

Bio cash-cow? Context and content of Czech organic farming

Dojná kráva Bio? Kontext a obsah českého ekologického zemědělství

L. ZAGATA

Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic

Abstract: This work presents results of a qualitative empirical study on practices of farmers participating in the Czech system of organic agriculture (ecological agriculture). Growth of this sector has been seen almost solely in positive terms, without questioning its content. However, Czech organic agriculture does not stem from the organic movement as is the case in Western Europe and therefore it is necessary to ask what it draws on and to discover, with regard to its nature, whether it can meet the expectations stated in official policies. This paper briefly describes the development of organic farming in other countries and the current problem of its conventionalization. The research study then shows evidence that organic farming is not adopted only because of state's subsidies, but also due to the specific value orientation of farmers, despite the history and the lack of tradition of these specific practices in the Czech Republic.

Key words: organic movement, ecologic farming, motives, conventionalization, bioproducts

Abstrakt: Tato práce prezentuje výsledky kvalitativního empirického výzkumu praxe českých ekologických zemědělců. Růst tohoto odvětví je viděn téměř výhradně pozitivně, bez toho, aby byla položena otázka ohledně povahy tohoto sektoru. Protože české ekologické zemědělství nevyrůstá z praxe organického hnutí jako v západní Evropě, je třeba se ptát, na čem tedy staví, a zjišťovat, zda-li s ohledem na svou povahu může plnit očekávání oficiální politiky. Tento text stručně zachycuje vývoj organického sektoru a aktuální problém konvencionalizace. Studie ukazuje, že ekologický způsob hospodaření v České republice neexistuje jen díky dotacím státu, ale také díky specifickému hodnotovému zaměření zemědělců, které je přítomno v jejich praxi navzdory historii a chybějící tradici tohoto způsobu hospodaření u nás.

Klíčová slova: organické hnutí, ekologické zemědělství, motivy, konvencionalizace, bioprodukty

The importance of organic farming in the Czech Republic has been growing. This is indicated by the increasing number of farmers engaged in the official system (named *ekologické zemědělství* – *ecological agriculture* in English), as well as the commitment of the official *Action Plan* to reach a point at which 10% of the total agricultural land in the Czech Republic will be farmed organically by the year 2010. This goal stems from the viewpoint that organic agriculture is able – in accord with the concept of sustainable development – to provide many environmental, social and economic benefits, and therefore it is supported by the relevant sectoral policies. It is still surpris-

ing how the increasing importance and extent of the expected advantages lag behind the amount of knowledge concerning the Czech form of organic farming itself.

For instance, a brief inspection shows that in the last four years, only eight papers dealing with Czech organic agriculture have been published in this journal. Most of them (five overall) analysed economic effectiveness of this particular type of farming, two of them focused on the issue of organic food consumption, and the last one described the development of the organic farming sector in the past few years from a structural point of view. Thus it is obvious that

Supported by the Czech University of Agriculture in Prague, Faculty of Economics and Management (Grant No. 11190/1312/113150).

there are still many questions in need of an answer, including the most important ones, which are related to the expected positive role of organic farming in our country.

This paper does not seek to deny the advantages of organic farming methods. It rather tends to point out that meeting its expectations is based on certain assumptions, which cannot in the context of the Czech Republic be taken for granted. This fact becomes clear when we compare the historical development of organic farming in our country and see that formalized organic farming is a phenomenon that has been introduced to the Czech Republic from abroad. In the Western Europe and the USA, it had taken more than seven decades and the efforts of the so-called organic movement before the organic farming was officially acknowledged. The formalized organic agriculture existed since 1970s and its current form still refers to fundamentals and values of the previous social movement. The recent fast growth of organic farming has produced concerns, in foreign countries, that organic farming may be losing some of its distinguishing features, what – if so – could threaten its merits.

The same question can and should be asked within the Czech variety of organic farming. If organic farming stems in essence not only from the formal rules stated in law, but also from an ideology in which organic practices are embedded, then what is organic farming in our country based on, since we lack the particular tradition of this way of farming? Besides that, if we link the absence of the historical social movement with a negligible demand for organic food today, and the obvious fact that the entire organic-farming sector is prevalingly shaped by agrarian policy measures, a sceptical view arises that that ecologic farmers simply “undergo” this way of farming only due to subsidies provided by the government. If this were true and the participation in the system of organic farming was a mere expression of an utilitarian attitude, the merits of organic farming would be undermined.

This paper therefore attempts to answer an elementary question about the nature of Czech organic farming, which can be stated like this. *What motives do ecologic farmers pursue with regard to formal and informal norms and intrinsic values of the organic way of farming?*

The answer to this question can be seen as crucial in defining the role that organic farming performs in the Czech Republic. This text will firstly briefly show how organic farming was conceptualised in terms of its development in the modern society. Then the research methods will be briefly presented. The

results are set out in the next part, which starts with a description of the study cases and follows with an analysis and interpretation. Significant portions of the analysis are aimed at the issue of inherent values in organic farming, the farmers' relation to the environment and landscape, and their approach towards organic (bio) production.

MODERNIZATION OF AGRICULTURE AND THE RISE OF ORGANIC FARMING

Modern organic farming was born in Great Britain, from where it spread to other European countries and the USA. The origin and development of organic farming in fact illustrate very well the change, which the modern society has preceded in the previous hundred years. The origins of the organic movement reach back to the last decade of the 19th century, but a significant development occurred in the 1920s and '30s. Within the agrarian sector, there emerged a quarrel over the methods of food production. Modernists were supporting what has become the conventional way of farming based on specialization and mechanization of production, which applied knowledge of the natural sciences (especially chemistry). The organic movement opposed this trend. The issue of food production in adequate quality and quantity was answered by them with reference to non-modern societies that had managed to produce food effectively for the whole centuries without massive impacts on nature. Their arguments did not completely draw on expert knowledge legitimating the use of certain farming methods, but on traditional schemes, which – as they were saying – *must have been correct*, if they enabled people to survive for many centuries. Their central theme was the belief in the natural order, which per se transcend human life and which, as they argued, needed to be respected by human activity.

The main figures of the European and American organic movement (such as Sir Albert Howard, Rudolf Steiner, Lady Eve Balfour, Jerome Rodale) are nowadays conceived as the “founding fathers” of the organic farming. Historical study (Conford 2001) shows that agriculture was a central point of this movement, but its scope was much broader and tackled other issues, such as rural development, the role of religion, environmental protection, human nutrition, social justice etc. After the World War II, the social movement failed to compete successfully with the orthodoxy of chemization and mechanization of agricultural production, which started to dominate from that time. The shift towards intensification was underlined by the political concept of supply secu-

rity that was related to foreign exchange shortages in Europe, and the organic movement consequently became less active.

The resurgence of the movement is dated to late '60s and early '70s of the 20th century as a result of different ideological influences that can be interpreted as a critique of the industrial society. The pioneers of the organic movement remained the basic source of inspiration that was taken up by other interest groups engaged in nutrition issues, the counter-culture of the '60s and also by the modern environmental movement (Guthman 2004). In the beginning of the 1970s the IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) was founded, which has united all sorts of groups promoting alternative methods of farming. Diverse ideological stances and practices have been put together by this in a formalized scheme, which was named *organic farming* and which later on became a part of the official policy.

The activities of the new organic movement and the consequent rise of organic agriculture in the 1970s and '80s (in Western Europe and the USA) can be seen as a protest against the attributes and impacts of certain forms of modern agriculture. This point of view resembles the former quarrel from the beginning of the 20th century, while the revival of this conflict can be interpreted as a part of an upcoming phase of reflexive modernity in terms of Ulrich Beck's theory (Beck 2004 [1986]).

The aim of the first phase of the modernization process – the so-called simple modernization – was to produce general abundance in all spheres of social life. This process became strong within the agrarian sector at the beginning of the 20th century and its main instruments, opposed by the organic movement's holistic approach to nature, have been innovations in production based on intensification and appropriation (Guthman 2004). The goal of modernization was to speed up and enhance biological processes and at the same time to limit the related risks: artificial fertilizers released farmers from the need to put their land aside, rationalized feeding increased growth rates of animals, insecticides reduced risks of plant damage by insects etc. The subsequent process of appropriation has led to the moving of some activities (formerly directly linked to agriculture) to other sectors of economy, in the pursuit of a greater control and profitability. The results of this process are obvious when one takes a look at the current forms of production. A few decades of experience with this way of farming have clearly marked the limits of its (un)sustainability. The production of secondary risks (Giddens 1998 [1990]) that have started to threaten nature led to reconsideration of

some modern methods. This reappraisal can be seen as the process of reflexive modernization, in which the original modern foundations come to notice and are being reconsidered. Organic farming from this viewpoint represents a paradox of the society's modernization: its role is to modernize conventional agriculture, which is per se a precondition and result of the "spirit of the modern times" (Bauman 1995).

Organic agriculture began to spread on a large scale in Western Europe and the USA after the foundation of the IFOAM. At the beginning of 1990s, it became a legitimate part of the Common Agricultural Policy (see the Council Regulation No. 2092/91 on organic production etc.), which contributed to its growth. However, the rapid development of the organic sector that attracted a wide range of producers and consumers inevitably implied weakening of the original ideology, which had been the principal of organic farming. This has recently raised the question of whether the organic sector – due to its growth and economic pressure – is not already experiencing the processes of intensification and appropriation that contradicts the merits of organic farming. This question is embodied in the so-called conventionalisation hypothesis that has been founded on the basis of empirical study on organic farming in the USA (Buck et al. 1997; Guthman 2004). The authors of this concept argued that organic farming carried out in this way lacks being alternation and becomes a mere analogy of conventional agriculture.

Similar examples have not been found since the Guthman's study, although other authors identified certain traits of the conventionalised organic agriculture in Western-European countries (Tovey 1997; Kaltoft 2001; Michelsen 2001). The hypothesis therefore still enjoys a lot of attention, while the main focus is on the possibility of delineating basic criteria that would enable us to distinguish the "genuine" organic agriculture from its conventionalised form (Darnhofer 2005). How does the Czech organic farming perform with regard to this theory?

The application of the conventionalisation hypothesis in the context of the Czech Republic is rather difficult due to two points. Firstly, the Czech agrarian sector and particularly its ecologic/organic part have a very different structure that renders the original criteria useless. The second and probably more important fact is that the history of Czech organic agriculture does not include the advance from a social movement to a formalized system, and thus it is pointless to assess to what extent the current form diverts from its original foundations and values, which have never been a part of its history. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to describe whether organic farming

preserves its intrinsic distinctions, because (as we have already pointed out), even organic products can be produced in a close-to-conventional way.

Besides that, one can still ask what organic farming develops from. What are the farmers' motivations for practicing and participating in the organic scheme? Is it a matter of a utilitarian approach that is supported and enforced by the means of formal control, or is this approach related to some other values? And if so – which ones?

METHODS

The research questions underline the explorative character of the study. Data have been gathered by the combination of several techniques. In autumn 2005, six farms were visited, which had been registered in the system of organic farming. They were selected using the official *List of organic farmers (Seznam ekologických zemědělců)* for the year 2004. The objects of the study were chosen in successive steps to make the theory – that was being constructed – saturated. At the same time, we took notice of the fact that the sample should consist of *common* types and forms of production within the Czech organic scheme. Due to this, for instance, no farms that specialize in bee keeping were visited, because this kind of production is relatively rare in the organic sector (there are five farms in total). On the other hand, four farms, which keep cattle for beef production, were picked. The sampling method was supposed to remain in accord with the structure of organic farming in the Czech Republic.

On each farm, we conducted a semi-standardized interview with the production manager (in five cases the director was also the owner). The interview focused on identifying (1) the background of the farm's conversion, (2) the source of knowledge of organic farming, and (3) the extent to which the manager accepted the value-system of organic agriculture and the organic movement. All of the interviews

were transcribed and then analysed using qualitative techniques.

It is useful to note that this research strategy has abstracted away from the quantitative way of capturing the observed phenomenon and therefore it does not insist on the principle of statistical representativity. Nonetheless, one can argue that the results of this study can be generalized throughout specific situations, which correspond with the studied conditions and phenomena.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY CASES

The farms visited are located in four different regions: two of them in the Ústí Region, one in Central Bohemia, two in South Bohemia and one in the Vysočina Region. Three farms had a part of their farmed land (in the range 41–50% of their overall land) in the so-called conversion period. The remaining three subjects were fully engaged in the system of organic agriculture.

Considering their size, the studied eco-farms were a relatively heterogeneous group: the two smallest farms had approximately 4.5 and 20 hectares, while the two largest ones farmed about 200 and 1 000 hectares of land, respectively. The remaining two subjects farmed 70 hectares each. All of the studied farms practiced combined production, however, in four cases the crop production included only farming on perennial grassland. The other farms farmed arable land as well as perennial grassland. Livestock production was represented by beef cattle, goats and sheep, and cattle and horses. The largest areas of land belonged to the farms that specialized in beef production (Bohuslavice, Sobeslavice), as the Table 1 shows.

Within the scope of Czech organic agriculture, it was significant that not all farms' products were sold to customers with the Bio label (certifying organic products). The Bohuslavice farm did not deliver its animals to organic slaughterhouse, but to a conven-

Table 1. Land areas and a review of livestock production of the studied farms

Location	Cattle beef production	Goats	Sheep	Horses	Cattle
[1] Milanovice	20.4 ha				
[2] Bohuslavice	202.8 ha				
[3] Karlovice		62.6 ha			
[4] Jirikovice				4.6 ha	
[5] Radkovice			75.4 ha		
[6] Sobeslavice	981.4 ha				

tional one (which is not allowed to provide meat of the supplied bio-cows and bio-bulls with the relevant certificate). The reason for doing so was that there were no accredited processing facilities near this farm. Nor did the Karlovice and Jirikovice farms manage to sell their products as bio-food.

Some of the farms made an effort to diversify their activities in the terms of multifunctional agriculture at the farm level. This fact became visible in the case of the Jirikovice farm, and partly on the Radkovice farm, where farmers profited from the occasional visits of tourists. Milanovice was going to add a similar type of activity to its business and planned to provide accommodation to visitors in future.

Observation of the basic attributes of these farms, such as land areas, types of production, business forms and so on, makes it possible to describe the structure of this agrarian sector, but it says only little about its inherent content. Let us finally have a look at how the participating actors *make* organic farming, what it means for them, and let us try at least partly to shed light on the motives, which they pursue within their businesses.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Defining ecological agriculture

Foreign organic agriculture won an important “battle of language”, in that its content has been constructed as the opposite of conventional agriculture, which includes all non-organic forms of farming and bears some negative connotations (Michelsen 2001). Maintaining the distinction is crucial indeed. Organic farming is institutionally distinguished by three pillars: its use of specific farming methods, its organizational and institutional framework, and product certification. The official name of this kind of farming is embedded in the Council regulation (No. 2092/1991 on organic farming) from the year 1992. Yet in the early 90’s in the Czech Republic, one could see with regard to non-conventional agriculture the name *alternative farming* (Dvořáková 1990), but it has not survived. In contrast to the English adjective *organic*, which refers not only to *healthful and close to nature*, but in the transferred meaning also to *whole* in terms of *purposeful constituency* referring to the original traditions of farming (Lampkin 2005), the naming of the Czech *ecological* farming lacks the dimension of the holistic perspective on nature and position of humans, because the meaning of *ecological* connotes mainly an effort to *limit the harmful impacts on nature*.

This is proved by Czech legislation, which defines ecological agriculture as a “specific kind of farming, which regards environment” by:

“reducing or banning the use of substances and methods, which burden, pollute or infect environment, or increase the risk of food-chains contamination” [...]“ (Zákon č. 242/2000 Sb. o ekologickém zemědělství/Act No. 242, Coll. 2000 on the ecological agriculture).

Because of the relative absence of a tradition, the formal designation plays an important role. However, in this form it does not include a positive definition of ecological farming. From the farmer’s point of view, the definition can hardly offer a reference point that would provide ecological farming with the desired meaning. Consequently, the *official participation* of farmers in the ecologic farming scheme is prevalently an economic matter. Farmers simply compare benefits from joining the formal system with costs (including the transaction ones related to “difficulties” with enhanced administration and control of their farming) of joining and staying in the system of ecologic agriculture.

Participation in the system, however, differs from the actual *practice* of non-conventional farming, which should be analysed separately. One can consider the question of joining the official systems as being of secondary importance after deciding *why* and *how* to farm, although it is obvious that the possibility of receiving subsidies certainly influences this choice. The decision to join the formal system of ecological agriculture brings with it all kinds of possibilities of dealing with this role and so giving ecological farming a specific meaning, which makes up its content. So, is official participation – a priori or a posteriori – linked to specific motivation that would account for an alternative approach to ecological farming?

Importance of non-conventional practice

The conversion process, i.e. the gradual implementation of organic rules during a given period of time, is a necessary step before a farm gets registered in the organic scheme. Some of the interviewees stated that the process did not in fact require them to make large changes, because their farming had already suited organic rules. It appears that this situation was linked with their effort to accommodate natural conditions of their locality, which was after all a must, because of many different reasons. Often as a memento there served examples of “bad” practice, that was carried out in the same areas before the year 1989. In Milanovice, where they farm in a cosy valley with many steep fields, we have heard this:

“Right on this place, there was planted corn. As they seeded, the day after came water and all mould got in the pond over there. Last year Mr. Janousek – who takes care of the ponds here – could still find the corn in barn. Nor even mice ate it as the seeds had been soaked.”

The situation has changed, nowadays they plant vegetables and fruit on arable land, and enrich the soil with organic fertilizers and composts. The selection of the planted vegetables respects the given natural conditions. If cabbage is not doing well on their field (because slugs eat it), they rather plant kohlrabi – the Czech giants, because Dutch seeds did not “like” it there.

Organic rules limit the possibilities of intensifying production and so nature is given more room to work on. Under those conditions, it is rarely possible not to respect it without a risk of economic ineffectiveness of the selected way of farming. In a certain environment, non-conventional agriculture can therefore become a natural and at the same time effective kind of agricultural production, and that is why farmers opt it.

The official organic farming is based on balancing the relation between biological processes and production effectiveness with the state’s supported valorisation of agricultural production. The interviews show that this relation is not uniform, but gains at least two – ideal-typical – positions that can be held out on two groups of farmers. One of them conceives conventional farming inappropriate, because it *“fights with nature and therefore it is not worthy”*. On the other hand, the latter group considers conventional farming to be *“economically ineffective, when it is not in accord with nature”*. Both of these approaches vividly influence the content of ecological farming and at the same time illustrate how farmers reflect their activities.

As one can see, in the case of the first group, farming equals ecological farming. Their practice and notion of farming exclude other forms of agriculture that would differ from that kind, which is enforced with formal rules of the ecological scheme. For the second group, the ecological way of farming represents only one of the possible kinds of agricultural production, which is opted for with regard to the given natural condition, but primarily because it is economically efficient. This also implies that the second group of farmers can, under certain circumstances, be willing to farm conventionally, while in the case of the farmers, who were put in the first group, it is unlikely to happen.

Nonetheless, the observed farms also showed us that this tripartite classification: natural conditions, farming methods and economic efficiency, is in fact

more complicated, because all the categories are inevitably a part of a broader context. When we tried to analyse it, we found out that the non-conventional farming often stems from a peculiar approach to nature as a part of an actors’ biography. The point of ecological farming is not therefore based only on local conditions, on state subsidies, but also on the specific life experience that shape an approach toward nature and the way it is used for agricultural production. This attitude has been vividly framed with a particular attention to landscape.

This fact is well illustrated in the case of the farm Bohuslavice. The local farmer has farmed in a way corresponding to organic rules since the early 90’s. In those times, there were no subsidies under the “ecology” title. With regard to the location of the farm in a foothill area, he decided for extensive cattle farming, because for him it was the “least expensive and the most favourable” manner to farm the given locality, which he has been visiting for many years, because he had used to organize scout camps there with his friends.

“We were bringing them [children in the camp] up in a sort of Indian lifestyle, so we liked the landscape and we have always tended to landscape, which was civilized but not intensively farmed. [...] For instance, during the times of Germans, the landscape here was lively, then it was desolate for 40 years and we said that we would recover it here. It is not possible to do it to the same extent, because there are two and a half million people missing, but at least to make it look good” (Bohuslavice).

A similar account was provided by an eco-farmer in Karlovice, who was also pointing out the importance of animal husbandry (in his case goats) for maintaining the landscape, or the Milanovice farm, where the local farmer makes an effort to prevent the locality from developing “large hotels, large ski slopes, large holiday facilities”, which would irreversibly change the locality, where a couple of generations of her family have farmed before.

It has been quite surprising to see the importance that farmers attach to the landscape maintenance function of their farming, and how much they appraise it. Obviously, this was happening particularly in case of the farmers, who farmed large areas (such as Bohuslavice, Karlovice), but this attitude was also seen on smaller farms (for instance in Milanovice). It was especially this role, the farmers explained, that was in their opinion the main benefit of their farming. The category *landscape maintenance* is to a certain extent linked with the goal to produce values related with keeping up rural culture and agricultural production. This goal was obvious within the farm Jirikovice, whose owner put a particular accent on

diversification of his activities towards non-agricultural economy. *Landscape maintenance* as well as *keeping-up and presenting rural culture* are related to production of public goods (in terms of positive externalities), which have been consciously appraised by farmers as a part of their job. It seemed that for them, this, rather than the Bio label, represents the tangible result of their work in relation to ecological farming.

Another common trait that was present in the narrations of farmers with regard to their approach to landscape was an attitude that promotes personal engagement to a political level. From this viewpoint, some farmers take a similar stance to what was observed in studies on the members of the Western organic movement (Tovey 1997). In the context of the Czech Republic, this attitude has got a specific shape, because some of the interviewees explicitly disagreed with (or even refused) the political activism of Czech environmental movements, which in their opinion did not lead anywhere. They considered their own contribution as “doing ecology from the bottom” in contrary to a mere political “organizing things” that are supposed to favor the environment.

However, it has not been only love of landscape (to rephrase the book of Hana Librova from the late 1980s), but also other attributes of the respondents’ positive relation to nature, which were included in farming. It is difficult to observe, whether for instance a concern about the way that farm animals are kept serves as a precursor of organic farming, or whether it is its result. The interviews rather prove the latter case and the importance of the value that *the animals are doing well* (Karlovice) or *the animals are fine* (Jirikovice) is from this point of view comparable to the importance of landscape maintenance. The significance of those aspects has been contextually related to the production type of farms.

Issue of bio-production

Czech ecological farming has grown up in the last couple years, with regard to the number of participating eco-farmers and the size of farmed areas, but the supply of Czech bio food has been increasing in a much slower pace. Our interviews recorder three cases of farmers, who farmed in the ecological scheme, but the products of their farms did not make it to final customers with the certificate Bio. The main reason of this situation is a lack of processors that would be registered as bio food producers, and so a lot of products originating in ecological farming lose the certificate Bio in the following processing stage.

This is in particular typical of meat production. As an example, we can state an experience of the farm Bohuslavice:

“When I sell, I don’t need it. No one has ever in my life asked me to certificate that it is ecological cattle. Although I have offered it, nobody cares.” (Bohuslavice).

Ecological agriculture in terms of production of bio-products loses its important point due to the processing stage that hinders the valorisation of products. Often this is not a profitable business, because of the inadequate demand. The same situation can occur at farms, which process their own bio-products. If they do not have the available distribution channels enabling them to access a specific market for bio-products, they may give up certification of the products because it is not worthy for them. This situation could have been seen on the farm Karlovice, which is located in a region, where there is almost zero demand for certified food and whose farmer (for personal reasons) lost interest in distributing the products to larger towns. In this situation, it seemed more beneficial to him not to make products in bio-quality, because the costs of registration, control and certification of processing exceeded the marginal revenue from selling products with the Bio label.

A slightly different situation could be seen on the farm Jirikovice, where the local farmer also gave up production of certified food, because he had not had an adequate demand. He argued that people, who know what the Bio certificate means and who would request it, are very scarce and what more, his farm is visited by many people, who buy his products anyway, so he does not need the certification. Indeed, selling the “unofficial bio-food” in his case does not require a third party that would regulate the trust between him and the customer, because people can assess the quality of his product by their direct experience on the farm. The formal system of certification thus loses the point, because it is the customer, who defines the quality of the food. The same situation was observed at the farm Karlovice.

The link between low demand for bio-products, difficulties with grasping the intrinsic values of their production and the formalized scheme of farming and certification here finds a common denominator in the issue, which was opened at the beginning of the analysis and which tackles the question of defining ecological farming in the context of our country. The insufficiency of processing facilities is related to the low demand of the public. It is a question to what extent it is a result of relatively low marketing activities of the Bio label and to what extent it is a matter of Czech gastronomy culture. Either way, one can see that for many ecologic entrepreneurs making bio-products is not the ultimate

goal of their work. Under certain circumstances, it can even entirely lose its meaning and be substituted with a different value – related for example with the non-production function of agriculture.

DISCUSSION

It is necessary to get more information than is presently available in order to provide a qualified assessment of Czech organic farming. If ecological farming is an imported phenomenon, it is certainly useful to observe how the foreign organic sector is developing. However, an evaluation of the nature of Czech ecological farming requires a different viewpoint. The issue of conventionalization of ecological farming can hardly be answered in context of the Czech Republic, because there are still missing clear the criteria that would respect the shape of post-communist agrarian sectors and the short history of organic (ecological) agriculture. It is important to note that this does not mean that this issue should be overlooked; rather the opposite. Those calling for the growth of this sector, increasing production and processing outputs (Jánský et al. 2004) should be confronted with the question, how its development would eventually shape the nature of this way of farming. It is necessary to keep in mind that ecological agriculture got a much broader meaning and thus cannot be seen, as it often happens – as an agricultural production without artificial fertilizers – because even this can be carried out in a way, which may not differ from the conventional industrialized agriculture.

The current low demand for bio-food, the lack of processors and the difficult notion of the content of ecological agriculture (that can from the farmers' point of view turn into a mere bureaucratic control of their activities without any substantial meaning) spin a vicious circle of the actual problems. The state performs a crucial role for the development of this sector in all countries with official organic schemes, including the Czech Republic (Brožová 2005). Studies from abroad (Michelsen 2001), however, show that the policies supporting the growth of this sector are limited in their effects. In the year 2005, the Czech Republic has recorded for the first time a decrease in number of farmers participating in the ecological farming scheme. It will be therefore interesting to watch, whether the Czech ecological farming has already reached the ceiling delineated by the state's support, and how it is going to develop in future. From a certain point of view, this could present a positive phenomenon, because the engaged organizations can be finally forced to deal with the issue of identity of the Czech ecological farming.

Underlining the differences from conventional farming (for farmers and customers) and the stimulation of demand for bio food is one of the ways to put an end to the vicious circle of production links of the Czech ecological farming, in which Bio certificates are getting lost on their way to customers.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to find out what Czech ecological farming draws on. In spite of the fact that ecological farming is institutionally distinguished from conventional agriculture, its formal definition does not deliver the reference point that could constitute its intrinsic meaning. The intention of non-conventional practice overlaps the formalized scheme. Many farmers obviously pursue this way of farming, which can appear to be a natural and at the same time economically effective kind of agricultural production. This also means that it is not possible to conceive Czech ecological agriculture, despite its lack of tradition, as only the result of the material motivation of farmers. The research brought some evidence that the practice of ecological farmers is *also* based on a specific approach to nature, which is an essence of non-conventional farming. Another interesting finding was the extent to which the ecological farmers valued non-production function of their agricultural activities. Due to the current state of the processing industry, low demand and marketing possibilities, the production of certified goods itself can sometimes lose its importance. This situation is in my opinion linked with the identity issue of the Czech ecological farming that influence producers as well as customers, whereas the relatively low demand for bio food just reflects this state.

The fact that the farming of some ecological farmers does end with produce of certified bio-food does not make them unsuccessful. Indeed, from a certain point of view, they are very successful, because farming for them naturally embodies practices that correspond with the organic agriculture foundations. That is why it is desired that those farmers remain in the official scheme of ecological agriculture. If a development of this sector is concretely based on their practice, ecological farming may in future be able to meet the expectations that are placed upon it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to appreciate goodwill of the farmers, who took part in the research, shared their time and

provided me with valuable information, for which I hereby thank them. I am also thankful to my colleague Eva Kučerová, who was engaged in the research. The study was financially supported by the Internal Grant Agency of the Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Agriculture Prague (grant No. 11190/1312/113150). The final version of the paper has been greatly improved thanks to the comments of Paul Brassley from the University of Plymouth. Its final form, however, remains the author's responsibility.

REFERENCES

- Akční plán ČR pro rozvoj ekologického zemědělství do roku 2010 [Action Plan of the Czech Republic for the Development of Organic Farming by 2010] (2004). Ministerstvo zemědělství ČR, Praha.
- Bauman Z. (1995): Úvahy o postmoderní době (Essays on postmodern times). Slon, Praha.
- Beck U. (2004): Riziková společnost. Na cestě k jiné modernitě (Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity). Slon, Praha.
- Brožová I. (2005): Organic agriculture as one of aspects of multifunctional agriculture. *Agricultural Economics*, 51 (2): 51–56.
- Buck D., Getz C., Guthman J. (1997): From farm to table: the organic vegetable commodity chain in Northern California. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 37 (1): 3–20.
- Conford P. (2001): *The Origins of the Organic Movement*. Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 of 24 June 1991 on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs.
- Darnhofer I. (2005): Organic farming and rural development: Some evidence from Austria. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 45 (4): 308–323.
- Dvořáková V. (1990): Alternativní (ekologické) zemědělství [Alternative (ecologic) farming]. *Vesmír*, 69 (9): 503–506.
- Giddens A. (1998 [1990]): *Důsledky modernity (The Consequences of Modernity)*. Slon, Praha.
- Guthman J. (2004): *Agrarian Dreams. The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Jánský J., Živělová I., Novák P. (2004): The influence of state subsidies on the development of organic agriculture in the Czech Republic and in EU. *Agricultural Economics*, 50 (9): 394–399.
- Kaltoft P. (2001): Organic farming in late modernity: At the frontier of modernity or opposing modernity? *Sociologia Ruralis*, 41 (1): 146–158.
- Lampkin N.H. (2005): Organic farming. In: Soffe R.J. (ed.) *Countryside Notebook*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 181–198.
- Michelsen J. (2001): Recent Development and Political Acceptance of Organic Farming in Europe. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 41 (1): 3–20.
- Seznam ekologických zemědělců k 31. 12. 2004 (The list of organic farmers 31/12/2004). [online]. Praha: Ministerstvo zemědělství ČR, 2005 [cited 12. 10. 2005]. Available at URL <<http://www.mze.cz>>. Seznamy v ekologickém zemědělství.
- Tovey H. (1997): Food, environmentalism and rural sociology: On the organic farming movement in Ireland. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 37 (1): 21–37.
- Zákon č. 242/2000 Sb. o ekologickém zemědělství [Act No. 242, Coll. 2000 on ecologic agriculture].

Arrived on 27th June 2006

Contact address:

Lukáš Zagata, Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague, Kamýčká 129, 165 21 Prague 6-Suchbát, Czech Republic
tel.: +420 224 382 195, e-mail: zagata@pef.czu.cz
