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Organic Farming in Poland as a Social Movement*

Abstract

In accordance with the official state dokument entitled 'The State's 2nd Ecological Policy' the development of organic farming and other farms which use environment-friendly methods of production has become one of the ways leading to the creation of sustainable development. A new situation has emerged after a long period when the number of ecological farms in Poland was rather low. As a result of financial aid in 1999 and legal regulation in 2002 conditions have arisen for the fast growth in number of ecological farms. Polish organic farming has undergone various phases and is assuming certain aspects of a social movement. This is often more than simply a methods of production, it is also a way of life. The number of farms with certificates may not be that large yet it has been growing steadily and the products have been finding consumers. Perhaps this style of farming will one day prove to be an opportunity for Polish agriculture in the European Union.

Keywords: agriculture, health food movement, organic farming, organic food, social movement, sustainable development.

Introduction

By *organic* we mean not only the way of fertilising the soil, but the way of farming, how the farm is treated as an organic integrity, where all the elements co-operate. Ecological agriculture is described as biological, organic or biodynamic. This also means that in this system of agriculture there is a balance between vegetable and animal products within the boundaries of the farming establishment so that all products are created using biological nutrients and minerals from the producing farm and without preservatives. The basis for this principle is to throw aside the current trend of

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processing food products using agricultural chemicals in the professional markets of animal husbandry and the food industry.

Ecological farming aims at producing vegetable and animal products within this balance between fodder and fertiliser. This means that all the animals feed on vegetables grown on the very land they fertilise with their manure, creating a self-sustaining system. This animal by-product can be used in many ways in agriculture, thus avoiding the use of chemical or non-organic fertilisers. For instance, it can be used in the form of compost, as a solid mixture of manure and straw, as liquid manure, or as green manure in a mixture with rock flour providing the soil with minerals.

The benefit to the environment of organic farming lies in the lack of contamination it causes. This means that contaminants to the soil which are of non-organic origin are excluded from this form of agriculture, which is not the case with industry or other expensive, fast movements. Care for the environment can be seen in organic agriculture by observing the rich vegetation between growing areas, healthy meadows and pastures, the nurturing of trees in the area, the protection of streams and ponds, and the lack of contaminants delivered to the soil and water.

New Social Movement (NSM)

In this paper I wish to look at organic farming as a kind of social movement, to give an example of the New Social Movement in organic agriculture. But first of all we need to consider what we mean by NSM. Most social theorists agree that social movements, a mode of collective action, involve a specific type of socially conflicting relationship. The classical type is the workers' movement which marked nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrial society. More recently student movements, civil rights movements and peace movements. From a theoretical point of view, too, social movements stand at the centre of social scientific discussion. Herbert Blumer claimed early on, that collective behaviour and social movements are core concepts of sociological theory. Like most notions in the social sciences, social movement does not describe part of reality, but is an element of a specific mode of constructing social reality.

When talking about New Social Movements we have to remember their characteristic features which are as follows:

- change civil society,
- prefigurative logic,
- post-materialist values,
- identity (individual, collective, public),
- diversity of networks.

The unifying theme of the movement is deep disquiet about the environmental consequences of providing patterns of economic growth on

a global scale. Unlike reform environmentalists, the greens do not put their faith in technological advances and improved environmental management. For them, the environmental crisis demands nothing less than a profound transformation of social, economic and political life: the creation of sustainable society. The idea of eco-development, which is also understood as sustainable economic development taking for granted that using the natural environment and its resources is done in such way that it provides for human needs without any loss for future generations.

Protection of the environment and promotion of economic development are not separate challenges. Development cannot subsist on the basis of deteriorating environmental resources and the environment cannot be protected when growth plans consistently fail to consider the costs of environmental destruction. Ecological and economic concerns are interdependent. Therefore, the environment and economics must be integrated from the start in decision making, not only to protect the environment but to promote long-term economic development. Ecological impacts do not respect political boundaries. Water pollution moves through shared rivers, lakes and seas. The atmosphere carries pollutants over vast distances. Chemical runoff from farms, hazardous emission from factories and warm water released from power plants transgress national frontiers. These harmful conditions must be dealt with in a political context, through well-enforced laws.

Sustainable development includes two key components:

- the concept of *needs*, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, and
- the idea of *limitations* imposed by technology and society on the ability of the environment to meet those needs.

Sustainable development means meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspiration for a better life. Sustainable development is best understood as a process of change in which the use of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change all enhance the potential to meet human needs both today and tomorrow.

Alternative agriculture movements, such as the movement for organic farming, demand that we somehow overcome this consumption/production divide in our thinking about food. From such movements rural sociologists can learn to look at food in a new way, as something whose meaning and value is not exhausted by its nutritional content, its economic cost or political agreements [...], but which is part of our life. (Tovey, 1997)

Organic Farming Issue

Organic agriculture as a farming system is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable. The idea is to stimulate natural mechanisms

of agricultural production by organic means and assure constant soil fertility as well as plant and animal wholesomeness. Organic farming was initiated as a biodynamic method in 1924 and started developing in the 1970's as a protest against the growing chemicalisation of farming and consequently the chemicalisation of food.

In order to define the concept of organic farming we may use the Codex Alimentarius according to which the organic production system is designed to:

- enhance biological diversity within the whole system;
- increase soil biological activity;
- maintain long-term soil fertility;
- recycle waste of plant and animal origin in order to return nutrients to the land, thus minimising the use of non-renewable resources;
- rely on renewable resources in the locally organised agricultural system;
- promote the healthy use of soil, water and air and minimise all forms of pollution that may result from agricultural practices;
- handle agricultural products with emphasis on careful processing methods in order to maintain the organic integrity and vital qualities of the product at all stages;
- become established on any existing farm through a period of conversion, the appropriate length of which is determined by site – specific factors such as history of the land, and type of crops and livestock to be produced.

Organic farming aspires to produce food which is not only 'good to eat' but also 'good to think' (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992; in Tovey, 1997) and in so doing also produce a certain kind of society. Organic farming is about producing food and in that sense, it is a movement dedicated to production rather than conservation, working on natural resources in order to create something useful and necessary for human beings.

Most discussions on organic farming treat it as a set of agricultural production techniques and practices, which are thought to be entirely different from conventional farming practices mainly because of what they exclude, i.e. the use of industrial chemicals to increase soil fertility or regulate plant growth, the use of artificial pesticides to deal with plant disease problems (Tovey, 1997).

Organic Farming in Poland

BEGINNING OF THE POLISH SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN ORGANIC FARMING – THE CASE OF SANNIKI

Sanniki is in central Poland and is one of the Polish communes where interest in organic farming is still developing. The farmers are very interested in health food and biodynamic agriculture. The process started over

10 years ago. The Ecological Association was established in Sanniki on 25 July 1991. There were various reasons for converting to organic farming but the main idea was to change the way of thinking about food and soil.

Everything started from one farmer who came to Sanniki from Switzerland with the idea of farming in a biodynamic way. That was the first impulse for some farmers that a different way of farming is possible. That and the first meetings of the Association, seeing not only the importance of profit from production but also quality of health food are seen as a *change of civil society* and *post-materialist values*. The new way of thinking is important, to make new organic products more popular and natural on a large scale. The values here are ecological food and people's reaction to it as something natural, good and worth caring about.

In order to attain popularisation of ecological agriculture among the inhabitants of Sanniki the responsible people organised:

- theoretical training – the lecturers were well-known experts on a variety of subjects, connected with ecological issues (forestry, biodynamic);

- theoretical and practical training conducted by ecologists who already have their own ecological farms. During this training experts visited organic farms and gave the farmers many very important clues on how to work on them;

- the Sanniki farmers also participated in Basic Ecological Agriculture Courses, organised by EKOLAND (an organic farmers' organisation);

- during seminar trips farmers visited organic farms which have EKOLAND certificates. The guides were ecological farmers who gave practical advice about organic farming methods.

This alternative agriculture movement in Sanniki has developed a strong collective identity among local participating farmers. At the beginning it wasn't easy for them to decide whether to join the movement. Those who stayed with the old way of farming doubt in the success of the new way of farming. They predicted that their neighbours would soon lack food production. However, some of them tried and managed very well. Now they have far better farming results than the 'old fashioned farmers.'

Various activities give the farmers a strong collective identity. Each month they organise meetings to discuss all current problems and how to transform the farms so as to have good results in organic farming. They jointly provide a production means such as:

- mineral natural manure;
- biological protection means.

They also try to organise the promotion and sales of their organic food products.

ORGANIC FARMING

Farmland covers around 18.4 million hectares of the global country surface, i.e. 59% of the surface of Poland. This area includes other, non-farming land. According to statistical data the farmland area in Poland has diminished by 230 thousand ha since 1995 and by about 328 thousand ha since 1990. Nowadays around 90% of farmland is owned by the private sector.

For many years the agricultural sector was one of the most neglected, backward and poorest sectors of the Polish economy. The most significant problems include:

- the wide discrepancy of development level between regions, in terms of production intensity, farm surface area, infrastructure, unemployment and access to the market;

- the fragmentation of farms, failure of small farms that are unable to ensure a livelihood for the family.

The average size of farms in Poland is about 8 hectares (of which 7 ha is agricultural land). Organic farming in Poland seems to have quite a long history, its roots going back to 1924. More recently the idea of organic agriculture was developed among Polish farmers at the turn of 1970's and 1980's. At that time training for farmers interested in agricultural production using ecological methods was first set up. The above activities resulted in the first group of farmers deciding to convert their farms to an organic model of agriculture. The organic agriculture movement started in the 1980's due to growing ecological public awareness. Early seminars given by 'revolutionary' scientists and German experts led to the establishment of the first organic farmers' association, EKOLAND in 1989. The association became a full member of IFOAM in 1990.

The first organic farming initiatives in Poland were not governmentally supported (until 1997 there were no regulations of financial support for organic farming), although the first 27 farms obtained organic farm certificates in 1990.

In Poland the main inspection and certification body for organic farms is EKOLAND whose activities include:

- development of standards for organic farming;
- certification of organic farms;
- promotion of organic farming and environmental protection;
- active in the whole country.

There are other inspection bodies in Poland, i.e.:

- Agrobiotest;
- Bioekspert company
- Polskie Towarzystwo Rolnictwa Ekologicznego (PTRE) (Polish Association of Organic Agriculture).

The standards for organic farming certification were developed according to the IFOAM basic standards for organic agriculture.

Against the background of the European Union the area of agricultural land under ecological cultivation in Poland is slightly over 1% of the general ecological area in European Union countries. (www.organic-europe.net)

The number of organic farms and farms in their first and second year of conversion is 1787, i.e. 0.07% of all farms in Poland.

There are now 669 organic farms in Poland – by organic farms I mean farms with certificates. Since the 1990's interest in and the number of organic farms has increased.

Table 1

Organic farms in Poland

Year	Number of farms	Land area (in ha)
1990	27	300
1991	49	550
1992	94	1,240
1993	174	2,170
1994	225	3,540
1996	236	6,855
1997	207	6,010
1998	181	5,546
1999	254	5,050
2000	338	6,380
2001	669	14,967

Source: EKOLAND (www.ekoland.org.pl).

The slow growth of organic farms in the mid-nineties can be understood as a result of the change in the certification process. Since then only farms with two years of conversion may try to meet the requirements for obtaining the organic farm certificate.

Farms with certificates as well as those in the period of conversion undergo yearly inspections by one of the inspection bodies. To be certified organic farms (and processing units) fulfil the requirements of the standards for organic farming, the lack of which leads to the loss of the certificate.

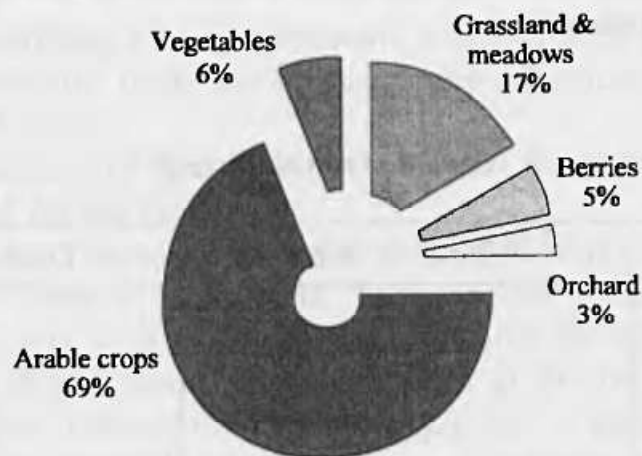
POLISH REGULATIONS AND THE SYSTEM OF ORGANIC FARMING SUBSIDIES

At first, in Polish law there were no legal acts referring to organic farming, its standards or way of labelling products. Farmers had no gov-

ernment support. Since 1998 organic farming in Poland started getting support from state subsidies. According to the decision of the Ministry of Agriculture the degree of donations and specific rules of their concession were established. Since 1999 organic farmers have been getting state subsidies for farm cultivation and costs of farm control.

Figure 1

% share of subsidies to organic agriculture



Source: *Produkcja rolna metodami ekologicznymi w 2001 roku* (Ecological production of agriculture in 2001). Inspekcja Skupu i Przetwórstwa Artykułów Rolnych, Główny Inspektorat (The Inspection of the Purchasing Centre and Processing of Agricultural Products, General Inspectorate), Warsaw 2002. www.gisipar.gov.pl

In 1998 the Ministry of Agriculture and a group of organic farming experts started working on the legal act on organic farming which came into force in 2001. The act fulfils EU requirements and regulations and includes:

- agricultural production;
- processing;
- the trade of organic agriculture products;
- inspection;
- the labelling of organic farming products;
- certification obligations;
- sanctions.

Organic products have to be labelled as grown organically. Labels should contain the producer's name, certificate number and logo of certification body.

THE STRUCTURE OF POLISH ORGANIC FARMS

Most organic farms do not specialise in a specific type of production but are mixed. They keep animals and produce grain, potatoes and vegetables

Table 2

Land use in organic production (organic farms and farms in conversion)

Land use	Land area (in ha)	% of total organic land
Arable crops	18,594,36	53
Grassland and meadows	14,484,48	41
Vegetables	982,85	3
Berries	640,25	2
Orchards	395,92	1

Source: *Produkcja rolna metodami ekologicznymi w 2001* (Ecological production of agriculture in 2001). Inspekcja Skupu i Przetwórstwa Artykułów Rolnych (The Inspection of the Purchasing Centre and Processing of Agricultural Products), Warsaw 2002, www.gisipar.gov.pl

Table 3

Organic farms with certificates and in conversion 2000–2001

Voivodship	Farms in the conversion period into organic farming.			Organic farms with certificate		
	year 2000	year 2001	increase/decrease	year 2000	year 2001	increase/decrease
Dolnośląskie	24	37	+13	9	17	+8
Kujawsko-pomorskie	12	24	+2	34	35	+1
Lubelskie	135	123	-12	58	165	+107
Lubuskie	8	10	+2	8	12	+4
Łódzkie	6	8	+2	13	16	+3
Małopolskie	68	128	+60	25	45	+20
Mazowieckie	88	125	+37	54	106	+52
Opolskie	4	10	+6	3	3	0
Podkarpackie	18	179	+161	2	10	+8
Podlaskie	21	40	+19	11	16	+5
Pomorskie	13	17	+4	13	17	+4
Śląskie	5	5	0	8	10	+2
Świętokrzyskie	159	305	+146	50	157	+107
Warmińsko-mazurskie	26	47	+21	29	34	+5
Wielkopolskie	14	22	+8	17	19	+2
Zachodnio-pomorskie	10	29	+19	4	7	+3
Total	611	1,109	+498	338	669	+331

Source: *Produkcja rolna metodami ekologicznymi w 2001 roku* (Ecological production of agriculture in 2001), *Inspekcja Skupu i Przetwórstwa Artykułów Rolnych, Główny Inspektorat* (The Inspection of the Purchasing Centre and Processing of Agricultural Products, General Inspectorate), Warsaw 2002, www.gisipar.gov.pl

Table 4

Production on organic farms (with certificates and in conversion)
in 2001 (in ha)

Voivodship	Vegetables (ha)	Rural (ha)	Fruits (ha)	Berries (ha)	Grass & Meadows (ha)	Total in Voivodship (ha)
Dolnośląskie	9.58	1,359.61	7.87	33.54	1,202.72	2,613.32
Kujawsko-pomorskie	31.74	708.00	15.85	5.78	179.83	941.20
Lubelskie	276.84	2,118.89	48.17	248.26	1,294.68	3,986.84
Lubuskie	10.63	1,661.11	6.80	72.79	339.57	2,090.90
Łódzkie	12.72	219.67	10.75	3.76	120.92	367.82
Małopolskie	26.72	599.73	39.01	12.68	2,232.03	2,910.17
Mazowieckie	91.99	1,554.26	58.82	75.32	679.49	2,459.88
Opolskie	2.35	69.90	0.43	0.44	19.44	92.56
Podkarpackie	43.43	1,307.98	62.48	31.24	3,925.78	5,370.91
Podlaskie	13.32	533.51	4.86	16.12	466.21	1,034.02
Pomorskie	140.84	988.72	6.73	12.18	403.43	1,551.90
Śląskie	2.81	26.23	2.21	3.15	25.89	60.29
Świętokrzyskie	248.20	2,342.07	94.49	96.46	687.57	3,468.79
Warmińsko-mazurskie	19.57	2,133.71	22.03	12.52	1,906.72	4,094.55
Wielkopolskie	35.27	764.62	8.65	7.91	442.43	1,258.88
Zachodnio-pomorskie	16.84	2,206.35	6.77	8.10	557.77	2,795.83
Total	982.85	18,594.36	395.92	640.25	14,484.48	35,097.86

Source: *Produkcja rolna metodami ekologicznymi w 2001 roku* (The Ecological Production of Agriculture in 2001), *Inspekcja Skupu i Przetwórstwa Artykułów Rolnych* (The Inspection of the Purchasing Centre and Processing of Agricultural Products, General Inspectorate), Warsaw 2002, www.gisipar.gov.pl

in crop rotation. They have grassland for the animals. The majority raise a wide variety of crops, including organically cultivated grain. Organic animal production also exists in Poland. The most popular ecological products are vegetables (carrots, beet, cucumbers), grain products (bread, flour), dairy products and fruit (mainly strawberries, black and red currants, raspberries and apples).

Organic farms in Poland are not particularly larger than traditional ones. The size of most organic farms (1094 i.e. 61.2% of the total number) ranges between 5 and 10 hectares. Farms larger than 50 ha represent around 7% of the total number. Smaller farms are mainly in south-eastern and central Poland, whereas larger farms are mainly located in north and north-western Poland (zachodnio-pomorskie and warmińsko-mazurskie voivodship).

THE ORGANIC PRODUCTS MARKET
– WHERE TO BUY AND HOW TO SELL

In Poland the share of organic products on the market is still relatively small. The first shop selling organic food opened in Warsaw in 1989. Nowadays, there are about 200 shops in Poland selling organic products which are not much more expensive than traditional ones. For shopkeepers it is important that their prices are stable. Some products, mainly vegetables and fruit often have the same price as products in any other shop. The selection of Polish organic products is probably not as wide as in other European countries. It is estimated at about 200–300 items, while for example in Ireland or Germany it is between 2000–3000 products, ten times more than on the Polish market.

There are more shops selling organic food in big cities, where farmers from that region supply them with their products. 'Direct marketing' also exists but it is not too popular. Some farmers have regular customers, who buy organic products directly from them on their farms or the farmers deliver the products to their houses, but that is a small percentage of the organic products sold. Restaurants and kindergartens or others with a growing demand for organic products i.e. vegetables, fruit and bread are another market for these farmers. According to the shopkeepers the biggest interest of their customers is in such organic products as fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy products and bread. The shopkeepers claim that these are generally not accidental customers. They see them as people who are concerned about health food and the environment.

The owners of shops with organic food have problems selling these products which they blame on the lack of information and advertising of organic products by the media. This is not the case in all cities. In Warsaw information does exist and therefore the distance between organic food producers, sellers and customers is smaller. The local authorities advertise organic farming products, the city organises organic food fairs and local newspapers write about organic food, organic farmers and places where people can buy. Unfortunately, as farmers and shopkeepers say this doesn't work in all big Polish cities.

Conclusion

The production of organic food has recently become more and more attractive. It is an opportunity for both small farmers and big food industries. Sales in shops with health food increase faster than sales in supermarkets and the consumption of organic food has been increasing.

When Poland joins the European Union demand for organic food will inevitably increase. In rural areas neighbouring with big cities the tendency

of young people who have lost city jobs and have decided to buy small farms with good soil with the idea of farming organically is noticeable.

Organic agriculture in Poland has considerable development potential. The fact of the low usage of fertilisers and plant protection means may be conducive to this. If financial subsidies and support for the promotion of organic farms and agrotourism increase Poland has a chance to become one of the leaders of organic food producers and a tourist attraction of Europe.

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