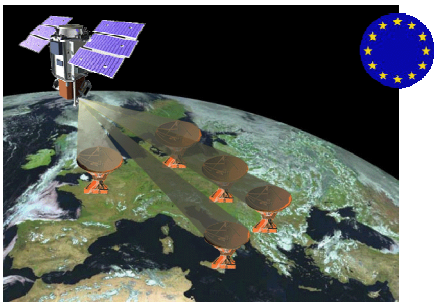

Contract No.: FOOD-CT-2004-003375

CHANNEL

Opening Channels of Communication between the Associated Candidate Countries and the EU in Ecological Farming

Instrument: Specific Support Action

Thematic Priority: Food Quality and Safety

Publishable final activity report

Period covered: from 15 November 2004 to 14 June 2006 Date of preparation: 30.06. 2006

Start date of project: 15 November 2004 Duration: 19 months

Project coordinator name: Prof. László Radics
Project coordinator organisation name: Corvinus University of Budapest Revision [draft]

1. Project execution

The main objectives of CHANNEL project are as follows:

- to assess and analyse which development stages have the participating countries achieved in organic agriculture;
- to open communication channels on different levels necessary for starting the harmonization and equalization process in organic agriculture.

Identification of the project's goals

- Monitor the situation of organic farming in the new accession candidate countries and in potential candidate countries.
- Create links to stakeholders of participating countries.
- Create communication channels between the new accession candidate countries and potential candidate countries and between these countries and the European Union.
- Disseminate knowledge in organic agriculture.
- Create an interactive central data bank.
- Create a common web site and discussion forum of the project.

There are 25 participants from 15 countries taking part in the Project as contractors.

Part. no.	Participant name	Country
1	CORVINUS University of Budapest, Faculty of Horticultural Science, Department of Ecological and Sustainable Production Systems	Hungary
2	Central Service for Plant Protection and Soil Conservation, Budapest	Hungary
3	National Institute for Agricultural Quality Control, Budapest	Hungary
4	Research Institute for Animal Breeding and Nutrition, Gödöllő	Hungary
5	University of Kassel, Department of Organic Farming & Cropping Systems	Germany
6	Center for Agricultural Landscape and Land Use Research, Müncheberg	Germany
7	Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Organic Farming and Applied Ecology, Vienna	Austria
8	Federal Agricultural Research Centre, Braunschweig	Germany
9	Nikola Poushkarov Institute of Soil Science, Sofia	Bulgaria
10	Faculty of Agriculture, University of South Bohemia, Ceské Budejovice	Czech Republic
11	Biokontroll Hungaria, Budapest	Hungary
12	Association of Hungarian Small Animal Breeders for Gene Conservation, Gödöllő	Hungary
13	Agricultural University of Wroclaw	Poland
14	Institute of Agricultural Research-Development, Fundulea, Calarasi	Romania
15	University of Veterinary Medicine, Kosice	Slovakia
16	Slovak Agricultural University, Nitra	Slovakia
17	University of Maribor, Faculty of Agriculture	Slovenia

18	Estonian Organic Farming Foundation, Tartu	Estonia
19	Institute of Botany, Vilnius	Lithuania
20	Lithuanian Institute of Agriculture, Kedainiai	Lithuania
21	Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari, Valenzano	Italy
22	University of Lecce, Deparment of Biological and Environmental Science and Technology	Italy
23	Agricultural Research Institute of Cyprus, Nicosia	Cyprus
24	The Genista Foundation, Kalkara	Malta
25	Priekuli Plant Breeding Station, Priekuli	Latvia

Contact details of the coordinator:

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The work performed:

In the participating countries the characteristics of organic agriculture are different, concerning the stage of development, the forms of organization, the legislative system, the economic framework and the cultural background. Our aim is to help harmonization and equalization processes of the knowledge on the field of organic agriculture in the old, the new and the candidate EU countries.

To reach our goals we decided to create a common database with information about the main fields of organic farming in the participating countries. The thematic groups are identical with our workgroups; these are plant protection, organic seed and propagation material, animal husbandry, agrotechnology, weed management and soil fertility.

CHANNEL Project can be reached through Internet from the beginning of the project, and at our website we have a discussion forum to communicate as well.

We created a questionnaire for all workgroups to collect data, which has three levels (public authorities and decision makers, farmers' associations and advisors, researchers) and beside these we have one general questionnaire.

At the first meeting in November 2004 in Malta we discussed the form and the content of the questionnaires.

The first wave of the survey was carried out from January to March 2005. Data collection was carried out by the active involvement of the national representatives and under the control of the workgroup leaders. The national representatives sent out the questionnaires to the target persons, who sent them back after filling the data in. Then the data were supervised and put into the online form of the questionnaires on our webpage by the national representatives, who had the right to access the database. National representatives are responsible for the validity and correctness of the collected data in both surveys.

On the second meeting in Ceské Budejovice in May 2005 we evaluated the first part of our work and the problems arose during that time. We made some changes in the questionnaires, because there were some overlapping and some questions that could not be answered for technical or financial reasons. We agreed in the number of the questionnaires to collect then.

The second wave of the survey lasted from the middle of May 2005 to the end of July. The data were continuously filled in the online versions on our homepage. After completing the questionnaires at the end of the first reporting period in November 2005 we planned to finish the compiled versions of the questionnaires.

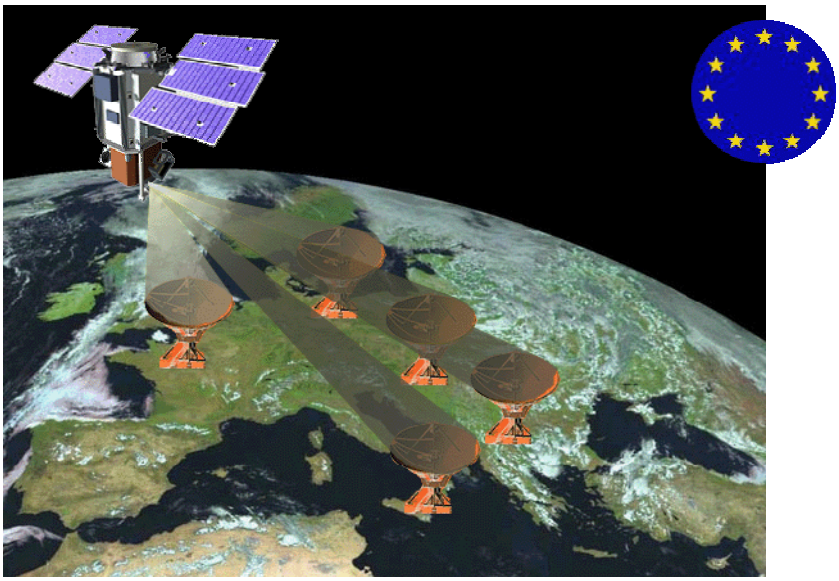
The second wave results were evaluated during the 3rd meeting in Cesis, Latvia, between 9-14th January 2006. Also here we discussed the organising process and plans of the Final Disseminating conference.

The final conference was held at Budapest 5-7 April 2006 where results of CHANNEL project were shown for a wider audience from all around Europe.

Results: As a result of our work we collected available data concerning organic farming in the participating countries. This data base a large common database in organic farming, from which the consolidated checked results are available for all interested experts, scientist or students at www.channel.uni-corvinus.hu under 'Final

conference presentations' and 'CHANNEL Conference CD: Country profiles and Abstracts'. CHANNEL project was introduced on several forums in Europe. We have excellent relations with the SAFO programme and have taken part on the Joined Organic Congress that was held in June 2006.
Our knowledge was disseminated through leaflets and newsletters and the final CHANNEL disseminating conference where the heads of the leading researching programmes, researchers, experts, decision makers and others interested, mainly organic farmers and students have taken part from the old, the new and the candidate countries of the EU. This provided an excellent opportunity for these people to meet and discuss the state-of-art in organic farming, the research and educational programmes on this field. These communication channels we established during the project will serve as an important tool in the harmonization process. Beside this the results from the database and presentations of the final conference are available for all the participants and those who are involved and interested in Organic farming.
Due to our work the EU gets a clear idea about the situation of organic farming in the participating countries, and these countries get acquainted with each other's organic farming. It helps in harmonizing the level of knowledge about organic agriculture and familiarising this in the widest possible scope of stakeholders and all interested.
The CHANNEL website has 1 303 461 visitors until now. This is available: www.channel.uni-corvinus.hu

Project logo:



After 19 months of work with contribution of 25 partners from 15 European countries the following main consequences are gathered:

CONSEQUENCES

GENERAL ASPECTS:

- Organic farming (especially acc. EU 2092/91) is relatively new, short conversion period – there are lacks in knowledge, research and education.
- Infrastructure for organic farming is only slightly developed (for marketing, investments, processing, ...)
- In some countries the market and export for (mainly) arable organic products is not established, therefore the economic pressure and possibilities to improve the management in practice is small.
- There are some specific traditions in land use, which are partly not covered by the EC regulations, e.g. fruit and mushroom collection in the wild (open range); some small animal keeping methods (e.g. rabbits); grassland-arable land-rotations; set aside-arable land–rotations
- In some countries there are extreme conditions in natural conditions (rainfall, moisture, soil acidity, low nutrient contents, wet soils, ..) which require specific adaptation of the land use systems, this should be reflected by the EC regulations

- In organic farming problems can only be solved by using multiple tools together – knowledge is the key to use the tools appropriate. Improvement in research and advisory services is essential. The aim is to create special research focuses. Deepening of research-topics needs to consider the regional conditions (like climate, soil type,...), as special local factors have an major influence on organic agriculture. Regional aspects play a key role: the comprehension and solution of problems and the identification of factors of influence can be much more clearly and much more successful (e.g. dry land farming).

SPECIAL NEEDS:

1. Development of the advisory service
   There is a general demand in the participant countries for specific support to develop an extension service specialized to organic farming. The established advisory service serves the purposes of the conventional production in most of the countries.
2. Development of the training and education system
   Further education of practitioners and the establishment of well informed and qualified advisory services is a basic need.
3. Development of applied research and contacts between producers and researchers
   Establishing contact between persons involved in production and research would be highly profitable. With establishing contact or approximating the parties, practice could significantly influence the trends in applied research thus ensuring the practical implementation of research results and their beneficial effect on the economy.
4. Development of the subsidy system
   There is a need for more subsidies designed specifically for organic farming.
5. Smaller regional projects enable members from new accession countries to conduct a better and more effective project-management. For these reasons small dimension projects focused on local problems and conditions have a pronounced positive effect.

SPECIAL NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY THEMATIC WORKGROUPS:

Organic Plant Protection

Several serious deficiencies in plant protection and forecasting that call for further research.
The registration process for beneficial organisms is extremely difficult, elongated and expensive in the EU when compared to other parts of the world. The simplification of the registration process and the reduction of costs would promote the success of organic plant protection.

Organic Seed Material

Need for acceptance of classical breeding and support of the system of VCU test for varieties for organic farming on European level.
Use of organic cultivars: according to EU-standards the used cultivars and plantlets have to be of organic propagation, confirmed by central European partners – this is only partly fulfilled.
More support is needed to improve local organic seed production on legal basis. In situ conservation of plant genetic resources need to be supported.

Organic Agrotechnology

Better rotation programs: demand of sufficient proportions of legumes and green manures in crop rotations.
High need of external N-sources on one hand and insufficient practice of manure management.

Organic Weed Management

Main limitations in improving weed management practice are: economic costs of weed management, which are not covered yet by the market prices for organic products, available machinery, new machinery hardly exists. Infrastructure for supporting investments in machinery are missing. Capital for investments is missing, as level of available capital in farms in general seems to be very low.

Organic Animal Husbandry

It is necessary to subsidise the gene conservation of rare local animal breeds, together with their breeding traditions, which are considered as the bases (both genetic and environmental) for ecological type farming and sustainable agriculture.

In fact organic animal husbandry is inconceivable without local, well-adapted breeds. Most of the local breeds are threatened and many of them are not conserved. That is why it is highly recommended to support different countries (mainly in East- and South-Europe) saving local breeds together with breeding traditions, wherever it is possible.

Both financial and professional aid is needed: guidelines, instructions, professional education organised and subsidised by the EU. Above them EU regulation(s) is also needed concerning gene conservation: it is indispensable to make clear for all EU member and candidate countries that gene conservation is a duty!

Organic Soil Fertility

Improvement of soil fertility management plays a key role. The soil organic matter is of high importance and needs to be protected and enhanced. Local network-communities need to be established to answer the needs of the regions.

Especially in the new EU member states the relevancy of soil fertility will increase in the future. The seasonal variations and also the variations of the local climate are mostly more pronounced than in western European countries. These conditions will be further amplified by the consequences of climatic change. To soften these factors more importance will be attached to soil fertility. For this reason subsidies should be adapted more to the needed measures for soil fertility improvement.