

## Organic farming remains important even in war

*Organic agriculture in Ukraine is characterised by many active people, active associations, more than 400 organic farms and its own law. Due to Russia's attack, it is facing as yet unforeseeable challenges. Stefan Dreesmann, head of the German-Ukrainian Organic Agriculture Cooperation project, summarises the status quo.*

The beginnings of organic farming in Ukraine date back to the 1990s. At that time, the first farms converted their land to organic farming. From 2010 onwards, there was a strong increase in development, which was caused by a growing sensitivity for environmental issues, a very active environmental movement and the increasing demand for organic raw materials in the EU. Currently, there are several associations in the field of organic agriculture in Ukraine. These organisations are very active, organise trade congresses and fairs, support their member farms in their further development and bring in their interests politically, for example in the Ukrainian parliament. The farms and areas are relatively evenly distributed across the country. In terms of area, the focal points of organic farming are the south-east along the Black Sea coast, which was particularly affected by the war in April 2022, the centre and the west of Ukraine. The main cultivation areas for organic cereals and oilseeds are in the south and north-east.

### **Less livestock, more exports**

The data available to our project "German-Ukrainian Cooperation on Organic Agriculture" show that a wide variety of crops are grown on Ukrainian organic farms, for example cereals, grain legumes, oilseeds, special crops (especially fruit) or vegetables. There are some large organic dairy farms in Ukraine, but compared to Germany, the share of grassland and dairy farming is relatively low. Chickens and pigs are also kept on a small scale on Ukrainian organic farms. In addition, relatively few root crops are cultivated. Another distinguishing feature between Ukrainian and German farms is their strong orientation towards exports.

### **Ambitious goals for organic farming**

According to the responsible Ukrainian ministry, there were a total of 549 certified organic enterprises in 2020. 419 of these are farms that cultivate around 460 000 hectares of land organically. This is slightly more than one percent of the total agricultural area. Almost all of these farms are certified according to the EU organic regulation. In Ukraine, several organic inspection bodies are accredited under the EU organic regulation, the largest being "Organic Standard", which inspected almost 400 of the 549 organic enterprises in Ukraine in 2020. In spring 2021, the Ukrainian government issued a decree stipulating that at least three percent of agricultural land should be managed organically by 2030. That would be about 1.5 million hectares. To achieve this goal, the Ukrainian government passed its own law on organic farming. They were supported in this by our project. The term "organic" (in Ukrainian the term "organic" is used for this) is now also protected by law in Ukraine. After the implementation of the necessary further steps, such as the approval of the organic inspection bodies and the establishment of an organic seed database, the Ukrainian government's timetable foresaw the certification of the first farms according to the organic farming law this year. Exports play the most important role in the marketing of products, with grain maize, soya, wheat and sunflowers (in that order) accounting for the largest volumes. The consumption of organic products in Ukraine has risen steadily in recent years. These are almost exclusively organic

products certified according to the EU organic regulation - on the one hand imports from the EU, on the other hand organic products produced and manufactured in Ukraine. The organic products produced and marketed in Ukraine are in particular dairy products, cereal products, vegetables and fruit. These products are mainly marketed through the various supermarket chains. In some cities, such as Lviv, organic products can also be purchased through specially founded delivery services. It is also possible to buy organic products via the internet. There are also two organic hotels in and outside Kyiv (Kiev). The organic hotel just outside Kyiv was attacked by Russian missiles on 9 March and burnt down.

### **Prospects for the future**

Until the outbreak of war on 24 February, farm operations were running normally: fields were tilled with autumn sowings and, due to a relatively mild winter in some areas, Ukraine was expecting a good harvest of winter cereals, including organic ones. Since the beginning of the war, everything has changed (see interview with the President of the Organic Federation of Ukraine, Eugene Milovanov, page 42). According to the assessment of our project, organic farming could play an important role in Ukraine now and after the end of the war. In particular, due to the lower input of inputs, a holistic management approach and the integration of legumes, it offers solutions for the current challenges in Ukraine, especially for securing the food supply.

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### **The "German-Ukrainian Cooperation on Organic Agriculture" project**

The project has been running since 2016. With the Bilateral Cooperation Programme, the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) supports partner countries in building a productive, resource-conserving agriculture and food sector. The project focuses on support for the development and implementation of a separate law on organic farming in Ukraine, the implementation of a digital knowledge platform and cooperation with Ukrainian organic associations. More info: [coa-ukraine.com/en](http://coa-ukraine.com/en)

### **Targeted assistance for organic farms in Ukraine**

At the end of March, the GLS Treuhand Foundation for the Future of Agriculture, in cooperation with our project, launched an appeal for donations for an "Emergency Aid Ukraine Organic Farming" (see [www.zukunftsstiftung-landwirtschaft.de](http://www.zukunftsstiftung-landwirtschaft.de)). In this difficult time, the Ukrainian organic farming movement, which has been growing for years, and the people on the organic farms are to be helped directly through

- supporting refugees on organic farms,
- financial support for the purchase of inputs (e.g. organic seeds) and maintenance of farm buildings,
- financial (temporary) support for organic farmers as a result of loss of earnings due to the acts of war, and
- creation of new jobs on the organic farms as well as temporary wage transfer for refugees if they work on the farms.

# „ Organic farming will continue to develop despite the war “

*Eugene Milovanov is President of the Organic Federation of Ukraine. We conducted the interview with him at the beginning of April.*

## ***Ö&L: What is the current situation under war conditions on the organic farms that are members of your organisation?***

Eugene Milovanov: Many organic farms in the south and north-east of Ukraine are suffering a lot from the Russian aggression. Some of these organic farms in Kherson and Kharkiv administrative districts are under Russian occupation. As a result of the Russian-led war, a significant proportion of farms in the other regions where fighting is or has taken place are also suffering. However, most organic farms were still able to carry out their field work in the spring. At the same time, the main problems today are not only mines in some fields, regular rocket attacks, but also a significant increase in the price of certain inputs, fuel shortages and a lack of quality seeds for summer crops. In addition, there is a shortage of labour on many farms, as many of them are deployed in the war effort.

## ***In this situation, where do you see the biggest challenges for the export of organic products from Ukraine to the European Union?***

The main obstacles for the export of organic products from Ukraine in 2022/23 will be, in my opinion, the reduction of agricultural land in organic farming, the partial non-use of existing land due to lack of seeds and fuel, and a possible deactivation of certification bodies in some parts of Ukraine as a result of military hostilities. Other challenges will be the decline in agricultural crop yields due to, in many cases, poorer quality seeds, the threat of fuel supply disruptions, and worsened export logistics, especially for exports by water.

## ***What role do you think organic farming will play in Ukraine in the future?***

Given the existing problems, as the war continues and this creates a number of additional negative challenges for Ukrainian organic producers, we can now assume that exports of organic cereals, pulses and oilseeds to EU countries will decrease by at least 30 percent this season. If the war actions by Russia continue, Ukrainian organic export losses could be even higher - especially given the logistical problems both at the ports and on the roads. Nevertheless, the organic movement in Ukraine continues to develop and receives considerable support from colleagues in Germany and many other countries. In almost 30 years, Ukraine has gained a lot of experience in organic production, achieved significant successes in training specialists for organic agriculture and established itself as a reliable partner on the international organic markets. Ukrainians - both consumers and farmers - are aware of the importance of further development of organic products to meet the needs of the domestic market as well as for export to the EU and other regions of the world. Food and nutrition security, including organic production, are among Ukraine's priorities. And neither Russia nor its belligerent attack will prevent this. Despite the current problems, organic agriculture in Ukraine will continue to develop and integration with the EU and the whole peaceful, civilised world will deepen.

Interview: Stefan Dreesmann

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