

ORGANIC OLIVE GROWING CONCLUSIONS

EKOLOŠKI UZGOJ MASLINA ZAKLJUČCI

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Over the past decade olive producers in Croatia have shown an increased interest in planting olive trees. This is a result of different incentives at the national, county and local level. Croatia has the prerequisites for olive production: climate, soil and indigeneous varieties; however, it has taken some time for producers to opt for the more demanding organic farming.

In organic farming, all agro-technical measures are taken to combat pests and additional protective agents are used to prevent the damage to the tree and the fruit of olives. Use of pesticides is allowed in line with special regulations.

Since the adoption of the relevant legislation in Croatia 53 hectares of organic olive groves cultivated by 18 producers have been registered in the period 2001-2007. In 2007 there were 2.96 hectares in Zadar county, 5.51 hectares in Primorsko-goranska county, 14.89 hectares in Istrian county and 29.41 hectares in Splitsko-dalmatinska county.

All organic groves are on plots that are not polluted by industry or roads. The producers who qualify for state support own olive groves with at least 50 old olive trees or newly planted groves of 0.5 ha. The producers are required to register in both the Family Farm Register and the Organic Agricultural and Food Producers Register. Furthermore, they should demonstrate basic knowledge of organic farming and work with the Croatian Agricultural Extension Institute. It is expected that the producers keep records of their organic farm management practices.

The objectives of organic olive growing are organic olives and olive oil. However, the organic farmers are to establish a stable ecosystem where pest

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population is kept in check. A balance must exist between beneficial organisms and pests with those beneficial organisms keeping pest population at a tolerable level. The olives and trees can be economically protected by stimulating the development of the pests' natural enemies such as insects, birds and animals and by planting useful 'host' plants in hedges next to olive groves.

Combating of diseases, pests and weeds is done by employment of agro-technical measures such as pruning/cutting, good selection of olive varieties, appropriate tillage, placing mechanical barriers, belts for hunting, traps, pheromones and food lures. The criteria of every agricultural management practice are reduced pollution and olive production with fewer residues.

HOW TO RECOGNISE THE VALUE OF ORGANIC FARMING?

Ultimately the success of organic farming is not only measured by kilos and tonnes of produce, but rather by its contribution to the preservation of natural resources in Croatia (soil, water, air) and improved quality of life. The former is measurable and the latter is not.

For organic farmers the critical point are conversion time. This is 1-3 years period in which the organic producer must make the plan of conversion. Before the conversion times it is necessary to make soil analysis (acids, organic matter, nutrients, pesticide residues and heavy metals.).

The farm could not be conventional and organic in the same time. Since the adoption of the relevant legislation in Croatia 477 producers have been registered in the period 2001-2007, but only 18 producers of organic olive groves.

In Croatia the number of laboratories for soil, food and quality analysis is sufficient. The certification costs have been subsidized by some Croatian counties. At the moment on Croatian market the organic olive plant seedlings for planting are not available. The new olive orchards are established with conventional plants and then have a conversion period of 3 years.

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