

ESTONIA

Water management

Location

Tartu

Programming period

2014 - 2020

Priority

P4 – Ecosystems
management

Measure

M1 – Knowledge transfer
and information actions

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 339 422
EAFRD 302 086
National/regional 37 336

Project duration

2016 – 2017

Project promoter

Estonian University of Life
Sciences (lead partner)

Contact

elen.peetsmann@emu.ee

Website

www.maheklubi.ee

A series of knowledge-transfer activities to increase knowledge and skills on organic plant and animal production, processing and marketing.

Summary

Organic farming is expanding very rapidly in Estonia. However, since it is not possible to study organic farming, there is a big need for new knowledge on how to efficiently produce more organic food.

Different knowledge-transfer activities were organised and targeted at the organic farming sector, in order to increase knowledge and skills on organic plant and animal production, processing and marketing.



Results

In 2016 and 2017, a total of 79 training days were delivered and 10 presentations in organic businesses were organised. In the same period two conferences were held along with four study trips, two in Estonia and two abroad.

In terms of participation, there were 2 026 participants in 2016 and 1 852 in 2017.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Practical field days and trainings are very important. First-hand experience on how different technologies work gives farmers the motivation and knowledge to improve their production system.
- ❑ Cooperation in the sector is very important.

Context

In Estonia, the area under organic farming has expanded 2.5 times over the last ten years, reaching up to nearly 200 000 ha. This represented 20% of the total agricultural area in 2017.

Some vocational schools, as well as the Estonian University of Life Sciences (EULS), offer organic farming courses, but it is not currently possible to obtain a degree or to specialise in organic farming. Also, a specialised organic farming advisory system does not currently exist in Estonia; organic advice is provided by the general advisory system.

Up to 2015, organic producers were offered basic and additional training courses organised by the ministry of rural affairs and financed from the RDP. Farmers who apply for support for organic farming are obligated to take part in a two-day basic training course during the first year. In addition, all farmers who enter the scheme must participate in two additional days of training courses during the five-year commitment period. Handbooks and materials were also published in Estonian on different organic farming topics. Apart from the activities set out by the ministry of rural affairs, different local organic farming development organisations used other financial resources to organise trainings, study trips and publish materials.

In this context, the training system on organic farming was planned on a year-to-year basis depending on financial resources, as it was very difficult to make long-term plans. In order to improve the system, the ministry of rural affairs prepared a long-term programme for knowledge transfer on organic farming for the period 2016–2019. The programme is financed from the RDP and is now implemented in cooperation with the Estonian University of Life Sciences, the Estonian Organic Farming Foundation, the Centre for Ecological Engineering, the Estonian Crop Research Institute and the Organic Research Centre of EULS.

Objectives

The aim of this project is to achieve the objectives and carry out the activities outlined in the Estonian Organic Farming Development Plan 2014-2020:

- i. Improving the competitiveness of organic farming and increasing the consumption of local organic food.
- ii. Organising organic farming training and information days for producers, processors and distributors and starting up long-term training programmes.

Activities

The consortium of five partners was created in 2015. All the project activities are targeted to every part of the organic food production chain: farmers, processors, caterers and distributors. In 2017, there were 1 888 organic farmers and 186 processors, plus caterers (cafeterias, restaurants, public catering such as kindergartens and schools) and distributors in Estonia.

In 2016-2017 an array of different knowledge-transfer activities were organised:

- Training days for farmers, processors and caterers (with local and foreign experts). Topics covered included plant production (cereals, vegetables, fruits, berries and their processing), animal production (dairy, beef, sheep, chicken and apiculture), marketing and cooperation, etc.
- Demonstration trials and their presentation events were organised on weed management in vegetable production; berry and fruit varieties and agrotechniques; cereal varieties and agrotechniques; crop production; plant protection.



- Presentation events in organic enterprises on plant and animal production and processing.
- Organic farming conferences. Topics covered included gardening (2016) and the environment (2017).
- Study groups: group of farmers meet four times a year with one tutor. Topics in 2016: cereal, vegetable, beef and fruit production. In 2017: cereal (two study groups), fruit and beef production.
- Study trip to Estonian organic enterprises (topic in 2016: sheep production; in 2017: production, processing and tourism).
- Study trip to other countries to visit organic enterprises. Topic in 2016: plant production; in 2017: poultry.

Information materials produced included booklets on dairy cattle, beef cattle, cereals and oil crops, berries, fruits, composting, seed production, berry and fruit varieties suitable for organic farming, marketing, an overview of organic farming in Estonia; electronic guidelines for fruits, berries and small-scale vegetable processing; quarterly organic farming magazine (eight issues). All published materials are free and available to all online.

The internet portal www.maheklubi.ee provides information on events, published materials and other topics to the organic sector.

The activities covered all 15 counties in Estonia, with at least one activity occurring in each county. Also half of activities were practical and organised in farms as field days.

Main Results

In 2016 and 2017, a total of 79 training days were delivered and 10 presentations in organic businesses were organised. In the same period two conferences were held along with four study trips, two in Estonia and two abroad.

In terms of participation, there were 2 026 participants in 2016 and 1 852 in 2017.

Key lessons

- Practical field days and trainings are very important. First-hand experience on how different technologies work gives farmers the motivation and knowledge to improve their production system.
- Cooperation in the sector is very important.