

**THE ROLE OF IFOAM AGRIBIOMEDITERRANEO
ORGANIZATION IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIC
AGRICULTURE ON THE MEDITERRANEAN**

**ULOGA ORGANIZACIJE IFOAM AGRIBIOMEDITERRANEO
U RAZVOJU EKOLOŠKE POLJOPRIVREDE MEDITERANA**

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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the role of IFOAM AgriBioMediterraneo (ABM), Regional Group of world umbrella organic organization, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), in development of organic agriculture (OA) in the Mediterranean region. Promotion, development and dissemination of information, knowledge and expertise related to Mediterranean organic agriculture and food production, as well as the development of agribio tourism on family farms have been major ABM goals since its' constitution in 1990. Furthermore, major figures will be presented of ABM development during the time, organization and functioning of the ABM structure, consisting of 148 IFOAM members from three continents and 21 Mediterranean countries: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Macedonia, Malta, Marocco, Palestine, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Some major ABM achievements in homogenization of the organic sector in the Mediterranean will also be showed, as well as potential advantages for Croatian organic food production deriving from its' activity.

Key words: Organic Agriculture, Mediterranean, AgriBioMediterraneo, IFOAM

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SAŽETAK

Članak opisuje ulogu IFOAM AgriBioMediterraneo (ABM), Regionalne grupe Svjetske krovne organizacije Međunarodne federacije pokreta ekološke poljoprivrede (IFOAM) u razvoju ekološke poljoprivrede u zemljama Mediterana. Promocija, razvoj i širenje informacija, znanja i ekspertiza vezanih uz mediteransku ekološku poljoprivredu i proizvodnju hrane, uz razvitak agriekoturizma na obiteljskim gospodarstvima, bili su glavni ciljevi ABM-a još od svog osnutka 1990. godine. Nadalje, bit će prikazani glavni podaci vezani za razvoj ABM-a tijekom vremena, organizacija i funkcioniranje strukture ABM-a sastavljenog od 148 članova IFOAM-a s tri kontinenta iz 21 mediteranske zemlje: Albanije, Bosne i Hercegovine, Hrvatske, Cipra, Egipta, Francuske, Grčke, Izraela, Italije, Jordana, Libanona, Makedonije, Malte, Maroka, Palestine, Portugala, Srbije, Španjolske, Sirije, Tunisa i Turske. Također će biti prikazana i glavna dostignuća ABM-a u homogenizaciji sektora ekopoljoprivrede Mediterana, uključujući i potencijalne prednosti za hrvatsku ekološku proizvodnju hrane.

Ključne riječi: Ekološka poljoprivreda, Mediteran, AgriBioMediterraneo, IFOAM

INTRODUCTION

When considering the role of IFOAM AgriBioMediterraneo's (ABM) role in organic agriculture (OA) in the Mediterranean region, it should be emphasized that it is one of the official regional groups of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), a worldwide umbrella organization of the organic agriculture movement.

In order to achieve better efficiency several regional groups should be established within the IFOAM system. According to the ABM Statute it is established by the IFOAM members of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea including ex-Yugoslavian states, Portugal and Jordan.



Figure 1. The official logo of the ABM.

It coordinates the activities of IFOAM-member organizations in the Region. ABM provides a forum for the exchange of experiences to provide local development, harmonize actions and goals between different countries and institutions and to promote cooperation between various groups of interest involved in the organic production chain. It is one of the oldest regional initiatives within the IFOAM. Established in Vignola in 1990 and officially recognized in Bari in 1997, this year ABM is celebrating its 18th anniversary

DISCUSSION

What is ABM today? According to the IFOAM Directory 2008 it is an official IFOAM regional group consisting of 146 members from 21 Mediterranean countries and three continents, thus representing one fifth of total IFOAM members. Out of that number, 91 members come from seven EU countries (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain), 15 members from non-EU European countries (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania and Macedonia) while 40 members from the Middle East and North Africa no (MENA) countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey and Tunisia).

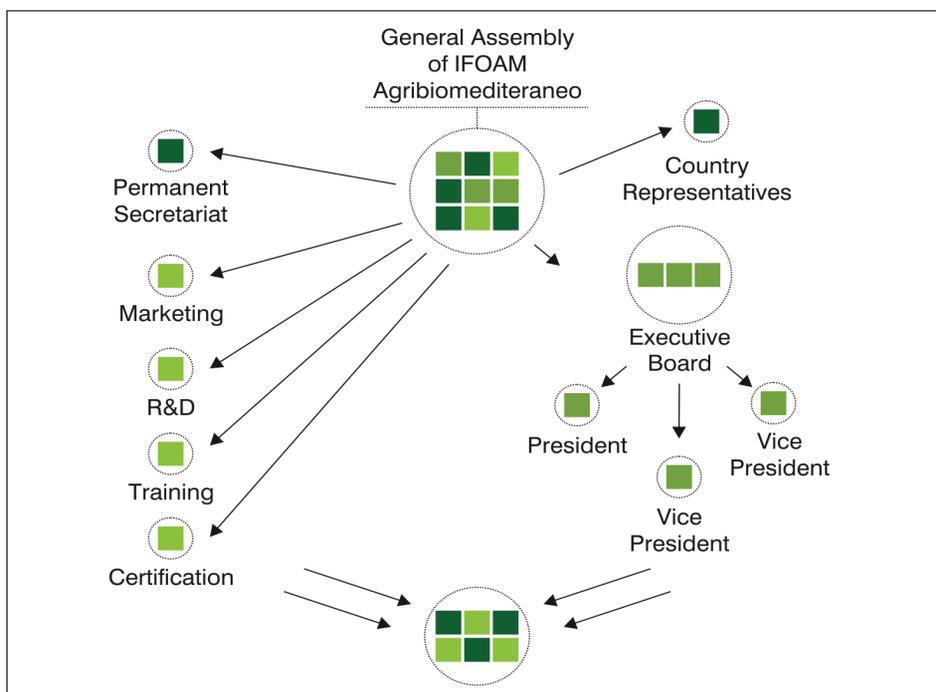


Figure 2. Shows the ABM organization structure.

The General Assembly (GA) is the higher body of the ABM. It is formed by the IFOAM members of the region. A regular GA is held every three years and next to take place will be in June 2008 in Modena, Italy. Each member of the ABM sends a representative to the GA and when quorum is reached (one fourth of the members) decisions on action plans for the coming term, as well as on all matters related to the ABM, election and exoneration of the regional and executive boards, acceptance of the budget and agreement on any fees can be voted. In the IFOAM organization, ABM as an official regional group is responsible for the specific issues of Mediterranean organic agriculture and food production. Its task is to further strengthen the identity of Mediterranean organic sector creating the network of the organic movements in the Mediterranean countries. It is accomplished by establishing contacts, relationships, exchange of knowledge and experiences among members and other Mediterranean organic subjects giving special emphasis on common roots, history and culture.

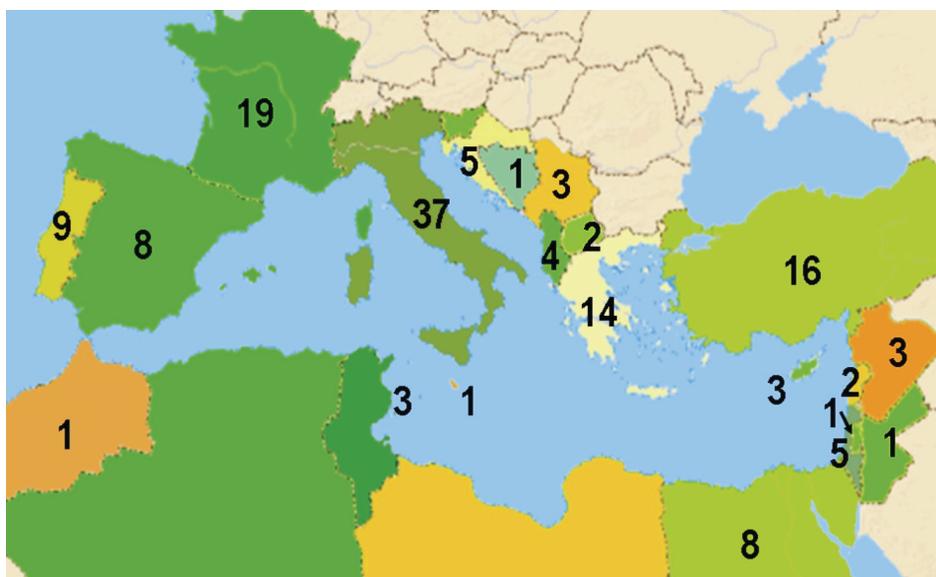


Figure 3. Distribution of ABM members by countries where numbers represent the number of ABM members in each country.

Agribiomediterraneo has adopted the action plan for the period from 2005 to 2008 focusing on strengthening the organic agriculture as a way for sustainable rural development. Yet, many obstacles have to be overcome. ABM has working groups on the following subjects: Training, Standard and Certification (S&C). Research and Development (R&D) and Marketing. In order to develop organic agriculture, ABM promotes a holistic view of organic agriculture, including social and ethical aspects (GMO campaign to establish GMO free regions, use of local seed varieties). In the area of standards and certification ABM aims at the harmonization of regulatory and inspection systems in the Mediterranean context and at the dissemination and development of alternative forms of standard-setting and inspection that suit the Mediterranean context, in order to increase market access for small farmers (Internal Control Systems (ICS) and Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)). Presently, the first author of this paper holds the position of the ABM Regional Board member and coordinator for Standard and Certification Work Group.

Research on organic farming has increased substantially in recent years but the activity in the Mediterranean countries is still at a low level including the EU-Mediterranean countries as well. In that regard, ABM is trying to improve funding of research on organic farming and specific research within the Mediterranean context. It also participates in activities that lead to the increase the participation of Mediterranean organic associations, research institutions and universities in European projects. Furthermore, networking and information exchange between Mediterranean countries and, in particular between IFOAM and other relevant IFOAM groups (IFOAM EU Group, International Society of Organic Agriculture Research ISOFAR etc.), development of the scientific knowledge on organic agriculture linked to particular Mediterranean problems and incorporation of the farmers' perspectives and experiences into organic farming research are also very important part of the ABM agro-ecological strategy. Another big issue is promotion of development of organic traditional Mediterranean crops and local markets where ABM official website and newsletter are important tools in dissemination of the information and communication among ABM members.

It is also important to emphasize the role of the Permanent Secretariat as the contact point for the regional group. It executes all the activities deliberated by the ABM Regional Board (RB) and it is responsible for fulfilling all the administrative work of the RB as well as the communication with IFOAM administration, distribution of the information among the boards and members. Presently, the task of the ABM Permanent Secretariat is performed by the SEAE Spain (abmsecreariat@agroecologia.net).

ABM AND CROATIA?

It could be emphasized as important for the development of the Croatian organic sector that during the period from June 2000 to April 2005, Croatian IFOAM member Eko-Liburnia, Rijeka, hosted the ABM Permanent Secretariat. During that period ABM started to function properly, shaping its own identity and becoming a reliable IFOAM regional group, covering all kinds of specific Mediterranean organic agriculture issues, with a strong emphasis on development of the regional training, standards and certification, marketing and research and development programs and projects. Consequently, many regional

projects and initiatives have started, some of them being already implemented, some of them still going on, including the hosting of the official ABM website: <http://www.ifoam-abm.com>

CONCLUSION

ABM strongly supports the agroecological vision of organic agriculture both for environmental/agronomic and economic/social aspects of agriculture. The Mediterranean means the «sea between lands». It is the birthplace of some of the oldest, most deeply rooted cultures and civilizations of our planet and of three of the most influential global religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It is also a cradle of democracy, welfare state and the most important periods of freedom that humanity has ever enjoyed. Finally, the Mediterranean is traditionally a sea of communication. Therefore, the future role of the ABM within the IFOAM system is to serve as an ideal meeting point or, better to say, forum for all the other different IFOAM regional groups. Members of the ABM are at the same time members of some other regional group, either African or Asian, either EU or non-EU. Not to mention the Mediterranean influence on Latin America and all other world regions as well.

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