

IDENTIFYING TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES AND SKILLS NEEDS IN THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR OF KOSOVO*: ORGANIC FOOD

SUMMARY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

This summary report¹ forms part of a broader study on the technological changes and skills needs of the Western Balkan agri-food sector, conducted by the European Training Foundation (ETF). The aim of this summary report is to examine the potential of organic farming and food production in Kosovo² from the perspective of skills supply and demand.

The study aims to inform a foresight exercise on technological changes and skills needs in the organic food sector of Kosovo. The purpose of the foresight exercise is to identify concrete skills related measures to support the accelerated development of the sector in preparation for the single market.

OVERVIEW

Organic farming is an agricultural method that aims to produce food using natural substances and processes. Producing organically means respecting the rules on organic farming, designed to promote environmental protection, maintain biodiversity and build consumer trust in organic products. Organic farming rules also encourage a high standard of animal welfare and require farmers to meet the specific behavioural needs of animals. In 2021, the EU adopted an action plan for the development of organic production to support both production and consumption, and to further enhance sustainability, in line with the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy.

EU citizens increasingly value organic products. Based on the 2020 Eurobarometer survey on EU agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), citizens believe that organic products are more likely to comply with specific rules on pesticides, fertilisers, and antibiotics (82% agreed), are more environmentally friendly (81%), and are produced with higher respect for animal welfare (80%). According to the survey, 56% of citizens recognise the organic logo, up from 27% in 2017.³ The retail sales of organic products in the EU doubled between 2015 and 2020.

The share of agricultural land under organic farming in the EU is growing rapidly. Over the period 2012-2020, its share increased by more than 50%. On average, though with substantial variation across EU Member States, organic farms in the EU are bigger than conventional farms and run by younger farm managers. The European Commission has set a target of at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land to be under organic farming by 2030.

In Kosovo, the share of land under organic farming in 2020 was 0.4%.⁴ Between 2019 and 20202, the size of land under organic farming in Kosovo grew from 1,036 hectares (ha) to 1,604, an increase of

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² *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence - hereinafter 'Kosovo'

³ EC (2022). Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP 2022. Available [here](#)

⁴ Willer, Helga, Jan Trávníček, Claudia Meier and Bernhard Schlatter (Eds.) (2022): The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2022. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL, Frick, and IFOAM – Organics International, Bonn. p. 44. Available [here](#).

568 ha.⁵ In addition to land under organic farming, Kosovo has a large share of organic land for foraging of wild edibles and beekeeping. This land was measured at 596,843 ha in 2020.⁶

For the purpose of this study the organic foods market niche was analysed through four broader NACE classification groups:

- crop and animal production, hunting and related service activities (A1)
- fishing and aquacultures (A3)
- manufacture of food products (C10)
- and manufacture of beverages (C11)

According to the available statistics, there were 66 organic producers in Kosovo in 2020 and 21 organic processor.

Organic production in Kosovo is mainly focused on fresh fruits and vegetables, and berries (raspberries and blueberries). Wild collection of non-wood forest products (NWFP) and medicinal and aromatic herbs (MAPs) dominate the organic foods sector⁷, with more than 300 species being collected and, to some extent, cultivated, of which at least 67 species have commercial value.⁸ Usually, it is the people who live in mountainous areas who pick and produce such products. They are generally women with lower educational levels.⁹ The main market for exports of MAPs and NWFPs is the EU (95%) of which 83% are NWFPs.¹⁰ However, wild collection of NWFPs and MAPs is not covered by the niche as defined for this study.

SKILLS DEMAND

Most in-demand profiles that companies, producers of organic foods were looking for relate to expertise in farm management, specifically expertise in pesticide usage in organic farming, and soil management. This suggests a shortage of occupational profiles such as:¹¹

- farm manager (ESCO 6130.1)
- agronomist (2132.2)

⁵ Willer, Helga, Jan Trávníček, Claudia Meier and Bernhard Schlatter (Eds.) (2022): The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2022. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL, Frick, and IFOAM – Organics International, Bonn. p. 49. Available [here](#).

⁶ Willer, Helga, Jan Trávníček, Claudia Meier and Bernhard Schlatter (Eds.) (2022): The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2022. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL, Frick, and IFOAM – Organics International, Bonn. p. 81. Available [here](#).

⁷ EkoConnect (2022). p. 7. Available [here](#).

⁸ EkoConnect (2022). p. 11. Available [here](#).

⁹ EkoConnect (2022). p. 11. Available [here](#).

¹⁰ EkoConnect (2022). p. 16. Available [here](#).

¹¹ Based on the skillsets these occupations have following the ESCO classification of Skills, Competences and Occupations. Available [here](#).

- soil scientist (2133.11)

Interviewed companies have contracted foreign experts to supporting them in organic production but find this costly. Companies expressed they were unable to recruit specialists domestically.

Interviewees indicated that the following occupations are in demand by organic producers, and can be found domestically:

- machinery operators (including various occupations from ISCO group 8 - Plant and machine operators and assemblers and ISCO 6 - Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers)
- food technologists (ESCO 2145.1.4)

Interviewed companies felt that the support from business intermediary bodies is insufficient for companies to keep up with the growth of the sector. Companies rely primarily on on-the-job training and hiring specialists from abroad.

SKILLS SUPPLY

Vocational education in the agri-food sector

Vocational education and training programmes are broader in scope and there are no programmes specifically on organic agriculture and food production. However, the continuing vocational education and training centres, under the administration of the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK), has the capacity to develop new trainings, but interest from potential participants is low and trainings are mainly attended by the illiterate, unemployed, or those planning to emigrate.

Intermediary organisations

In 2013, an association to support organic certification, Organika, was established in Kosovo. Today the association has 32 members and 28 certified organic food producers. The certified companies are primarily active in the foraging of Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) and cultivation of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs).

Other business intermediary organisations provide sporadic support to organic food producers. For example, in 2022, the Association of Fruits and Vegetable Processors of Kosovo (PePeKo) organised a training on bio-products, their commercialisation and internationalisation.

Finally, the agricultural advisory services in Kosovo provide some counselling and training for companies operating in the agri-food sector. Examples of their relevant projects include:¹²

¹² Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (2021). Kosovo Green Report 2021. p. 143-144. Available [here](#).

- “Support to farmers for soil analysis, training, advice and recommendations for the results of soil analysis”, which was funded from the Kosovo’s state budget. There were 884 farmers trained in the basics of soil analysis as part of this project.
- Projects on capacity training for farmers and municipal councillors, in addition to grant-writing workshops for farmers.

Higher education and research

Higher education in agricultural sciences in Kosovo is provided by the University of Prishtina (UP), Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary. The University of Prishtina is the only university specialised in undergraduate and graduate studies, scientific research, training, and extension in agriculture and food processing. It offers programmes in agriculture, livestock, forestry, veterinarian medicine, and agrarian economy. Their programmes in food technology and biotechnology are relevant for organic food production. They also offer undergraduate courses in Plant Production, and graduate courses in Plant Protection and Pomology and Viticulture.¹³ According to the interviewed companies, most of their employees are graduates of the University of Prishtina. There were 291 students enrolled in undergraduate studies at the faculty in 2021/2022, and 90 students enrolled in graduate studies, mainly master’s programmes.

¹³ Ekoconnect (2022). Kosovo. P. 9.