foods and sustainable packaging solutions. These guidelines align with European strategies regarding the transition to a greener food system.

NielsenIQ data shows that modern food retail recorded an average growth of 8-10% in 2024, mainly due to the expansion of supermarket chains and the growth of online commerce. However, inflation and high energy and logistics costs continue to put pressure on prices.

For processors and retailers, the main challenge remains to maintain competitiveness in the face of increasing production costs and increasingly stringent food safety requirements. Reducing waste, investing in digitalization and strengthening the relationship with local suppliers are priority directions for the Romanian food market.

Forecasts show that the Romanian food market could record an average annual growth of 3-4% by 2030, if the sector we are discussing continues to invest in modern technologies and adapt the offer to new consumer preferences.⁵

In our country, the control and certification of products obtained from organic farming is currently ensured by private inspection and certification bodies. These are approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in Order No. 688/9 August 2007 for the approval of the Rules regarding the organization of the inspection and certification system, the approval of inspection and certification bodies and the supervision of the activity of control bodies. The approval of control bodies by the MADR is necessarily preceded by their accreditation, in accordance with the European standard EN ISO 45011:1998, issued by the Romanian Accreditation Association "Renar".

The sales spaces for organic products in our country are: sales at the farm gate; sales in seasonal markets; specialized stores; traditional and modern retail; hypermarkets, supermarkets, cash & carry stores; online stores: www.rangali.ro; www.organikshop.ro (organic cosmetics); www.biomania.ro; network marketing (Life Care); sales through the online exchange for organic products (www.agricultura-ecologica.ro). 60% of organic products are sold in organic stores, 30% in supermarkets and 10% in other stores. The main store chains that have introduced organic products and have set up special spaces for them are: Carrefour, Cora, Gima, La Fourmi and Mega Image.

Supply and demand for organic products in Romania

The area cultivated organically worldwide amounted to 31.4 million hectares, with Romania ranking 16th in terms of cultivated area. The total area of organic crops in Romania has increased more than 10 times since 2000. The consumption of organic products in Romania represents less than 1% of total food and is expected to barely reach 2% in the next 5 years. The average consumption of organic products in Western Europe is 3-5%. In Germany, consumption is 5%, in England and Austria 3%, and in Hungary 2%.

Among the products sold on foreign markets, cereals were in the greatest demand with 54%. Oilseeds accounted for 22% of exports, fruits and mushrooms 20%, processed dairy products 1%, honey 0.94% and other organic products 2.06%. Countries where Romanian organic products are exported are: the Netherlands, Germany and Italy, and one of the objectives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is the even more massive penetration of national organic products on the US market, where nuts, berries, mushrooms and cereals are already exported.

The varied preferences of consumers influence the diversity of the offer of organic products on the market. Sales of organic products have been increasing from year to year.

1. In 2009, the growth was 80% compared to 2008, and in some categories it increased fourfold... sales were almost 30% higher compared to the same period last year," says Andreea Mihai, marketing director at Carrefour Romania, which has had eco-friendly products on its shelves since 2003.²
2. Mega Image went even further, being the only supermarket that offers its own brand of eco-friendly products (Delhaize Bio).
3. Cora hypermarket launched the first organic cotton textile products at the beginning of 2012, along with food and cosmetics-detergents.
4. On the automotive market, Dacia is developing a hybrid engine, the Dacia Hamster Hybrid-Electricway, while in tourism, hotels such as Saturn, Vega, and Meitnermerg are using organic products;
5. On the real estate market, Ozone Homes, part of the South Pacific Constructions group, is selling eco-friendly houses with utility bills reduced by up to 35%.
6. Organic wooden furniture massive has the largest share in exports.
7. The cosmetics market also reflects the transformation of the organic culture in Romania. Creams with parabens are replaced by creams with olive oil.

Romanian organic product offer

Our country has aligned itself with new trends, as a result of which stores selling organic products have also appeared. Therefore, the National Authority for Consumer Protection gives several reasons to consume a wider range of organic products.⁶

Organic dairy products: Organic dairy products such as milk, butter, yoghurt and cheeses are obtained from the best milk from animals raised in the organic farming system. Their diversity reflects: consumer preferences, producer innovations and regional traditions. For example, organic cheeses cover a very wide spectrum of European specialties. All animals are fed with high-quality grass and fodder, which does not contain genetically modified organisms. The animals benefit from appropriate shelters and bedding, where the animals can exercise regularly, benefiting from access to pastures and walks in the open air. Processed dairy products are obtained in accordance with consumer requirements and food safety rules and do not contain artificial flavours and sweeteners. Different types of organic dairy products can be purchased and can be identified as organic by their label.

Organic bread and cereals: Cereals such as wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt and rice make a major contribution to the European diet. Without them, Italian pasta, French baguettes, Czech dumplings or Belgian beer would not exist.

Farmers in the organic farming system provide these raw materials in a way that respects both the environment and the animals. Instead of synthetic fertilizers, natural fertilizers, compost or other organic matter are used to improve soil fertility. In organic farming, plant protection is based on preventive measures, crop rotation, the cultivation of locally adapted varieties, mechanical or physical weeding and the use of a natural method of pest control.

Organic beer and bread must be produced from organic yeast that does not contain GMOs. Organic bread and pasta can be purchased from specialized bakeries or from specialized organic food departments. Organic grains are often the basic ingredients for other processed organic foods or beverages, which can in turn be identified by logos or labels specific to the organic production method.

Offer - organic producers from Romania: Currently, there are about 3,000 thousand producers, most of them individuals (natural persons), but also farmers, cultivators and animal breeders. They carry out organic farming activities: vegetable crops of vegetables, fruits, cereals, soy, etc. and animal breeding: sheep, cattle, poultry, goats, pigs, horses and beekeeping. If France is currently the most important agricultural producer among the 27 member states, Romania, through its agricultural potential, could compete with it. European experts say that our country has the chance to become the largest eco-agricultural producer in Europe, and this is because so many chemical products have not been used in Romanian agriculture in recent years, and the soils are clean, only good for receiving European certifications and starting organic production. About 15-25% of Romania's land is chemically untreated.¹ Over 90% of organic production in Romania goes for export.

Bio processors in our country: Processors are fewer in number than producers. The weak point of the organic food industry in our country is represented by: processing, packaging and marketing of products. This handicap of the eco industry is mainly determined by the high costs of industrial and packaging facilities that meet the standards of organic agriculture. The increasing demand and the lack of processors in the country determine the raw organic product to follow external routes. Only a small part of this type of food finds a place on the domestic market. Products of plant origin are processed from wheat, sunflower, corn, peas, soy and fruits (sour cherries, cherries, raspberries, blueberries, sea buckthorn, nuts, etc.); products of animal origin: eggs, milk, meat; dairy products: sheep's cheese, cheese; bee products: honey, honeycombs, wax, propolis, pollen.

Some of the registered processors are: LaDorna, Can Serv, Radix, Deltanav, Apidava, Arfungo Comimpex, LTA Mondial, Petras Bio the first organic pasta and whole grain processor in Romania.¹

Exporters: In 2007, there were 37 exporters registered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Rural Affairs. Over 90% of organic production in Romania is exported. About 50 million euros were collected in 2006 and about 80 million euros in 2007. Berries, medicinal plants, nuts, mushrooms, cereals and honey are well-priced on the European market in countries such as Italy, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The amount of products for export increases every year. Some representative exporters from Romania are: Dorna Lactate, Delta Dunarii Organics, Apiprodex, Tremot Dobre and sons.

Importers: There are fewer than exporters. 14 registered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2007. Most of the products sold by organic stores come from imports, because in Romania we cannot currently speak of a sustained production in this field. The biggest problem of an importer is distribution. Contracts must be concluded with hypermarkets, online stores and own stores must be created. Investment in this type of business can start from a few thousand euros and can reach 100,000 euros. Some names of importers are: Mega Image, Sano Vita, Nutrimold, Ecofruct, Apiprodex, and Natura Land.

Conclusion

The growing interest in organic food is evident, reflecting a positive trend among consumers. Organic products are perceived as a healthy choice contributing to improving consumer well-being. The estimate of a continuous growth of the organic food market until 2025 underlines their importance. More and more people prefer organic food. Consumption is expected to increase by 40% by 2025. In Romania, 87% of people are interested in products that improve intestinal health. The way organic food is bought has changed. 33% of Europeans buy food online once a month. The pandemic has made more people prefer to buy online. The organic food market is growing rapidly. Consumers are looking for food with nutritional benefits and innovations. Popular organic products, such as plant-based alternatives to meat, are preferred. Plant-based meat alternatives are becoming popular. Their demand will increase by 25% by 2025. They are healthy and reduce carbon emissions. Sales of organic products will increase by 15% next year. The market for organic food is expanding due to awareness of the benefits. Supermarkets with a wide range of organic products sell 10% more. This trend is also seen in online sales, which increase by 50% for organic products.

Choosing organic food brings great benefits to our health. It also has a great positive impact on the environment. By using less pesticides and chemical fertilizers, we help protect biodiversity and soil health. Organic practices help create a more balanced ecosystem. This is crucial for the future of agriculture. In Romania, Western requirements encourage the adoption of new agricultural practices.

Carrefour, for example, works with over 1,450 local suppliers.⁷ This shows a strong commitment to organic products. Consumers who choose organic food help reduce CO2 emissions. Carrefour, for example, wants to significantly reduce CO2 emissions by 2050. They also want to use 100% recyclable materials by 2025. These choices are important steps towards a greener future.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflicts of interest.

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