

DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIC FARMING IN WALLONIA: PAST, PRESENT AND PERSPECTIVES

*Philippe BURNY, Frederic DEBODE
Walloon Center for Agricultural Research, Gembloux, BELGIUM
e-mail : burny@cra.wallonie.be*

Keywords : Wallonia, organic farming, development plan.

1. Introduction

Organic farming is today fully recognized as an alternative to conventional agriculture and its problems (water and air pollution, large use of pesticides and possible impacts on human health, vegetal and animal diseases, overproduction, etc.) and is clearly supported by the Common Agricultural Policy and its "greening".

Belgian (and Walloon) agriculture is an intensive one, with a high "labour force/agricultural area" ratio and high yields thanks to good soils, but also the use of large quantities of inputs like fertilizers and pesticides.

However, organic farming increased in importance during the last years and the Walloon regional government has just launched a development plan in June 2013. So, this paper aims to analyse the evolution of organic farming in Wallonia and to present the goals and the measures of the new development plan.

2. Material and methods

The data concerning organic farming and its products come from the national farm census organized every year on May 15, from statistics delivered by the regional Walloon administration, from consumer surveys, a survey among organic cereals producers, and the interprofessional organization "Bioforum Walloniei".

The official development plan for organic farming decided by the Walloon government is also taken into consideration.

3. Results

3.1. Production

The number of organic farmers in Wallonia (figure 1) and the agricultural area devoted to organic farming (figure 2) sharply increased during the recent past [Bioforum 2013]; In 2012, there are nearly 1,100 organic farmers, managing nearly 55,000 ha. Both represent around 8% of the total in Wallonia.

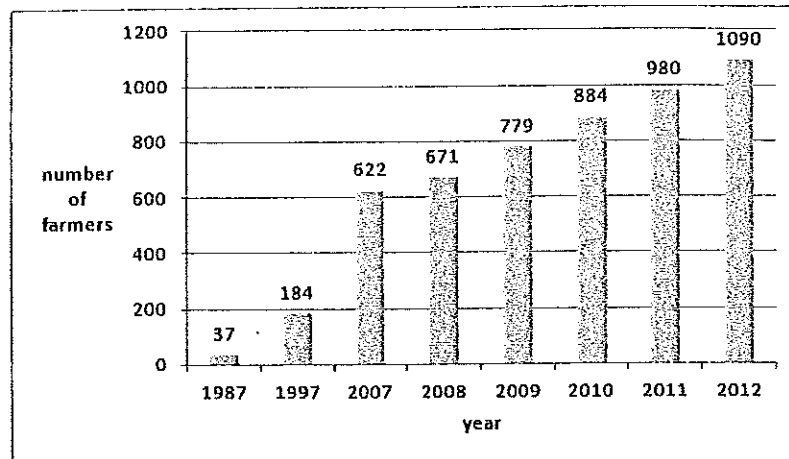


Figure 1. Evolution of the number of organic farmers in Wallonia (1987-2012)

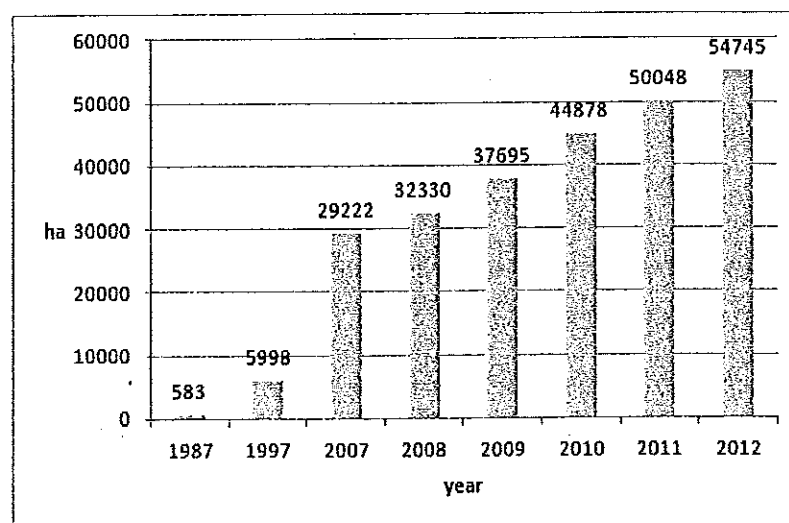


Figure 2. Evolution of the area (ha) devoted to organic farming in Wallonia (1987-2012)

The most important area devoted to organic farming is used for meadows (43,000 ha), on which cattle is raised, before general crops (mainly spelt, wheat and barley). Vegetables are not very important from the production point of view (372 ha in 2012).

According to a survey among organic farmers [Debode, Schiepers, Burny 2013], their mean age and the size of their farms are the same as for conventional agriculture. They are not newcomers but turned to organic farming in order to increase their self-sufficiency for the feedstuff and to be more independent from inputs providers. The financial support is also an important factor to convince the farmers.

3.2. Financial support

In Wallonia, the financial support for organic farming [Service public de Wallonie, Direction générale de l'Agriculture, des Ressources naturelles et de l'Environnement 2013] is significant (table 1).

Table 1. Financial support for organic production in Wallonia (€/ha)

Classification of crops	From 0 to 32th ha	From 33th to 64th ha	From the 65th ha	Area in conversion (2 years)
- Group 1 Meadows and forage	275	150	75	150
- Group 2 Fallow	275	150	75	150
- Group 4 Other annual crops	450	325	150	150
	From 0 to 14 ha	From the 15th ha		
- Group 3 Horticulture	750	450		

Prices paid to farmers for organic products are higher than for conventional products, but sometimes the products are sold as conventional ones, because the market for a given organic product is too small (bovine meat for example). And yields are significantly lower. So, the financial support is really important to reach an acceptable level of profitability.

3.3. Consumption

For food products, the market share of organic products reached 1.9% in 2012 in Belgium. The market share is very variable according to the products : 9% for eggs, 5% for vegetables, 3% for bread, and only 0.7% for meat. Nearly 60% of the total expenses are devoted to vegetal products.

The percentage of purchasing households is also highly variable: 60% for vegetables, but only 9% for poultry meat.

Supermarkets are still the main place where consumers buy organic products (44%), before specialized shops (31.5%). Direct sales (5%) and local markets (4%) are far behind.

3.4. The regional development plan

In June 2013, the Walloon government approved a development plan for organic farming [Cabinet du Ministre wallon de l'Agriculture 2012].

The measures which will be implemented include:

- coordination of the actors, from farmers to consumers;
- creation of a specialized research unit within the Walloon Centre for Agricultural Research;
- improvement of communication;
- strengthening of extension services;
- to support promotion activities
- continuation of the financial support to farmers through the 2014-2020 period;
- to support direct sales;
- to support cooperatives and food chain building;

- to build up teaching activities.

The development plan precise quantities targets for 2020:

- to reach 14% of the agricultural area
- to increase the number of organic farmers to 1,750;
- to double the number of organic products processing enterprises and so reach 500 units;
- to increase the value of organic products sales of the processing enterprises from 222 million € in 2009 to 500 million €;
- to increase the share of organic products in the households food expenses to 3.0%.

4. Conclusions

Organic farming has significantly developed during the last years in Wallonia, notably thanks to the financial support from the public authorities. In 2013, the regional government decided to even strengthen the public support through a series of specific measures which will be implemented in order to reach quantitative targets in 2020. The market for organic products has increased and will probably continue to expand. So, organic farming will probably play a more important role in Walloon agriculture, though there are economical (prices for consumers, profitability for farmers) and technical (lower yields, pests, etc.) limits.

5. References

- [1] Bioforum 2013. *Le Bio en chiffres* (2013)[http://www.biowallonie.be/pdf/37-Le_Bio_en_chiffres_2012.pdf]
- [2] Cabinet du Ministre wallon de l'Agriculture 2012. *Note au Gouvernement wallon relative au Plan stratégique pour le développement de l'agriculture biologique à l'horizon 2020*.
- [3] Debode F., Schiepers H. et Burny Ph. 2013. *La production céréalière en Wallonie*. In Livre Blanc - Céréales - Edition Février 2013, 11e Perspectives, pp. 11/2 à 11/10. Gembloux, Belgium.
- [4] Service public de Wallonie, Direction générale de l'Agriculture, des Ressources Naturelles et de l'Environnement 2013. *Statistiques sur l'agriculture biologique en Wallonie*.