Regional economic integration and local food: the case of Latvia during European Union accession

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Abstract: Latvia’s agriculture sector remains economically important despite 50 years of central Soviet planning as well as rapid reorientation to a market economy after independence in 1991 and accession into the European Union in 2004. At independence, many Latvians embraced a local organic farming movement which has evolved during an era of sweeping economic and socio-political change. This article synthesises the current theoretical discourse surrounding alternative food movements with empirical evidence derived from field research in Latvia. To examine how regional economic integration has impacted Latvia’s organic movement, I highlight its institutional actors and support networks then examine movement opportunities and constraints. The Latvian example may inform organic movements elsewhere as they strive to develop and maintain sustainable alternative food systems within the framework of regional economic integration and/or trade liberalisation.

Keywords: European Union; Latvia; local food systems; organic farming; social movements; sustainable society; trade liberalisation.


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1 Introduction: independence and the organic movement

Latvia first achieved nationhood in 1918, after Latvians united under the banner of ‘land and freedom’ (Boruks, 2003). Land reform was instituted and transferred control from large German estates to individual Latvian homesteaders. Due to popular pressure, reform was socio-politically rather than economically motivated: new farms averaged 20 hectares in size. At the end of World War II, this north-eastern European nation was absorbed into the Soviet Union, at which time Moscow cancelled land reforms and
instituted Kolholz (collective) farm policies. Kolholz farms were complete industrial units with farming occurring around a central processing centre. Produce was dispersed via easterly networks, making Latvia a primary Soviet food producer (Boruks, 2003; Cramer, Jensen and Southgate, 2001). After independence was reinstated in 1991, Latvia dismantled the Kolholz system and reinstalled the land reforms of the first Republic. Policies impacted Latvian agriculture in much the same way as first independence did: land usage converted from industrial holdings to a large number of small-scale, independent farm operations. In 2000, the median Latvian farm was 23 hectares (Boruks, 2003).

During the political thaw that occurred in the 1980s Glasnost period, the Soviet government offered greater freedom of speech, which was used in Latvia to build a strong environmental movement. At this time, many Latvians openly opposed the Kolholz agriculture model, citing environmental concerns. The inception of the independence movement popularly known as the singing revolution, derived from a reawakening of traditional nature attitudes and environmentally inspired political actions (Boruks, 2003; Bunkšė, 1992). To many Latvians, the burgeoning organic movement symbolised the dream of a small-scale, independent farming future. In an article from this early independence period, Bunkšė emphasised the timeless domain of the Latvian worldview, fashioned from centuries of occupation. As he states, ‘there is a feeling that only in the rural countryside does one have a true identity through contact with timeless nature and culture’ (1992, p.205) In this sense, Latvians sought to reconstruct a homeland from nature-culture tradition and national notions of freedom.

The aspirations of the organic farming movement were largely unrealised in the 1990s when rapid and extreme market-liberalisation policies led to a collapse in the agricultural economy (Boruks, 2003). In May of 2004, Latvia joined the European Union, further aligning its agricultural, economic and political interests to those of greater Europe. The question then arises: how are Latvia’s organic farmers faring in the face of such sweeping social and political change? This article focuses on three questions:

1 How has European Union membership impacted Latvia’s organic farming movement?

2 Who are the institutional actors involved in organic development and what support networks have they developed?

3 What opportunities and constraints face organic farmers as Latvia continues to integrate with the European Union?

2 Theoretical considerations

While a political economy perspective has been critical for understanding the impact of globalisation on industrial agriculture, Murdoch, Marsden and Banks (2000) highlight its inability to account for the influence of nature on agricultural development. They contend that it lacks a proper framework for analysing alternative agricultural movements and the roles quality, nature and social justice play in such trade. To meet this gap, the authors propose the use of conventions theory to investigate the political relations between informal and institutional conventions. This theoretical model is sophisticated as it identifies and analyses a large number of social conventions; however, only a simplified
version is required here. In her work on alternative agricultural trade, Raynolds (2004) explores how industrial and market conventions (embodied by traditional economic considerations such as efficiency, standardisation and price competition) vie with domestic and civic conventions promoting trust, ecological diversity and social justice.

Organic agricultural trade has become increasingly globalised and local food movements are often viewed as a counter-hegemonic force, developed by actors striving to maintain food traditions and intact communities (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005). Europe is particularly rich in this regard, for there, ‘the rural imaginary also embraces a distinctive European ‘possessive investment’ in national traditions, although expressed in an ‘unmarked’ discourse of small family farms, local markets … regional food cultures, vibrant rural communities and ecologically diverse rural environments’. (2005, p.363) DuPuis and Goodman provide a timely critique of the politics of localism, demonstrating its constraints. The authors situate local food movements within greater policy discourse, highlighting three areas of concern. The first deals with power and the potential for local elites to gain monopolistic control. The second area lies with the often unproductive competition generated by the limited scale of regional markets. The third recognises the role neoliberalism may play in co-opting movement values and goals (2005, p.365).

The theoretical considerations outlined above are of acute relevance to this study; given Latvia’s diminutive size, its organic farming movement is essentially a local food movement set at the national scale. Moreover, it seeks to carve out a sustainable market presence during a period of profound socio-political transformation. A simplified conventions framework enables exploration into how European Union integration conventions (industrial/market) interplay with those of the Latvian organic farming movement (domestic/civic). Insights into the politics of localism provide structural grounding for an analysis of the relationships between various actors as they seek to develop rural communities by strengthening commercial organic production.

3 Methods

This research was conducted over a ten-month period from February to November in 2005; one year after Latvia joined the European Union. In addition, in August of 2008, I engaged in follow-up interviews with key informants. Due to the country’s small size and the nature of its organic movement and markets, the unit of analysis was at the national level. I conducted the research in Latvian, utilising a combination of qualitative methodologies, including participant observation, unstructured, semi-structured and formal interviews, surveys and four farm case studies. During the exploratory phase, participant observation enabled me to meet with a wide range of actors across the nation. In later stages, purposive selection ensured representation from each region, commodity network and institutional sector. As the differing nature of commodities creates unique opportunities and constraints for farmers, I selected only produce farms to participate in the case studies to control for inconsistency. To match Latvian small-scale farm demographics (Zobena, 1997), the case studies included a commercial organic farm, an organic-conversion farm and a conventional farm. In addition, I conducted a case study of an ecotourism farm as this category represents a newly emergent demographic, closely aligned with the organic movement. Figure 1 highlights the location of the case study farms. Each of the case study farms were situated in the southern and eastern regions of the country, where the majority of commercial and organic agriculture occurs.
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4 Research findings

Despite the rapid socio-economic changes due to European Union accession, the core objectives of the Latvian organic farming movement remain strongly grounded in the domestic and civic conventions of its inception. Indeed, positive institutional changes have occurred as European Union admittance has provided both technical and financial support for enhanced organic development. Moreover, organic farmers, as well as local institutional actors have actively engaged in the process. European Union admittance has also threatened future production and market development. The influx of inexpensive European food imports (including organic items) has impeded local commercial development, while membership has led to massive emigration due to stagnant salaries and a steeply rising cost of living. This loss of an available rural labour force has disallowed many organic farmers from expanding production and developing sustainable, local organic food supplies. Despite these constraints, tremendous growth has occurred due to the availability of European Union organic farming subsidies. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the number of certified organic farms is rapidly expanding. To better understand the nature of this growth, I will first highlight the institutional actors and support systems available to organic farmers in Latvia, noting the implications of their involvement. I will then outline in further detail the opportunities and constraints facing the organic movement as a whole.
**Figure 2** Organic agriculture expansion in Latvia

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organic-certified hectares</td>
<td>1,426</td>
<td>10,540</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>151,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of organic-certified farms</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>4,120</td>
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*In 2004, Latvia formally joined the European Union.

**Source:** Latvia Ministry of Agriculture (2008).

### 4.1 Institutional actors and support systems

Figure 3 displays the primary institutes and organisations involved in Latvian organic agriculture development. Interagency relationships are delineated by lines with dashes representing less formal relationships or more minimal collaboration. It is important to note that in Latvia, the lines between the public, private and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sectors are blurred. As each sector is involved in organic development, this section serves to explain their roles in further detail.

**Figure 3** Web of organic actors


*Source:* Author research (2005).

Founded in 1995, the Organic Agriculture Association (LBLA) is an umbrella NGO for organic farmers, processors and organisations. It promotes Latvian organic production, processing, marketing and retail. Further, it coordinates practitioner-practitioner and practitioner-expert collaborations. This organisation maintains a democratic structure: each member possesses one vote and the association president is elected for three years. Members also elect a council to manage affairs and council members (representing each district and agricultural sector) serve a three-year term. Members must pay annual membership dues, but are allotted equal participation in the decision-making process. The Organic Agriculture Association maintains a website and distributes a monthly journal to subscribers. Finally, it has developed and controls the rights to Latvia’s only nationally accredited organic label, though as of August 2008 there are tentative plans to transfer label ownership either to the Ministry of Agriculture or to the organic certification agencies operating in Latvia.⁴
The Agricultural Advisory and Training Centre (LLKC) is a privatised former governmental agency, providing advisory services to farmers throughout Latvia. Rural advisory centres operate in each district, but are linked to a head office situated a short distance from Riga, the capital city. Farmers go to district offices for consultation and to access farming material. These district centres also offer organic-farming courses. While the course is not required for certification, it has gained national recognition and enrolment rates have rapidly increased. The yearly course is decentralised, allowing district groups to customise the syllabus. Sessions are primarily taught by academic and agricultural research experts and the course culminates with an oral and written exam.

Organic certification originated in 1995 when German inspectors provided certification services to Latvian farmers. National certification began in 2000 and has operated under European Union standards since 2004. Two agencies manage the organic-conversion and certification process: Vides Kvalitāte, a privatised NGO, receiving no external funding, and the Certification and Testing Centre, a privatised limited enterprise receiving state funds to provide subsidised services to farmers.

Within the government sector, organic affairs are managed by the Food and Veterinary Department of the Ministry of Agriculture. It coordinates projects and provides meeting space for organic and ecotourism organisations. The government also allocates European fund monies for organic processing development. In 2005, entrepreneurs were eligible to apply for assistance. However, to receive funding, they were required to invest an equal sum from their own pocket and to pay the full amount up front, securing reimbursement upon project completion. While this strategy appeared to foster self-sufficiency yet supply financial assistance where needed, the reality was more complicated. Most would-be-beneficiaries lacked personal funds and were required to take bank loans. This was a relatively straightforward process for farmers who used land as collateral; however, processors without land ownership were unable to secure loans. Further, according to one Ministry employee,5 some entrepreneurs were ‘unable to complete their project within the required time-frame due to Latvia’s shortage of construction workers and its lengthy building and permit procedures’, leading to the loss of reimbursement.

In terms of organic farmers, most research participants had taken the organic-farming courses and received regular information through their district advisory centre. Each of the case study farmers had acquired financing for farm development projects. Farmers were active in travelling to regional fairs and outdoor markets where they made direct sales to consumers. Those who actively participated with the Organic Agriculture Association had also set up personal buyer networks, consisting of retailers, restaurateurs, and wealthy individuals, to whom they made regular deliveries. Despite these successes, commercial production remained low. Many farmers were unable to successfully enter the commercial sector, and instead remained lifestyle farmers, consuming the majority of their crop and trading the remainder.

In 2005, Latvia’s organic processing sector was extremely weak. The bulk of organic products were sold directly to buyers from individual farms, with a variety of farmers striving to develop on-farm processing capability. However, organic processors did exist for a variety of commodities. Latvia’s primary organic dairy processor produced unpasteurised dairy products, using a comprehensive quality testing system. Latvia possessed organic bread and juice processors, and one organic meat slaughterhouse – a former farm devoted to beef. Although pork is Latvia’s national dish, Latvia did not have
an organic pig slaughterhouse. Further, lack of organic poultry and egg processing centres meant that organic chicken and egg producers processed their products on-farm.

Because there are a large number of conventional processors in Latvia, I conducted telephone surveys to determine their interest in developing organic products. My selection process was largely purposive: respondents represented large-scale, medium-scale and small-scale enterprises in roughly proportionate numbers, with equitable representation from Latvia’s regions. Findings demonstrated that a growing number of conventional processors were closely watching organic market trends. Some had begun the organic certification process and were aggressively marketing their future organic lines to consumers. Their participation may not translate into increased sales for Latvia’s organic farmers, as those engaged in the organic-conversion process were not simple processors. Rather, they were agribusinesses that processed food items raised or grown on their own large farm. As most conventional processors had been in business longer and operated on a larger scale than did small-scale organic processors, they possessed the ability to access supermarket buyers. Because of this, their future organic lines will have access to a broad range of consumers who do not seek out organic-specialty shops, and this may hinder the market development potential of the local organic movement. Moreover, at times, there was a discrepancy between marketing campaigns and reality. A leading national dairy company provided support to Latvia’s 2005 slow food festival, where it prominently displayed its corporate banners alongside organic-label flags. Although rumours circulated that the company planned to begin an eco-milk line in answer to farmer requests, a leading company official flatly told me that the company ‘has no plans to begin organic production’.

These issues demonstrate that conventional processors entering into Latvia’s organic farming sector are doing so, not because of commitment to domestic or civic norms, but because of its commercial potential. For them, organic production is little more than a market strategy, and respondents emphasised their desire to develop industrial organic production, as well as their bitterness over the stringent regulations involved. Conversely, my interviews with movement-aligned organic farmers demonstrated that their primary focus was on maintaining domestic and civic conventions. They supported even stricter regulations, although each wished to expand production and market access as well.

Retailers and restaurateurs played an important role in organic farming development. As of 2005, people could buy organic products in a number of small shops and two restaurants in the capital city. Apart from the Preiļi city market, where a stall was managed by a farmers’ cooperative, it was difficult to buy organic products through official retail channels outside of the capital city and its environs. In Rīga, two of Latvia’s six leading supermarket chains sold organic products, but of the two, one sold only organic imports. A popular foreign-owned chain did offer local, organic items, but these were minimal. According to its production manager, organic sales comprised 1% of total turnover and only from 3 to 4% of its organic products were Latvian. While the supermarket wished to support organic production, it was concerned over the lack of organic sales within its Latvian stores. In 2008, the retail situation had somewhat improved, with ten small organic shops, though only two of these were located outside of the capital city. Additionally within Rīga, there was a year-round outdoor green market where organic farmers sold their products twice a month in an upscale shopping district. Three supermarket chains also carried organic products, though Latvian organic goods remained difficult to find on supermarket shelves (Krjaževa, 2008). Finally, consumers within Rīga and its environs could purchase local organic products in one of two internet
shops and have their purchases delivered directly to their homes. While these developments are positive, they demonstrate ongoing tensions between local farming ideals and the industrial and market conventions that supermarkets follow. Indeed, Latvian organic farmers have largely expanded their sales through small shops and outdoor markets where domestic and civic conventions remain paramount.

4.2 Opportunities and constraints

Upon European Union accession, farmers became eligible for greater subsidies than had hitherto been available. All farms received annual per-hectare subsidies from the European Fund. Organic-certified farms received this amount along with an additional sum. Farms undergoing organic-conversion received a still larger amount for five years, and farms situated within nature reserves received subsidies for any land taken out of production. Though organic subsidy availability may be considered an important success, issues remained. Variation existed but average organic farm turnover was low, with most farms experiencing annual turnovers ranging from 500 to 6,000 Lats. Small turnovers and minimal subsidies made it difficult for farmers to expand commercial production, particularly given the rising cost of living. European Fund allocations were dependent upon individual governments and varied within member states. In countries where ministries placed higher importance on organic development, farmers were able to access more funds.

Most institutes and agencies collaborated with one another, lending strength to mutual goals. The Organic Agriculture Association was extremely active. Not only did it bring a much-needed farmer voice to the Ministry of Agriculture, but also it coordinated with a variety of agencies to further organic goals. The Ministry also allocated European fund monies for cross-cultural learning exchanges, collaborative projects and conferences. While most organic farmers were fiercely independent, some formally collaborated with one another. For example, the Preiži farmers’ cooperative in eastern Latvia facilitated communal distribution and sale of its produce. The cooperative focused on two goals: coordinating the sales, transport, and distribution of members’ goods to minimise expense and enhance local consumer awareness. Other farmers developed demonstration or educational centres, a practice that was particularly widespread in the impoverished region of eastern Latvia where organic practitioners were trying to recruit labour and provide a viable alternative to emigration for regional youth. Some maintained agreements with secondary schools to provide training.

Though foreign-owned, Latvia’s leading supermarket chain sold local organic products and was willing to work with organic processors and farmers to increase sales. In terms of consumer awareness, tremendous possibilities existed for supermarkets and organic advocates to collaborate on marketing initiatives; yet due to ineffectual production and distribution capacity, these opportunities were almost entirely unrealised.

A major constraint facing Latvian organic retail lies in national food traditions. Rather than paying premium fees for certified products, many people buy produce directly from relatives or neighbours. In this manner, fresh produce flows informally from country to city and are viewed as more than a commodity. The Latvian food-gift custom develops and maintains rural–urban networks. Such linkages are constructed informally as Latvian city-dwellers help their country community in return for food gifts. The tradition is powerful enough to reconnect previously separated families and maintain old friendships. Not only was the food-gift tradition important during the Soviet era when
shops offered long lines but little selection, but also became critical after independence when incomes plummeted. While countries such as Latvia are subject to globalising trends, cultural tradition remains a significant force in people’s lives. By seeking to carve out a commercial niche, the organic movement risks creating an atmosphere of unproductive competition, particularly given that the movement’s market focus is almost entirely geared toward the more affluent capital city. The number of organic-certified farms is rapidly increasing, yet many consumers already receive the same food items produced by organic farmers through their own informal networks.

In the early 2000s, the Organic Agriculture Association contracted a consultancy group to conduct consumer research for internal use. Results from their survey showed that 91% of respondents were interested in purchasing organic products; however, very few were actually buying these items. Conversely, though high-quality conventional options were often more expensive than organic counterparts, they were stocked in most supermarkets and sold well. This implied that lack of purchasing power may not have been as serious a constraint as many organic advocates believed it to be. The discrepancy between interest and sales was partly due to lack of consumer awareness, and two issues lay at the heart of this problem: underdeveloped marketing strategies and label confusion.

In 2005, there was extensive label confusion for a variety of reasons. First, farmers reproduced the organic label on their commercial goods according to financial capability with some displaying a large, colourful label and others using a hazy black–white stamp. Second, there was a preponderance of other specialised food labels, with some appearing to mimic European organic labels, and even the national organic label. Non-organic imports often stated ‘Eko’ on their packaging to denote ‘economical’ but in Latvian this term translates into ‘organic’. While the Organic Agriculture Association lobbied the government over misleading labels with some success, it felt unable to address the issues surrounding imports. The most serious label competition came from the national, State-funded ‘Green Spoon’ label. To qualify for it, a processor must ensure that a minimum of 75% of the product’s ingredients were grown in Latvia (BODE, 2008). A number of processors used Green Spoon on their conventional items and the organic label on their organic goods, which in turn may have increased consumer confusion. As of 2008, the Latvian organic farming movement had made significant strides in minimising these issues. Organic packaging was more clearly marked and the movement has been active in dispersing informational materials to consumers.

The underdevelopment of the organic processing sector has compromised the ability of the movement to compete within Latvia’s regionalising economy. While devoted to domestic conventions, organic retailers and restaurateurs found it difficult to stock a steady supply of local items. Mainstream supermarkets increasingly stocked organic imports, yet there was an almost total absence of local, organic goods. This issue highlights the tensions between the industrial and market conventions guiding Latvia’s retail sector and the domestic and civic conventions of the movement. Increasingly, retail requires a consistent, standardised-quality supply of marketable goods. However, the domestic ideals embodied by the small-scale family farming tradition are not easily compatible with the level of industrialisation required by supermarkets, which is where Latvia’s consumers increasingly shop. Moreover, many organic farmers hold strong civic notions of independence, viewing collective organisation as distastefully ‘Soviet’. As the manager of one cooperative put it, ’we have thrown out the baby with the bathwater’.

Those who do wish to develop commercial organic production find their way barred by a variety of factors. These include steep competition from foreign imports, minimal
ministerial support and the lack of a viable local market. Latvia’s value added tax system also limits the ability of farmers to move from lifestyle to commercial production. While the tax system acts to tax agricultural enterprise while protecting lifestyle farmers, organic farming falls into an intermediary grey zone. Farmers who live off produce without generating much profit are not required to register, but those with sufficient profit must do so. Although organic enterprises receive end-of-year tax returns, they pay significantly higher taxes than lifestyle producers.\textsuperscript{16}

In this sense, the system has discouraged organic practitioners from expanding beyond lifestyle production to develop commercial farming, and has prevented non-commercial farmers from accessing governmental enterprise development funds. Latvian culture may praise the domestic ideal of the small family farm, but it also possesses an equally strong market orientation, developed in part through its historical role as a major European trade zone. While many of the organic farmers involved in this research had a spiritual relationship with their land, they were also rugged entrepreneurs. The structural constraints of the tax system may partially explain why the rapid increase in the number of Latvian organic-certified farms has not translated into increased commercial production. Rather, the majority of certified farmers sold their produce to conventional processors for lack of other buyers.\textsuperscript{17}

Because Latvia’s economy has become integrated with that of the greater European Union, it must develop a competitive market edge if it wishes to compete with regional imports. Globalisation has transformed the shopping patterns of individual Latvians, who increasingly prefer one-stop supermarket shopping to the outdoor markets of the past. Globalisation has also lessened the nation’s capacity to protect its producers through market regulation. However, Ministries choose where to allocate monies and subsidies, meaning that the Latvian government still has the authority to determine the direction of the national economy. Because the Latvian government has not invested in the development of its organic sphere to the same level as neighbouring European Union members, organic farmers are finding it difficult to compete with the influx of less expensive imports. In response, the movement has strategically maintained its focus on domestic and civic conventions by expanding its presence through outdoor green markets and slow food festivals.

5 Conclusions: toward a slow food future?

Latvian organic farming successes are readily apparent. While first-generation organic farmers worked without subsidies, organic subsidies were instrumental in encouraging recent growth. In a short time span, institutional and grassroots involvement led to rapid conversion rates. Despite some difficulties with collaboration, both formal and informal interagency cooperation occurred, and these linkages streamlined development objectives. Further, there was a healthy mix of educational initiatives from organic farmer courses to on-farm educational activities. In many cases, admittance into the European Union and subsequent subsidies fostered these successes.

European Union accession had a negative impact on organic development as well. The influx of inexpensive regional food imports impeded the development of local commercial production. Moreover, while European Union membership led to rapid rises in the cost of living, salaries remained low. Because national development initiatives focused on urban locales, Latvia’s rural regions became increasingly depopulated as
people fled in search of higher paying jobs in Rīga and abroad. In the future, low salaries may also limit the ability of consumers to purchase organic products and ultimately stimulate an atmosphere of unproductive competition as Latvia’s organic farmers compete with one another to reach Rīga’s affluent consumers.

Four central issues also hindered organic sector performance:

1. Low consumer awareness existed due to underdeveloped marketing strategies and the proliferation of specialised food labels.

2. Potential consumers received food gifts from country relatives and did not buy many fresh products at the commercial level.

3. Organic processing was underdeveloped, limiting the availability of products that consumers did purchase.

4. Excellent opportunities existed for farmer-farmer and farmer-expert collaborations, yet remained underutilised or undeveloped.

These issues hindered organic market growth despite the expressed desire for organic products by Latvian consumers, and the interest of Latvia’s largest supermarket chain in stocking local organic options.

Organic practitioners were not only aware of the obstacles they faced, but also actively sought solutions. By 2008, labelling issues had successfully been addressed, and organic markets had experienced modest growth through the expansion of open-air green markets where farmers may more easily maintain their focus on domestic and civic ideals. It must be remembered that Latvia only recently re-emerged as an independent nation and that its first decade was spent adjusting to a market-based economic system. While globalisation continues to impact agricultural and economic development and to transform individual lifestyles, Latvia’s local organic movement holds much promise. As its practitioners find innovative ways to balance market and industrial convention requirements with their domestic and civic goals, they may yet realise a revitalisation of Latvia’s rural communities, where ‘timeless nature and culture’ can continue to inform and inspire Latvian identity, even as regional integration moves forward.

Acknowledgements

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References


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Notes

1 For a more in-depth understanding of conventions theory, see Thévenot (1995).
2 Case study farms are as follows: Ataugas (organic farm), Jaunpātes (organic-conversion farm), Priekuļas (conventional farm) and Salenieki (ecotourism farm).
3 Unless otherwise stated, the information contained in this article was derived from author research in 2005.
4 Interview with Regina Grinblate, Director of the Aizkraukle Agricultural Advisory and Training Centre, August 2008.
5 Interview with Ministry of Agriculture official, June 2005.
6 Information obtained from telephone surveys of 22 conventional food processors, representing each region in Latvia. Among the respondents, six were meat or egg processors, six were dairy processors, five represented the fresh produce sector and five processed grain.
7 Telephone discussion with company official, July 2005.
8 Interview with Ivars Andinš, Production Manager for VP Market, July 2005.
9 Information provided by Irena Baraškina, agricultural marketing lecturer at the Latvia University of Agriculture, August 2008.
10 Information obtained from Gatis Kaimiņš at the Ozolnieki Agricultural Advisory and Training Centre, May 2005.
11 As of August 2008, 500–6,000 Lats translated into approximately 711–8,537 Euro or 562–6,750 British Pounds (source: www.xe.com).
12 Information from internal documents at the Aizkraukle Agricultural Advisory and Training Centre, May 2005.
13 Interview with Irena Baraškina, agricultural marketing lecturer at the Latvia University of Agriculture, April 2005.
14 Interview with Regina Grinblate, Director of the Aizkraukle Agricultural Advisory and Training Centre, August 2008.
15 Interview with Jānis Gavars, Director of Preiļi Organic Farming Cooperative, May 2005.
16 Information concerning the tax arrangement obtained from internal documents at the Aizkraukle Agricultural Advisory and Training Centre, April 2005.
17 Interviews with various organic farmers and processors in 2005. For example, according to Iveta Virsnīte, in a July 2005 interview, Ķēipenes organic dairy was unable to expand beyond its half-ton daily production not because it lacked producers or buyers, but because it could not secure funds for expansion. Given this limited capacity, most organic farmers had no choice, but to sell their milk to conventional processing facilities.